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Albia, Iowa in the 1920s: Coal, corn and change

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ALBIA, IOWA IN THE 1920S: COAL, CORN, AND CHANGE

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of History
and the
Faculty of the Graduate College
University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
University of Nebraska at Omaha

by
Derek S. Oden
August, 2000

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts,
University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Committee

Theron Wood - History
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Date August 18, 2000

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ABSTRACT

Albia, Iowa: Coal, Corn and Change in the 1920s

This is the story of Albia in the 1920s. Albia, the seat of Monroe County, is located in south central Iowa. The town achieved its greatest population gain during the first decade of the twentieth century. Access to ample railroad transportation, trade with its hinterland, and manufacturing aided this expansion. Albians also enjoyed a thriving period of coal mining and agriculture.

This era of prosperity ended during the early 1920s because the demand for local coal fell sharply. As a result, the population of the county began to shrink. Following the war, agriculture also entered a recession when farmers struggled to survive. Albia's population dropped from 5,067 in 1920 to 4,425 in 1930.

Albians responded energetically to hard times. The Commercial Club sponsored special events to attract shoppers. The United Mine Workers actively supported home-buying coal campaigns and the town's many civic organizations worked to relieve the growing poverty.

This story also traces additional developments which began to erode the relative isolation of Albians. The growing number of automobiles impacted Albians and numerous road improvements demonstrated their importance. The radio brought entertainment and useful information to remote portions of the county. Nevertheless, for all these positive changes, these innovations brought some unfavorable outcomes. Movies replaced many earlier forms of entertainment which did not bode well for Albians who enjoyed the Chautauqua or lyceum course. In addition, the automobile aided the transient ways of criminals.

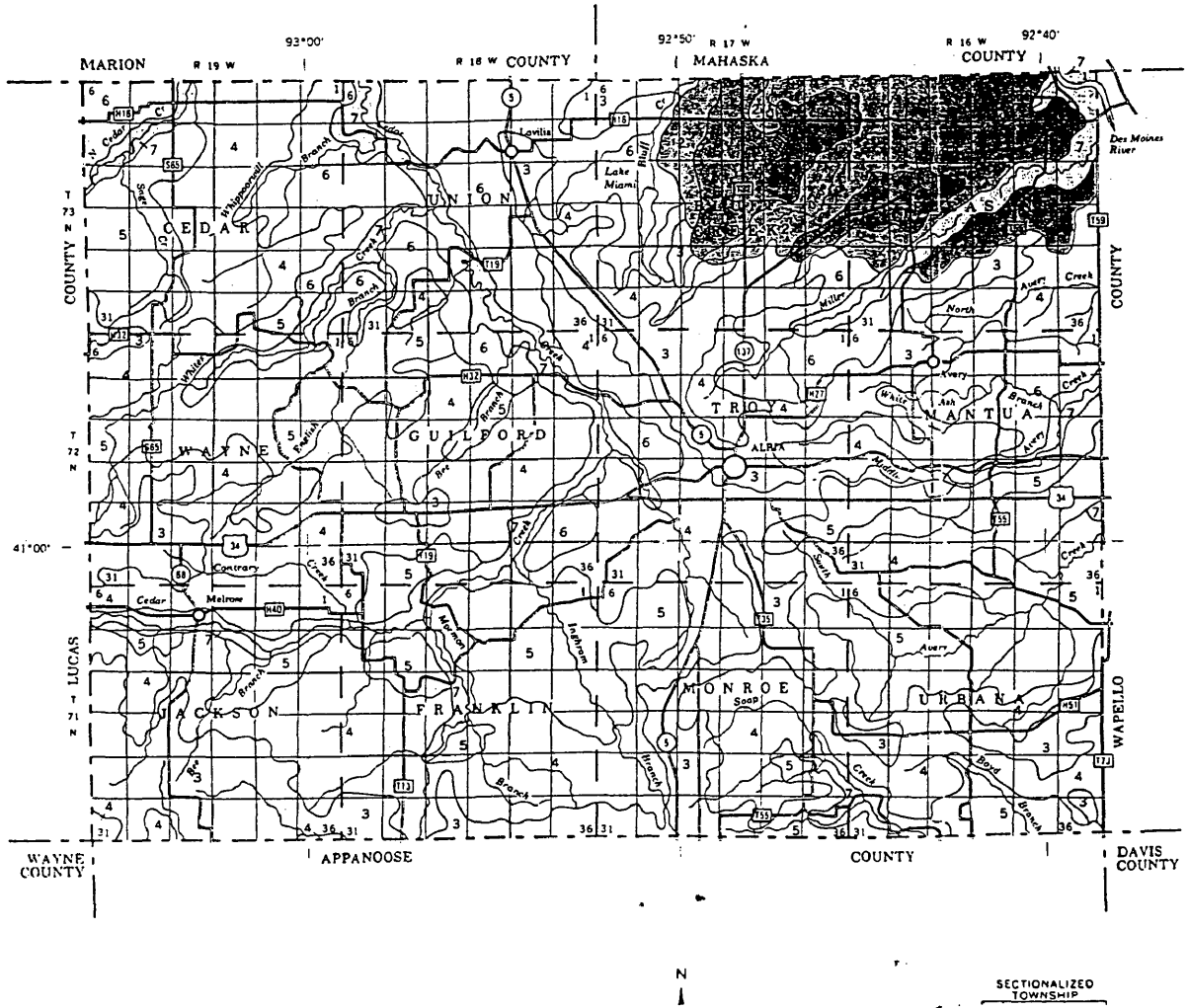
These developments contributed to a feeling of uncertainty in Albia. The

appearance of the Ku Klux Klan demonstrates that some people felt threatened by the changing times. Editorials defending small-town living against the criticisms of many writers also illustrate the tension of the age. Nevertheless, Albians showed a capacity to adapt. Clubs encouraged a feeling of belonging and addressed many of the town's problems. The Albia Junior College provided students with new educational opportunities and the town's churches continued to give life spiritual significance. This is a story of a people who faced the challenges of an eventful decade with all the resourcefulness that their past had bequeathed to them.

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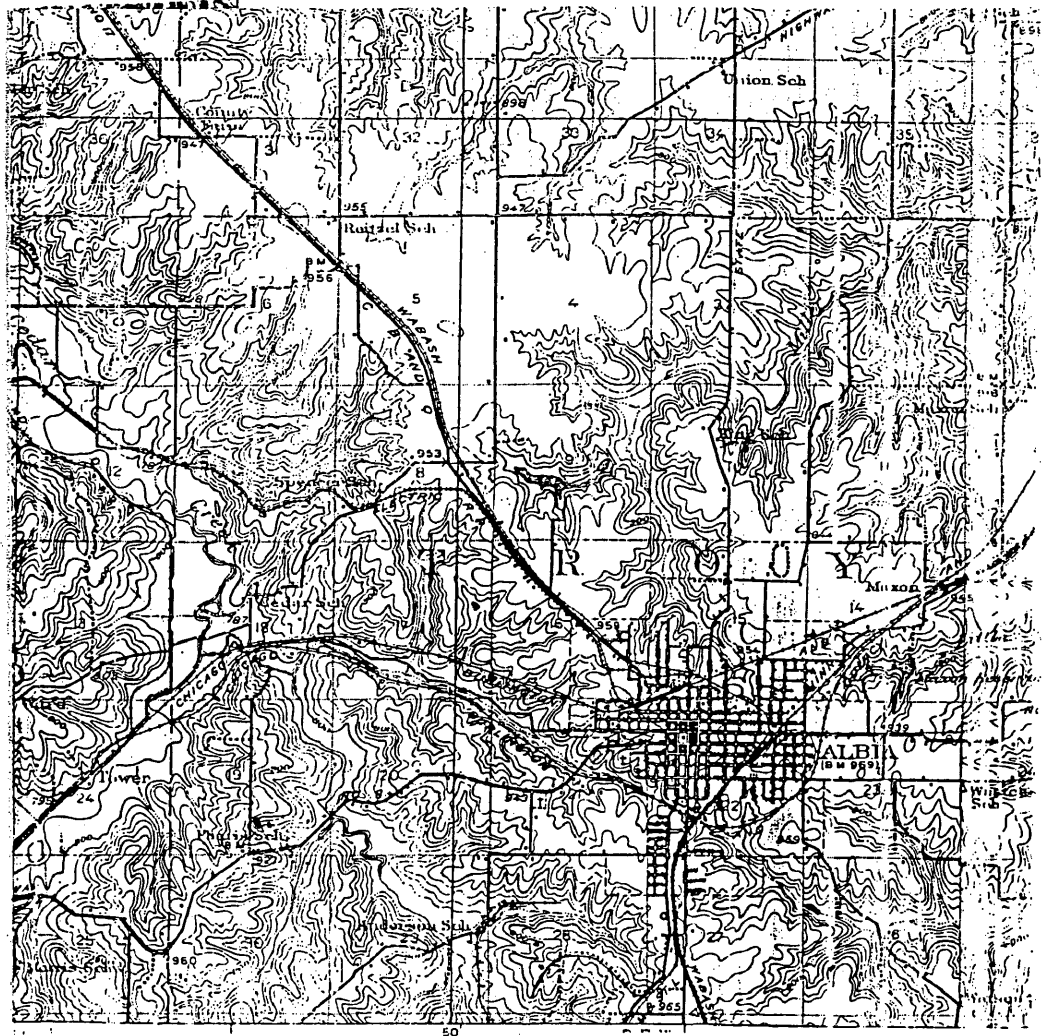
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Fig. 1 Monroe County Townships



Courtesy of Soil Conservation Service, General Soil Survey of Monroe County, Iowa, 1982

Fig. 3 Albia and Surrounding Area



Courtesy of Department of Interior U.S. Geological Survey, 1929

INTRODUCTION

ALBIA'S DREAM TO BE A CITY

Iowa has long had the dual reputation of being a state subtle in beauty, but also rather dull. Motorists traveling on Interstate 80 often comment that the state consists solely of corn fields intermixed with small, tranquil towns. This opinion is based partly on reality, since Iowa's landscape consists largely of gently rolling farmlands dotted with little communities. Historian Dorothy Schwieder employs the phrase, "middle land," in describing Iowa. She points out that it is located in the nation's center; its geography is relatively uniform, and its people are predominantly of European ancestry.¹ Schwieder's term, "middle land," is effective in describing the state. Iowa does not possess mountains, beaches, or deserts and lacks the extremes of states directly to the west; it does not contain sparsely settled regions like Nebraska's Sandhills or South Dakota's Badlands. Iowa's ethnic and racial composition has lacked diversity. These characteristics of the state could lead one to assume that Iowa's history is featureless and uninteresting. However, judgments drawn by examining the historical record of the state's various regions lead to a different conclusion. Such an inquiry reveals that behind the present backdrop of small towns and seemingly limitless cornfields is a rich and varied past. In addition, a closer examination reveals geographical and physical subtleties and contrasts in this land of moderation.

If these travelers on I-80 would exit into Des Moines and proceed to the south, they would notice that the scenery changes. Although the alteration is not drastic, it is noticeable. The vast seas of corn give way to forested hills and

¹ Marvin Bergman, ed., Iowa History Reader (Ames: State Historical Society in Association with Iowa State University Press, 1996), 2.

pastures. The land becomes rougher and resembles northern Missouri. The scenery of immense cornfields fades into a setting of grazing cattle and brushy ditches. Travelers on Highway 5 would eventually come to Albia; a Monroe County town of roughly 3,870 people located sixty miles southeast of Des Moines and thirty-five miles north of the Missouri state line (refer to Figure 2).² Albia's appearance is indistinguishable from many towns of similar size in the Midwest. A visitor driving through Albia would pass a grain elevator, rustic fairgrounds, and then a Casey's convenience store. Soon the tourist would drive through the town square consisting of a courthouse surrounded by numerous small businesses. After leaving the square, the driver would proceed through a sleepy residential area and perhaps see an elementary school, a dairy cream, and a fast food restaurant before passing a few small manufacturing plants and returning to the rolling countryside.

A person would be left unaware of Albia's dynamic past as a prosperous coal mining region. Monroe County led the state in coal production for twenty-four years. The county averaged 2,500,000 tons of coal per year between 1901 and 1921.³ A casual visitor would also be unaware that as a result of this industry, many booming mining communities existed close to Albia. Today, little remains of these thriving towns. The second largest town in Monroe County is Lovilia, which has dwindled to a mere 551 people.⁴ Buxton, another mining community, had at its height roughly 6,000 residents who were sustained by the

² Rand McNally Road Atlas (Skokie, Illinois: Rand McNally & Company, 1996), 35.

³ Thomas Landis, "A History of Monroe County, Iowa as a Coal Mining Center" (Master's Thesis, Department of History, Northeast Missouri State University, 1963), 39.

⁴ Rand McNally Road Atlas, 123.

county's copious mines.⁵ Buxton was also unique in that fifty-four percent of its residents were African-Americans.⁶ However, unlike Lovilia, nothing remains of the once thriving coal town. An itinerant person would also be unaware of the numerous changes Albians experienced in the 1920s. The decade bombarded the community with dramatic changes that transformed life. This period brought unprecedented changes in transportation, communication, and entertainment. Albians also witnessed theatrical Ku Klux Klan meetings, bootlegging busts, and a surprising amount of criminal activity. Those living during this time recognized the great changes transpiring. In 1929, scholars Robert Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd stated, "we are coming to realize, moreover, that we today are probably living in one of the eras of great rapidity of change in the history of human institutions."⁷

One may question the usefulness of studying small towns since many Americans now live in large urban centers. However, these places hold an important place in American history and are more significant than convenient gas stops. A large number of modern suburban residents have parents or grandparents who grew up in small towns. Even today, many Iowans directly identify with these communities since half of Iowa's citizens resided in small towns as late as 1994.⁸ This project was also undertaken for personal reasons. I spent most of my childhood and adolescence in a small town in southern Iowa,

⁵ Stephen Rye, "Buxton: Black Metropolis of Iowa," Annals of Iowa 41 (Spring, 1972), 939.

⁶ Dorothy Schwieder, Black Diamonds: Life and Work in Iowa's Coal Mining Communities, 1895-1925 (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996), 78.

⁷ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1929), 5.

⁸ Bradford E. Burns, Kinship with the Land: Regionalist Thought in Iowa, 1894-1942 (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996), 179.

and many of my ancestors were coal miners and farmers. Thus, this work is an attempt to gain some understanding of their world.

But why study Albia? It is true that all of Iowa's towns experienced change during the 1920s, but this was a particularly critical time in Albia and Monroe County. The area possessed greater racial diversity than most places in Iowa, since African-Americans made up 6.29 percent of the populace.⁹ Monroe County also suffered the greatest population loss between 1915 and 1925 in the state, losing 21.1 percent of its residents in a mere ten years.¹⁰ However, the state did not witness a reduction in population. In 1920, Iowa had a population of 2,404,021 and ten years later it had risen to 2,470,939.¹¹ The purpose of this thesis is to reveal how the community responded to a mixture of demographic, social, technological, and economic changes. The study will encompass many facets of life in Albia during the 1920s.

The first chapter, "Albia's Troubled Hinterland: Falling Slate, Falling Prices, Idle Mines, and Electric Irons," discusses Monroe County's key industries: coal mining and farming. The coal industry influenced the community in a number of ways; business and entertainment activity reflected its presence. Albia also became the symbolic center of the industry in 1901 when the town won a competition with the cities of Des Moines, Oskaloosa, and Ottumwa to be the headquarters of the thirteenth district of the United Mine Workers of

⁹ Executive Council. Census of Iowa, 1925. (Des Moines: State of Iowa Publication Office, 1926), XXXviii.

¹⁰ Ibid., viii.

¹¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930. Population, Vol. I., (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932), 363.

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⁹ Executive Council, Census of Iowa, 1925 (Des Moines: State of Iowa Publication Office, 1926), XXXviii.

¹⁰ Ibid., viii.

¹¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930. Population, Vol. I., (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932), 363.

America.¹² Countless mining-related articles in the newspapers reflected the industry's importance. The chapter will outline the nature of mining in the area, its importance to Albia, and the decline of mining. Labor disputes will be analyzed because they were common during the era. Therefore, it will be critical to discuss the role of the United Mine Workers. Finally, efforts to revive the industry will be evaluated.

The impact of agriculture upon Albia will also be examined. Albia's economy depended on the farmers' prosperity and numerous activities reflected agriculture's importance. The 1920s brought a severe downturn in the agricultural economy, and this chapter will consider the problems of Monroe County farmers. It will also discuss efforts by the Iowa Farm Bureau and the Iowa State College Cooperative Extension Service to improve life for farmers.

The second chapter entitled "Albia's Challenges: Hard Times, Hard Liquor, Health, and Highways," will treat the profound technological, political, social, and economic changes the town confronted. The decade produced many developments that contributed to today's cultural landscape. The popularity of movies, radio, automobiles, and national advertising all came to fruition. This chapter will analyze the manner in which these transformations affected life. This portion of the work will focus upon a variety of problems facing the town and the resourcefulness of its citizens. These include the strain of economic hardship brought about by the recession in Albia's hinterland, and social issues such as crime, Prohibition, poverty, and health concerns. The condition of Albia's manufacturing and retail establishments will be considered as will problems which affected local politics such as public safety matters and the Ku Klux Klan.

¹² Landis, "A History of Monroe County, Iowa as a Coal Mining Center," 55.

The final chapter, "Albians in Accord: Learning, Playing, Praying, and Joining," discusses education, entertainment, religion, and club activity. This portion of the thesis treats the progress made in education during the decade. This includes the creation of the Albia Junior College. Albia's religious activities will also be analyzed by examining churches, religious organizations, and revivals. Club activity was especially prevalent in the early twentieth century; hence, the chapter will also identify the important clubs of the community and the manner in which they enriched life and entertained Albians.¹³ Albia supported a large number of organizations representing almost any conceivable area of interest. The town offered a surprising number of entertainment options which will be described in detail. These included older forms of entertainment such as chautauquas, lyceum courses, and club picnics intermixed with new sources of amusement. These new outlets included talking movies, the radio, and vacations to faraway destinations. Finally, the chapter will examine how schools, churches, and entertainment both cushioned and reflected this transitional decade.

The 1920s will be the focus of this thesis; however, the decades that preceded these years place the work in a historical context. The region that would become Iowa was in political flux throughout the early nineteenth century; it was part of the Missouri, Michigan, and Wisconsin territories before the creation of Iowa territory in 1838.¹⁴ In December of 1846, Iowa became a state after President James Polk officially admitted it into the Union; Monroe

¹³ Dorothy Schwieder, The Middle Land (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996), 158.

¹⁴ ibid., 26.

County was organized three years prior to that event.¹⁵ The early residents of Monroe County were fortunate to inhabit an area possessing many rich natural resources. The memoirs of Hanna Hawke, a young girl who lived in southern Iowa during the 1840s and 1850s, are revealing. She lived in Appanoose County, which lies directly to the south of Monroe. Hawke commented on thick stands of timber consisting of hickory, elm, butternut, and walnut trees. She also said that the landscape contained sizable stretches clothed in thick prairie grasses. The land yielded to agriculture by producing “mushmellons, tomatoes, corn, pumpkins, squashes, and every kind of fruit and vegetables.”¹⁶ The youthful Hawke observed the bountiful wildlife including large numbers of prairie chickens and geese that filled the autumn skies.¹⁷ She also said that the howls of wolves filled her with trepidation during the night.¹⁸ Lone Saunder’s recollections echo Hawke’s observations concerning the wealth of the land. The Saunders family came to Monroe County in 1852. She stated that, “wild turkeys were so plentiful that my mother would not cook all that was killed and brought home by my father.”¹⁹ The conditions in Albia at the time were not much different than in the surrounding countryside. The town grew slowly at first and as late as 1854 was little more than a cluster of a few buildings. An early settler reminisced in 1922 by saying, “At that time one could stand on the public

¹⁵ ibid., 34.

¹⁶ Brian Birch, “Possessed of a Restless Spirit: A Young Girl’s Memories of the Southern Iowa Frontier” The Palimpsest 66 (September/October, 1985), 179.

¹⁷ ibid., 179.

¹⁸ ibid., 180.

¹⁹ Union-Republican, August 7, 1922, p. 2.

square of Albia and see cattle grazing in all directions. The scattering one-story frame or log buildings did not obstruct the view of the surrounding country.”²⁰

During the formative years, the county was called Kishkekosh after a famous Fox chief.²¹ County Commissioners soon searched for a seat, selecting a relatively flat section of land approximately two and a half miles east of the county’s midpoint. The location at that time was still in its natural state.²² The county name, “Kishkekosh,” was changed to “Monroe” and the village of Princeton became county seat, but as was often the case in Iowa history, a dispute arose over which settlement would permanently hold this status. In January, 1846 Clarksville obtained a post office and rivaled Princeton for the county seat.²³ Princeton’s leaders soon sent a petition to the Iowa House of Representatives citing the reasons why their village should retain its position while Clarksville residents tried to persuade officials, arguing that they were closer to the center of the county.²⁴ Princeton’s boosters countered that “Clarksville is a crooked ridge, interrupted by sloughs, while Princeton is a beautiful level prairie.”²⁵ Princeton supporters possessed a strong argument since present-day visitors will notice that Albia is much flatter than the

²⁰ ibid., December 12, 1922, p. 2.

²¹ Frank Hickenlooper, Illustrated History of Monroe County, Iowa (Marceline, Missouri: Walsworth Publishing Company, reprint 1976), 19.

²² Harriet Mildred Heusinkveld, “The Historical Geography of Population in Mahaska, Marion and Monroe Counties” (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Geography, University of Iowa, 1958), 73.

²³ Hickenlooper, Illustrated History of Monroe County, Iowa, 25.

²⁴ ibid., 26.

²⁵ ibid., 30.

surrounding countryside. In April, 1846, the Iowa House decided in favor of Princeton as the county seat. Shortly thereafter, the hamlet's name was changed to Albia. The name is of Celtic derivation and means "high flat plateau."²⁶ By August, the Monroe County Board of Commissioners had made plans to construct a court house. The center of county government would consist of a modest log structure built by a contractor who received \$75 and was financed by a county bond of \$160.²⁷ Albians also built another modest building for \$174 which would serve as a jail.²⁸

Such facilities were soon needed to deal with individuals who buckled under criminal temptation. A large portion of crime involved stealing horses and other livestock. Citizens usually responded by using the county sheriff and the judicial system; however, some could not contain their anger and resorted to violence. Vigilante activity increased after the Civil War when Garret Thompson and his horse-thieving companions troubled northern Missouri and southern Iowa. In June of 1866, the county's vigilance committee captured Thompson and placed him in Albia's jail. However, a large unruly crowd broke into the building and hanged him in a forest southeast of Albia.²⁹ Chas. Brandonan, another alleged horse-stealing outlaw, met his demise at the hands of an angry mob two years later.³⁰ There were isolated incidents of lynching almost

²⁶ Historical Sketchbook of Albia and Monroe County, 1859-1959 (Albia, IA: Albia Centennial Corporation, 1959), 22.

²⁷ Ibid., 31.

²⁸ Ibid., 32.

²⁹ Ibid., 177.

