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Franklin A. Doty

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FLORIDA AND IOWA: A CONTEMPORARY VIEW

by FRANKLIN A. DOTY

WITHIN THE SPAN of one generation after the admission of Florida and Iowa to the Union, the citizens of the two states confronted each other in the awful strife of the Civil War. Portents of this bitter separation had been discernable in the birthing of the states, but who could have said with assurance that these two frontier communities, having so many more roots and inheritances in common than they had fatal divergencies, would shortly stand drawn in battle array against each other? Regardless of their common institutional origins, the two communities came to subordinate themselves to, and form a part of, the emerging realities of North and South, and played the roles between 1861 and 1865 which larger events thrust upon them.

Iowans had in fact prided themselves from the beginning on having been the first new state to be carved out of that part of the Louisiana Purchase which from 1820 had been "forever" designated as free soil. The activities of Iowans in the underground railroad were prominent and wide-spread. Even during territorial days, disparaging attitudes toward "slave" Missouri were frequently evident. This pious gleam in the Iowan's eye did not quite cover, however, the mate of civil privilege which he attempted to assure to the white folk in subsequent debates on the Iowa constitution. It was not, indeed, until after the Civil War that "free soil" Iowa formally removed all civil disabilities against members of the Negro race.

In Florida, on the other hand, it will be recalled how deliberate were the attempts to preserve and protect the institution of slavery as the area emerged into statehood. This fundamental dedication, among other things, led to the conflict which would

[Editor's Note: Readers of the *Quarterly* will recall an article by Mr. Doty, published in July, 1956, on the admission of Florida and Iowa to the Union as a phase of the sectional politics of the ante-bellum years. In the present article, the same author, who has lived and taught in both states for a number of years, presents an informal commentary on the two commonwealths and their respective roles in the contemporary national scene.]

one day be called inevitable. Florida's role in the Confederate cause was in some respects more critical than the role of Iowa in the fortunes of the North. Although the resources in men and materials poured out of Iowa during the war years, her soil was not invaded, her homes and farms were not pillaged, nor her borders tormented by the enemy. Florida, on the other hand, suffered as her harbors were occupied, her coasts ravaged, and her soil darkened with the blood of her sons. While paralleling Iowa's role as the breadbasket of her cause, Florida was closer to the crushing advance of the war, and - firmest point of all - was on the side that lost.

The painful process of setting the nation to rights again indirectly pitted the two states against each other for nearly a generation. From these unhappy years, time has kindly carried forward the two communities into the firm bonds of the reconstructed nation and into the reciprocally advantageous relationships of the family of states in this, the world's largest and richest free trade area.

Run down a few statistics and you begin to build a foundation from which to appraise the two states today. In numbers of people, Florida had out-distanced her twin sister in the proportions of 3.5 millions to 2.7 millions by 1955. This considerable margin of difference is a fairly recent phenomenon, however, for in 1945 Florida led Iowa only by 2.5 millions to 2.3 millions. The change here indicated points to the fact that the last decade has been one of the most exciting in the peace-time history of Florida. While Iowa added in the vicinity of 400,000 souls, Florida underwent the tremendous addition of nearly one million persons, or an increment of roughly forty per cent. According to the United States Census Bureau calculations - thus excluding the possibility of local exaggerations - Florida, between 1950 and 1955, increased at the rate of 348 people per day or 16 every hour. This was the third highest rate of population increase among the 48 states for these years. Among other results of this growth the two states reversed their positions in rank among the states, with Florida, as early as 1950, rising to 20th place, bypassing Iowa in the 22nd rank. In 1910 by way of sharp contrast, the rankings were Iowa tenth and Florida thirty-third!

Beside the distinguishing features of the rate of population growth, other aspects of the population give additional insights into the make-up and the maturing of the two states. Today their population density is very close: Florida has 51 persons per square mile and Iowa 48. The national figure is 50.7. The changes in the density figures are more interesting, however, and reveal much about the growth of the two states. As long ago as 1920, Iowa's density was 43 while in the same year Florida showed about 18 persons per square mile. This statement is merely going the long way around to say that Florida remained an open, semi-frontier state long after Iowa had virtually reached her maturity as a fully occupied agricultural domain. It implies also a recency and rapidity of settlement and growth which has not been without its disadvantages and troubles for the southernmost state.

