

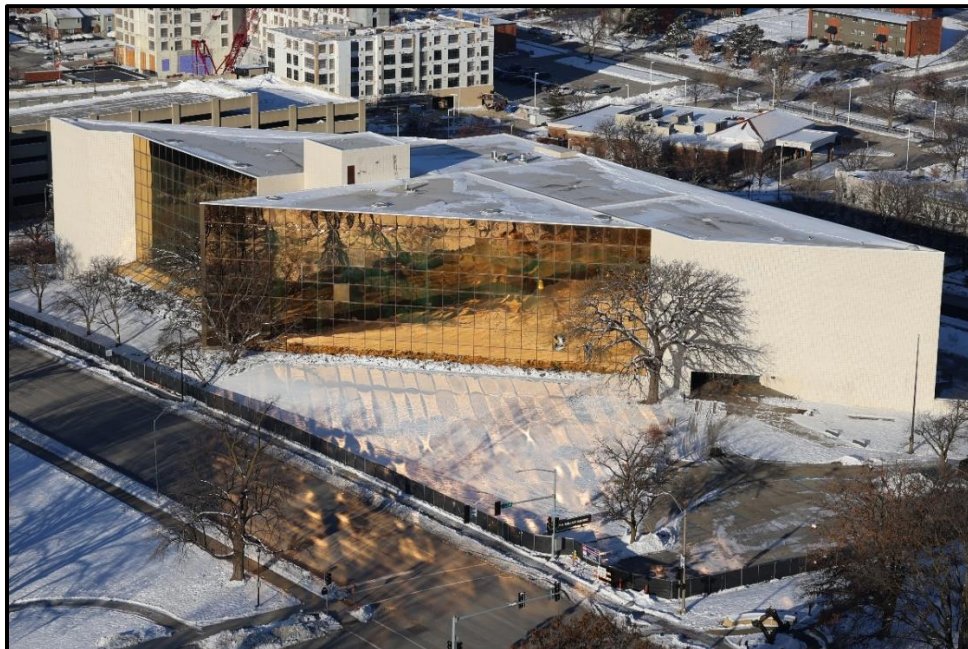


Pieces of Iowa's Past
This Month:
Looking Back at the Henry A. Wallace Building
December 2025

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.

Looking Back at the Henry A. Wallace Building

Known for its iconic gold-tinted windows mirroring the Capitol, the Henry A. Wallace Building on the Capitol Complex has been plagued with issues throughout its lifespan. The building that once housed several state agencies, including the Department of Agriculture, Department of Natural Resources, and Department of Public Safety, is in the process of demolition.



Looking northwest at the Henry A. Wallace Building; December 2025.

The Wallace Building was completed in 1978 at a cost of \$10.4 million. At the time of opening, the Wallace Building contained a 1,300-gallon fish tank, two large meat lockers, a 60-foot shooting range, the most advanced and sensitive weights and measures devices, a multi-colored fountain, and special padded floors for laboratory technicians who stood for hours at a time.

When it came to considering the building's namesake, notable Iowans such as Norman Borlaug, Carrie Chapman Catt, Henry A. Wallace, and Ansel Briggs were contenders. Being constructed for the purpose of the new agricultural building, there was great debate between Norman Borlaug and Henry A. Wallace. The Iowa General Assembly chose Henry A. Wallace, who was a farmer, journalist, scientist, businessman, humanitarian, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, U.S. Secretary of Commerce, and Vice President.

Fuss on Naming Building

SOME BACK 'BORLAUG' OVER 'WALLACE'

By Richard Doak


Some Republican members of the Iowa House say a new state agriculture building should be named after Dr. Norman E. Borlaug instead of the late Henry A. Wallace.

An effort to name the building after Borlaug, the native Iowan who won the Nobel Prize for his work in agricultural research, is being made by eight Republican House members.

State Representative Cooper Evans (Rep., Grundy Center), who is leading the effort, said the idea is to substitute Borlaug's name for that of Wallace, a name already recommended by a Democratically controlled committee.

Evans said there would be nothing wrong with naming the building after Wallace, but he said Wallace was probably better known as a politician rather than as an agriculturalist.

Wallace was a pioneer in the commercial development of hybrid corn. A Democrat, he served as vice-president under President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1940s, and also served as U.S. secretary of agriculture and secretary of commerce. In 1948, he ran



NORMAN E.
BORLAUG

HENRY A.
WALLACE

unsuccessfully for president on the Progressive Party ticket.

In the last Legislature, when Republicans were in the majority, Democrats attempted to name the proposed state agriculture building after Wallace when funds were first appropriated for the building. Republicans defeated that effort and the building was left unnamed.

This year, with the Democrats in control, an appropriations subcommittee making a supplemental appropriation for the building decided to name it after Wallace.

Evans said he plans to attempt to name the building after Borlaug when the appropriations bill comes up before the House. Evans said he really

does not care which man the building is named after but thinks the decision should be a conscious one rather than simply accepting the Wallace name, which is tucked away in a long appropriations bill.