³⁰ Ibid., 173.

until the end of the nineteenth century. In March of 1893, Lewis Frazier killed his wife in Hiteman during a fight over the custody of their children. A mob of miners snatched Frazier from authorities and hanged him from a tree in Hiteman.³¹

Although Albia's early history contains such sensational stories, pioneers usually spent their time leading productive and law-abiding lives. As is typical in Iowa, many of the county's early pioneers originated from states directly east. These old-stock Americans included settlers from Illinois, Wisconsin, and Indiana and were augmented by immigrants from Germany, Ireland, and other European nations.³² A large number of the first pioneers chose lands close to rivers which offered abundant timber and water. Trees were used for building materials in the construction of log homes and fences.³³ Many also settled in wooded areas because they offered an environment similar to states farther east.³⁴ These immigrants quickly transformed the virgin prairie and timber into prosperous farms with relatively primitive tools, including axes, simple plows, drags, and scythes.³⁵ In 1922, one old pioneer of the county remembered, "For breaking sod we used an eighteen-inch plow and five yoke of oxen. One man drove the oxen, and one held the plow handles."³⁶ These hardy settlers also endured the cramped, scantily furnished log homes during

³¹ Ibid., 183.

³² Landis, "A History of Monroe County, Iowa as a Coal Mining Center," 17.

³³ Heusinkveld, "The Historical Geography of Population in Mahaska, Marion and Monroe Counties," 32.

³⁴ Ibid., 20.

³⁵ Schwieder, The Middle Land, 46.

³⁶ Union-Republican, December 11, 1922, p. 2.

the frigid Iowa winters and hot, steamy summers.³⁷

However, all was not work for the early citizens of Monroe County. One popular activity was the “hoe down.” These dances served as pleasant diversions from the daily grind of work and household chores and also offered opportunities for young people to socialize. Although these were popular events they attracted some criticism. One early town resident hinted that some members of the community believed they were not a proper form of entertainment.³⁸ Camp meetings were important diversions from the pioneers’ ceaseless toil, serving as outlets for the tragedies and trials of life. The zealous preachers of the day delivered fiery sermons at gatherings which were probably similar to modern-day revivals experienced by charismatic Christian groups. According to pioneer historian Frank Hickenlooper, “at times the subject lies in a cataleptic state for hours, unconscious of surroundings.”³⁹ Pioneers also entertained themselves with quilting parties, debating, and spelling and husking bees.⁴⁰

These early farmers of Monroe County, like their counterparts across Iowa, endured some isolation.⁴¹ However, the settlement of Iowa proceeded rapidly enough to decrease this hardship.⁴² By the end of the nineteenth

³⁷ Schwieder, The Middle Land, 45.

³⁸ Hickenlooper, Illustrated History of Monroe County, Iowa, 214.

³⁹ ibid., 215.

⁴⁰ Historical Sketchbook of Albia and Monroe County, 1859-1959, 42.

⁴¹ Heusinkveld, “The Historical Geography of Population in Mahaska, Marion and Monroe Counties,” 73.

⁴² Schwieder, The Middle Land, 48.

century, farmers had considerable access to the outside world. Frank Hickenlooper in his Illustrated History of Monroe County, Iowa, first published in 1896, said, "the farmer-boy has outgrown those rural distinctions which once built a brush fence between himself and the social world. Better roads, the bicycle, the 'covered buggy' and fast team, increased population, railroads, rural churches; the increase of country villages, and the later improvements in the common school system have combined to bring him out in to the open 'clearing.'"⁴³

These developments also silenced the wolves that Hanna Hawke had heard. Soon, the sounds of nature were forced to compete with the bellowing clamor of locomotives. The Burlington and Missouri crossed the county in 1856 and, by 1870, the county seat was linked to Chicago by the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad.⁴⁴ The area's highly developed railroad system remained intact into the 1920s. Albia had the following railroads in 1920: the Chicago and North Western, the Wabash, the Minneapolis and St. Louis, and the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy.⁴⁵ These companies possessed thousands of miles of roads which connected Albia to countless cities and small towns. In 1923, the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy alone operated a total of 9,405.53 miles of lines.⁴⁶ These lines made transportation possible regardless of the weather

⁴³ Hickenlooper, Illustrated History of Monroe County, Iowa, 196.

⁴⁴ Landis, "A History of Monroe County, Iowa as a coal Mining Center," 25, and Heusinkveld, "The Historical Geography of Population in Mahaska, Marion and Monroe Counties," 157.

⁴⁵ Rand McNally Commercial Atlas of America (Chicago, Illinois: Rand McNally Company, 1921), 237.

⁴⁶ Poor's Manual of U.S. Railroads, 1924 Vol. 57 (Broadway, New York: Poor's Publishing Co., 1924), 1035.

conditions.⁴⁷ Albia's extensive railroad service also promoted modernization and connected the town to the national economy.⁴⁸ Soon after the arrival of the railroads, Albia began to grow rapidly. By 1870, Albia boasted a population of 1,621.⁴⁹ The trend toward a rising population stabilized during the closing decades the nineteenth century. In 1880, Albia had 2,435 residents and in 1895 the population had risen to 2,588.⁵⁰ The town continued to prosper throughout the final decades of the nineteenth century.⁵¹ By the early 1900s, Albia had three miles of paved streets, cement sidewalks, a fourteen-acre park, chautauqua grounds with an auditorium, a public library, and three art galleries.⁵² Interurban trolley lines also linked Albia to Hiteman and Centerville and were used extensively by miners who spent their earnings liberally in Albia. The decade between 1900 and 1910 witnessed Albia's largest population gain, from 2, 889 to 5, 067.⁵³ This rise constituted a 172 percent increase.⁵⁴

The first decade of the twentieth century also witnessed Monroe County's rise to its leading position in coal production. Coal mining existed in Iowa during

⁴⁷ Schwieder, The Middle Land, 63.

⁴⁸ Burns, Kinship with the Land, 5.

⁴⁹ Heusinkveld, "A Historical Geography of Population in Mahaska, Marion and Monroe Counties," 70.

⁵⁰ Historical Sketchbook of Albia and Monroe County, 1859-1959, 22.

⁵¹ Ibid., 22.

⁵² Landis, "A History of Monroe County, Iowa as a Coal Mining Center," 77.

⁵³ Historical Sketchbook of Albia and Monroe County, 1859-1959, 22.

⁵⁴ Heusinkveld, "A Historical Geography of Population in Mahaska, Marion and Monroe Counties," 157 and 159.

the state's early period and during the 1850s and 1860s, the industry experienced slow but steady growth. By the late 1860s Monroe County possessed a few mines; these were small ventures located primarily along Bluff, Miller, and Avery Creeks.⁵⁵ The arrival of the railroads heightened the demand for coal since railroad companies required vast quantities to supply their trains. Therefore, a strong correlation between the growth of the railroads and the size of the coal mining industry existed.⁵⁶ By 1895 Monroe County had eighteen mines which produced 559,982 tons of coal. This number mushroomed to 2,488,963 tons by 1920.⁵⁷ There were two kinds of mines in Iowa: captive mines which provided fuel needs to a railroad and local mines which depended on local consumption. Local mines were the most numerous and work was usually seasonal. This forced miners to find other work during the summer months.⁵⁸ Coal mining also had unexpected results in Monroe County. In 1880, one mine owner from Albia decided to recruit African-American laborers from Missouri to replace striking workers. Henry Miller's method of solving labor disputes would be adopted numerous times with the result of making Monroe County relatively racially diverse.⁵⁹

Manufacturing also contributed to the significant growth Albia experienced during early twentieth century. Although the value of Iowa's

⁵⁵ Landis, "A History of Monroe County, Iowa as a Coal Mining Center," 23.

⁵⁶ Schwieder, The Middle Land, 12.

⁵⁷ Hickenlooper, Illustrated History of Monroe County, Iowa, 331, and Landis, "A History of Monroe County, Iowa as a Coal Mining Center," 145.

⁵⁸ Schwieder, The Middle Land, 240-241.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 90.

agricultural products were much greater than factory production, manufacturing did enhance Iowa's economy.⁶⁰ The value of the state's manufactured products increased from \$132,871,000 to \$259,238,000 between 1899 and 1909.⁶¹ Although the state's largest urban centers accounted for most of this output, Albia attracted factories which contributed to economic growth. In June of 1894, Albia acquired the Albia Canning Company. This plant largely employed miner's wives who worked there to supplement their family's incomes. These hard-working women labored in the hot factory removing the skins of scalded fruits and vegetables. The Western Manufacturing Company was established on January 23, 1895 and produced stackers and rakes for harvesting hay and various types of pumps.⁶² Unfortunately, both of these establishments would be destroyed by fire, a fate that many homes, businesses, and factories met throughout Albia's history.⁶³ In February, 1910 Albia's industries included the Acme Telephone and Manufacturing company, the Albia Packing company, Albia Roller Mills, Albia Creamery, and the Kreager Bakery and Ice Cream factory. There were also four cigar factories: the Wood Cigar Company, the Tobey and Becket Cigar Company, the Porter Brother Cigar Company, and the Albia Cigar Company. The John Z. Evans Manufacturing and Supply Company, which assembled mining tools and repaired automobiles, also made Albia its home. The Lester and Albia Bottling Works represented an active bottling

⁶⁰ Keach Johnson, "Iowa's Industrial Roots: 1890-1910" Annals of Iowa 44 (Winter 1978), 163.

⁶¹ Ibid., 187.

⁶² Landis, "A History of Monroe County, Iowa as a Coal Mining Center," 72.

⁶³ Historical Sketchbook of Albia and Monroe County, 1859-1959, 35.

industry.⁶⁴ A large number of these factories benefited by the close proximity of Monroe County's farmlands and mines. The Albia Packing Company supplied bulk meat shipments to Buxton and other mining towns while the Albia Roller Mills profited by the sale of flour to the miners. W.H. Kreager's bakery and ice cream factory purchased many of its ingredients from local farmers and sold his finished products to outlying mining communities.

Albians were optimistic during the first decade of the twentieth century, and these sentiments were expressed in a brochure published by Albia businessmen in 1909. They praised their city as being the "top-notch city of southern Iowa" and they wanted their town to become a city of 25,000 with more factories, dairies, and paved streets.⁶⁵ Albians were proud of the accomplishments of their pioneer predecessors. These hardworking families had carved out prosperous farms from the county's wooded hillsides and prairies. The area's coal had also contributed to the town's development and fed the hungers of an industrialized nation. These economic roots had provided the nutrients for the town's growth; a settlement of four families in 1847 had in three generations grown into a community of 5,000 persons.⁶⁶ The town profited from its many industries and a flourishing trade existed between Albia's merchants and the rural families of Monroe County.

This optimism might have been tempered since the next ten years did not bring explosive growth; however, the period between 1910 and 1920 did not bring any drastic economic downturns. The town witnessed a marginal drop in

⁶⁴ Heusinkveld, "The Historical Geography of Population in Mahaska, Marion and Monroe Counties," 166-167.

⁶⁵ Historical Sketchbook of Albia and Monroe County, 1859-1959, 40.

⁶⁶ ibid., 20.

population from 5,138 in 1915 to 5,067 in 1920.⁶⁷ The farm economy remained prosperous, especially from 1909 to 1914, an era that is commonly known as the Golden Age of agriculture. This period extended into the later teens because of the great demand for American agricultural products during the war years.⁶⁸ Mining also witnessed years of prosperity as coal production achieved records of 2,614,402 tons in 1913 and 2,488,963 tons in 1920.⁶⁹ The war years had disrupted regular rhythms of life, since Albians had sent many of their young men to the war and their attention was focused on international issues. Therefore, after World War I many wanted to return to normal times. However, trouble in Albia's hinterland would contribute to dashing these expectations. The decade would also greatly dampen hopes of the businessmen who had dreamed that Albia might become a small city.

⁶⁷ Executive Council, Census of Iowa, 1925 (Des Moines, State of Iowa Publication Office, 1926), 925.

⁶⁸ Douglas R. Hurt, American Agriculture: A Brief History (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994), 221.

⁶⁹ Landis, "A History of Monroe County, Iowa as a Coal Mining Center," 144.

CHAPTER ONE

ALBIA'S TROUBLED HINTERLAND:

FALLING SLATE, FALLING PRICES, IDLE MINES, AND ELECTRIC IRONS

In the 1920s, coal mining and agriculture were the primary economic activities in Monroe County and a discussion of both is essential to interpret accurately Albia's history. Their importance is demonstrated by the number of people engaged in these industries. In 1915, 17.7 percent of the gainfully employed were occupied in agricultural professions and 28.8 percent were working in mines.¹ The period represents a pivotal moment in the town's history since coal mining entered into a decline from which it never would recover and agriculture also suffered. The decade's challenges severely affected the economic well-being of the area's inhabitants. By the 1930s, Monroe County had the largest proportion of residents on public assistance of any Iowa county.²

Although the area depended heavily on mining and farming, it possessed relatively mediocre farmlands and mineral wealth. Monroe County's coal contained excessive amounts of water, ash, and volatile matter. The U.S. Geological Survey classified it as poor quality bituminous coal.³ The county also has poor agricultural land in comparison to the rest of Iowa, since it is hillier and less fertile. This region is commonly referred to as the Southern Pasture Area which extends roughly from the bottom two tiers of the counties almost to

¹ Harriet Mildred Heusinkveld, "The Historical Geography of Population in Mahaska, Marion and Monroe Counties." (Doctoral Dissertation, Department of Geography, University of Iowa, 1958), 165.

² *Ibid.*, 231.

³ *Ibid.*, 253.

Nebraska.⁴ The suitability of the soil for raising crops such as corn is also rather poor, even when compared to counties just to the north such as Marion and Mahaska County.⁵ This is especially true in the southwest portion of the county because the land is particularly broken. The crop yields are lower and the ground is more suited to beef cattle production than to growing crops.⁶ The area is not prime territory for the dairy industry because the pastures often burn up in the summer.⁷ It is also notable that in 1910, Monroe County had a relatively high proportion of "unimproved land" which represented 23.3 percent of its territory, while the average for the rest of the state was 12.6 percent.⁸

In the 1920s, the county was dotted with numerous coal camps ranging in size from ones such as Buxton to tiny villages. These were temporary communities that dwindled when the mines were worked out. The average life span of a mine was from ten to fifteen years which resulted in the rise and fall of numerous coal towns.⁹ Coal and railroad corporations often created these communities and usually provided their inhabitants with housing. One such town was Hocking, which was owned and developed by the Hocking Coal

⁴ Leland L. Sage, A History of Iowa (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1974), 14.

⁵ Heusinkveld, "The Historical Geography of Population in Mahaska, Marion and Monroe Counties," 26.

⁶ Sage, A History of Iowa, 15.

⁷ William J. Peterson, The Story of Iowa 1 (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., Inc., 1952), 20.

⁸ Heusinkveld, "The Historical Geography of Population in Mahaska, Marion and Monroe Counties," 110.

⁹ Dorothy Schwieder, Black Diamonds: Life and Work in Iowa's Coal Mining Communities, 1895-1925 (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1983), 157.

Company in 1899.¹⁰ Hiteman was another sizable town which, at its height, had a population of 1,500.¹¹ Buxton, the largest of these communities, was created when the Consolidation Coal Company (a subsidiary of the Chicago and North Western Railroads) invested \$6,000,000 in founding the town.¹² A biracial community with excellent living conditions and a reputation of promoting harmony, Buxton contained two YMCAs offering a variety of recreational facilities including a roller-skating rink, pool tables, tennis courts, a gymnasium, and a swimming pool. For Buxton residents with more sedentary inclinations, the YMCA buildings contained a fine library and the availability of typewriters.¹³

Nevertheless, life was far from optimal in most of the camps. Albia's press often indicated that many of the camps possessed dismal living conditions because of their quick construction. In addition, some Iowans were concerned that miners' children were receiving an inferior education. Although this was an essentially accurate portrayal of camp life, by the 1920s housing and schools in the coal towns were improving. This trend came about because of state government action. In 1919, an engineering instructor from the Iowa State College visited many of Iowa's coal camps and then submitted his findings to the Iowa Legislature.¹⁴ Charles Nichol's account of conditions in Iowa's coal camps promoted the passage of the Good Housing Act which required

¹⁰ Thomas Landis, "A History of Monroe County, Iowa as a Coal Mining Center," (unpublished Masters Thesis, Department of History, Northeast Missouri State University, 1963), 31.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹² Stephen Rye, "Buxton: Black Metropolis of Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 41 (Spring, 1972), 940.

¹³ Schwieder, *Black Diamonds*, 80.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

companies to deliver their town plans to the State Board of Health. A permit would only be given if the Board was confident that the firm would abide by state standards. The law also authorized the Board to oversee all coal towns which had already been built. The year also witnessed an increase in state funds to the schools in coal mining camps. This consisted of \$50,000 to be devoted to physical improvements.¹⁵ These efforts created a progressive precedent and additional measures were taken throughout the decade.

These coal towns had an enormous effect on Albians; the town gained economic benefit both from mines in close proximity and from those in more distant parts of the county. The sheer number of men engaged in mining between 1901 and 1925 attests to its importance. During the period, 3,500 to 4,000 miners were employed yearly in coal mines located within twenty miles of Albia.¹⁶ The town's businesses were nurtured by the purchasing power of mining families.¹⁷ They benefited from an electric street car system which served the mining communities of Hocking, Hiteman, and the mines of the Albia Coal Company. The street car was in operation during the pinnacle of the county's coal mining.¹⁸ Albia's businessmen also sought the trade of the miners by traveling to their communities and taking orders. In addition, Albians were also connected to the industry in personal ways. Many people had family members, friends, and relatives who were miners. Therefore, many Albians were either intimately tied to the mines or least interested in one of the county's

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 146.

¹⁶ Landis, "A History of Monroe County, Iowa as a Coal Mining Center," 104.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, 67.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 19.

most important industries.

Monroe County's coal industry experienced a final successful year in 1920 since it was the last season in which production remained at the levels of earlier years.¹⁹ The area led the state until 1925, but a decline in production had begun even earlier as chronicled by the State Mine Inspectors' Reports.²⁰ In 1920, Monroe County produced 2,488,963 tons of coal, but by 1921 the county only produced 1,562,607 tons and the total plummeted to a still lower figure of 816,616 tons in 1925.²¹ This decline continued through the end the decade. In 1926, the county's coal output was 779,420 and by 1928 it had fallen to 351,856 tons.²² These figures followed a general trend experienced in Iowa's coal-producing areas; the number of miners throughout the state dropped from 16,398 in 1916 to 6,804 in 1930.²³ After 1925, Monroe County's coal production decreased for a number of reasons. The fact that railroads purchased coal out of state after World War I contributed greatly to the downturn. These inexpensive imports came from states such as Kentucky and Illinois.²⁴ This trend increased as the decade progressed. In 1926, there were 6,000,000 tons of coal imported into Iowa while the state's mines were only able to sell 3,000,000.²⁵ This

¹⁹ Ibid., 145.

²⁰ Ibid., 104.

²¹ Ibid., 144.

²² Ibid., 145.

²³ Ibid., 55.

²⁴ Heusinkveld, "The Historical Geography of Population in Mahaska, Marion and Monroe Counties," 228.

²⁵ Union-Republican, August 11, 1927, p. 4.

downturn was heightened by the structure of Iowa's deposits, which made them more expensive to mine in comparison to those in other states. These changes were exacerbated in the late 1920s and 1930s by the appearance of other forms of energy such as fuel oil, natural gas, and electricity which began to contend with coal.²⁶

Although mining's decline was economically detrimental, its end may have had a positive aspect. Mining was a dangerous occupation which exacted a heavy price. A majority of the county's mines employed the "room and pillar" method of extracting coal. This procedure required the removal of large portions of coal while leaving pillars to support the roof. Miners worked in these spaces and, after excavating the desired length, they slowly abandoned the room by harvesting the coal in the pillars.²⁷ Mining posed numerous dangers including collapsing roofs, explosions, poor ventilation, and flooding. The weakness of the ceilings in the county's mines was one of the most significant occupational hazards. The mine roofs "collected moisture in the summer and caused a chemical reaction" which weakened them. This problem increased operating expenses, but, more importantly, it heightened the likelihood of accidents.²⁸ Although by the 1920s mining had witnessed marked safety improvements, accidents continued to occur. Newspaper articles describing mining fatalities were often brief, implying they were common events. Roof cave-ins and explosions resulting from faulty handling of explosives were persistent dangers. The young men who were killed frequently left wives and small children. In

²⁶ Schwieder, Black Diamonds, 168.

²⁷ Landis, "A History of Monroe County, Iowa as a Coal Mining Center," 40.

²⁸ Ibid., 47.

1921, Will Kellog was crushed by a collapsing ceiling at the Number 18 mine near Buxton. He was only eighteen years old and was just learning the mining trade.²⁹ Henry Dixon was also killed by falling slate the same year at a mine near Hiteman, leaving a wife and a young baby.³⁰ Fortunately, not all accidents ended in death. In 1922, three shot firers barely avoided death from a large explosion at the Number 5 mine in Hocking.³¹ A more spectacular non-fatal accident occurred a year earlier when the Number 2 mine outside of Rizerville was almost totally destroyed by flames. The inferno was most likely caused by a "windy shot." Fortunately, no one was injured; however, the conflagration resulted in the death of eight mules and approximately \$100,000 worth of damage.³² In 1928, an explosion resulted in the death of two miners. Albert Phillips and Elmer Clouse were killed in a mine explosion near Lockman; both men were under thirty and left a total of five children fatherless.³³

The area witnessed many efforts to promote safety. In 1920, a rail car from the Bureau of Mines visited Albia and staff members from the organization conducted short courses on mine rescue and First Aid. All those connected to the industry were invited to attend the sessions. Everyone who completed the class successfully received a certificate indicating their achievement.³⁴ In 1921,

²⁹ Albia Union, September 16, 1921, p. 3.

³⁰ Ibid., July 22, 1921, p. 2.

³¹ Monroe County News, November 30, 1922, p. 1.

³² Ibid., February 24, 1921, p. 1.

³³ Union-Republican, April 2, 1928, p. 1.

³⁴ Albia Republican, February 12, 1920, p. 1.

the car also visited Buxton for two weeks offering a similar program.³⁵

One of the most significant aids to injured miners was the Miner's Hospital in Albia. The institution was established by G.W. Hartstuck and Dr. Thomas Gutch in 1913 and provided low-cost medical care. Miners paid a small monthly bill which gave them the opportunity for quality treatment and also helped fund the hospital. The hospital was a blessing for many miners who would have not otherwise had access to such high-quality medical care. Dr. Gutch gained considerable recognition for his work in the hospital, eventually becoming the leading medical official for the 13th Miners District.³⁶ Nevertheless, death in the mines was not uncommon and fatalities continued to be a grim aspect of life.

Coal mining was also wracked by labor disputes between miners and operators. The miner's voice for achieving better pay and conditions was the United Mine Workers of America, established in 1890.³⁷ The decade's most intense labor disputes occurred in 1920, 1922, and 1927. These strikes and other less severe labor disagreements usually consisted of quarrels over wages. In the summer of 1920, the county's miners participated in a national strike, seeking an increase from six to eight dollars per day.³⁸ The walkout required intensive negotiations, but talks were finally successful on August 5, 1920 and the miners received their pay increase. The new wage was set at

³⁵ Ibid., March 24, 1921, p. 1.