In rural-urban balance the statistics reveal some noteworthy comparisons and contrasts. In 1920, both states showed a nearly exact parallel in the predominance of rural over urban dwellers in proportions of about 2 to 1. But by 1950, Florida had upset this picture completely for in that year there were about 350,000 more city dwellers than rural people in the Sunshine State. Iowans maintained their dedication to the country side, but not nearly in the old ratio, for by 1950 there were only about 200,000 more people dwelling in the country than in the cities of the Hawkeye State. It is highly probable that by this writing Iowa's urbanites have broken into the majority.

In view of these many differences in the history and background and growth of the two states, it may come as a surprise to some to discover that income-wise, the people of the two states are on remarkably close levels. The per capita income of Floridians in 1955 was \$1,654 and that of Iowans \$1,577. It is interesting that here, as in the case of population rankings, the two states reversed their positions, since the figures for 1954 showed \$1,610 for Florida and \$1,667 for Iowa. In this respect, while Iowans' income is consistent with the general level of the midwestern agrarian states, that of Floridians is conspicuously out of line with any other neighboring states, some of which show barely half the per capita income that Florida can boast. Indeed, Florida enjoys a comfortable margin above even the Old Dominion, above Louisiana, situated as she is amid the crossroads of enor-

mous land, water and air commerce, and even above the "sovereign state" of Texas!

If one bears in mind the general ratio of population between the two states (3.5 to 2.7), it is worthwhile to note the differences in the sources of income. Floridians earn more than two and a half times as much in service trades as do Iowans, and nearly that much more in the construction trades. On a percentage basis, however, Iowans who work on farms or who own them take home almost 25% of the total income of the state, while comparable people in Florida earn only 6% of the state's total income. No labored interpretation of these figures is called for. They simply underscore the dominant features of the economics of the two states.

But what is the living like in Iowa and Florida? Far be it from a Yankee newly come down to tell Floridians what their state is all about. This brings up the question, however, of just who are today's Floridians. The hard fact of the matter is that in 1950 nearly 54% of the residents of Florida were not native, but had migrated to the state from elsewhere. This percentage must have materially increased by 1957. The corresponding figure for Iowa in 1950 was about 19%. This massive migration to Florida is one of the fundamental factors which helps to explain, among other things, why Florida is the political maverick among the deep south states, having voted for Republican presidents in 1928, 1952, and again in 1956. It also goes a long way to explain the extraordinarily favorable income figures for Florida, as compared with her southern neighbors. It means greater diversity of talents, wider resources in ideas, greater productivity, more funds for investment and enterprise, - all within the framework of a phenomenally expanding market.

But this transplanted Iowan will never-the-less tell a Floridian that he has yet to sample a Florida tomato that even begins to resemble the taste of an Iowa tomato. That Florida corn is a sorry affair compared with the fat, deep yellow Iowa corn when it is popped into the kettle not an hour after it has been picked. That he would rather have a mouse in his basement than a roach in his kitchen. That, in fact, he would admire to have a basement! That a barn, to be a worthy barn, ought to be a painted barn. That a clean elm is more poetic than a moss-strewn oak. That

it is a disgrace to be able to count the ribs of a cow. That sand is wonderful when confined to the shore or consigned to concrete. That Iowa houses are warmer at 20 below than Florida houses at 20 above. That mild winters hardly compensate for the physical and spiritual stimulation of vigorous changes of season. But perhaps this is mere quibbling.

Iowa's greatest asset is her prodigiously fertile soil, in spite of the persistent and diabolical legend that no land south of the Rock Island railroad (Davenport, Iowa City, Des Moines, Atlantic, Council Bluffs) is worth putting a plow into. This dividing line would cut off a third of the state, and it is simply not true. The land is better north of the Rock Island, but this is to be blamed on Missouri, much of whose celebrated gumbo has oozed up over the line. The nearest the writer ever came to experiencing a suspension of the second law of the conservation of energy was in driving a car over a dirt road in southwest Iowa early in the morning before the dew had risen. What you do after a rain is simply to stay at home.

