

*Pieces of Iowa's Past*, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides monthly, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All italicized text/block quotes in this document are taken directly from historical publications with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

## **Examining the Zeros: Legislative Session at the Homefront**

This year begins the 90th Iowa General Assembly. Some of this year's *Pieces of Iowa's Past* articles will briefly examine the work of the 10th, 20th, 30th, 40th, 50th, 60th, 70th, and 80th General Assemblies, or observe interesting events that happened during those years.

The 50th General Assembly convened January 11 and adjourned April 8, 1943, an 88-day session. Additionally, a special session was held from January 26 to January 28, 1944.

The Governor of Iowa in 1923 was Bourke Hickenlooper. Lieutenant Governor Robert D. Blue presided over the Senate, and Henry W. Burma was Speaker of the House.



Governor  
[Bourke B. Hickenlooper](#)



Lieutenant Governor  
[Robert D. Blue](#)



Speaker of the House  
[Henry W. Burma](#)

There were 44 Republican and 5 Democrat Senators, and in the House, there were 98 Republican and 10 Democrat members. Governor Hickenlooper was a Republican. In total, 157 legislators served during the 50<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.

## **Legislative Session at the Homefront**

The second world war was at the forefront of the minds of the Iowa Legislature and governor. The newly inaugurated Governor Hickenlooper spoke heavily to the effort Iowans, and Americans, were putting toward the war effort as well as thanking them for the sacrifices they made for the sake of helping American troops overseas.

*Usual peacetime activities and commodities have been restricted, many thousands of our men and not a few of our women have joined the armed forces. Our money has been poured out in ever increasing millions to meet the cost, and our fertile fields have responded to the untiring work of our farmers by producing the greatest volume of food in our history. The efforts and production records our farmers have made-and their determination to do even more in spite of a desperate shortage of help-is one of the great patriotic contributions to the cause of freedom...In every community patriotic and unselfish citizens are contributing, without pay, untold time and energy to ration boards, selective service, civilian defense, and other vital public activities. At great personal and financial sacrifice to themselves they are doing a magnificent job under difficult circumstances. They deserve the public thanks.*

Much of his address continued in a similar way, with the underlying tone of remembering the condition of the nation during wartime while still outlining what can be done in the state during the legislative session to assist the people of Iowa.

As noted by Governor Hickenlooper, Iowa farmers and citizens worked to provide food and resources to help with the war effort. In February, the governor [stated](#):

*Iowa is concerned with the manpower shortage just as other states. We will find it difficult to harvest the crops although an increase has been noted in dairy products. We are anxious to produce more than our share, but it takes men to do this.*

Despite his worry over manpower to help harvest crops, Iowa had managed to [increase production](#) comparatively to prewar numbers of corn, hogs, eggs, and soybeans by 30, 53, 51, and 300 percent (respectively). R.K. Bliss, Iowa State University extension director, said that “never before in recorded history had so few people produced so much food.” These examples prove Governor Hickenlooper’s statement “that Iowans answered the call for wartime unity and sacrificed for the contribution to the war effort.”

## Legislative Session at the Homefront



Brig. Gen. Charles Grahl  
The Des Moines Register; February 21, 1981

On February 22, 1943, the battleship USS *Iowa* was commissioned in New York City. At the ceremony was a delegation from Iowa that included Governor and Mrs. Hickenlooper, selective service director of Iowa Brig. Gen. Charles Grahl, Iowa Representative John Gardner, and Iowa Senator Ben Whitehill. Lieutenant Governor and Mrs. Blue were originally scheduled to attend. However, Lt. Governor Blue later announced he and his wife would not be in attendance, as he did not feel it responsible for both the Governor and Lt.

Governor to be out of state while the legislature was in session in Iowa.

The battleship was a source of pride for the state. As the world’s most powerful battleship, she was the flagship of the United States Navy that would go on to carry President Roosevelt overseas to meet with Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin as well as be nicknamed “The Big Stick” and “the Battleship of Presidents.” She was also the namesake of a class of four total battleships, which included the USS *Wisconsin*, USS *Missouri*, and USS *New Jersey*. Governor Hickenlooper [said during the ceremony](#) that “Iowa is



Representative John Gardner  
[House Military Affairs Committee Chair](#)

extremely proud of the ship and name and our people feel confident that it will carry on the fine naval traditions of the old Iowa which served during the Spanish-American War." Referencing the Sullivan brothers of Waterloo who served on the *Juneau*, Governor Hickenlooper also spoke of the importance of service and the large number of Iowans who enlisted to fight. According to the governor, Iowa was one of the top three states in naval enlistment according to population.