³⁶ Landis, "A History of Monroe County, Iowa as a Coal Mining Center," 54.

³⁷ Schwieder, Black Diamonds, 126.

³⁸ The Albia Union, August 3, 1920, p. 1.

eight dollars a day.³⁹

During the spring of 1922, the nation experienced another labor dispute, and Albians worried that it would have a negative economic impact. The community's anxiety was warranted since the loss of mining payrolls represented a significant economic blow, and a strike could result in coal shortages. Some Albians speculated that the town's utility company and packing plant might be jeopardized. Farmers were also anxious that they would have insufficient coal supplies for their steam engines during the harvest.⁴⁰ In 1922, the County Agent stated, "The coal strike affected the farmers very much in this county. Small slopes owned and operated by non-union miners were in operation until threshing time. After[,] the union miners visited these slope mines in body and asked that these mines be closed. The farmers who owned them were afraid to operate and had to shut down."⁴¹ Despite these fears the county's residents were able to procure enough fuel to survive the strike.

Albia was the headquarters of the 13th Miners District of the United Mine Workers, and, therefore served as the logical meeting place for striking miners. The town was also home to miners who worked nearby. On July 29, 1922, the district's president gave a speech at the Comet Theater. Joe Morris attracted a crowd numbering approximately 600 people. He said that the operators wanted to destroy the union. He also stated that the possibility of coal shortages was greatly exaggerated and that miners needed support from merchants and farmers. The assembly was also addressed by the owner of Teitel department

³⁹ ibid., August 6, 1920, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Union-Republican, June 29, 1922, p. 1.

⁴¹ Iowa Department of Agriculture and Inspection, Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Archives, Monroe County Annual Narrative Report, 1922, 8.

store and former Senator John F. Clarkson. Both supported the miners in their desire for better wages and conditions.⁴² The strike ended on August 15, 1922,, when the operators agreed to not reduce the miners' wages.⁴³ Albians embraced the return to normalcy by hosting a spontaneous celebration. A band played as the miners gathered in the courthouse yard. The happening drew a large crowd with many waving signs featuring slogans such as, "United We Stand, Divided We Fall" and "We Stand For Our President John L. Lewis." The miners attended a free matinee at the King Theater followed by a street dance which continued into the night.⁴⁴

During the spring of 1927, the region's coal fields were again embroiled in conflict over wages. Morris charged that twenty percent of the men received a daily salary and that the hardship increased when mines were idle. The miners wanted a salary totaling at least \$7.50 per day for all workers, an amount that miners and operators had decided upon in the Jacksonville Agreement. This settlement occurred between Union leaders and representative of mining companies on February 19, 1924 in Jacksonville, Florida.⁴⁵ On April 1, 1927, this accord expired and mine owners moved immediately to reduce wages.⁴⁶ Morris also stated that railroads were not properly charged for their fuel and that

⁴² Union-Republican, June 31, 1922, p. 1.

⁴³ Monroe County News, August 24, 1922, p. 1.

⁴⁴ Ibid., August 17, 1922, p. 1.

⁴⁵ John H.M. Laslett, ed. The United Mine Workers of America: A Model of Industrial Solidarity. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 113.

⁴⁶ Monroe County News, July 19, 1928, p. 1.

operators were afraid to confront them.⁴⁷ On April 1, the failure to reach a wage agreement resulted in another strike. This six-month shutdown was the longest dispute in the area's history.⁴⁸ This walkout occurred in the "central competitive field" which included mines in western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa.⁴⁹ Although there was little confrontation in Monroe County, this was not the case just to the south in Appanoose County. In Mystic, large numbers of miners picketed outside of the Winifred Mine to protest the use of non-union miners. In September, the situation became so strained that the county's sheriff felt compelled to employ tear gas to dispel an angry crowd. The confrontation occurred largely because non-union workers traveled through Mystic from work and passed by many miners' houses. They were heckled and jeered by union miners and their families. The governor contemplated sending troops to Appanoose County, but decided that authorities in Centerville were up to the challenge.⁵⁰ However, the area witnessed the sabotage of the Winifred Mine's electric transformers which were destroyed in a dynamite explosion. Centerville's police believed that strike sympathizers were responsible for the blast.⁵¹ The walkout finally concluded on October 4, 1927, when the Iowa operators agreed to continue to pay the miners \$7.50 per day which had been the standard before the labor dispute.

⁴⁷ Ibid., March 24, 1927, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Ibid., October 3, 1927, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Union-Republican, February 3, 1927, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Monroe County News, September 26, 1927, p. 1.

⁵¹ Ibid., September 29, 1927, p. 1.

Both parties agreed to come to a complete settlement by April 1, 1928.⁵² Despite this favorable news, many of the mines did not reopen, which disheartened Albians who had just endured an especially protracted labor dispute.⁵³ This was a vivid demonstration of the fact that the county's coal industry could not absorb all the forces arrayed against it.

In fact, the decade witnessed the closing of some of the area's largest mines. In 1925, the Consolidation Coal Company announced its dissolution; it was taken over by an Illinois firm. The company's demise revealed the frailty of the industry.⁵⁴ The firm had been one of the largest and most progressive coal companies in Iowa.⁵⁵ In March 1927, mines Number 18 and 19 near Buxton closed down within three weeks of each other. A considerable amount of equipment was abandoned in these mines. One Buxton miner years later stated, ". . . and all that valuable equipment abandoned down there. Just went away and left it, must have been worth more than \$50,000, still down there somewhere."⁵⁶ Even though new mines continued to open, by the end of the decade the industry was in rapid decline.

Nevertheless, Albia's leaders were not idle as one of their most important industries began to disintegrate; instead, they assumed a leading role in promoting Iowa coal. The town's press continually pleaded with the county's residents to purchase Iowa coal. These editorials and ads proclaimed that

⁵² Union-Republican, October 6, 1927, p. 1.

⁵³ Monroe County News, October 6, 1927, p. 1.

⁵⁴ Ibid., November 30, 1925, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Rye, "Buxton: Black Metropolis of Iowa", 945.

⁵⁶ Landis, "A History of Monroe County, Iowa as a Coal Mining Center," 107.

buying local coal contributed to prosperity, while purchasing foreign coal only benefited distant areas. The United Mine Workers Union also recognized that the media was essential in promoting their cause. In August 1924, they paid \$1,000 for a full-page ad in the Des Moines Register which advocated the use of Iowa coal. In Albia and many southern Iowa communities, merchants purchased ads promoting local coal, hoping it would result in greater prosperity for their businesses.⁵⁷ During the summer of 1924 ads frequently appeared praising the use of Iowa coal. The Union-Republican featured one ad which listed seventy businesses and professionals who participated in a public awareness drive.⁵⁸ During the 1924 county fair, the Anderson Hardware Company gave away a ton of Monroe County coal with the purchase of a stove.⁵⁹ The State Mine Inspectors also attempted to save the dying industry. These state employees whose job duties included maintaining safety standards had a vested interest in the survival of mining. In 1926, Inspector W.E. Holland wrote a lengthy editorial indicating that southern Iowans should devote the same time to the ailing coal industry as they did to the agricultural problems.⁶⁰

Despite the dismal prospect, some Albians continued to believe that the industry would be revived. In 1925, these idealists hailed the invention of the "Koal Ekonomizer," a product which allegedly made the Iowa product "superior" to foreign coal. A firm from Des Moines invented the liquid, but it was manufactured in Albia. Although it apparently improved the quality of coal when

⁵⁷ Union-Republican, August 18, 1924, p. 1.

⁵⁸ Ibid., August 21, 1924, p. 7.

⁵⁹ Ibid., August 21, 1924, p. 8.

⁶⁰ Ibid., March 23, 1926, p. 5.

it was applied, it was rarely mentioned in 1925 and never heard of again.⁶¹ In December of 1928, an article in the Union-Republican contended that coal would not be replaced by other fuels since researchers were finding new applications. The piece stated, "more than five thousand products, many in common use every day, are made from coal, coal isn't going out, it's just coming in."⁶² Despite such positive sentiments, coal production continued to plummet. In 1929, operators, miners, and civic leaders of southern Iowa organized to search for solutions. During the last half of the year Albia's Commercial Club rooms hosted a number of meetings. One such gathering occurred in July when leaders from nine Iowa towns met to discuss the problem. The communities included Albia, Ames, Centerville, Chariton, Des Moines, Knoxville, Lovilia, Mystic, and Ottumwa. Although the meeting was cordial, it failed to produce new solutions.⁶³ Similar meetings continued to occur throughout the fall; however, no viable measures were adopted before the close of the decade.

The decade also brought challenges to the county's farmers. The period between 1910 and 1920 had largely been prosperous for agriculture. The years between 1909 and 1914 have been described as the Golden Age for North American farmers. These years brought price equivalence with other segments of the financial system.⁶⁴ Following these years, the arrival of World War I increased the demand for American agricultural products and farmers boosted production and bought more land on credit. The prosperous times ended when

⁶¹ Ibid., February 19, 1925, p. 5.

⁶² Ibid., December 27, 1928, p. 2.

⁶³ Ibid., August 1, 1929, p. 1.

⁶⁴ Dorothy Schwieder, Iowa: The Middle Land (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996), 147.

Europe began to rebound from the war and in May of 1920 national subsidies were eliminated.⁶⁵ Prices also plummeted because foreign products flooded the market.⁶⁶

Since Albia possessed numerous businesses which depended on agriculture, these depressed conditions brought additional worries to local businessmen. These merchants included Bernstein Brothers who purchased wool from sheep growers; Gantz and Kellog who bought eggs, poultry, and cream; the Union and Alexander Supply companies which both sold equipment, and the Wilkin Grain Company. In addition, struggling farmers like striking miners tightened their wallets which hurt all merchants. By the end of 1920, the farmers' anxieties were highly apparent. On November 25, the county's bankers and farmers attended a gathering in Ottumwa which was held to address the poor agricultural conditions and to promote understanding. Many of the area's financial and farm leaders were present. However, the discussions sometimes degenerated into heated quarrels.⁶⁷

Iowa's farmers expressed their feelings about the falling farm prices in a variety of ways. Some advocated a radical response by sanctioning the burning of corn. A.L. Anderson of the Albia Union denounced such drastic measures, believing that it was wrong because the world was filled with starving people.⁶⁸ The editor also placed much blame for the farmer's woes on wild land speculation during World War I. Anderson stated, "One of the things that is

⁶⁵ Ibid., 149.

⁶⁶ Douglas R. Hurt, American Agriculture: A Brief History (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994), 221.

⁶⁷ Albia Republican, November 25, 1920, p. 1.

⁶⁸ Albia Union, December 8, 1921, p. 4.

putting the farmers in a tight place is the war time prices for land. Men incautiously put money and credit for farms that were abnormally high at the time and have trouble paying out.”⁶⁹ If Anderson took an unsympathetic stance, others in the community rallied to support struggling farmers. The Women’s Club of Albia endorsed a campaign to increase the consumption of corn products by one-half pound every day. This statewide campaign was built upon the premise that if only half of the citizens of the country increased their corn consumption it would provide a market for 64,285,689 bushels.⁷⁰

The farm crisis not only sparked heated local debate, but it also transformed national politics. The decade witnessed many attempts by Washington politicians to relieve the financial calamity. Farming advocates began to call for greater involvement by the national government by intervening “in the marketplace for the purpose of controlling surpluses and increasing prices.” These efforts were aided greatly by approximately thirty congressmen who organized themselves into a “farm bloc” and worked diligently to pass farmer-friendly legislation.⁷¹ The efforts of these congressman resulted in a number of bills which included the Packers and Stockyards Act and the Capper-Volstead Act. The first Act “prohibited monopoly and the restraint of trade in the slaughtering business” and the second “exempted agricultural cooperatives from anti-trust laws.”⁷² This trend toward an increased level of involvement by the national government continued throughout the decade. One of the best-

⁶⁹ Ibid., December 20, 1921, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid., February 10, 1922, p. 6.

⁷¹ Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939. (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951), 324.

⁷² Hurt, American Agriculture: A Brief History, 266.

known proposals was the McNary-Haugen Bill, a plan centering on a resolution to sell agricultural surpluses on two different markets which would hopefully raise farm prices. Products sold in the United States would sell at a domestic market price, but commodities sold later on the world market would probably sell at a deficit. To cover this loss, an equalization payment would be levied upon all producers.⁷³ Unfortunately for farmers, President Calvin Coolidge rejected this attempt to relieve low farm prices. Herbert Hoover also opposed intense involvement by the national government in the affairs of agriculture. Therefore, despite energetic efforts, American agriculture continued to struggle throughout the decade.

However, the farmers were not alone in their battle; they were assisted by the Farm Bureau, the County Extension Agent, and Iowa State College. The Monroe County Farm Bureau shared meeting rooms with the Commercial Club above the Latimer Brothers and Hurst store located on the town's square. The County Extension Agent's office was also located there, indicating the close relationship between the Extension Service and the Farm Bureau.⁷⁴ The Smith-Lever Act had given birth to the Cooperative Extension system in 1914 which created a cooperative relationship between local, state, and national governments in order to improve the quality of farm life.⁷⁵ The Monroe County Farm Bureau was established in 1917 and the area welcomed its first county agent the following year.⁷⁶ The county and home demonstration agents were in

⁷³ Schwieder, Iowa: The Middle Land, 150.

⁷⁴ Albia Republican, November 11, 1920, p. 1.

⁷⁵ Dorothy Schwieder, Seventy-Five Years of Service: Cooperative Extension in Iowa (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1993), 15.

⁷⁶ Union-Republican, October 4, 1926, p. 5.

the vanguard of this attempt to enhance rural life. During the 1920s, Monroe County had three extension agents. Samuel Baxter was the Extension Agent from the decade's beginning until he resigned in the fall of 1921. Emmet Gardner was appointed as his successor on December 3 and occupied the position until September of 1927.⁷⁷ He was a dedicated worker throughout his tenure as illustrated by his first year of service in which he only took three days of vacation and lost no time due to illness.⁷⁸ Fred Tarr replaced Gardner in October of 1927 and served the remainder of the decade.⁷⁹

The Farm Bureau and Extension Agent addressed three different needs. The first need was to increase the farmers' productivity and efficiency which included taking measures to eliminate agricultural diseases and distributing information about new farming methods. They also facilitated efforts aimed at securing better prices for farm products. The Farm Bureau and the Extension Office fulfilled this goal by "gathering and disseminating" information, but not directly forming farming organizations.⁸⁰ The second need the Extension Office addressed included improving home life and childhood education, which was accomplished through classes conducted by the Home Demonstration Agent and by sponsoring agricultural clubs for young people. The Farm Bureau addressed another need of the farm community by sponsoring picnics and other gatherings which were an opportunity for farm families to hear speakers and socialize. The farmers responded favorably to these organizations and often

⁷⁷ Monroe County News, December 8, 1921, p. 1, and Union-Republican, September 22, 1927, p. 1.

⁷⁸ Monroe County News, February 15, 1923, p. 3.

⁷⁹ Union-Republican, October 17, 1927, p. 1.

⁸⁰ Albia Union, November 29, 1921, p. 7.

cooperated with each other to protect their interests.

The County Agent's activities were impressively diverse. These projects included testing different crop varieties, campaigning to eliminate agricultural pests, and working to educate farmers on raising better livestock. In general, he acted as a conduit of information to aid in solving almost any conceivable farming problem. This role is graphically illustrated in the Agents' efforts to improve soil quality. In 1921, Frank Mann spoke at a Farm Bureau dinner in Albia and described the impressive benefits he had gained from the use of limestone, clover, and acid phosphates. He stated, "it is possible to increase our yields to 75 bushel of corn per acre."⁸¹ Agent Emmet Gardner swiftly responded to the need to invest in the farmers' greatest commodity: the soil. In 1922, after several evaluations of samples, he commented, "we found that most of the soil we tested needed lime."⁸² This resulted in an energetic campaign to increase the use of lime and planting legumes to enrich the soil. The following year, he ordered "ten car loads" of limestone to be shared among fifty farmers.⁸³ As the decade progressed, these efforts grew. The farmers embraced this drive by jointly purchasing 2,100 tons of limestone, resulting in \$500 of savings in 1926.⁸⁴ A legume campaign was equally enthusiastic. In 1927, over 2,800 persons were present in meetings which discussed the use of legumes.⁸⁵ Farmers responded favorably to Gardner's advice about growing more alfalfa.

⁸¹ Albia Republican, February 24, 1921, p. 1.

⁸² Annual Narrative Report, 1922, p. 5.

⁸³ Ibid., 1923, p. 2.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 1926, p. 1.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 1927, p. 1.

In 1922, only forty acres were planted, but 740 acres were sown in 1928.⁸⁶ On July 29, 1927, a legume train sponsored by the Iowa State College arrived in Albia.⁸⁷ The event attracted 500 people who listened to talks given by agricultural experts from Ames. The exhibit was intended to educate and spark concern in regard to soil quality and how it could be improved through the use of lime and legumes.⁸⁸

Erosion was a particularly stubborn problem on the hilly farms surrounding Albia. The Farm Bureau was very active in trying to combat these unsightly ditches which ravenously consumed top soil. In 1921, H.H. Sunderline of Iowa State College visited the county and presented multiple demonstrations. He instructed farmers on a variety of methods which prevented the expansion of earth-eating ditches. One technique involved stringing mesh wire across ditches.⁸⁹ These presentations continued throughout the decade. In 1924, Sunderline returned to Monroe County and educated farmers on terracing, an additional prevention measure. These presentations were particularly fruitful and "six dams were built in the county" following this visit.⁹⁰

The Farm Bureau also sponsored numerous informational meetings which were held throughout the county and contained both social and educational elements. However, Albia was the most popular location since it was the county's commercial and governmental center. These gatherings came

⁸⁶ Ibid., 1928, p. 6.

⁸⁷ Union-Republican, August 1, 1927, p. 1.

⁸⁸ Annual Narrative Report, 1922, 1927, p. 6.

⁸⁹ Albia Republican, April 7, 1921, p. 5.

⁹⁰ Annual Narrative Report, 1924, p. 10.

in a variety of forms, but all received a high level of participation. In January of 1923, a meeting attracted a large crowd. County Agent Gardner summarized the many accomplishments of the Extension Office in 1922 and proposed ideas for projects in 1923.⁹¹ The annual Farm Bureau picnics were also popular; farm families gathered to listen to speakers and enjoy a variety of entertainment. In July of 1926, the annual Farm Bureau Picnic at the Monroe County fairgrounds included a speech by J.S. Coupe, Assistant to the Secretary of the Iowa Farm Bureau; he said that cooperation was the key to improving agricultural conditions.⁹²

The County Extension Agent also actively worked with farm children to promote involvement in clubs. These organizations include the Calf, Pig, Pure Bred Gilt, and the Poultry Clubs. These are just a few of the many youth groups that were active during the decade. A large portion of children's projects involved preparation for competitions at the county and state fairs. The county agents worked diligently to encourage fair officials to offer generous prizes for excellence in raising livestock. In 1922, the Monroe County Fair offered \$700 worth of prizes to youth who showed calves. These funds were donated largely by Albia businesspeople. The youth also benefited from entrance fees which were often reimbursed by the Farm Bureau. In addition, the organization furnished a tent for the youth to sleep in.⁹³ These agricultural clubs continued to be vibrant social and educational outlets throughout the decade. For instance, in 1927, there were eighty club meetings with over 1,992 people in

⁹¹ Ibid., January 18, 1923, p. 1.

⁹² Union-Republican, July 5, 1926, p. 1.

⁹³ Annual Narrative Report, 1922, p. 11.

attendance.⁹⁴ There were also attempts to educate young people in management skills. The Farm Record Club was conceived in order to fulfill this purpose; unfortunately, it received only nominal participation. County Agent Gardner said that "it was hard to get the boys to take much interest in this work for the reason that most of the boys in the Club were out of school and did not have time for it."⁹⁵

There were also a number of organizations to improve prices through cooperative marketing ventures. One of the more active of these enterprises was the Wool Marketing Association, first mentioned in the 1922 annual narrative report. The year witnessed two meetings of the organization resulting in one car load of wool to be sold jointly.⁹⁶ In 1925, Albia and Moravia sent approximately 12,000 pounds of wool to the Chicago Wool Pool.⁹⁷ The County harvested a substantial amount of wool during the decade. In 1919, the area produced 92,326 pounds and ten years later the output had risen slightly to 93,326 pounds, revealing that the county possessed a respectable sheep industry.⁹⁸

Another collective venture was the establishment of a cooperative creamery in Albia on July 7, 1926. An agreement was reached with the Pioneer Creamery Company of Galesburg, Illinois. The Extension Agent Report stated,

⁹⁴ Ibid., 1927, p. 2.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 1922, p. 11.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 1922, p. 9.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 1925, p. 22.

⁹⁸ Executive Council. Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920. Agriculture, Vol. 6, Part I, p. 550, and Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930. Agriculture, Vol. 2, Part 1, p. 954.

“the contract called for a flat price to be paid of 2 cents above the Chicago standard butter market for all other than sweet cream, for it 10 cents above the direct shipper’s price was to be paid during the summer months and 3 cents in winter months.”⁹⁹ This venture resulted in economic benefit for farmers. In 1927, thirty-five farmers were rewarded by sending 28,290 pounds of butter fat with the aid of the cooperative creamery, giving them “a profit” \$1,000 above what they would have received from the local price.¹⁰⁰ The Farm Bureau and Extension Agent aided these cooperative efforts by providing information and facilitating a participatory spirit amongst farmers.

The Monroe County Poultry and Pet Stock Association was a cooperative effort which worked to promote poultry raising in the county. Its annual poultry shows were popular events which promoted the Association’s work. In 1921, the show was held in Albia. The exhibition featured over 500 birds from Monroe County and surrounding counties. However, the citizens of Monroe County received the bulk of the awards for excellence in poultry-raising.¹⁰¹ The area’s involvement in the poultry industry is demonstrated by Harry Pharis’ hatchery which was located in Albia. In 1923, the enterprise contained a capacity of 24,000 eggs and provided the area with chicks of almost every popular breed.¹⁰²

Women were also very active in the Farm Bureau and the County Extension Service. Both organizations expended a considerable amount of

⁹⁹ Annual Narrative Report, 1926, p. 25.

¹⁰⁰ Annual Narrative Report, 1927, p. 65.

¹⁰¹ Monroe County News, December 15, 1921, p. 1.

¹⁰² ibid., January 11, 1921, p.1.

energy into making them active participants. In 1921, Agent Samuel Baxter said that women's involvement was essential to a strong and vibrant Farm Bureau in Monroe County.¹⁰³ Baxter's observation was demonstrated throughout the decade, since extension activities included a large number of projects involving women. These activities usually consisted of efforts to improve the quality of life in the homes of farming families. The Home Demonstration Agent shouldered the bulk of the responsibility of facilitating these domestic projects. This role was filled by the wives of the county agents who were dedicated stewards of their position and facilitated numerous projects in the county. These included sewing projects, health education, home beautification, and other activities aimed at improving the quality of rural life. Although they were always identified by their husband's name, they were an essential part of extension work and their contributions were invaluable.