When it comes to the poetry of nature, however, here is something that Florida can't begin to match - depending on tastes, of course. Stand at a cross-roads in Hamilton County, in north central Iowa, early on a May morning. Look at that flat, black, *black* soil. Then follow along the little glimmering row of fresh green slips of corn leaves, four or five inches tall, as it outlines the path of the plumb-line-straight furrow until you lose it on the horizon. Smell the earth as the moisture rises. Feel the simple beauty of the design, expand your mind into the distance, and envision the promise of fruition. This is one of the sublimest of human experiences.

There is no doubt that Iowa's land is her crown and glory. Certain of the staple by-products of animal husbandry, when regularly plowed back into the ground, enhance its productivity and make it literally the empire of corn and hogs. Which of these products goes most to market depends upon the vagaries of the respective price structures. Good prices for corn will direct the golden stream to mills and bins and granaries, but uncertainties or depressions in the price of corn will conspire to give it the muddy mobility and porcine personality of an Iowa hog a season hence.

These are admittedly earthy values, and Iowa cannot contend too successfully in the field of the exotic and the glamorous. There is natural beauty in the state, to be sure. The sharply hilly section in northeast Iowa is a pleasant contrast to the gently rolling prairie which characterizes most of the state. Considerable resort and recreational activity has developed there. In northwestern Iowa, nature has deposited a considerable number of lakes whose existence Minnesotans begrudgingly acknowledge, but only as terribly inferior ponds. Nevertheless, the fish has bitten the man here, and fairly extensive recreational enterprise flourishes in this area during the mild months. In fact, something approaching a social elite has identified itself with the area around Lake Okoboji for a number of years.

One of the pleasant experiences the writer has had, and often, is to drive west from Des Moines on route 6 of an afternoon. You are soon in fairly high table land that constitutes the watershed between the Mississippi and the Missouri, and some truly fabulous farm land can be seen on every hand. After you pass Atlantic, you begin to rise and fall between the increasingly vigorous corrugations that parallel the valley of the Missouri. The greater variety of the landscape and the novelty of each successive vista make the time pass quickly, and then you are on the last and highest ridge from which in graceful curves you ease down into the historic gateway city that takes its name from the region itself - Council Bluffs.

Both Florida and Iowa, in this connection, have an interesting cultural feature in common in the prominence of Indian names attributed to rivers and lakes. The Wapsipinicon might well be paired with the Withlacoochee, and Okamanpedan take equal rank in Indian lore with the Okeechobee. Indian wars and purchases and removals occupy many pages in the history of the two commonwealths. Both states, give or take half a century, have had their cowtowns and cowboys and all the color and lore associated with that way of life. But it is doubtful if Kissimmee will ever know the life and times that Sioux City experienced when the latter was one of the hottest and wildest spots in the Missouri valley along in the 1870's and 1880's. (Family tradition has it that the writer's great-aunt flatly refused to leave Chicago for a visit to relatives in Omaha in the early 1900's for fear of Indian threats to life and limb!)

In other aspects of cultural development, Iowa took a long lead over Florida in public support for education, as befitted her earlier population growth, and boasts of the high literacy rate enjoyed by her traditionally rural people. But the gap is closing, as residents of Florida can testify, especially since the beginning of the Minimum Foundation Program in 1947. Iowa takes exceptional and pardonable pride in Grinnell College, a private institution, considered to be the oldest (1859) educational institution west of the Mississippi with continuous service as a four-year college. Iowa preceded Florida by more than half a century in establishing public support for higher education, but today both states spend princely sums on two large and burgeoning state universities, with Florida adding a third for her colored citizens.