After his arrival back to his home state, Senator Whitehill gave a [detailed report](#) to the Senate of the commissioning ceremony. An interesting observation from



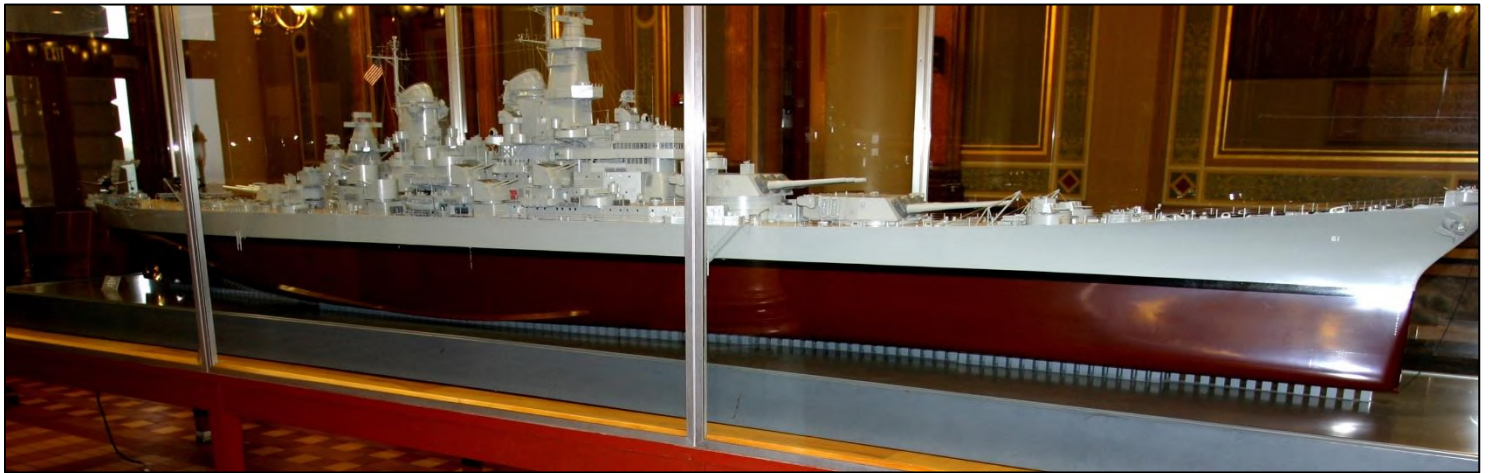
Senator Ben Whitehill  
[Senate Military Affairs Committee Chair](#)

Whitehill was that despite the large number of photographers present, very few photos were published, as many were for Naval records. Additionally, there were no newspaper articles published in New York about the ceremony. As he described, a number of details about the ship were kept confidential. These details included when and where she would sail. He noted that "he [Lieutenant Glad, representing the ship's commander] was very gracious and

obliging to explain everything we could see, but under the strict navy censorship, could not tell us anything regarding many things that were held as a navy secret." Though there were a number of things they could not know, the delegation described to have an excellent experience during the commissioning.

The *Iowa* went on to serve in WWII, was decommissioned, and reinstated for the Korean Conflict. She was reinstated yet again for the final time during the Cold War as part of President Reagan's plan to have a 600 vessel Navy. Shortly after a devastating explosion in gun turret 3 which claimed the life of 47 sailors, the commanding ship was decommissioned for the final time in October of 1990. Many of the US Navy's battleships were destroyed. However, the *Iowa* did not meet the same fate. Due to initial and ongoing

appropriations given from the Iowa Legislature, the *Iowa* was restored and is now a floating museum in the Port of Los Angeles in California. She is available to visit and take tours. If a visitor is an Iowa resident, they can go on board and tour her free of charge.



Scale model of the USS *Iowa* on display in the Iowa State Capitol. The model is 18 feet, 7 inches long. On the model,  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch is equivalent to 1 foot on the ship.



L to R: Rear Admiral Marquart, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox, Captain John McCrea, and Governor Hickenlooper looks on.  
Photo courtesy of the [USS Iowa Battleship Museum](#)



L to R: Governor and Mrs. Hickenlooper and Brig. Gen.  
Charles Grahl look out over New York City.  
The Daily Times; February 22, 1943



L to R: Senator Ben Whitehill, Brig. Gen. Charles Grahl,  
Representative John Gardner, Governor and Mrs. Hickenlooper.  
The group is studying a photo of the ship after arriving in New  
York.  
Des Moines Tribunes; February 22, 1943