The county's women embraced these efforts as evidenced by the high level of participation. In 1925, hundreds of women declared that they had learned a considerable amount from the extension program's sewing and clothing demonstrations.¹⁰⁴ Nutrition projects also attracted much interest in the county. One project aimed at improving the health of the county's residents consisted of training sixty-one women as local leaders. These individuals were critical in disseminating health information to the county's women.¹⁰⁵ Their message advocated a more balanced diet of fewer fried foods and sugar and eating more dairy products and fruits. The Extension Office also recommended

¹⁰³ Annual Narrative Report, 1921, p. 48.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 1925, p. 1.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 1926, p. 1.

that families drink more water. These diet projects were also helpful to the women of the county and hundreds reported that they benefited significantly from this activity.¹⁰⁶ Agent Gardener was extremely pleased by the success of the year's nutrition projects. He stated that it "was one of the most valuable home projects that has been conducted in the county in Farm Bureau work, in as much as it has aroused great numbers of persons to thinking of the value of health."¹⁰⁷

Gardner's comment points to an interesting contradiction in farm life in the 1920s. Although residents of rural areas often struggled to make do on shrinking profits, in many respects life on the farm began to improve. Although drastic innovations would wait until the 1930s, the period's technological developments foreshadowed what Deborah Fink and Dorothy Schwieder have called a "social renaissance in the thirties."¹⁰⁸ One improvement in rural life came in the form of better roads. Many highway projects in the decade brought greater ease of transportation and allowed rural families to partake in the entertainment and social activities which had traditionally been available primarily to town residents.¹⁰⁹

Better roads also made it easier for Albians to travel into the countryside, but some were not courteous visitors. One editorial denounced the urban sightseers' rude behavior, saying that farmers often complained "of property destruction, leaving rubbish on the ground, taking fruit without permission,

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 1926, p. 11.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 1926, p. 14.

¹⁰⁸ Deborah Fink and Dorothy Schwieder. "Iowa Farm Women in the 1930s: A Reassessment." Annals of Iowa 49 (Winter 1989), 571.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 584.

lighting fires without due precautions and other faults.”¹¹⁰

Another benefit, rural electrification, would not reach most residents until well into the thirties.¹¹¹ Despite this fact, the age of rural electricity was on the horizon. In 1925, the Union-Republican revealed that one out of seven Iowa farms had electricity.¹¹² The paper also stated, “light is the great civilizer,” saying that electricity would revolutionize life on the farm by decreasing the grind of daily farm life, which, in turn, would make rural life more desirable for young people.¹¹³

However, some new technologies did arrive in full-force and one of these was the radio.¹¹⁴ In 1926, the Union-Republican reported that in the United States “25 to 40 percent of all farms possessed radios.”¹¹⁵ However, the radio of the day required considerable effort to maintain. The sets used large batteries which often had to be taken to town to be recharged.¹¹⁶ Farm families usually embraced the variety of entertainment that broadcasts brought into their homes, but farmers valued radios as a quick and effective way to get weather and market reports.¹¹⁷ Therefore, farmers no longer had to rely on crucial data from

¹¹⁰ Union-Republican, August 20, 1925, p. 2.

¹¹¹ Fink and Schwieder, “Iowa Farm Women in the 1930s,” 585.

¹¹² Union-Republican, June 8, 1925, p. 5.

¹¹³ Ibid., August 10, 1925, p. 7.

¹¹⁴ Fink and Schwieder, “Iowa Farm Women in the 1930s,” 586.

¹¹⁵ Union-Republican, March 15, 1926, p. 7.

¹¹⁶ Reynold M. Wik, “The Radio In Rural America During the 1920s,” Agricultural History 55 (October, 1981), 340.

¹¹⁷ Union-Republican, March 15, 1926, p. 5.

newspapers which often gave imprecise reports that were “too slow in delivery.” The growth of reporting the markets grew tremendously during the decade. In early 1922, “the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced that thirty-six stations had been licensed by the Department of Commerce to air market information. The reception was limited to about 100,000 farmers with radios. However, this number increased to 365,000 in 1924 and 553,000 in 1925.”¹¹⁸ Radio changed almost every aspect of rural life. The broadcast of national advertisements multiplied the shopping choices for farm families. People in rural areas also adopted the belief that the radio would ease the loneliness of country living and aid in keeping young people on the farm. In addition, radio changed the face of religion and politics because spiritual and secular leaders could be heard by the turn of a knob.¹¹⁹

Despite this progress in transportation and communication, farm families saw their standard of living was not comparable to that of town residents, a point evidenced in Albia’s press. A 1922 “boilerplate” piece appearing in the Union-Republican attempted to discredit the notion that rural women did not want their daughters to marry farmers because it doomed them to a sub-standard living. The piece said that in reality they wanted their daughters to stay on the farm since rural women enjoyed many benefits that were unavailable to town women.¹²⁰ This was one of many articles which tried to dispute a growing belief that farm life was undesirable. This trend is not surprising since urban residents even in towns of Albia’s size had numerous technological devices available to

¹¹⁸ Wik, “The Radio In Rural America During the 1920s,” 342.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 347.

¹²⁰ Union-Republican, August 10, 1922, p. 8.

them. The fast pace of rural improvement could not keep up with the frantic speed at which urbanites received domestic innovations. These largely came because of the availability of electricity in towns. This one difference between the countryside and towns created a technological gulf which was highly apparent during the period.

For instance, one task which had created endless drudgery was ironing; before the advent of electric power, irons were generally cumbersome time-consuming devices because they required repeated warming. However, after the First World War, electric irons arrived in the marketplace in large numbers. By 1929, a questionnaire given to 100 Ford workers in another state indicated that only two of them did not own an electric iron. In addition, forty-nine of these employees also had electric washing machines.¹²¹ These are just two examples of a host of labor-saving devices that followed the advent of electrical power. Albia's businesses reflected the arrival of this convenience. The Albia Light and Railway Company placed an ad in the Union-Republican which urged husbands to purchase "a handy electrical or gas appliance" and listed the following items as appropriate gifts: electric irons, turnover toasters, Eureka Vacuum Cleaners, coffee percolators, curlers, grills, table stoves, ABC Washing Machines, three-heat warming pads, and H.B. Hair Driers.¹²² The Poling Electric Company also attempted to lure customers into the electric age by advertising Hoover Vacuum Sweepers and Dexter Electric Washing

¹²¹ Stephen Cutcliffe and Terry S. Reynolds, eds., Technology and American History: A Historical Anthology From Technology and Culture (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 325.

¹²² Union-Republican, December 21, 1922, p. 7.

Machines¹²³ J.H. Williams and Son also featured featured electric washers.¹²⁴ The Darby and Wood Store also sold numerous appliances including waffle irons and toasters.¹²⁵ In April 1929, an article featured in the Union-Republican stated, "the old time kitchen is dying in this country, the plumber and the electrician have so modified the kitchen that the picturesque fireplace is no longer present, and the room itself is reduced to the size of a modern laboratory."¹²⁶ Albians appeared to embrace these new technologies and probably benefited greatly from them. However, people in rural areas could visit the community and gaze in wonderment at the ever-increasing variety of electrical appliances that were unavailable to them. Some mining and farming families probably concluded that life in Albia was much easier than in the country, and this may have been true in purely physical terms. Nevertheless, Albians were not immune from a host of challenges which crowded in upon their lives.

¹²³ Ibid., April 11, 1922, p.5, and June 23, 1924, p. 4.

¹²⁴ Ibid., September 20, 1923, p. 6.

¹²⁵ Ibid., December 21, 1925, p. 5.

¹²⁶ Ibid., April 4, 1929, p. 3.

CHAPTER TWO

ALBIA'S CHALLENGES: HARD TIMES, HARD LIQUOR, HEALTH, AND HIGHWAYS

Albians witnessed an increase in both the number and rate of changes in the 1920s. The decade, sandwiched between the 1850s and the present, illustrates the increasing speed of social and technological transformation in modern times. During this era the obituaries printed in Albia's newspapers show that the pioneers were departing and with them a simpler time. Albia's relative isolation from the outside world had ended (refer to Figure 3). Today, the phrase, "globalization," describes the interconnected world of the twenty-first century. The roots of this process can be seen in Albia during the 1920s.

The town had sent its young men to fight a war in Europe. An increase in crime, the coming of the Jazz Age, and Prohibition were additional deviations from the past. Economic tumult added to the decade's transitional nature. Monroe County farmers competed in the world market with farmers from Canada, Argentina, and Australia, and the area's mines suffered because of competition from states which produced higher quality coal. Albians also grappled with the need for improved roads. Therefore, this period presented many challenges to the traditional way of life. This chapter will examine how these various changes affected life in Albia.

Technological innovation was probably one of the most visible agents of change. The car and radio revolutionized life by decreasing isolation and connecting Albia to the outside world. Albians enthusiastically embraced these new devices. The town's press featured stories about the radio, revealing how it affected people's sense of space, entertainment habits, and access to information. The radio even affected politics because leaders could be heard

immediately from distant places. The newspapers also contained many advertisements for radio receivers which tempted consumers to purchase the latest models. Albians could buy radios from various merchants including Becker-Bowen Motor Company and Poling Electric Company. In 1926, the Union-Republican reflected the importance of the radio by stating it is a "social force that permeates every part of our daily life."¹ Although there was little mention of it, Albia even had a radio station as early as 1922.² Likewise, the automobile received much attention in the town's newspapers. Car shows were popular and numerous businesses related to the automobile prospered. The number of cars in Monroe County increased throughout the decade and, by 1925, Monroe County had one automobile for every 6.5 persons.³ However, editorials often pointed out the danger of cars. The greater ease of travel could distract youth or even become a tool for moral decline. In addition, the numerous car accidents of the decade illustrated the danger of driving.

Albians reacted to the issues of the period in a variety of ways. These challenges can be investigated by studying the town's political culture. The Republican party's dominance was apparent throughout the 1920s as Albians and other Monroe County residents typically voted for Republicans at all levels of government. County officers usually lived in Albia and were rarely Democrats. The GOP received the largest number of votes in the Governor's races between 1920 and 1932. In 1932, a Republican candidate for governor

¹ Union-Republican, February 11, 1926, p. 2.

² Monroe County News, March 2, 1922, p. 1.

³ Union-Republican, July 13, 1925, p. 3.

still earned the most votes even though the party had weakened.⁴ Republican presidential candidates were also victorious between 1920 and 1928. In 1928, the closest race occurred when Herbert Hoover received 4,060 votes while Alfred E. Smith obtained 2,819.⁵ However, in 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt wooed depression-ravaged voters and defeated Hoover 3,716 to 2,458.⁶ The most pronounced aberration in the allegiance to the Republican party was in Jackson Township which is located in the southwest corner of the county (refer to Figure 1). This area consistently supported Democratic candidates for office, probably because this locale possessed large numbers of Irish Catholics. Georgetown, which is also in the western portion of the county, was another example of the exceptional Democratic strength of the region. The presence of a large Catholic Church reveals that religious orientation contributed to polarity in the county.⁷

The town's newspapers reflected political concerns. Albia began the decade with three papers: the Union, the Republican, and the Monroe County News. The first two were Republican. The News, which was published weekly, provided a voice for the Democratic minority. The Union was a biweekly paper and the Republican was published only on Thursdays. The Union and Republican consolidated in 1922, leaving the town with two newspapers. The press revealed the major political debates of the decade by enthusiastically embracing their party's platforms.

⁴ Iowa Official Register, 1933-1934, 207.

⁵ Iowa Official Register, 1929-1930, 423.

⁶ Iowa Official Register, 1933-1934, 207.

⁷ See Iowa Official Register as follows: 1923-1924, p. 442; 1925-1926, 482; 1927-1928, p. 405; 1929-1930, p. 377; 1931-1932, p. 391; 1933-1934, p. 207.

The News defended the record of the Democratic party and frequently attacked Republican leaders. The paper praised Woodrow Wilson's efforts to "make the world safe for democracy" and criticized his opponents. During Warren G. Harding's presidential campaign the News said he "is a man of mediocre ability."⁸ Harding also received criticism because of his opposition to Wilson-style foreign policy. These diatribes often consisted of assaults upon Harding's Tea Pot Dome Scandal and his farm policies. The paper also suggested that Harding's actions contributed to world instability.⁹ However, its assessment of the Calvin Coolidge administration was particularly harsh. Coolidge was depicted as a friend of big business and an enemy of farmers. One editorial said that he would do nothing to ease the agricultural problem which interfered with the "party's meal ticket, the profiteers, grafters, and monopolists."¹⁰

Albia's Republican papers hailed their party's accomplishments and avidly boosted its candidates. They also defended the party against Democratic criticism. For instance, one editorial in the Union-Republican countered denunciations of Harding and Coolidge by stressing that the economy had improved during their administrations.¹¹ Another piece attempted to detract from critics of the Tea Pot Dome Scandal, saying that the petroleum reserves would be managed more effectively by private groups than if they were controlled by

⁸ Monroe County News, July 15, 1920, p. 1.

⁹ Ibid., October 14, 1920, p. 1.

¹⁰ Ibid., August 23, 1923, p. 2.

¹¹ Union-Republican, February 25, 1924, p. 4.

the government.¹² This undying support continued throughout the 1924 campaign. The Union-Republican was extremely confident about Coolidge's potential success, arguing that any Democrat who ran against him "would be like a snow ball in hades."¹³

Albian N.E. Kendall's successful campaign for governor in 1920 was one of the greatest local triumphs and his inauguration elated many of his fellow townspeople. As the Republican reported, "It is a distinct honor for any town and county to furnish the governor of a state like Iowa, and Albia and Monroe County are more elated over this special privilege than has been any county or town in the state."¹⁴ Kendall had received his early political experience as County Attorney for Monroe County and his accomplishments were a source of pride throughout the decade.¹⁵

Col. Smith W. Brookhart, a frequent candidate in Iowa's U.S. Senate races, was another politician who appeared regularly in Albia's press. A maverick Republican, his popularity reveals that Monroe County's struggling economy greatly affected politics. Brookhart's liberal economic platform attracted labor, members of the Farmers Union, and dissenting Democrats.¹⁶ During the senatorial primary in 1922, Brookhart received over sixty percent of the vote in Monroe County. He acquired a greater percentage in Monroe than

¹² Ibid., March 10, 1924, p. 2.

¹³ Ibid., March 3, 1924, p. 2.

¹⁴ Ibid., January 6, 1921, p.1.

¹⁵ Iowa Official Register, 1921-1922, 300.

¹⁶ Jerry Alvin Neprash, Brookhart Campaigns in Iowa 1920-1926: A Study in the Motivation of Political Attitudes (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 32.

any other county in the state. The combined trauma of the depressed coal mining and farming conditions serve as a likely explanation for his success.¹⁷

Smith Brookhart visited Albia on several occasions. In 1922, he spoke at the Comet Theater to miners and farmers.¹⁸ However, Brookhart received much criticism and the Union-Republican was one of his greatest critics in Albia. The paper was unhappy over his success in the 1922 election but supported him in order to preserve party loyalty.¹⁹ During the 1924 primary campaign the paper did not endorse Brookhart; instead, it encouraged voters to lend their support to Burton E. Sweet.²⁰ Rumors constantly circulated as to whether Brookhart was a Socialist and his alleged compliments of the Soviet Union provoked a particularly strong attack. His enemies often said he was a Communist, and the “association of Brookhart with radicalism was a potent weapon” against him.²¹ In May of 1924, the Union-Republican declared that he was an embarrassment to Iowa and predicted that he would be defeated in the primary election.²² Although Brookhart was victorious, the criticism continued and reached a crescendo in October.²³ A writer for the Union-Republican described a speech he gave to a crowd of 300 local people. The editorial referred to

¹⁷ Ibid., 81.

¹⁸ Union-Republican, May 25, 1922, p. 1.

¹⁹ Ibid., January 22, 1922, p. 2.

²⁰ Ibid., May 19, 1924, p. 1.

²¹ George William McDaniel, Smith Wildman Brookhart: Iowa's Renegade Republican, (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1995), 82.

²² Ibid., May 22, 1924, p. 2.

²³ Iowa Official Register, 1925-1926, 441.

Brookhart as a "lover of Lenin and Trotsky" and vehemently attacked his critical view of Coolidge and Senator A.B. Cummins. The paper caustically asked "How this land of Lincoln and Washington has ever risen until it has become the most wonderful nation of the globe without the guiding hand of the wild man is more than can be imagined!"²⁴

These attacks upon Brookhart were common and were featured in newspapers across the state. Although the argument persisted that he was a Communist, Brookhart's strength remained intact as demonstrated in his victory in the 1926 primary election.²⁵ The Union-Republican again attacked Brookhart in his 1926 senate contest with Democrat Claude R. Porter. Porter won in Albia, but Brookhart carried the county by a margin of 896 votes.²⁶ These differences in political orientation were not common, and, in most instances, the town and county voted for the same candidates. Nevertheless, there were exceptions which were usually a result of the Democratic strongholds in the county.²⁷

Some Albians believed that neither party could solve the nation's problems. This is not surprising since the United States had undergone great transformations. One of these was a massive influx of immigrants totaling 14.5 million between 1900 and 1920. A large percentage of these were immigrants from eastern Europe who possessed alien languages and customs which

²⁴ Union-Republican, October 14, 1924, p. 1.

²⁵ Leland Sage, A History of Iowa (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1974), 257, and Iowa Official Register, 1927-1928, 349

²⁶ Iowa Official Register, 1927-1928, 405.

²⁷ See Iowa Official Register as follows: 1923-1924, p. 442; 1925-1926, 482; 1927-1928, p. 405; 1929-1930, p. 377; 1931-1932, p. 391; 1933-1934, p. 207.

seemingly threatened Anglo-Saxon America.²⁸ Technological changes added to this growing sense of insecurity and many persons viewed radio, movies, and automobiles as corrupting cultural influences, especially for the youth.²⁹ These new forms of communication and transportation existed within a culture of jazz and illegal liquor. Protestant America responded to these challenges to the bygone Victorian age and the Ku Klux Klan arose as a drastic response to perceived threats to established values. Although church leaders usually condemned the Klan, the organization was heavily Protestant, including approximately 40,000 pastors who joined the KKK during the 1920s.³⁰ These churchmen illustrated a widespread feeling that the nation's moral fabric was disintegrating. These developments created a hunger for a national organization which would serve as an outlet for American traditionalists. The Klan was a national movement which differed greatly from its nineteenth century predecessor or the modern version. The organization had more in common with the anti-Catholic Know-Nothing movement of the 1850s.³¹ The Klan had at its height approximately five million members in the United States with its primary targets being "Catholics, Jews, and foreigners."³²

The Klan was most active in Albia during the first half of the 1920s. Their brief history in the county is due partly to the resistance they faced from

²⁸ Wyn Craig Wade, The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 148.

²⁹ Ibid., 171.

³⁰ Ibid., 173.

³¹ Richard K. Tucker, The Rise and Fall of the Ku Klux Klan in Middle America (Hamden: The Shoe String Press, 1991), 52.

³² Ibid., 6 and 11.

community leaders, and follows a larger national pattern characterized by less Klan activity by the close of the decade. During the spring of 1923, the Klan organized itself in secrecy. The first meeting occurred in April and featured a speaker from Waterloo. The details of the gathering were closely guarded, and only those who had received invitations attended.³³ The Klan's subdued demeanor ended in August of 1923 in a display of unity on a farm southeast of town. A large crowd watched the spectacle of an estimated 300 white-robed and hooded Klansmen marching over a hilly forty-acre farm. The men concluded by burning a cross and initiating new members.³⁴ A similar incident occurred the next summer; it was also at night and included a cross burning.³⁵

The KKK encountered much local opposition. In 1925, the Klan wished to stage a Fourth of July parade donned in their white hoods, but the Albia City Council denied the request in a vote of four to three. Council members had come to a tie, but Mayor J.H. Elder supplied the deciding vote. Opponents criticized the Klan's unwillingness to reveal their identity and believed the parade could cause disorder and unrest during holiday celebrations.³⁶ Albia's established organizations, including the Lions Club, Commercial Club, church groups, and the Legion, opposed the Klan. The Lions Club issued a statement stating, "the Klan is an element of discord, an influence toward suspicion and the slanderous tongue, and encouragement of evil practices, as the boycott and mob action, that it is unworthy and holds up high ideals as a cloak for

³³ Union-Republican, April 22, 1923, p. 1.

³⁴ Ibid., August 20, 1923, p. 1.

³⁵ Ibid., June 30, 1924, p. 1.

³⁶ Ibid., July 2, 1925, p. 1.

questionable deeds."³⁷ The Commercial Club soon followed in censuring the Klan, saying that it had "disrupting effects upon the business interests and social life of Albia."³⁸ The United Presbyterian Church also passed an anti-Klan resolution.³⁹ Albia hosted speakers who vigorously attacked the Klan. John Wilkinson of Oklahoma addressed Albians in front of the courthouse using the Bible and appeals to "real Americanism" to criticize the Klan.⁴⁰ The Monroe County News also denounced the Klan. After a bloody dispute involving two Klan members in Georgia, the paper stated, "perhaps the sooner the instigators kill each other off the better it will be for the world."⁴¹ These attacks against the Klan aided in the organization's loss of legitimacy; by the end of the decade, following the national trend, the KKK faded into obscurity.⁴²

Albia's politics and cultural values were not the only aspects of life which experienced tumult. Indeed, the American small town itself faced criticism as a number of books were published in this era which found fault with small communities. These included works such as Edgar Lee Master's Spoon River Anthology, Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio, and Sinclair Lewis' Main Street. This literature arose from an increasingly urbanized American society whose outlook was becoming more metropolitan since cities had become the

³⁷ Ibid., May 3, 1923, p. 1.

³⁸ Ibid., May 10, 1923, p. 1.

³⁹ Ibid., May 7, 1923, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Ibid., September 1, 1924, p. 1.

⁴¹ Monroe County News, November 8, 1923, p. 2.

⁴² Gary D. Dixon, "Harrison County, Iowa: Aspects of Life From 1920 to 1930" (Master's Thesis, Department of History, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1997), 62.

nation's centers of commerce, culture, and capital. The dominance of cities was heightened by technological innovations such as cars, radios, and movie theaters.⁴³ By 1922, Main Street had sold 390,000 copies, a fact which boded ill for small town life.⁴⁴ However, on February 23, 1923, Alex Miller arrived as part of Albia's annual lyceum course and delivered a speech entitled "The Other Side of Main Street." Miller believed small towns were superior to cities since living in large urban centers caused social isolation. Miller's eloquent defense of their lifestyle probably comforted Albians.⁴⁵ John Urban was a writer from Chicago who was allegedly critical of the entire state of Iowa. The Union-Republican responded to him by stating, "what a blessing it would be if these poor and misguided and misinformed individuals could penetrate into the vastness of this wonderful paradise of corn and wine and learn the ABCs of living."⁴⁶ In May of 1925, this tension between small town and larger cities was also illustrated in an advertisement which appeared in the Union-Republican proclaiming Albia's ambitions for growth and prosperity. It contended that the trend toward urbanization had ended and Americans were returning to small towns to enjoy a superior way of life.⁴⁷ The Albia Union-Republican also took advantage of opportunities to glorify national figures who had humble origins. Nevertheless, the paper admitted in 1928 that many youth were fleeing to the

⁴³ Thomas Morain, Prairie Grass Roots: An Iowa Small Town in the Early Twentieth Century (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988,) 256.