It is a far cry, however, from the magnificent experimental theatre on the Iowa City campus or the creative work in music at Florida State, on the one hand, to the hayseedism and "wool hat" attitudes still to be found in the two states, on the other. The strong rural foundations and agrarian or gins of the two commonwealths exhibit modern carry-overs in the form of massive parochialism, narrow mindedness in the most literal sense, suspicion of urban ways and urban wealth, and even in the peasant-like dress, manners, and speech that can be detected around the courthouse square in the middling and smaller towns on a Saturday afternoon. These cultural gulfs and attitudinal conflicts are all a part of the American way, and the conciliation of these differences is one of the objectives to which the democratic political institutions, if not the social and "cultural" institutions, of both states are in large measure dedicated.

But who can gainsay it? Life in West Liberty is a lot different from life in West Palm Beach. Florida's crown and glory are her climate and her shores. (South Florida, that is!) These are the golden and glamorous assets that underlie the extraordinary development which was adumbrated in the facts and figures reviewed earlier. And these are not fickle and transient assets, it must be pointed out. In the atmosphere of the greater wealth and the more extensive leisure of these times, Florida has a marketable item whose stability was never greater and whose future was never more promising. Look how Florida rated in a recent poll of opinions on the states: First in choice for winter vacations (2 to

1 over California!), second as the state most desirable to move to, third in healthy climate and in natural beauty, and fifth in choice for summer vacations! This last point in itself constitutes a minor revolution in the tourist industry of the state, and seems to be a result of a combination of effective publicity and attractive summer rates.

Neither state, however, seems content or indeed feels secure in relying too exclusively on the natural assets which furnish its principal economic foundations. In both, therefore, one finds a quite wide diversity of enterprise. Under the promising conditions of an expanding free-trade economy within the United States, these efforts at local diversification do not seem always to exhibit the greatest wisdom. Partly inspired by state pride - which like any other kind can become foolish - these policies aimed at a "balanced" economy do reflect the fact, of course, that a very considerable portion of the market is still local. At the same time, however, they violate the so-called law of comparative advantage whose larger observance, on the national scene, goes a long way to explain the American standard of living. Nevertheless, it is local diversity in occupation and enterprise that gives variety and flavor to daily life. How unthinkable would be a community consisting of nothing but hotel keepers or hog raisers!

Thus in Des Moines alone there are over 500 manufactories, and the prominence of banking, insurance, and publishing in the city is fairly well known. Eight major railways converge on Council Bluffs, making it one of the largest mail transfer points in the country - as anyone can testify who has tried to get through the place on a train! Dubuque has a large tractor works and important lumber mills. If Sioux City boasts the world's largest creamery and Cedar Rapids the world's largest cereal mill (Quaker Oats), these are natural complements of local staple production. Maytag washing machines from Newton, Iowa, are known all over the United States.

In order to relieve Florida's prosperity from excessive dependence on the capacity of winter and summer visitors for driving, drinking, gambling, and sun-bathing, much effort has been expended toward balancing these factors with an improved agriculture and an expanding cattle industry. It may come as a surprise to some to learn that the lordly pine has now surpassed the

citrus tree in earning capacity in the state, and in addition stimulates the operation of several hundred saw mills as well as major forest extractive industries. Florida farmers sold 55 million dollars worth of tomatoes - right tasty ones, no doubt - and 18 million dollars worth of beans in 1956 to boost their average spendable income to \$5,156 - a gain of 17% over the previous year! Aided by the fencing law of 1949, the quality and quantity of Florida's beef cattle have risen steadily. Millions have been spent in research in breeding, nutrition, and improved husbandry.

In still another direction, Florida is seeking to diversify her economy and that is in light and heavy manufacturing industries. In 1953 alone, over \$100 millions were spent for new plant and equipment in manufacturing. Governor LeRoy Collins has been especially active in attracting more industry into the state, not without some objections, however.

It would seem, then, that Florida and Iowa, as they proceed into their second century, have found their respective and proper niches in the social and economic scheme of things. Each commonwealth presents a picture of unique resources wedded to a respectable diversity upon which the pursuit of the good life can be engaged in with great promise. If any prejudices have crept into this discourse upon the two states, they have been purely intentional. Suffice it to say, however, that life has been greatly enriched and horizons appreciably widened by the good fortune of residence in both states.