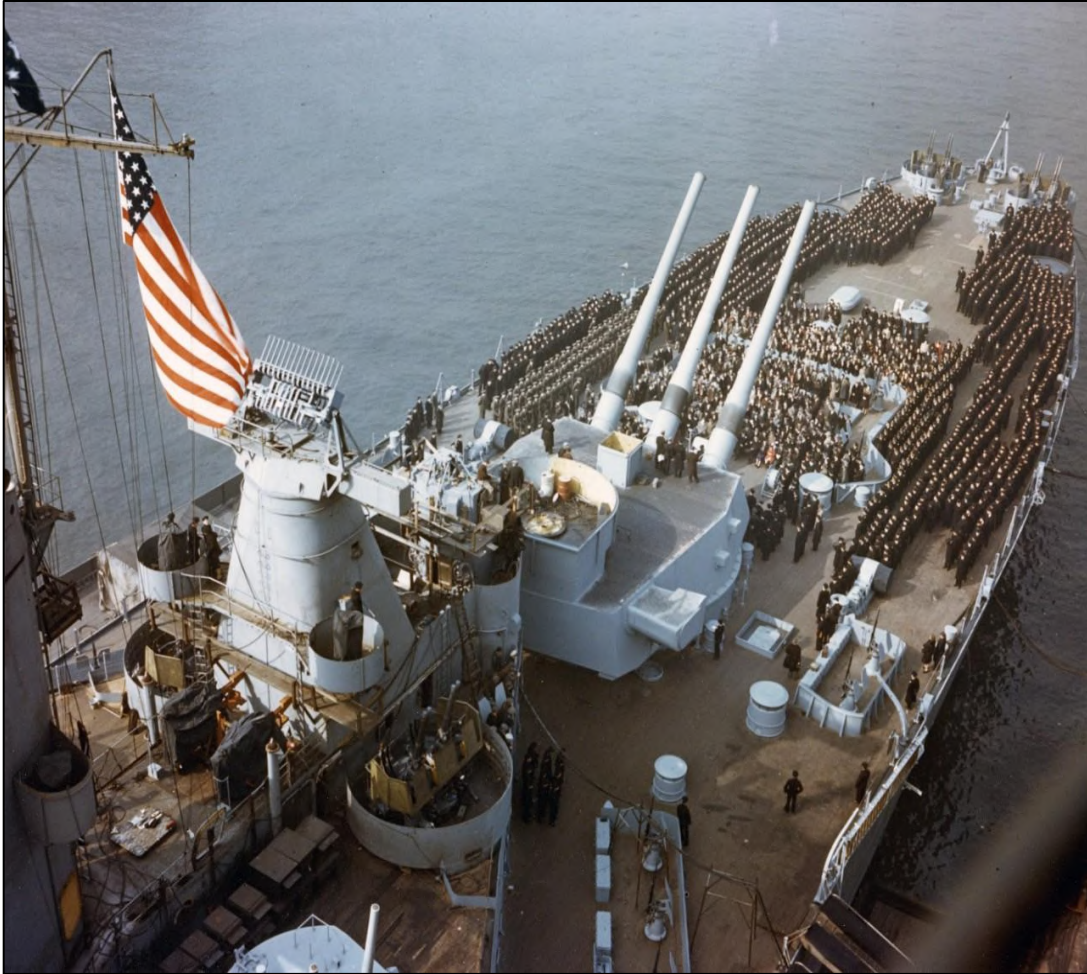
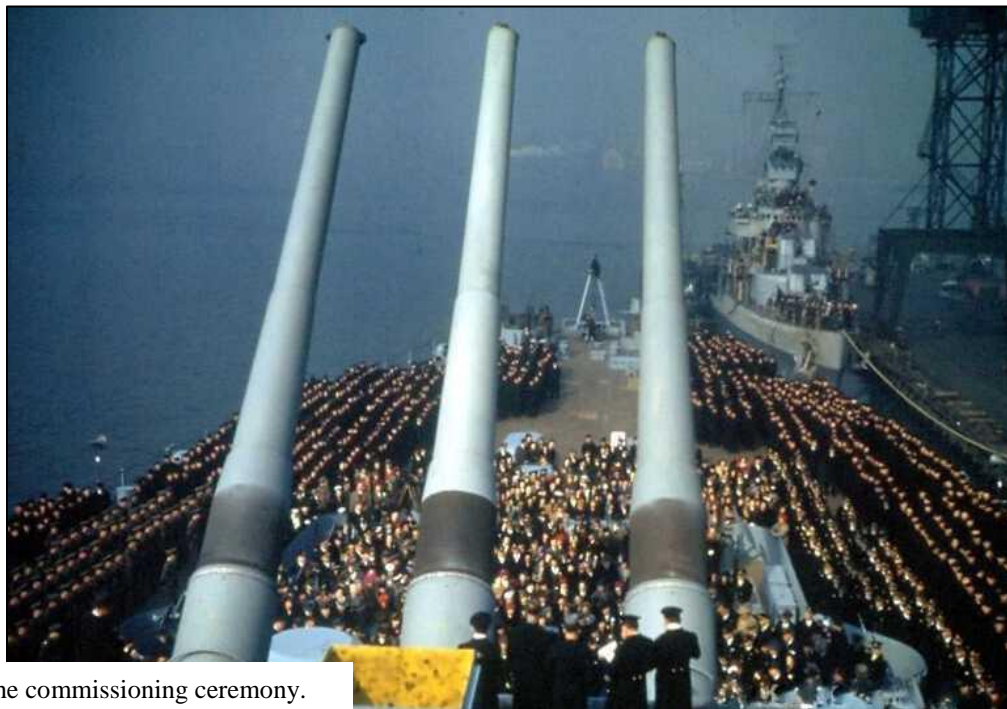


Photo of the commissioning ceremony of the USS Iowa, February 22, 1943.

Photo courtesy of [Naval History and Heritage Command](#)



Another view of the commissioning ceremony.  
Photo courtesy of [USS Iowa Battleship Museum](#)



View from the guest perspective of the ceremony.  
Photo courtesy of [USS Iowa Battleship Museum](#)



View from the sailors' perspective of the ceremony.  
Photo courtesy of [USS Iowa Battleship Museum](#)