⁴⁴ Richard Lingeman, Small Town America: A Narrative History 1620-The Present (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1980), 380.

⁴⁵ Union-Republican, February 8, 1923, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Ibid., June 26, 1923, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Ibid., May 25, 1925, p. 5.

cities and that rural communities needed to make life more appealing for them. Although the editorial was primarily aimed at young men, it also mentioned women.⁴⁸

Albians reacted in a variety of ways to a world that was becoming more technological, urban, and economically uncertain. The community's more influential citizens included journalists, businessmen, and members of civic organizations who were committed town boosters. These men were extremely active in betterment projects and even searched for new methods of organization. In October of 1929, Albians created the Monroe County Boosters Association in an attempt to increase town activism. An ad for the Association stated that it was open to anyone regardless of age, color, place of residence, sex, or politics.⁴⁹ Albia's press supported proactive measures such as homebuying, community involvement, and beautification projects. The newspapers also praised the town, unceasingly indicating that it possessed a dynamic commercial life, healthy banks, an adequate water supply, excellent transportation systems, vibrant social institutions, and friendly people. However, statistics gleaned from an investigation by the State Auditor on March 31, 1922, reveal a more realistic appraisal. Although Albia ranked fifteenth in taxable valuation per capita among 107 other Iowa communities, it was fiftieth in city debt and forty-fourth in per capita tax. Albia was noticeably deficient in its fire prevention measures, being in last place in the number of fire hydrants.⁵⁰

Despite Albia's less than spectacular ratings, the newspapers were

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, March 1, 1928, p. 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, October 3, 1929, p. 2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, July 23, 1923, p. 1.

relentlessly optimistic, stressing the need for a service-minded populace. A 1927 Union-Republican editorial stated, "Every citizen of a town owes that town his cooperation in improving it and making it better place in which to live for the future as well as the present. This cooperation takes the form of voting during elections, supporting civic improvement organizations, supporting public institutions, and taking part in all movements which are for the betterment of the community."⁵¹ The paper occasionally promoted the belief that normal times had returned. In 1926, an editorial stated that conditions had improved and that this change was noticeable to the community's business leaders.⁵² One piece even chastised individuals who, after living in other cities, complained about their home town. The writer said that Albia would probably be better off without such critics.⁵³ The Monroe County News echoed these feelings of town patriotism and one editorial from this paper argued that town unity should be stronger than individual party allegiance.⁵⁴

If shopping and services are measures of vitality, Albia deserved praise. The town offered a dynamic commercial life encompassing clothing stores, car dealerships, restaurants, grocery stores, and numerous other businesses, even as its merchants struggled to survive against shrinking profits. Albia's primary promotional instrument was the Commercial Club which in 1927 had 256 members representing ninety-five percent of the town's firms.⁵⁵ The

⁵¹ Ibid., June 17, 1927, p. 2.

⁵² Ibid., February 15, 1926, p. 2.

⁵³ Ibid., September 16, 1924, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Monroe County News, July 6, 1922, p. 2.

⁵⁵ Union-Republican, January 31, 1927, p. 1.

organization sponsored numerous events and cooperated with other groups in community betterment projects. The Club met regularly at its rooms located on the square.⁵⁶ These dinner meetings featured speakers and were used to plan for upcoming events. The Commercial Club was extremely dynamic. In 1929 alone, the organization devoted itself to the Fall Festival, road promotion, poverty relief, holiday decorations, and a variety of other projects.⁵⁷ The town's press actively promoted the Commercial Club. The Monroe County News featured ads calling for increased membership, and K.D. Melcher of the Union-Republican indicated that the community's health depended on a progressive Commercial Club. He cited the numerous activities it had sponsored and said that it needed greater support.⁵⁸

The Commercial Club increased sales and attracted new customers by sponsoring special events. These occasions included the yearly Fall Festival, holiday observances, and milestone celebrations. Albia also frequently hosted special sale days which attracted thousands of shoppers. Merchants believed that their town could become a major commercial center and this assumption justified such energetic marketing efforts. A series of special sale days occurred in May, June, and July of 1922. Shoppers received coupons entitling them to free fuel on Gas Day. Auto Day awarded gifts to individuals who drove into town. A two-day "buyer's carnival" featured extensive sales involving almost the all the local retailers.⁵⁹ Merchants advertised that items would be offered "at a

⁵⁶ Monroe County News, December 9, 1920, p. 1.

⁵⁷ Union-Republican, January 24, 1929, p. 3

⁵⁸ Monroe County News, April 22, 1920, p. 4; Union-Republican, December 13, 1928, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Union-Republican, April 27, 1922, p. 1.

strictly cost price.”⁶⁰ Some eighty-eight of the town’s businesses sponsored or participated in these special days.⁶¹

Albia’s merchants also promoted the Fall Festival. Visitors were treated to low prices and entertainment. In 1926, the celebration consisted of Farmer’s Day, Miners Day, and School Day and featured a variety of contests including hog calling, fiddle playing, tug of war, foot racing, greased pole climbing, pig catching, and boxing. Merchants also acquired a merry-go-round and sponsored farm produce contests. Ben Vardaman gave a speech entitled “Saving the Rural Community From Extermination” which exhibited the vulnerability of small towns. Political figures such as Claude Porter and Brookhart’s campaign manager addressed celebrants.⁶² In 1928, the event featured a Hard Road Day and Political Day. The Commercial Club poignantly demonstrated the event’s importance by canceling that year’s Fourth of July celebration which freed resources for the Fall Festival.⁶³ These efforts were rewarded and approximately 15,000 people attended in a single day.⁶⁴ The press applauded the merchants’ efforts and encouraged Albians to attend the annual event. Albia’s press also augmented the Commercial Club’s promotional efforts by continually pleading with residents to shop at home.

Albia’s businesses also experienced intense competition within the town. Merchants usually faced numerous challengers who constantly promoted sales,

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, May 1, 1922, p. 1.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, May 8, 1922, p. 1.

⁶² *Ibid.*, October 7, 1926, p. 1.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, May 24, 1928, p. 1.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, November 1, 1928, p. 1.

often opening these occasions by giving away gifts. The Arnold Jewelry Store promoted a forthcoming sale by giving away \$1,000 worth of merchandise.⁶⁵ Despite this aggressiveness, many merchants closed during the decade. They included Brody's, Burn's, and Burdock's clothing stores and Hunter's Fashion Shop. Other abandoned ventures comprised the J.H. Williams and Son's furniture store, Strasburger's general store, Anderson Hardware Company, and Nel Peterson's two groceries. Nevertheless, Albia witnessed the arrival of new businesses. Some of these were small undertakings such as neighborhood markets or other hometown ventures. However, chains also infiltrated Albia's business community.

The trend toward chain stores was most apparent in the grocery and clothing businesses. The Red Ball grocery store chain was one of the first to arrive when, in 1920, Albia received the twenty-eighth outlet.⁶⁶ Albians enthusiastically embraced the venture since opening day profits "ran into the hundreds."⁶⁷ In 1926, Albia acquired one of the most successful food chains. The Atlantic and Pacific grocery stores expanded from 1,726 establishments in 1915 to 10,000 in 1923.⁶⁸ In June, Albia's A&P grocery store held its grand opening.⁶⁹ The store's convenient location on the square aided its success. The

⁶⁵ ibid., October 19, 1922, p. 2.

⁶⁶ Albia Republican, September 2, 1920, p. 1.

⁶⁷ Monroe County News, September 9, 1920, p. 1.

⁶⁸ Lewis Atherton, Main Street on the Middle Border (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954), 240.

⁶⁹ Union-Republican, June 3, 1926, p. 7.

United Food Store also advertised aggressively during the decade.⁷⁰ The J.C. Penney department store opened on July 1, 1927, leasing a building on the square for fifteen years.⁷¹ By that time it had become one of the nation's most successful chains, having 885 stores nationwide with forty-seven Iowa locations.⁷² The store's founder visited the Albia store a year later. Albia's press celebrated him as a self-made man who should be a role model for the town's boys. The Union-Republican said that Penney believed "access to anything depends solely upon application, loyalty to an ideal and a willingness to work hard to secure the goal established."⁷³ These words probably comforted a community experiencing economic hardship. In the summer of 1929, Montgomery Ward considered opening an outlet but decided against it. Officials speculated that the reason lay in the fact that a store already existed in Oskaloosa. However, Spurgeon's, a much smaller chain, had arrived in 1928.⁷⁴

Despite the inroads of new companies, Albia retained local stores selling similar merchandise. In 1929, Albia had nine grocery stores and fourteen that had meat in addition to other food items. The presence of three radio and music stores is also surprising.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, commercial life reflected the adversity experienced in the outlying areas. The Union-Supply Company provided

⁷⁰ Ibid., February 2, 1928, p. 4.

⁷¹ Ibid., February 14, 1927, p. 1.

⁷² Ibid., August 22, 1927, p. 3.

⁷³ Ibid., August 30, 1928, p. 3.

⁷⁴ Ibid., September 20, 1928, p. 3.

⁷⁵ United States Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930. Retail Distribution, Vol. I, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1933), 419.

farmers with agricultural equipment, but in 1923 was forced to end its credit practices. The company justified the measure by implying that outstanding bills threatened its existence. The owner said, "we trust those owing us will not compel us to go to extreme measures to make collections."⁷⁶ The Albia Packing Company continually struggled to become viable. In 1920, the firm considered moving to Centerville because it lacked proper financing.⁷⁷ Despite this pessimistic gesture, the company achieved \$300,000 in sales in 1923, compared to \$111,000 eight years earlier. The plant also received \$12,000 worth of improvements in 1924, but, in 1925, operated at a loss, forcing it to close that summer. The Commercial Club inquired into the situation and outlined a refinancing plan which included a strict regulation of the company's expenses. The investigators were advised by a former associate of the John Morrell Company.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, some groups doubted the possible success of the venture. The members of the Farm Bureau "voted the company their good will but declined to become a party to any financial obligations."⁷⁹ Although the packing plant resumed limited operations on November 16, 1925, it was unable to pay interest on its large debt. During September of 1927, J.M. Glass led foreclosure proceedings and represented the company's bond holders.⁸⁰ The firm closed its doors for the remainder of the decade. A Delaware company purchased the idle plant in 1930, an acquisition which again breathed life into

⁷⁶ Union-Republican, December 20, 1923, p. 3.

⁷⁷ Monroe County News, November 25, 1920, p. 1.

⁷⁸ Union-Republican, May 21, 1925, p. 1.

⁷⁹ Ibid., July 13, 1925, p. 1.

⁸⁰ Ibid., September 12, 1927, p. 1.

Albia's feeble packing industry.⁸¹

Albia's two combination bakeries and ice cream manufacturers also experienced hardship. In 1923, the W.H. Kreger company employed thirty-six people and sold bread throughout the southern part of the state.⁸² The Hutchison Company, based in Des Moines, purchased the Kreger operation in February of 1926.⁸³ Soon the Peterson bakery and ice cream shop was also consolidated with the Hutchison operation. The Union-Republican declared that "with the addition of the Peterson business they will be able to work the plant at a more efficient stage."⁸⁴

However, not all was bad news for local businesses during the decade. Many manufacturing and other establishments retained their autonomy and weathered the difficult times. Some of these enterprises were especially innovative. In 1929, Albians W.W. Hartzell and Art Lewis started a fur farm. The farm planned to raise muskrats and silver foxes. A forty-acre plot of land a few miles outside of Albia served as an ideal location.⁸⁵ Monroe County had a considerable number of other manufacturing establishments. These included the Fuhs Bottling Works, the Diamond Bottling Works, several cigar manufacturing shops, and the Boyson Manufacturing Company. The Boyson plant built washing machines which were respected for their quality.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Ibid., January 2, 1930, p. 1.

⁸² Ibid., May 24, 1923, p. 1.

⁸³ Ibid., February 26, 1926, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Ibid., January 20, 1927, p. 1.

⁸⁵ Ibid., December 6, 1928, p. 1.

⁸⁶ Ibid., January 24, 1924, p. 1.

Albia's banks remained relatively stable, despite economic hardship. In 1920, there were six banks in Albia. These were Peoples National Bank, Peoples Savings Bank, Farmers and Miners Savings Bank, First National Bank, Albia State Bank, and Iowa Trust and Savings Bank. These institutions absorbed the initial shock of the downturn in agriculture and mining; however, they did not survive the early years of the decade unscathed. In 1920, the Farmers and Miners Savings Bank had \$371,245.98 of resources while one year later it had \$352,918.39.⁸⁷ The First National Bank witnessed a similar loss of assets. In November of 1920 it possessed \$603,448.71 of resources; this was reduced 13 months later to \$560,590.34.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the town's financial institutions demonstrated resiliency amidst hardship. During the 1922 coal strike, the Union-Republican reported that between March 10 and May 18 the deposits in Albia's banks increased by \$150,000.⁸⁹ By the end of 1922, the combined deposits of Albia's banks stood at \$2,269,254.32, but a year later they had risen to \$2,585,175.59, a fourteen percent increase. Albia's banks were not on the verge of collapse.⁹⁰ This was not the case throughout Iowa; the first six years of the decade witnessed a wave of bank closings across the state. A total of 384 financial institutions shut their doors between 1920 and 1926.⁹¹ Although there were no bank closings in Albia during the decade, the First National Bank took over the Farmers and Miners Savings Bank in April of

⁸⁷ Union, November 19, 1920, p. 6 and November 22, 1921, p. 6.

⁸⁸ Ibid., November 30, 1920, p. 3 and December 31, 1921, p. 2.

⁸⁹ Ibid., May 18, 1922, p. 1.

⁹⁰ Ibid., February 4, 1924, p. 1.

⁹¹ Neprash, Brookhart Campaigns in Iowa, 66.

1928.⁹² This consolidation arose out of a close relationship between the two institutions. Since its inception in 1901, the Farmers and Miners Bank had served as the savings department of the First National Bank, but the move was clearly a measure to increase efficiency and reduce operating expenses.⁹³

The community's efforts to relieve poverty were another sign that Monroe County was experiencing economic stress. The decade witnessed widespread privation which overwhelmed standard measures, principally widow's pensions and the County Farm. The latter provoked criticism during the decade. H.C. Evans of Des Moines was appointed by the state legislature to inspect a number of these farms across the state and he proclaimed that they failed to relieve suffering. He stated, "Living in this prison place for criminals and the insane, are several thousand children and respectable old people whose only offense is that they are poor."⁹⁴ William Mitchell was another detractor of county farms and their conditions. A former resident of Albia and a member of United Mine Workers of America's Pension Committee, he said that these homes were often depressing and unsanitary. In addition, older people possessing a strong work ethic were forced onto the farms because no one would hire them.⁹⁵ In March of 1928, evidence surfaced showing that inferior conditions existed at the Monroe County Farm. The situation came to light after county officials examined the farm. Inspectors contended that numerous repairs

⁹² Union-Republican, April 9, 1928, p. 3.

⁹³ Ibid., April 9, 1928, p. 1.

⁹⁴ Ibid., August 30, 1926, p. 1.

⁹⁵ Ibid., December 16, 1926, p. 1.

needed to be made and that unsanitary conditions were present.⁹⁶

Albia's typical solutions for poverty were inadequate in addressing the decade's problems. The coal strike of 1927 put tremendous strain on the system. The resources of the United Mine Workers of America union were consumed before the end of the dispute. By October, the county's poor fund found itself in the red, and 250 children from Bucknell lacked clothing. Although the strike had ended, many of the mines had not resumed work. The Monroe County Board of Supervisors responded to the crisis by transferring money from the county insane fund to the emergency account.⁹⁷ Albians also made appeals to the Iowa Red Cross which responded favorably and supplemented local efforts.⁹⁸ The state government also reacted by sending additional funds to Appanoose and Monroe counties.⁹⁹

The press featured ads urging people to donate money, food, and clothing. The King's Daughters answered immediately by delivering emergency supplies to Bucknell. This women's organization was active throughout the decade in a variety of charitable activities. A large number of Albia's other organizations joined together to relieve poverty. In less than a week, a considerable amount of necessities had been delivered to the struggling Bucknell mining camp.¹⁰⁰

Fires were more immediately destructive than poverty caused by the

⁹⁶ Ibid., March 15, 1928, p. 1.

⁹⁷ Ibid., October 24, 1927, p. 1.

⁹⁸ Ibid., October 31, 1927, p. 1.

⁹⁹ Ibid., November 3, 1927, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., November 10, 1927, p. 1.

receding mining industry. In June of 1920, the Albia Light and Railway Company experienced a small blaze which temporarily left the town without electricity. Fortunately, Albia's firemen reacted quickly and saved the town's power provider.¹⁰¹ The next year, the King Theater was completely destroyed by flames, but was soon rebuilt.¹⁰² On the night of January 16, 1929, a particularly destructive blaze damaged buildings on the square's west side as the fire department's efforts were complicated by the cold temperatures which caused equipment to freeze. Police also apprehended thieves who attempted to take advantage of the chaos. The Hurst and Parry store building was severely damaged and the owners lost \$30,000 worth of merchandise. The building had housed a number of Albia's clubs including the Rebekahs, Yeomen, and Pocahantas Lodge. Numerous other businesses including Albia State Bank, Bates and Simmon's Law Firm, Dr. Trimble's Optician Office, Mrs. Mitebeltrees' Beauty Parlor, Miller Drug Store, Gibbon's Novelty Store, and the Williams Furniture Store suffered lighter damage. The Gibbons' Novelty Store had endured an inferno a few years earlier which burned the Breyemeier Photography Studio to the ground.¹⁰³ The conflagration reminded Albians of a more destructive fire which had almost totally destroyed the south side of the square in 1904.¹⁰⁴

Fires also occurred in residential areas and were sometimes deadly. In 1925, one of the more tragic incidents occurred to the Mowe family. The father

¹⁰¹ Republican, June 3, 1920, p. 1.

¹⁰² ibid., January 20, 1921, p. 1.

¹⁰³ Union-Republican, January 17, 1929, p. 1.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Landis, "A History of Monroe County, Iowa as a Coal Mining Center." (Master's Thesis, Department of History, Northeast Missouri State University, 1963), 74.

confused gasoline with kerosene and threw it into a smoldering heating stove. The father, mother, and a small child died in the resulting inferno. A shattered family of four children survived.¹⁰⁵ Such disasters forced national, state, and local leaders to search for preventive measures. In 1923, Governor John Hamill proclaimed October 7-13 to be Fire Prevention Week. These observances were established in order to heighten fire awareness. The press urged Albians to repair damaged chimneys, stoves, and heating plants and take other steps to avert accidental blazes.¹⁰⁶ Fire Prevention Week occurred annually and consisted of many activities aimed at increasing public awareness. Buying insurance was another measure taken to reduce the effect of fires.

Despite great strides in medicine, disease was another source of hardship. In 1925, the Union-Republican listed the causes of death in Albia for the previous year which included pneumonia, diphtheria, tuberculosis, and rabies.¹⁰⁷ Monroe County periodically suffered through waves of illnesses, occasionally forcing schools to close. In October of 1922, the nearby community of Hiteman experienced a diphtheria outbreak which forced school cancellations. The schools were fumigated in order to kill germs. The month also witnessed an outbreak of scarlet fever in Monroe Township which caused school closings. Quarantines were strictly enforced.¹⁰⁸ In 1927, the town of Melrose was the first in the county to have all its school children immunized against diphtheria. These efforts were rewarded since the effects of disease

¹⁰⁵ Union-Republican, March 2, 1925, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., October 4, 1923, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., January 8, 1925, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., October 9, 1922, p. 1.

were on the decrease. In January 1929, the Union-Republican reported that during the 1920s the number of deaths from tuberculosis had been reduced by twenty-nine percent nationally. The paper also congratulated science and public health officials, saying that “great advances had been made in the prevention of smallpox, typhoid fever, scarlet fever, and other dreaded diseases of fifteen years ago”¹⁰⁹ In March, the paper also applauded the passage of the Tuberculosis Eradication Law, an act which greatly aided efforts to make sure lowans received meat products from tested animals.¹¹⁰

The decade also experienced rabies epidemics. Rabid dogs were usually killed before they could spread the disease. However, sometimes people were seriously injured or even died. These tragedies often prompted drastic measures. In 1924, a particularly severe outbreak occurred, causing the death of two persons in the county. In November, J.H. Anderson became one of these victims; he came down with the disease after being bitten by a dog. Anderson avoided treatment until he arrived at the hospital complaining of severe arthritis. A doctor at the Miners’ Hospital diagnosed him as having rabies. Unfortunately, treatment arrived too late and Anderson died after succumbing to delirium. He had to be placed in a strait jacket after biting a nurse. The incident illustrated the rapidity in which the disease could be spread. The rabid dog had also infected its puppies. These animals were responsible for transmitting the sickness to nine people. Fortunately, the situation was detected. The dogs were destroyed and the individuals were successfully

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., January 10, 1929, p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., March 21, 1929, p. 2.

treated.¹¹¹ These incidents precipitated major efforts to stamp out rabies. The citizens were ordered to comply with strict measures issued by the State Board of Health which stated that all dogs "must be confined and immunized." The measure also proclaimed that all dogs which were allowed to run free would be shot. Dr. Don M. Griswold, who was sent by the State Board of Health, devised this plan.¹¹²

Disease often exacted an especially heavy toll on the young. The community took vigorous measures to promote health, including fund-raising activities, children's clinics, and hygiene classes. One fund-raising event was the sale of Christmas seals by the Iowa Tuberculosis Association with the proceeds split between the local and statewide organization. The Tuberculosis Association supported a variety of activities, especially clinics which aided in diagnosing and treating children's diseases.¹¹³ Such clinics were the result of cooperation of many organizations. One held in December of 1925 involved the Monroe County Medical Society, the Women's Club, and health officials from the University of Iowa. Children who were below average in weight and height were the focus of the event.¹¹⁴ There were also free dental clinics. One of these was the result of a cooperative effort including the County Agent and teachers.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, December 15, 1924, p. 1.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, December 18, 1924, p. 1.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, November 23, 1925, p. 1.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, November 19, 1925, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, January 5, 1925, p. 1.

The community also hosted courses on hygiene and preventative medicine. In May of 1920, the Monroe County Chapter of the Red Cross sponsored classes in the basement of the library. Albians could attend the classes without charge and learn methods of improved hygiene.¹¹⁶ In 1920, the local Red Cross also established a county nurse position. The nurse was required to have a high school diploma and receive training at the University of Michigan. The nurse worked in the schools to promote health and diagnose childhood ailments.¹¹⁷ Flora Kay received the appointment and worked vigorously to prevent disease. During January and February of 1921 she conducted 442 examinations in the schools and visited forty-eight youths at their homes.¹¹⁸

Crime was another problem that was surprisingly common. Innovations such as improved highways and cars enabled criminals to practice their illegal vocations over a wider area. The passage of the Eighteenth Amendment instituting Prohibition was another contributing factor. Although it might be assumed that little lawbreaking occurred in Iowa, the reality of the situation was different. The conviction rates rose from 3.81 percent to 5.57 percent per one thousand persons between 1920 and 1925 in Iowa. Rural areas were not immune, since the crime rate doubled in twenty-one of the most thinly-populated counties.¹¹⁹ Albia witnessed a variety of criminal activities ranging from minor infractions to violent crime.

¹¹⁶ Union, May 4, 1920, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ Republican, April 9, 1920, p. 1.

¹¹⁸ Monroe County News, March 3, 1921, p. 1.

¹¹⁹ Douglas Wertsch, "Wallaces' Farmers Crusade Against Rural Crime in 1920s," Annals of Iowa 50 (Spring, 1990): 377-378.

Theft continued to be a problem throughout the 1920s. These offenses varied from extensive crime rings to petty acts of burglary. Auto theft was a continual problem. In 1922, F.L. Van Cleve was apprehended in Des Moines and charged with participation in a car-thieving ring. The investigation revealed that stolen vehicles had been altered in Albia before their resale.¹²⁰ On one sleepy Sunday evening auto thieves stole three automobiles. The owners were Dr. T.E. Gutch, Dr. Frank N. Bay, and Dr. E.S. Connett, all prominent Albia residents. The Connett's family car was stolen in front of the Christian Church. Dr. Bay's vehicle was located after it collided with a telephone pole, and Dr. Gutch's car was found in a ditch on the road between Albia and Ottumwa. Unfortunately, the Connetts' car was not recovered.¹²¹

The Ottumwa-based Richmond Gang was also active in Monroe County. The car enabled them to spread their activities over a large portion of southern Iowa. The bandits succeeded in robbing a general store in Tyrone. The Richmonds also pillaged the Hiteman Post Office. One of their more colorful exploits involved staging a heist of a freight train in Ottumwa. In December of 1923, four members of the gang were arrested and placed in the Monroe County jail. Their capture was the result of the cooperation of authorities from Albia, Ottumwa, and Oelwein. Gene Richmond, Carl Richmond, Roy Richmond, and Earnest Ramsey were all apprehended. Ramsey "squealed" on his comrades, hoping to get a lighter sentence.¹²² Judge D.M.

¹²⁰ Union-Republican, September 14, 1922, p. 1.

¹²¹ Ibid., October 13, 1924, p. 1.

¹²² Ibid., December 13, 1923, p. 1.

Anderson sentenced Gene to five years in prison while Roy received ten.¹²³

Crime rings were not limited to stealing cars or plundering stores. Seven individuals were arrested in Appanoose County for stealing farm animals, equipment, and other property in Appanoose, Van Buren, Monroe, Davis, and Wapello Counties. Their apprehension involved the cooperation of local, state, and federal authorities. The men were well-armed, but were apprehended peacefully.¹²⁴

Albia's merchants were also victimized, but these crimes were often petty. The D.C. Anderson Grocery Store experienced a burglary in May of 1922, but only three dollars and some tobacco products were stolen.¹²⁵ A similar incident occurred when the Best and Young and the Thompson barber shops fell victim to intruders on the night of January 24, 1924. The items stolen included two rifles, a comb, and some razors. Authorities assumed that local thieves were responsible.¹²⁶ Jewelry stores were attractive targets for thieves. Harold Parmley, who had an extensive criminal record including offenses in Wyoming and Nebraska, was arrested for the theft of \$1,000 worth of merchandise stolen from the Lambert Store.¹²⁷ In May of 1928, a drifter from Virginia broke a window at the Arnold Jewelry Store and stole six watches. The itinerant man made his escape, but Sheriff A.A. Robinson notified the surrounding towns, and Grover Jones was captured in Ottumwa. As was often

¹²³ Ibid., March 6, 1924, p. 1.

¹²⁴ Ibid., June 11, 1925, p. 5.

¹²⁵ Ibid., May 25, 1922, p. 1.

¹²⁶ Ibid., January 28, 1924, p. 1.

¹²⁷ Ibid., June 29, 1922, p. 1.

the case with incidents involving African-Americans, the headline declared that the individual was a “negro.”¹²⁸

Safe blowers threatened Albia’s businesses and banks, illustrating the increasing mobility of crime. In September of 1923, a safe blower escaped from the Monroe County jail after plundering communities to the south of Albia. He was later arrested in New Mexico for stealing a car in Missouri and taken back to Missouri where he was charged with that crime.¹²⁹ Two safe blowers from New Hampshire were arrested for money that was stolen from the safe of the Becker Bowen Motor Company. The men possessed a car that they had stolen in New Hampshire and had driven to Albia.¹³⁰

Even efforts to improve the town’s attractiveness were not safe. The members of Albia’s Women’s Club were outraged when some unknown individuals wreaked havoc on flower beds in front of the library. This was one of many examples of wanton destructiveness that occurred in the community. Vandals also targeted the water fountains by the court house and the tourist park.¹³¹

The delinquent youth of Albia also received much attention in the town’s papers. Reporters often responded to incidents involving minors in a moralizing manner. The Monroe County News scolded youngsters who placed tacks on the county’s roads stating that they “better cut it out as the place is being

¹²⁸ Ibid., May 24, 1928, p. 1.

¹²⁹ Ibid., December 17, 1923, p. 1.

¹³⁰ Ibid., October 18, 1926, p. 1.

¹³¹ Ibid., July 27, 1922, p. 1.

watched and it will go hard on those that are caught.”¹³² One event involved two teenage girls who had run away to Avery. The girls’ second attempt resulted in reaching the distant city of Springfield, Illinois. The Union-Republican responded to their forced return by stating, “It would appear that both have tired of their parental restrictions and have no consideration for their parents who have been caused untold worry by their escapades.”¹³³

Albia’s wayward youth were responsible for some of the petty robbery that occurred in the town. Robert Lawson, a sixteen year-old, was sentenced to five years at the state reformatory in Eldora because of his connection to the robbery of the Monroe Market and Grocery.¹³⁴ A more dramatic incident occurred in August of 1927 when six boys were condemned to the Eldora school after being found guilty of breaking into numerous Albia businesses.¹³⁵

Probably one of the most distressing thefts involved the Clerk of the District Court, Lloyd Waters, who admitted to embezzling \$2,318.40 of the county’s funds. However, he was probably responsible for much more since \$10,000 was actually missing. Waters was convicted in the spring of 1925 and sentenced to spending up to ten years at the state penitentiary at Fort Madison.¹³⁶

Thievery, vandalism, and break-ins constituted the majority of crimes. The town also experienced violent offenses. However, some of the most

¹³² Monroe County News, May 31, 1923, p. 2.

¹³³ Union-Republican, March 20, 1924, p. 1.

¹³⁴ ibid., April 13, 1925, p. 1.

¹³⁵ ibid., August 8, 1927, p. 1.

¹³⁶ ibid., April 27, 1925, p. 1.

appalling incidents transpired in the surrounding coal camps. Violent acts were often the result of fights or squabbles, but some were premeditated murders. One of the more gruesome of these happened in October of 1929 when Jim Henry was murdered by being stuck in the head with a mining pick. Governor Hamill reacted to the ghastly nature of the crime by volunteering a \$250 reward for anyone who provided information.¹³⁷ Eventually, Tom Romans, who had served as Buxton's sheriff, was linked to the crime.¹³⁸ The mining camps also witnessed incidents of rape; one occurred in Buxton during the fall of 1924 when Leroy Garnett brutally assaulted Hannah Zapuder. Garnett was found guilty of the assault and committed to twenty years of "hard labor" at the Anamosa State Penitentiary.¹³⁹

Domestic abuse produced some of the most violent tragedies. One of the more shocking incidents concerned the Bennet family who lived near Lovilia. James Bennett, otherwise known as "Crazy Jim" to members of the community, seriously wounded his wife and then killed himself.¹⁴⁰ A similar incident involved the Knight family. Joe Knight had apparently become overwhelmed with rage because of his wife's alleged infidelity. He cut two large gashes in her throat and then attempted to end his own life. Both were treated at the Miner's Hospital and survived their wounds. The couple had nine children who were

¹³⁷ ibid., October 31, 1929, p. 1.

¹³⁸ ibid., November 29, 1929, p. 1.

¹³⁹ ibid., October 30, 1924, p. 1.

¹⁴⁰ ibid., August 21, 1925, p. 1.

severely affected by the ordeal.¹⁴¹ Knight served only thirty-five days in jail.¹⁴²

Wife abandonment was another issue which appeared in Albia's courtroom. William Brown of Albia was found guilty of wife desertion in 1924 after Albia's deputy sheriff traveled to Clinton to apprehend him. The judge ruled that Brown would serve a year in prison if he failed to provide for his wife and family.¹⁴³ The following month, Leo Decker also faced a similar charge.¹⁴⁴ Albia's authorities also prosecuted those who had committed adultery. Edna Olson and E.C. True faced the charge of lewdness in what Albians termed the "Room No. 35 Affair." The Union-Republican said that Judge Anderson gave True "some mighty wholesome advice and pointed out to him the err of his ways". Miss Olson promised that her infatuation with the married True was over; however, both received stiff fines from the judge.¹⁴⁵

Suicides, perhaps stimulated by clinical depression arising from poor economic conditions, also revealed the darker side of life. The prospects for the mentally ill must have been dismal. Treatments were limited and a considerable amount of shame was probably associated with diseases of the mind. The press revealed few clues as to why individuals had killed themselves. Following the suicide of one respected Albia businessman, the Union-Republican stated that there was no reason for the crime except a mental illness. The story of George Brachen, a German immigrant who resided in Buxton, is particularly lamentable.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., April 9, 1925, p. 1.

¹⁴² Ibid., April 23, 1925, p. 1.

¹⁴³ Ibid., August 14, 1924, p. 1.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., September 18, 1924, p. 1.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., January 14, 1924, p. 1.

He had been unemployed because of the coal industry's decline and left a wife and a family in Germany.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, it is difficult to find a general explanation for such self-inflicted deaths for the specific causes which represented deeply personal battles are lost to history. For instance, George Robinson ended his life in 1925, even though his personal financial situation was not troubled.¹⁴⁷

Albia and its surrounding communities also experienced many booze busts. Some Albians failed to suppress their illegal appetites; one was so desperate that he consumed denatured alcohol which usually served as car antifreeze. Fortunately, he survived, but the incident symbolized the determination with which many people pursued intoxicants.¹⁴⁸ County Sheriff A.A. Robinson and Deputy Oscar Tedford were devoted to apprehending violators. A majority of the busts occurred in mining towns and in the countryside. However, one bust occurred at the home of Ella Glassford of Albia. The Glassford residence had been suspect for several weeks because of "strange and questionable goings on." Ella Glassford and Robert McVeity opened the door only after the police had threatened to use force. They reportedly possessed illegal beverages and were partially clothed.¹⁴⁹ Such stories must have supplied endless gossip in a close-knit community such as Albia.

One of the largest seizures occurred in August of 1923. Sheriff Robinson

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, May 26, 1927, p. 1.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, March 30, 1925, p.1.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, October 23, 1923, p. 1.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, June 23, 1924, p. 1.

orchestrated a series of raids spanning a few days which obtained 350 gallons of booze and mash. Andy Terdatich contributed fifty-two gallons and attempted to convince the authorities that the still was used for washing clothes and that his chickens consumed the grain. Abe Turner provided the largest amount which consisted of forty-five gallons of finished whiskey and 100 gallons of mash. Authorities were forced to borrow a truck in order to haul the confiscated items back to Albia.¹⁵⁰ An even larger amount of booze was taken when authorities seized between 500 and 600 gallons of finished liquor and mash near Buxton. Sheriff Robinson discovered a still at the Reuban Gaines home in old Buxton. The facility was hidden underground and consisted of two large rooms equipped with a variety of liquor-making paraphernalia. The subterranean chambers could be exited by using a ladder.¹⁵¹ Such large confiscations occurred throughout the decade. In August of 1929, a bust resulted in a seizure of 200 gallons from a still near Haydock.¹⁵² Sheriff Robinson's habit of emptying evidence into the town's gutters also attracted attention. The events reportedly drew crowds with some people trying to snatch a jug when he was not looking.¹⁵³

As the town's authorities worked diligently to enforce the laws, Albians struggled for an explanation for increasing lawlessness. A.L. Anderson, the editor of the Union, frequently cited the war as a cause of the rising crime. In an editorial in April of 1921, he stated, "people are not safe in their homes, in their

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., August 27, 1923, p. 1.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., November 12, 1923, p. 1.

¹⁵² Ibid., August 8, 1929, p. 1.

¹⁵³ Ibid., September 15, 1927, p. 1.

businesses, or on the public highways since the close of the war. The license to kill and destroy given at that time has made criminals out of many who before the war were sober minded.”¹⁵⁴ Poor parenting was another explanation which was popular with editors. The press often held the opinion that greater punishment was the solution. This often included an enthusiastic support of the death penalty and other tough sentences. A.L. Anderson was one of the more vocal advocates of severe punishments. As he said, “a few hangings and life time sentences will go a long way toward settling the criminals in this country.”¹⁵⁵ An editorial which appeared in 1928 in the Union-Republican criticized the insanity plea, saying that such excuses would result in the country being overrun with thieves.¹⁵⁶ The Union-Republican also spent much time protesting cases of national fame in which the criminal was perceived to have gotten off easily.¹⁵⁷

Despite these concerns, life continued to improve. Ironically, many of these betterments came about because of technology which demonstrated that innovation often has paradoxical effects. Although cars enhanced the nature of crime and caused many fatal accidents, autos made traveling easier and the movement for good roads created unprecedented mobility. For decades, politicians had debated the proper method of funding road construction. However, the general trend was away from local responsibility and emphasized greater participation from state and national governments. In 1902, the General

¹⁵⁴ Union, April 22, 1921, p. 1.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., February 24, 1922, p. 2.

¹⁵⁶ Union-Republican, January 23, 1928, p. 2.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., April 9, 1928, p. 2.

Assembly enacted the Anderson Law which expunged many aspects of the decentralized administration of roads and set the precedent for future legislation.¹⁵⁸ The Federal Act of 1916, which provided \$75 million over five years for rural roads, symbolized the national government's increasing involvement.¹⁵⁹ This movement toward more centralized control continued throughout the 1920s and was critical for progress in road-building.

Road enhancement also occurred largely because of the efforts of numerous boosters. These advocates faced an impressive challenge because as late as 1922 Iowa only had 334 miles of paved roads.¹⁶⁰ In Albia, the Commercial Club and the press were the main road building proponents. In 1924, they formed the Monroe County Iowa Good Roads Booster Club. The group was organized to work for county road improvements. The year also witnessed the establishment of the Harding Highway route which passed through Albia. This route originated in Washington D.C. and ended in Los Angeles.¹⁶¹ Albians were excited about the highway's possible economic benefits since they believed better roads would increase the number of tourists passing through town.

As the decade progressed, pressure to improve Monroe County's roads increased. In 1925, former Governor N.E. Kendall, commenting upon Iowa's highways stated, "there is a universal agreement that they must be brought to a

¹⁵⁸ William H. Thompson, Transportation in Iowa: A Historical Summary (Des Moines: Department of Transportation, 1989), 72.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 73.

¹⁶⁰ Drake Hokanson, The Lincoln Highway: Mainstreet Across America (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1988), 97.

¹⁶¹ Union-Republican, May 29, 1924, p. 1.

travelability corresponding with that of our sister commonwealths.”¹⁶² The town’s press stressed the great nuisance that impassable roads posed for the county’s citizens when roads were transformed into muddy bogs. Progress in other counties also convinced many Albians that they needed to keep up. In 1926, the Union-Republican stated that Monroe County needed to endorse a bond issue for road construction as had other counties.¹⁶³ This source of motivation was particularly true when comparing roads in the south with those in northern Iowa. Monroe County’s headway was particularly slow. In 1925, less than half of the roads were graded and none had been completely surfaced. However, thirteen counties in the northern half of the state had primary highways that had been completely graded and surfaced with either gravel or concrete.¹⁶⁴

The decade witnessed numerous road projects. These included construction ventures on primary roads, minor routes, and city streets. The primary road system was a “state road system of approximately 6,500 miles.”¹⁶⁵ These were the routes in the county that received the most improvement. In 1923, the State Highway Department unveiled a plan to grade and gravel three main routes in the county.¹⁶⁶ Monroe County’s citizens supported these state efforts by approving a \$600,000 bond to aid in surfacing its primary roads.¹⁶⁷ In

¹⁶² Ibid., January 15, 1925, p. 2.

¹⁶³ Ibid., March 18, 1926, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., May 7, 1925, p. 5.

¹⁶⁵ Thompson, Transportation in Iowa, 73.

¹⁶⁶ Union-Republican, December 17, 1923, p. 1.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., June 2, 1927, p. 1.

1928, this cooperation produced the much-celebrated achievement of paving the Harding Highway or Route 34 from Ottumwa into Albia. S.J. Groves Construction Company of Minneapolis was contracted for the project. The first section of concrete was laid near Georgetown and successive sections were laid east to the county line.¹⁶⁸ The town's streets also witnessed much improvement during the decade. The newspapers contained numerous articles describing improvements on a myriad of city streets. In 1927, a contract was awarded to widen the streets on the town square.¹⁶⁹ The town's newspapers contained many other stories which described projects aimed at bettering the streets.

Just as the rise of auto traffic precipitated the surfacing of roads, it signaled the end of older forms of transportation. In June 1925, the Albia Light and Railway Company discontinued interurban service between Albia and Hiteman and began removing its track. The manager of the railway said that the increased use of the automobile was the primary reason why the company had lost business.¹⁷⁰

There were also advancements in the water supply that greatly improved Albia's water quality. One of the physical improvements were new water main extensions. In 1922, approximately a mile of new piping was laid at a cost of \$4,000 to be paid from county funds. Such improvements in city plumbing were made throughout the decade.¹⁷¹ Through the early 1920s the press denounced

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., April 2, 1928, p. 1.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., September 5, 1927, p. 1.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., June 1, 1925, p. 1.

¹⁷¹ Monroe County News, June 22, 1922, p. 1.

the insufficient nature of Albia's water supply, saying that it was unsanitary and could possibly run short during a severe drought. The Monroe County News stated that it would "be gratifying to remove the large placards which the state department has pasted in our city, warning tourists and all strangers that our water is unsanitary and impure."¹⁷² This situation motivated the City Council to investigate means of securing a better water supply. By the fall of 1923, the City Council ruled out a number of possibilities including drawing water from nearby rivers and digging deep wells. The city government instead proposed building a new reservoir and filtration plant which required a \$80,000 bond issue.¹⁷³ This plan passed overwhelmingly and over twenty-five contracts were awarded for the project's construction and the work was well underway by the spring of 1924. The engineering contract was with Brown and Cook Company of Ottumwa.¹⁷⁴ The dam was built across Miller Creek with the aid of horses, mules, and wagons.¹⁷⁵

The new dam was completed in September of 1924. The project symbolized a considerable amount of effort. The dam's embankment required 54,000 cubic feet of dirt and the core wall had used 971 cubic yards of concrete. The core partition stood 54 feet above its foundation. Erosion would be prevented by brick pavement on the embankment's water side.¹⁷⁶ However, the new filtration plan was not completed until January of 1925. The city then

¹⁷² Ibid., July 19, 1923, p. 1.

¹⁷³ Union-Republican, September 3, 1923, p. 3.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., May 8, 1924, p. 1.

¹⁷⁵ Monroe County Engineer John Goode, interview by author, 23 May 2000, Albia, Iowa.

¹⁷⁶ Union-Republican, December 4, 1924, p. 1.

enjoyed the benefits of its new reservoir and filtration plant. The Union-Republican stated, “turn on the faucet, fill up the glass and take a drink folks, after years and years of wishing, after many a troublesome hour for the mayor, the city council, and after much conscientious labor on part of the contractors, Albia now has pure filtered city water.” The completion of the project ended all concerns about the water quality.¹⁷⁷ However, a dry spell during the summer of that year forced the town’s government to call upon its citizens to conserve water.¹⁷⁸ Albians continued to improve their filtration plant. During the winter of 1927, the City Council began purchasing new machinery that could purify the water without wasting expensive chemicals.¹⁷⁹

The manner in which community leaders approached their water problem is representative of their attitude in regard to most obstacles. The decade presented many challenges to the community, but Albia was very active in its response. Although the period witnessed considerable economic strain, Albia’s leaders adopted a proactive approach by using a variety of promotional tools. In addition, efforts to relieve poverty and improve health conditions reflected an impressive level of civic responsibility. Nevertheless, a rise in crime, the growth of technology, and the appearance of the Klan all suggest that modernization was beginning to create a new social paradigm. A study of Albia’s difficulties also reveals that small towns of the era harbored many social ills.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., January 19, 1925, p. 1.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., September 14, 1925, p. 2.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., February 10, 1927, p. 1.

CHAPTER THREE

ALBIANS IN ACCORD: LEARNING, PLAYING, PRAYING, AND JOINING

Although the town's residents may have experienced stress, many continued to believe that their community was a good place to live. Albia exhibited an impressive level of civic involvement, valued education, and offered many forms of entertainment. Social institutions such as schools and churches cushioned the period's pressing issues. Albia's clubs bonded residents in common interests and actively served the community. However, change was evident even in these spheres of life. This was especially true concerning the town's recreational activities; the chautauqua, lecture courses, fairs, and revivals all existed alongside the radio and the movie theater. These forms of recreation were augmented by other activities including sporting events, dances, and events at the new country club. In addition, transportation changes enabled Albians to enjoy festivities in other towns.

The chautauqua was one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the town during the early twentieth century. In 1874, John Vincent and Lewis Miller debuted an annual gathering for Sunday School teachers in New York. These humble beginnings spawned the circuit chautauqua which brought learned entertainment to Midwestern towns.¹ Chautauqua offered a smorgasbord of entertainment consisting of singing acts, lecturers, and plays.² The event was also laden with Victorian values with an "emphasis on self-improvement and self-restraint." Therefore, the event was recreational,

¹ Ralph Spencer, "The Red Oak Chautauqua Pavilion." Annals of Iowa 41 (Spring, 1973), 1273.

² Carol Main, "Miss Paul Hits the Glittering Chautauqua Trail." The Palimpsest 66 (July/August, 1985), 129.

spiritually uplifting, and also educational.³ The Albia Chautauqua Association had been in existence since the winter of 1904-1905 and the events enjoyed a sustained period of popularity.⁴ However, the decline of the chautauqua symbolized the manner in which entertainment was changing. Although Albia hosted the event throughout the decade, in the 1920s it received only lukewarm attendance.

In 1921, the chautauqua featured Wheelock's Indian Orchestra, Ellen Beach Yaw, The Virginia Girls, Kaufmann Male Quartet, Earnest Toy Artist Trio, Midland Metropolitans, and Frank Dilnot, editor of the London Globe.⁵ Despite this impressive variety, it failed to draw large crowds. The Union attributed the disappointing response to lack of advertising and poor ticket sales management. However, the newspaper remained enthusiastic stating, "Don't let anybody tell you that the Albia Chautauqua is dead. It is not and next year will prove it."⁶ However, the next event was also financially unsuccessful despite having a large number of acts including the Howard Quintet Orchestra, the Misner Players, and the Copely Operatic Company.⁷ The chautauqua also struggled in 1923; the Union-Republican stated that it "was a dismal failure. The guarantors were on the wrong side of the books by between \$400 and

³ James Paul Eckman, "Rejuvenation through Culture: Chautauqua in Nebraska, 1882-1925" (Doctoral Dissertation, Department of History, University of Nebraska--Lincoln , 1989), 39.

⁴ Historical Sketchbook of Albia and Monroe County, 1859-1959. (Albia, Iowa: Albia Centennial Corporation, 1959), 53.

⁵ Albia Union, July 15, 1921, p. 3.

⁶ Ibid., July 26, 1921, p. 3.

⁷ Union-Republican, July 17, 1922, p. 1.

\$500.”⁸ The 1924 event was also a disappointment, which convinced guarantors not to hold a chautauqua the following year.⁹ In 1925, the Union-Republican said that chautauquas had garnered little interest throughout Iowa and that fewer towns were featuring them. However, the editorial did not blame changing entertainment tastes; instead, it suggested that their poor quality was the explanation.¹⁰ There were numerous solutions aimed at reviving their popularity; one consisted of a plan calling for chautauqua boosters to pay for the event while the community attended free.¹¹ In 1926, Albia again decided not to host a chautauqua. The Union-Republican blasted the promoters by stating that “Chautauqua are perhaps a good thing for the community but the owners are in the game for the money they make out of it and they will continue just as long as they find suckers.”¹² Nevertheless, chautauquas’ protracted demise continued since the town hosted them in 1927 and 1928. The 1927 features were held in a tent just off the square and attracted a larger crowd than was expected.¹³ This must have been encouraging because there was another event in 1928.¹⁴ However, the press does not disclose that there was a chautauqua in 1929 which indicated that it was in an irreversible decline. This

⁸ Ibid., August 9, 1923, p. 1.

⁹ Ibid., July 28, 1924, p. 2.

¹⁰ Ibid., August 3, 1925, p. 1.

¹¹ Ibid., November 26, 1925, p. 2.

¹² Ibid., August 2, 1926, p. 2.

¹³ Ibid., August 4, 1927, p. 1.

¹⁴ Ibid., July 19, 1928, p. 2.

trend affected the popularity of the chautauqua in towns throughout the Midwest. Historian Thomas Morain argued that “the chautauqua format could not compete against movies and the radio; big-name stars were available on a daily basis.”¹⁵

The Lyceum Course was another amusement which consisted of both musical acts and lectures; however, Lyceum Courses also were experiencing eroding popularity. The 1922-1923 series included the following: The Zendeler Symphonic Quintet; Robert C. Cousins, the former chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee; Alex Miller, a lecturer; The Caven Welsh Singers, and The Harp Ensemble Company.¹⁶ In 1926, the “fourth number of the Lyceum Course” was a play entitled “Two Fellows and a Girl.” Unfortunately, the romantic comedy also attracted a small audience. The Union-Republican said that “the committee in charge of the course was disappointed in the attendance of the play” and “it was reached that it would not be an act of wisdom to attempt any further lecture courses for the time at least.”¹⁷ After 1926, the papers rarely mentioned the Lyceum Course, indicating that it was also on its way out.

Albia also featured traveling acts including circuses, vaudeville, and other visiting diversions. In July 1920, the Yankee Robinson Circus arrived. An ad in the Union stated that it featured hundreds of entertainers and wild animals. The colorful display included twenty lions, 500 horses, and ten polar bears.¹⁸ In 1925, another circus arrived in Albia; the Robbins Brothers Circus

¹⁵ Thomas Morain, Prairie Grass Roots: An Iowa Small Town in the Early Twentieth Century (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1988), 171.

¹⁶ Monroe County News, September 14, 1922, p. 1.

¹⁷ Union-Republican, February 15, 1926, p. 1.

¹⁸ Albia Union, July 20, 1920, p. 2.

also featured hundreds of animals and drew a large crowd. The Union-Republican stated “the Robbins shows are by no means the biggest shows on the road, but there is none that can surpass it in the quality of performance.”¹⁹ Magicians, fortune tellers, and aerial acrobats also practiced their craft. In 1922, Murdock “the Master of Mental Mysticism” visited Albia at the King Theater. The News said that he could see into the future and that he had “baffled college professors and scientists.”²⁰ In 1924, the Aerial Clacks, a troupe of tight-rope walkers, made a stopover in Albia and performed in front of the King Theater.²¹ However, these acts usually attracted small crowds and the press often complained of their poor quality.

Despite the decline of some recreational activities, the county fair remained popular. People from the entire county and surrounding areas gathered to enjoy this multifaceted event. Fairs were dominated by the area’s rural orientation, since livestock competitions and baking contests were numerous. The fair also featured an impressive variety of displays which showed the peoples’ skills in sewing, art, and canning. Merchants from the county’s towns also presented their products. In 1921, these merchants included Darby and Wood, the Anderson Hardware Company, and the L.L. Smith Music Company. In addition, various Albia car dealers displayed new car models. The News stated that the fair “is good advertising. It gives people from other counties some idea of our stores and their ability to keep up-to-date

¹⁹ Union-Republican, May 7, 1925, p. 1.

²⁰ Monroe County News, September 7, 1922, p. 1.

²¹ Union-Republican, October 16, 1924, p. 3.

goods.”²²

The entertainment at the fairs was augmented by various other activities, and each fair had a slightly different program. Those who visited the fair could also participate in horse and foot races. The victors were rewarded with cash prizes which, in 1923, ranged from \$25 to \$300.²³ In 1925, excitement grew as four cars, donated by the county's merchants, were raffled.²⁴ These fairs usually featured merry-go-rounds, ferris wheels, and sometimes entire carnival companies. In 1929, Governor John Hamill gave a speech at the fair, which indicated that guest speakers were common. Fair nights often brought dances and fireworks displays. The weather was often given as a deciding factor in determining fair attendance; however, the turnout was usually high. In 1923 a total of 30,000 people passed through the fair's gates.²⁵

Sporting events such as baseball, boxing, and even wrestling remained popular; however, baseball teams were hurt by the declining mining industry. Albia's team competed with baseball clubs from Buxton, Hilton, Block, Maple, White City, Lockman, Lovilia, Melrose, Ward, Hynes, Foster, and Avery.²⁶ These games were held at both the fair grounds and Cottonwood Park. However, support began to wane during the decade and, in 1923, the News suggested that economic difficulties were hurting attendance at the games.²⁷ Boxing and

²² Monroe County News, August 26, 1921, p. 4.

²³ Union-Republican, September 3, 1923, 6.

²⁴ Ibid., September 3, 1925, p. 1.

²⁵ Ibid., September 10, 1923, p. 1.

²⁶ Historical Sketchbook of Albia and Monroe county, 1859-1959, 78.

²⁷ Monroe County News, May 22, 1923, p. 1.

wrestling were also popular and, in 1921, a series of bouts were held at Albia's Skating Rink. The event consisted of a large number of matches, with the premier bout between Pep Webster of Buxton and Kid Graves of Omaha.²⁸ In 1922, the Comet Theater featured a wrestling match between Cecil Seals of Centerville and "Cyclone Thompson" of Quincy, Illinois. The exhibition also included a wrestling match between two Albia businessmen.²⁹ In 1924, one boxing match occurred in front of the court house between Floyd Bowers and Jack Shaffer. The Union-Republican proclaimed that the "Boxing Show was a Dandy" and that "each of the six rounds was full of action."³⁰ These kinds of events garnered mixed support from Albia's citizens.

Holiday celebrations remained popular; the biggest celebrations were often the Fourth of July, Memorial Day, and Armistice Day and their high attendance exhibited the town's strong patriotism. In 1920, the American Legion and the children of veterans planned Memorial Day observances. These activities included a parade on the town square in which Legion members marched and veterans gave speeches.³¹ In 1923, "hundreds" of people came to Albia to enjoy the Memorial Day services. The parade included twenty-two Civil War veterans, but the paper noted that "the grand army's ranks are rapidly depleting." Following the parade, a large crowd entered the King Theater where a male quartet sang "My Country Tis of Thee" and other patriotic songs. Congressman C.W. Ramseyer then gave a talk denouncing communism and

²⁸ Ibid., May 31, 1921, p. 5.

²⁹ Union-Republican, November 9, 1922, p. 6.

³⁰ Ibid., October 2, 1924, p. 1.

³¹ Monroe County News, May 27, 1920, p. 1.

expressing hope that the World War would be the last great conflict.³² The following summer also witnessed a large Fourth of July celebration at Cottonwood Park. The gathering featured speakers, foot races, and a baseball game. The Union-Republican said that the speakers were invited to “remind celebrators again of the significance of the day, and to revive again the unquenchable fires of patriotism which burn in the breasts of all loyal Americans.”³³

Despite these displays of unity, not every recreational activity was inclusive. The town’s prominent citizens welcomed the establishment of the Albia Country Club. In July of 1920, the members of the newly-formed organization had purchased forty acres of land east of town near the Burlington Reservoir. The organization’s 100 members worked diligently to increase their number and planned construction projects.³⁴ A clubhouse was constructed for \$3,000 and a golf course was built for an undisclosed amount. The Country Club opened in October 1920. Dr. H. C. Eschbach, the club’s president, gave a speech outlining the organization’s purpose and benefits which included fellowship between its members. The speech was followed by entertainment including an orchestra performance and the serving of appetizers.³⁵ Albia was similar to other Iowa towns in establishing a Country Club; Jefferson had founded a club in 1910. However, Albia was nine years ahead of its northern counterpart in offering its residents the opportunity to golf. In 1929, Jefferson

³² ibid., May 31, 1923, p. 1.

³³ Union-Republican, June 28, 1923, p. 1.

³⁴ Monroe County News, July 15, 1920, p. 1.

³⁵ ibid., November 4, 1920, p. 1.

acquired an additional Country Club which possessed a golf course.³⁶

Albia's elite gathered at the Country Club for dances, dinners, and golf contests sponsored by the Southern Iowa Golf Association.³⁷ The men often gathered to smoke cigars after dinner banquets and the clubhouse was also the site of weekday social events for the female members. In 1921, one of these events consisted of a musical in which women enjoyed vocal solos, readings, and other entertainments.³⁸ Women members also sponsored picnics which were popular in the summer. In 1926, the country club expanded recreational activities with the addition of a swimming pool.³⁹ Nevertheless, the Country Club must have received some criticism because of its membership requirement. In 1928, the Union-Republican featured an editorial which defended the country club saying it promoted unity among not only Albia's members, but also with country club members in other towns. The piece stated that critics "should become members and secure benefits which are most assuredly worthwhile. And that's that."⁴⁰

However, one of the most important developments of the decade was the manner in which local amusements competed with movies, a relatively new form of entertainment. Although the influence of the cinema had been felt since the first decade of the century, the period witnessed tremendous growth in its popularity. By the middle of the decade fifty million people patronized the

³⁶ Morain, Prairie Grass Roots, 172.

³⁷ Union-Republican, May 10, 1923, p. 6.

³⁸ Albia Union, September 27, 1921, p. 3.

³⁹ Union-Republican, June 10, 1926, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Ibid., June 7, 1928, p. 1.

nation's theaters. However, "by 1930 that figure would double, as even more people went more often."⁴¹ Albians appeared to demonstrate this trend, enjoying a variety of film genres including comedies, dramas, and suspense thrillers. The most popular motion pictures were usually set in large American cities and exotic locations. The period's famous actors included Norma Talmadge, Charlie Chaplin, Rudolph Valentino, Mary Pickford, Greta Garbo, and Buster Keaton. The News stated that "Charlie Chaplin seems to retain his hold on the movie fans of Albia, his stunt as a fireman having filled the King Theater to the limit Monday and Tuesday nights of this week."⁴² Rudolph Valentino was another popular film idol, and a story featured on the front page of the Union-Republican said that a young man from a mining camp in Monroe County corresponded regularly with him. The local man had reportedly left for Canada to study with Valentino and had sent a letter back home stating that he was currently studying with him.⁴³ In September of 1926, The Son of the Sheik, starring Valentino, played at the King Theater. Albians flocked to view what was reportedly his last picture.⁴⁴

The local press often featured short reviews of movies and motion picture advertisements. These commentaries attempted to temper the allure of big cities by highlighting their danger. An article in the Republican concerning the film, While New York Sleeps, implied that life in the city was filled with evil

⁴¹ Lizabeth Cohen, Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University Press, 1990), 125.

⁴² Monroe County News, February 12, 1920, p. 1.

⁴³ Union-Republican, February 28, 1924, p. 3.

⁴⁴ ibid., September 13, 1926, p. 3.

enticements and peril which could lead to disaster.⁴⁵ A piece discussing After Midnight explored the experience of two young women who were “exposed to all the temptations that New York holds forth.”⁴⁶ Despite these warnings about urban living, movie advertisements must have encouraged some young Albians to leave their small town. These ads were often provocative and boosted the image of a frolicking Jazz Age. In addition, they also probably served to further break down the isolation that small towns had sometimes experienced since parents had the additional worry that the media might be a corrupting influence.⁴⁷ In 1924, an ad for Sporting Youth stated that it featured “the excitement-seeking, jazz-hopping, pleasure-chasing youth.”⁴⁸ In 1928, an advertisement promoted the film, The Road to Ruin. The description said “closed cars parked on shady lanes, fast road houses, poker parties, love, passion and despair.”⁴⁹ These ads were also sometimes surprisingly sexual in connotation. In 1929, in an ad for the film, Naughty Baby, the description under the title stated “Naughty Baby, the girl with champagne ideas and home brew income, hat juggler at the hits, heart juggler on Park Avenue! She’s a knockout!”⁵⁰

During the 1920s, Albia had three movie theaters: the King, the Rex, and

⁴⁵ Albia Republican, May 5, 1921, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Union-Republican, January 16, 1928, p. 6.

⁴⁷ Dorothy Schwieder, The Middle Land (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996), 167.

⁴⁸ Union-Republican, November 13, 1924, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Ibid., October 11, 1928, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Ibid., March 14, 1929, p. 5.

the Comet. However, by 1927 only the King survived.⁵¹ In the meantime, however, the King had experienced difficulties, for on January 16, 1920, the original building was destroyed by a fire believed to have been caused by faulty wiring.⁵² A new theater was quickly built to replace the structure and the new King Theater formally opened on November 17, 1921. The new facility was funded by M.D. Pabst and R.T. Alford. The Union stated that it was the “most complete and modern movie picture house in the state.”⁵³ The community celebrated the opening night with hundreds of people attending the first picture.⁵⁴ The King was also the most prominent since it hosted a number of community events including political gatherings, holiday celebrations, and club meetings. In December 1923, the King Theater was the site of a gift-giving celebration when the merchants supplied the theater with an assortment of gifts. After the movie, names were drawn and Albia’s merchants thanked the town’s residents. The presents included free food, beauty items, and kitchen appliances.⁵⁵

The new King Theater witnessed a number of improvements during the 1920s, the most notable being the installation of sound equipment. The Union-Republican announced that the first sound movie would be heard in Albia on September 24, 1928:⁵⁶ The equipment to be activated was known as the Hana-

⁵¹ Ibid., November 24, 1927, p. 1 and December 1, 1927, p. 1.

⁵² Monroe County News, January 20, 1921, p. 1.

⁵³ Albia Union, November 15, 1921, p. 3.

⁵⁴ Ibid., November 24, 1921, p. 1.

⁵⁵ Ibid., January 11, 1923, p. 1.

⁵⁶ Union-Republican, September 10, 1928, p. 6.

A-Phone system; however, its performance was extremely poor. Therefore, Albians would have to wait until the spring of 1929 for sound movies. In April, technicians installed a new system known as the Vitaphone and Albians enjoyed their first sound production, State Street Sadie. After this victory, Albians enjoyed one of the most famous early sound movies, Al Jolson's Jazz Singer.⁵⁷ The Vitaphone system was the period's premiere sound invention, having been created by the cooperative efforts of Warner Brothers and AT&T.⁵⁸ The King continued striving to bring high-quality cinematic entertainment to Albia and by July, had installed a "new amplifying system together with the latest improved horns and reproduction mechanism for securing the ultimate sound effects."⁵⁹

In addition to the vast array of recreational options in Albia, the community also possessed a large number of clubs, which was typical of Midwestern towns during the period.⁶⁰ These clubs were not only entertaining, but were contributors to the town's well-being. Women's organizations, especially the King's Daughters and the Women's Club, were the most civic-minded. When the Albia Women's Club was established in the spring of 1920, the News stated, "the object of the club shall be mutual improvement, a broader culture and spirit of helping others."⁶¹ This organization featured a number of

⁵⁷ Ibid., April 11, 1929, p. 2.

⁵⁸ Tino Balio, ed., The American Film Industry (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 237.

⁵⁹ Union-Republican, July 25, 1929, p. 1.

⁶⁰ Schwieder, The Middle Land, 158.

⁶¹ Monroe County News, April 15, 1920, p. 1.

units including Civic Improvement, Home Study, Music and Dramatic Arts, Literature, Art, Home Economics, Handicraft, Conservation, and Evening Departments. This is not an all-inclusive list since the club's projects and divisions often changed. The Literature Department often met in the library to review literature. The Women's Club even had a History Department which offered lectures on a variety of topics including Iowa History and Economics.⁶² The Women's Club Art Department offered an art history class and Mrs. N.E. Kendall assisted in classroom instruction.⁶³ Mrs. Kendall's home also served as a meeting place for the organization and in 1924, the Kendall family donated it and formally opened it to the community.⁶⁴ However, the club's activities also involved many less formal gatherings at the homes of club members where the ladies played cards, sewed, or hosted luncheons and dinners.

The Women's Club also engaged in numerous projects including sanitation, child welfare, and community and school activities.⁶⁵ Some of the more beneficial activities involved charity work. In 1920, they sponsored a free Christmas celebration for Albia's children. The town's boys and girls were invited to a free children's show at the King Theater; following the picture each child was presented with a gift. The association invited the merchants of the community to support the event by giving contributions.⁶⁶ The Women's Club also occasionally staged plays. In 1928, they produced Aunt Lucia, with over

⁶² Albia Union, April 12, 1921, p. 3.

⁶³ Ibid., August 17, 1920, p. 3.

⁶⁴ Union-Republican, February 14, 1924, p. 1.

⁶⁵ Albia Union, May 4, 1920, p. 3.

⁶⁶ Albia Republican, December 16, 1920, p. 1.

100 hundred Albians acting in the play. The Universal Producing Company directed the performance.⁶⁷

Another notable women's organization was the King's Daughters which in 1921 had approximately 200 members.⁶⁸ As the Union put it, "this society is unique in its growth and purpose. It is non-sectarian, and it takes cheer as well as food into needy homes and teaches the occupants how to be self-sustaining."⁶⁹ This creed was illustrated on numerous occasions when the organization aided impoverished families.⁷⁰ In October 1921, Albia hosted the state convention which attracted King's Daughters' members from across Iowa. They listened to speakers describe the organization's projects and planned future activities. One undertaking concerned funding Iowa City's Perkins Hospital. Mrs. Agnes Latmer of Iowa City encouraged the King's Daughters to continue supporting her efforts to aid invalid children. The organization responded enthusiastically to her call by resolving to maintain their support of this worthy cause.⁷¹ Albia's King's Daughters also sponsored plays. In 1924, the organization staged Hello Algy, procuring its costumes from the Play Craft Productions Company, which demonstrated their commitment to produce a quality production. The News promoted the event by stating that "with the twinkle of an eye, one is taken from the orient with its mystic atmosphere to America to some fairy island, merely by the lowering or raising of a few

⁶⁷ Union-Republican, November 29, 1928, p. 8.

⁶⁸ Albia Union, April 22, 1921, p. 5.

⁶⁹ Ibid., October 5, 1920, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid., January 9, 1920, p. 3.

⁷¹ Monroe County News, October 20, 1921, p. 1.

curtains.”⁷² The club also offered less formal occasions at which members would meet for dinners or holiday celebrations. Despite their impressive contribution to the community, there is evidence which suggests that the Women’s Club and the King’s Daughters were elitist in orientation. This contention is supported by the fact that most leadership roles were filled by women from prominent families. Mrs. Thomas Hickenlooper was the leader of the Women’s Club History Department and also the wife of a prominent lawyer in the community.⁷³ Mrs. Don Kreger, whose family owned Albia’s Kreger Bakery, managed the affairs of the Women’s Club Literature Department.⁷⁴ In 1922, Mrs. D.W. Bates, the wife of another Albia lawyer, became the president of the Women’s Club.⁷⁵ She also was active in the organization’s Literature Department by leading discussions during meetings.⁷⁶ Prominent women not only served as the clubs’ leaders, but also as the speakers at meetings. In addition, many of the plays produced by these organizations had casts that consisted largely of Albia’s upper class. In 1929, a minstrel show’s participants included Mrs. George Wilkin, Mrs. Thomas Hickenlooper, and J.A. Canning, all highly respected members of the community.⁷⁷

Men were also heavily involved in clubs which included the booster-oriented Commercial Club, the Lions Club, and the American Legion. In June

⁷² ibid., March 20, 1924, p. 1.

⁷³ Union-Republican, April 12, 1921, p. 3.

⁷⁴ ibid., February 22, 1923, p. 4.

⁷⁵ ibid., May 11, 1922, p. 4.

⁷⁶ ibid., March 3, 1923, p. 5.

⁷⁷ ibid., March 14, 1929, p. 1.

1921, the Lion's Club was organized; it had some elitist undertones because initially one could become a member only by invitation. Describing the organization's mission, the Republican declared that "The objects of all Lions Club members shall be to promote the theory and practice of the principles of good government and good citizenship; to take an active interest in the civic, commercial, social and moral welfare of the community; to unite the members in the bonds of friendship, good-fellowship and mutual understanding."⁷⁸ The Lion's Club members engaged in projects, but they primarily provided fellowship for their members. The Lions also put on plays. In 1928, they staged a minstrel show at the King Theater which attracted a large audience.⁷⁹

Albia's Howard Cessna Post of the American Legion was another active group which in June 1922 had 125 members. During that month, the organization staged a drive for new members, noting that the county had 700 veterans.⁸⁰ The Legion engaged in many activities including the planning of Fourth of July, Memorial Day, and Armistice Day observances. The Legion also held an annual banquet which featured speakers and outlined next year's plans.⁸¹ These were often elaborate affairs; in 1929, the dinner was accompanied by the music of the King Theater Orchestra.⁸² The Legion also worked diligently to ensure that townspeople did not forget the sacrifices of veterans. In 1924, they showed the film, Iowa under Fire, which highlighted

⁷⁸ Monroe County News, June 23, 1921, p. 1.

⁷⁹ Union-Republican, February 23, 1928, p. 1.

⁸⁰ Ibid., June 26, 1922, p. 1.

⁸¹ Ibid., March 22, 1926, p. 1.

⁸² Ibid., March 14, 1929, p. 1.

Iowa soldiers in the world war.⁸³ Three years later, the Legion staged a play entitled Who Won The War in which Legion members portrayed aspects of the conflict.⁸⁴ In 1925, Albia's Legion Post participated in a state-wide drive to aid crippled veterans, a campaign which was highly successful.⁸⁵ The Legion also aided in the effort to relieve the poverty of the 1927 coal strike by distributing food and clothing.⁸⁶

The Women's Club, the King's Daughters, the Lions, and the Legion were only a few of the clubs which were active during the period. There were also groups which appealed to more narrow interests, such as the Albia Gun Club. The Club offered fellowship for hunters at Cottonwood Park.⁸⁷ There were also a number of clubs that were primarily religious. One of these was the Big Brothers whose activities were apparent throughout the period; another was the Loyal Men's Club, a Methodist group which held Bible studies aiming to cultivate interest in religious matters. Club members also assisted the church's pastor in his mission to teach the gospel.⁸⁸ In addition, many churches had clubs for young people. One of these was the Christian Endeavor which was affiliated with the Christian Church. This group aided in church services and

⁸³ Ibid., September 21, 1925, p. 2.

⁸⁴ Ibid., April 4, 1927, p. 1.

⁸⁵ Ibid., September 21, 1924, p. 2.

⁸⁶ Ibid., November 7, 1927, p. 1.

⁸⁷ Albia Union, July 8, 1921, p. 3.

⁸⁸ Ibid., May 18, 1920, p. 3.

hoped to strengthen the youths' commitment to Christ.⁸⁹ However, these are just a few of the major clubs. Albia's press frequently reported the meetings of a host of other groups including the Double Ten Club, the Triangle Club, the Kill Kare Club, the 50-50 Club, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Order of the Eastern Star.

Although entertainment and club activity were an important aspect of life in Albia, the town's churches and schools continued to be pillars of the community. The press contained numerous articles concerning these institutions, demonstrating their great importance. Albians could chose from a assortment of denominations. Among the congregations were First Methodist, First Presbyterian, United Presbyterian, Christian, United Brethren, Friends, Grace Episcopal, and a Catholic parish. In 1926, the largest Christian denomination in Monroe county was Catholic with 2,467 adherents out of 6,608 reported.⁹⁰ The remainder of those who provided their affiliation were divided among a variety of Protestant churches, the largest being the Methodist Church which had 1,020 members.⁹¹ There were either no Jews in the county or they did not state their religious affiliation.⁹² Albia's churches offered a variety of services including Sunday School, clubs, and community projects. These congregations were healthy as evidenced by a high level of participation by the members and the physical improvements of the buildings. In the summer of 1922, the Christian Church received \$8,500 worth of betterments; these

⁸⁹ Ibid., June 18, 1920, p. 2.

⁹⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1926. Religious Bodies, Vol. 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1930), 611.

⁹¹ Ibid., 609.

⁹² Ibid., 607.

consisted of adding additional Sunday School rooms, a larger worship space, and renovating the entire interior of the church.⁹³ St. Mary's Catholic Church also received renovations in 1922. These improvements included a new home for Father James A. O'Neill and a refurbishment of St. Mary's worship space.⁹⁴ Churches were also the locations of banquets, dinners, and prayer meetings.

In addition to regular church services, revivals continued to be a popular form of spiritual expression. They were usually led by visiting evangelists who delivered uncompromising sermons calling for holiness, acknowledging one's sinfulness, and a personal commitment to Christ. These traveling preachers visited a large number of the town's churches and their uplifting message was embraced across denominational lines. In 1923, evangelist Elgin Brough charged that unless men are spiritually transformed all reform movements are in vain.⁹⁵ The following year, five churches proposed a collective venture consisting of simultaneous revival gatherings.⁹⁶ In 1925, evangelist Mel Trotter visited a number of Albia's businesses and met with the town's ministers. Two hundred members of the Commercial Club were present when he addressed that organization. The substance of Trotter's message, reported on the front page of the Union-Republican, also consisted of repentance and strict allegiance to Christian principles. During one speech he stated, "You must either crown him king or crucify him. There is no middle ground and you are

⁹³ Union-Republican, April 20, 1922, p. 1.

⁹⁴ Ibid., May 4, 1922, p. 1.

⁹⁵ Ibid., February 1, 1923, p. 1.

⁹⁶ Ibid., March 18, 1924, p. 1.

either for or against him. There is no chance to play fast and loose with God.”⁹⁷ In January 1927, the United Brethren Church, the Christian Church, the Methodist Church, and the United Presbyterian church invited evangelists to hold revivals for their congregations.⁹⁸ In 1928, the First Presbyterian Church welcomed the Reverend Frank Schroeder and the Reverend Thomas Scotton. Schroeder was from Dubuque while Scotton was from Cedar Rapids. Both men came to Albia hoping to enliven the spiritual vitality of these congregations.⁹⁹

Albia’s youth also were active participants in religious events. In 1925, A.K. Harper conducted revival meetings which many teenagers attended. During one gathering 118 youths went forward and renewed their Christian faith. The majority of Harper’s meetings were held at churches and at a temporary structure known as “the shed.” However, some of the assemblies were held in schools indicating that citizens were comfortable with religious activities on school grounds.¹⁰⁰ The Union-Republican reported Harper’s meeting resulted in 576 Christian converts during his five-week stay in Albia.¹⁰¹

In addition to these activities, speakers traveled through the country giving talks on religious topics. The theory of evolution was a popular issue which often surfaced. In 1922, William Jennings Bryan gave a speech at Albia High School, attacking the theory of evolution and providing many arguments defending the theory of creation. The Union-Republican stated, “Bryan not only

⁹⁷ Ibid., October 15, 1925, p. 1.

⁹⁸ Ibid., January 9, 1927, p. 1.

⁹⁹ Ibid., March 29, 1928, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., October 31, 1925, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., October 19, 1925, p. 1.

attacked Darwinism from the standpoint of its conflict with the theologians' theory of the divine origin of man, but from a logical standpoint as well, and he laid the modern acceptance of Darwin's teachings at the root of all political and social evil." He also discussed topics such as "taxation, the industrial problem, the problem of law enforcement, profiteering and war." However, the bulk of his lecture focused upon what he viewed to be a heretical theory. As Bryan stated, "he who follows Darwinism, loses his divinity; he thinks and acts in terms of a brute and the devil instead of God." Finally, he indicated the theory of evolution would serve only in making its adherents atheists.¹⁰² The Union agreed with Bryan, saying "nothing except faith in a being higher than himself gets him anywhere in this old world."¹⁰³ In 1923, Benjamin H. Boyd of New York City addressed a crowd at the Comet Theater. The subject of his discussion drew heavily on Apocalyptic theology. He interpreted a crisis in the Ruhr Valley as a sign of deep religious significance. Boyd said, "something tremendous moves just under the troubled surface of international affairs. Events, some sinister and all significant, are lifting their heads on both sides of the Atlantic."¹⁰⁴

Albia's five schools represented a very important aspect of the town's life, serving as places to teach academic skills and entertain the townspeople. They also aided in binding the community together. In 1921, the value of the school buildings and grounds was \$315,000, with equipment valued at \$18,317.00 for the high school, \$3,884.30 for Lincoln Elementary, \$2,406.97 for Washington Elementary, \$2,067.63 for Grant Elementary, and \$991.25 for Jefferson

¹⁰² Ibid., May 1, 1922, p. 1.

¹⁰³ Albia Union, January 3, 1922, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ Union-Republican, June 11, 1923, p. 6.

Elementary. In November 1921, the total payroll was \$6,912.20 for the staff of the Albia Community School District.¹⁰⁵ However, the educational system was viewed in much larger terms than dollar amounts. The schools were institutions which prepared youth to be productive citizens and tools for world improvement. The press also reflected the high value placed on education. An editorial in the Union-Republican stated that Albia's "graduates will build upon the foundation that has been provided for them, a structure far more fair than that which has ever been built."¹⁰⁶ The newspapers often listed pupils who had perfect attendance, high grades, or other achievements. The papers consistently supported the mission of the schools by praising their accomplishments and encouraging parental involvement. In 1923, the Union-Republican stated, "Too much importance cannot be given to the school and its place in the social fabric."¹⁰⁷

Albians also supported their schools with specific actions. In 1921, school administrators established the Parent Teacher Association which met once per month to discuss school improvement. The formation of the organization was also assisted by the activities of the Women's Club. The Parent Teacher Association supported teachers and familiarized parents with educational issues.¹⁰⁸ In 1926, the high school marching band needed new uniforms and Albians responded by pouring out private donations.¹⁰⁹ The schools often invited parents to visit the schools. In 1925, the schools

¹⁰⁵ Albia Union, December 9, 1921, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ Union-Republican, May 18, 1922, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., May 21, 1923, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Albia Union, February 18, 1921, p. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Union-Republican, August 23, 1926, p. 1.

proclaimed a "visitation week," encouraging "parents and others to come and witness the class work and the exhibits."¹¹⁰ Albians also enthusiastically attended many school-related events such as athletic competitions, drama productions, and musical presentations.

However, teachers and coaches had to be innovative since material resources were meager. In 1920, the Union celebrated the addition of pencil sharpeners in each classroom stating, "now teachers will not have to spend so much time in sharpening pencils but can employ their time in more useful work."¹¹¹ In 1922, the scarcity of funds came to light when the track squad built a primitive cinder track; apparently it was not an oval but a simple "straight-away."¹¹² The financial pressures placed on Albia's teachers were noteworthy. In 1926, Albia's teachers' salaries averaged \$100 less per year than other teachers in Iowa. The Union-Republican declared that less was spent per student than any other town of its size. An editorial stated that "all towns in the state between five and six thousand population have a higher tax than Albia with the exception of Estherville, which is a wealthier community and has 300 less pupils enrolled."¹¹³

Albia also hosted many Extension Summer Schools conducted by the Teachers College at Cedar Falls. These summer sessions provided enrichment opportunities for the teachers of southern Iowa. In 1921, a session was held from June to August. The Iowa State Teachers College sponsored the classes;

¹¹⁰ Ibid., April 16, 1925, p. 2.

¹¹¹ Albia Union, January 9, 1920, p. 4.

¹¹² Ibid., March 24, 1922, p. 3.

¹¹³ Union-Republican, March 8, 1926, p. 1.

instructors included professors from Cedar Falls and superintendents from across the state.¹¹⁴ Albia continued to host these summer schools; in 1927, Albia's summer school was the state's second largest, attended by 190 students from 17 counties.¹¹⁵ This progressive spirit demonstrated that teachers were given more opportunities to be informed and professional standards were gradually being increased.

In addition to instructing the young, schools also provided adults with speakers and opportunities to watch athletic contests. During the spring of 1920, a series of lectures showed that Albia was not immune from the Red Scare. Two programs support this conclusion; one was entitled "Lessons in Patriotism" and the other was "Counteracting Dangerous Doctrines in Government."¹¹⁶ The high school was also the usual site for Albia's athletic contests. Albia's teams contended with towns such as Centerville, Corydon, Knoxville, Bloomfield, and Oskaloosa; all provided exciting competition. Football, basketball, and baseball games received much interest and were well attended. Even track was popular, especially when Albia sent its young athletes to the Drake Relays in Des Moines.¹¹⁷ Albia's press was delighted when the home team defeated a nearby rival; headlines such as "Locals Trim Oskaloosa" often appeared on the front pages of Albia's papers.¹¹⁸ In addition, those students, particularly males, who achieved excellence in athletic

¹¹⁴ Albia Union, June 10, 1921, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ Union-Republican, June 9, 1927, p. 1.

¹¹⁶ Albia Union, March 5, 1920, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., April 8, 1921, p. 2.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., August 12, 1920, p. 1.

competitions often were showered with community praise. One of these athletes was Fred Geneva, whose talents in football and track brought him vast praise in a local paper.¹¹⁹ However, sometimes the press was prone to exaggeration as in April 1926 when an article in the Union-Republican said that Albia's track coach had broken the world record in the discus throw. Coach Eben Gillespie reportedly tossed the discus 161 feet. The headline declared "Coach breaks World Record," but, the article later revealed that it was an unofficial world record. Nevertheless, Gillespie must have been quite a discus thrower since he frequently vied in national competitions. The piece said that at one contest "he was defeated only once and that defeat came by an Olympic champion."¹²⁰

The school's plays, debates, and musical performances were also of great interest to the community. Dramatic performances were often given solely by one class. In 1923, the junior class performed The Charm School, a comedy involving a young man who ran a girls' boarding school. The students become infatuated with him, which caused "many great calamities."¹²¹ Even the high school's faculty took part in a play to entertain the students and the community. In 1920, the teachers put on the comedy, Mrs. Briggs of the Poultry Yard, which was well-received by the public. The News said that "it was a scream from start to finish, no one could have convinced me that there was so much real humor and nonsense in our faculty."¹²²

Albia's young men also competed in numerous debates and, a similar

¹¹⁹ Union-Republican, May 12, 1924, p. 1.

¹²⁰ Ibid., April 15, 1926, p. 1.

¹²¹ Monroe County News, February 22, 1923, p. 1.

¹²² Ibid., February 5, 1920, p. 1.

activity, declamatory contests with the surrounding towns in southern Iowa.¹²³ These contests sometimes involved the high profile issues of the period. A debate and declamatory contest in February 1921 attracted a considerable amount of attention. Some of Albia's young men demonstrated their superior knowledge by placing first. These winners included Burton Tarr and Howard Brandenburg; the Union declared that during the contest "the beauty of our free school system was on full display."¹²⁴

Declamatory contests were another activity which judged excellence in public speaking. These events often featured different categories; a competition in 1924 had three divisions including Oratorical, Dramatic, and Humorous. The individual contestants gave speeches on topics ranging from the Bible to comic addresses such as "Aunt Jane at the Missionary Society."¹²⁵ These competitions judged excellence in public speaking on topics such as classical Rome, the death penalty, and war.¹²⁶

In the spring of 1927, a movement primarily orchestrated by the Albia School Board began to establish a junior college. State law forbade the funding of a junior college by taxing a town's residents; the funds for such an institution were required to come from tuition. A minimum of twenty-five students was also needed in order to support such an institution. The Albia high school was selected as the site for the school, and Myrla Harlow was chosen as the administrator. The college was "part of the public school system under the

¹²³ Albia Union, February 8, 1921, p. 4.

¹²⁴ Ibid., February 1, 1921, p. 2.

¹²⁵ Union-Republican, February 7, 1924, p. 1.

¹²⁶ Albia Union, February 1, 1921, p. 2.

supervision of the board of education.”¹²⁷ The rooms for the institution were at the high school. A reduction in the public school enrollment eased the demand for additional space for the school.¹²⁸ After its accreditation by the North Central Association of Colleges and Universities, the college enjoyed success during its first year of classes which began in the fall of 1927. However, enrollment was below the standard of twenty-five, the first semester having attracted only eighteen students.¹²⁹ The school offered classes in mathematics, English, speech, history, and chemistry.¹³⁰ The student body organized a basketball team and a chemistry club, and they chose the Pirates as their mascot.¹³¹ The initial success of the community college was validated by the approval of Miss Agnes Samuelson, the State Superintendent of Instruction, after her visit in January of 1928. She spoke to the Albia Women’s club and also to a large number of Albia’s business leaders.¹³² The Union-Republican praised the school board’s efforts to establish a junior college in Albia, citing the reduced expenses and the maintenance of parental influence on youths as advantages. In April 1928, the paper noted that, “the junior college is accredited by all the colleges of the North Central Association as well as many other outstanding institutions and we believe there is every reason for every Monroe County boy

¹²⁷ Union-Republican, May 23, 1927, p. 1.

¹²⁸ Ibid., April 11, 1927, p. 1.

¹²⁹ Ibid., October 20, 1927, p. 1.

¹³⁰ Ibid., October 20, 1927, p. 1.

¹³¹ Ibid., October 20, 1927, p. 1.

¹³² Ibid., January 12, 1928, p. 1.

and girl to take advantage of the rare opportunity which is theirs for the taking."¹³³ Albia's young people responded favorably to this call for greater attendance, and by the fall of 1929 the enrollment had grown to sixty-four pupils.¹³⁴ In 1929, the college organized a thespian society and produced a play.¹³⁵ The vibrant start of the college is also indicated by the fact that the school fielded a football team in 1929 which played colleges such as Graceland and other small private and community institutions. The football team was very successful, winning the southern Iowa football title and remaining undefeated during their season.¹³⁶

In the 1920s Albians had an interesting blend of recreational options which reflected the decade's transitional nature. Motion pictures and radio were similar to paved highways in that they decreased isolation; they were one of many tools that connected Albia to the outside world. Movies and radio were beginning to diminish regional culture and, in a similar manner, chain stores were beginning to standardize commercial life. This trend brought both positive and negative consequences. Although it is possible to debate which innovations had greater influence, life in Albia and other small towns would be changed forever.

Albia also possessed much stability during the decade. The great value placed upon Albia's churches and schools indicated that the town's residents still embraced the essential features of their culture. The high level of

¹³³ Ibid., April 2, 1928, p. 2.

¹³⁴ Ibid., September 19, 1929, p. 1.

¹³⁵ Ibid., March 7, 1929, p. 1.

¹³⁶ Ibid., December 12, 1929, p. 1.

participation in church services and revivals indicates that Christianity still had great influence. The town's schools were also vibrant institutions which worked diligently to prepare the town's children for a rapidly changing world. In addition, Albia's enthusiasm for clubs illustrates that many citizens valued small-town living and believed that civic involvement was essential for making it better.

CONCLUSION

Albia's past illustrates how hundreds of small towns were transformed during the 1920s. The period also revealed the manner in which a community responded to a variety of changes, including economic hardship, the effects of technology, and an increasing connection to the outside world. The decade brought a mixture of positive and negative developments.

One of the more unfavorable aspects of life was the bleak economic situation. Albia had grown largely because of the area's coal mines and farming lands. Mining and farming had experienced prosperous years prior to the 1920s; however, both experienced hardship when agricultural commodity prices plummeted and coal production declined. This hardship influenced the political climate by fueling Col. Smith W. Brookhart's popularity in the county. One of the more apparent effects of this recession was the sharp reduction in the county's population which fell from 23,467 in 1920 to 15,010 ten years later.¹ The demographic shift was caused primarily by the decreasing size and number of coal camps.

Nevertheless, Albia's community leaders faced these problems head-on; campaigns to buy home-produced coal and a stress upon agricultural cooperatives indicate their energetic approach. The town's businesses also held numerous sales, advertised unceasingly and, fortunately, a surprising number of merchants survived. In addition, the condition of Albia's banks indicated that the town's financial institutions were in able hands. Unfortunately, these economic difficulties were largely beyond the community's control. Albians could not change the quality of their coal or dictate federal farm policy, yet many continued to believe that the economy would improve. Some

¹ Leland Sage, A History of Iowa. (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1983), 311.

residents believed that innovations such as the Koal Economizer or new business ventures could bring relief; however, they were unaware that the Great Depression was approaching.

Despite these challenges, the town's leaders did not succumb to a fatalistic attitude; instead they focused their energy on improving their situation. Therefore, each challenge that faced the residents produced an energetic response. One of the vivid examples lies in the activities of the Farm Bureau and the Cooperative Extension Agent. Both the Extension and Home Demonstration agents worked diligently to improve life in rural areas. The high level of participation in the Farm Bureau's activities indicates that rural residents embraced the organization's work. In addition, miners and farmers were not afraid to engage in strikes or support political mavericks such as Smith Brookhart. Albia was a popular location to discuss the county's agricultural and mining problems since both the United Mine Workers' headquarters and Extension Agent's office were located in Albia.

The town's Commercial Club is one of the more vivid examples of community activism. The organization, largely made up of the town's business people, continually advocated home-buying and sponsored special celebrations including special sales days and the annual Fall Festival. The club worked tirelessly to find solutions for the struggling economy. Its effort to save Albia's packing plant was an additional example of its determination. Albia's organizations also came to the aid of miners when protracted strikes and closing mines forced many mining families into poverty. The King's Daughters, the American Legion, and the Women's Club were all active in providing relief to the poor. Despite the town's inability to end the recession, the residents usually responded effectively to the problems within their control. The manner in

which Albians improved their water supply is an excellent example of their activism.

The era also witnessed an immense proliferation of technology in every sphere of life. The effects of innovation were more ambiguous than were the economic difficulties. Although technology may have had its negative effects, its benefits seemed to outweigh the drawbacks. Technology served to decrease isolation and improve the quality of life. The decade witnessed an improvement in public health measures which reduced deaths due to tuberculosis. The proliferation of electric appliances began to decrease the drudgery of endless household duties. An improved system of roads increased the ease of transportation and began to make the benefits of town living more accessible to rural residents. However, farm families would have to wait until the next decade to benefit greatly from these positive changes.

Albians also began to have a wider range of entertainment options; the country's best entertainers were available with the purchase of a movie ticket or the turn of a radio knob. The era witnessed the growth of celebrity worship and the increasing influence of urban culture. These developments eroded the isolation that had often accompanied life in small towns. Albians became increasingly informed of trendy styles and urban habits. In addition, radio and moving pictures contributed to the demise of many of the more traditional entertainment activities. These included the Lyceum Course, the chautauqua, and other guest speakers. In addition to these changes in recreation, tourists passed through Albia in increasing numbers due to transportation improvements. These developments were augmented by the growth of chain stores and other consequences of modernization. All of these developments probably made it more difficult to maintain traditional moral codes and

established ways of viewing the world.

Technology also brought harmful changes; criminals with increased mobility traveled from distant areas and began to prey upon Albians. In addition, the car contributed to numerous accidents which often ended in death or severe injury. But more importantly technology served to standardize life and break down regional differences. This may have contributed to an erosion of stereotypes and misunderstanding; however, it may also have eroded regional identity.

Despite these changes Albians largely remained grounded in their Christian faith, family life, and belief in the superiority of small-town life. The town's press was the most enthusiastic defender of a distinctly rural value system. This town's newspapers tended to be suspicious of the glitter and excitement of the city. The many editorials aimed at detractors of small towns demonstrates this attitude. Perhaps these defenders of small towns had a valid point in believing that cities produced a lonely existence, since one's contributions were probably less observable in large cities; and it may have been easier to become socially isolated in a metropolitan environment. In contrast to urban living, Albia offered a variety of opportunities to socialize with other members of the community. The large number of clubs suggests that many residents found groups which promoted a feeling of belonging. The town also had a variety of church denominations and spiritual experiences which served to provide meaning in an increasingly complex world.

However, some Albians had difficulty expressing themselves in acceptable ways. The presence of the Ku Klux Klan indicates that some reacted radically to this rapidly changing world. Fortunately, these reactionaries garnered lukewarm support, and the organization soon disappeared. The press

might have exaggerated the town's harmonious life since crime was common during the period. Some young people engaged in anti-social behavior such as vandalism and theft. In addition, the large confiscations of illegal booze reveal that some residents refused to respect the law. These busts also demonstrate that despite the opportunities for "morally up-lifting" forms of entertainment, many Albians chose more worldly amusements.

The stories about domestic abuse, the inadequate condition of the County Farm, and government corruption also reveal that Albia was not immune to the darker aspects of human nature. These events also imply that life in Albia was similar to life in all historical contexts: a mixture of good and bad experiences which often challenge sweeping generalizations. The establishment of a Country Club and the exclusiveness of other organizations indicate that one's allegiance to the community probably varied greatly from one individual to another.

Finally, the study demonstrates the diversity that is Iowa history. The coal mining regions of Iowa were different from those that were purely agricultural. Monroe County would not have had the highest percentage of African-Americans in Iowa without coal mining. The topography of southern Iowa presented distinct challenges to agriculture and hence to the town economics of the area. The combination of a sharp failure in mining and the end of the glory days of agriculture gave a distinct flavor to Albia's experience in the 1920s.

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