"When you think of agriculture today, you think of Borlaug," said Evans. "He was a major contributor to solving the problem of world famine."

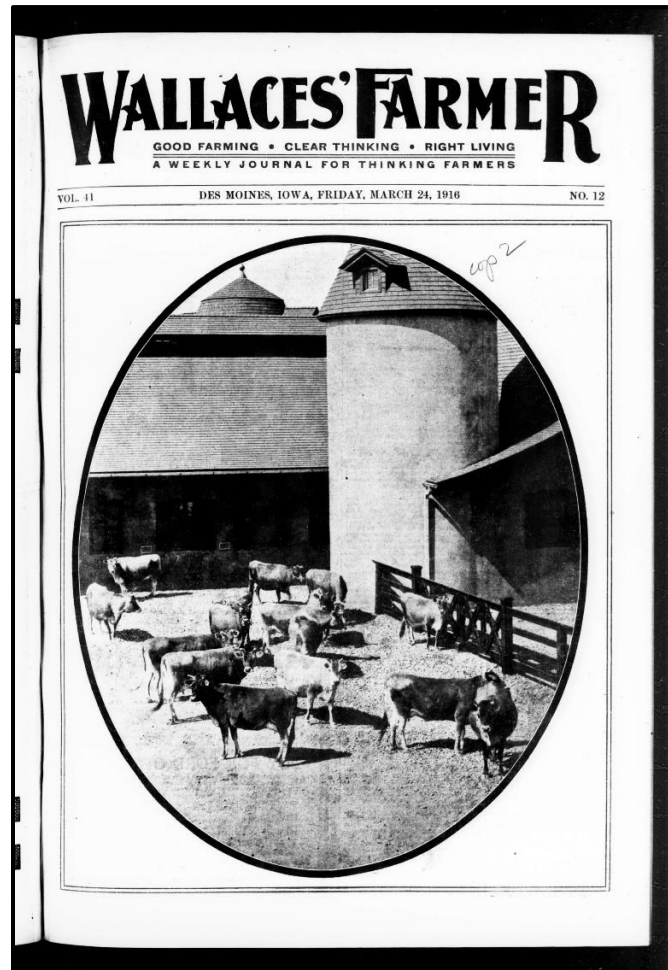
Evans said he does not know Borlaug's political affiliation, but believes he is uninterested in politics.

Evans said he also thinks a new state office building that also will be constructed should be named after Ansel Briggs, Iowa's first governor and a Democrat.

The state's two existing office buildings are named after Robert Lucas, territorial governor, and James Grimes, a governor and U.S. senator and one of the founders of the Republican Party.

The new agriculture building will be built on Grand Avenue, northwest of the Statehouse. The new state office building will be built south of the Lucas Office Building. The estimated cost of the two buildings is \$23.3 million.

Henry Agard Wallace was born on October 7, 1888, near Orient, Iowa. His grandfather, Henry Wallace, owned and edited *Wallaces' Farmer*, an agricultural newsletter widely read throughout the Midwest. Henry A. Wallace's father, also named Henry Wallace, served as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture in the administrations of President Warren G. Harding and President Calvin Coolidge.



Wallaces' Farmer; March 24, 1916. Internet Archive, [Wallaces' Farmer Collection](#).

After graduating from Iowa State College, now Iowa State University, Henry A. Wallace took over *Wallaces' Farmer*, in addition to experimenting in high-yielding strains of corn. In 1926, he created the Hi-Bred Corn Company, a firm that marketed the first high-yield, disease-resistant corn for commercial sale. When Franklin D. Roosevelt won the 1932 presidential election, he appointed Wallace to be U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. Despite Wallace's affiliation with the Republican Party, he strongly supported Roosevelt's New Deal domestic program. As U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Wallace oversaw the implementation of significant New Deal measures, such as the Agriculture Adjustment Act of 1933.

For Roosevelt's third presidential term in the 1940 election, he chose Wallace as his Vice President. In this role, Wallace was chairman of the Board of Economic Warfare and of the Supply Priorities and Allocations Board and acted as an ambassador traveling to China and the Soviet Union and delivering speeches in Central America and South America.



President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Henry A. Wallace; March 8, 1940. [Library of Congress](#).

Wallace was not on the ticket with Roosevelt in the 1944 election but was kept in Roosevelt's cabinet and offered the position of U.S. Secretary of Commerce. Wallace ran for president in 1948 as the Progressive Party candidate. After his defeat, Wallace took a step back from public life and continued working in his Pioneer Hi-Bred (formerly Hi-Bred Corn) corn company.

In 1966, one year after his death, Wallace received the Iowa Award, the state's highest citizen award. In December 1999, The Des Moines Register named Wallace the "Most Influential Iowan of the 20th Century."

THE DES MOINES REGISTER

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 31, 1999 7A

Henry Wallace tops list of most influential Iowans

OTHER NOMINEES

in alphabetical order



BIX BEIDERBECKE, Davenport, legendary jazz cornet player during the Roaring '20s.



TERRY BRANSTAD, Lake Mills native, youngest person to serve as Iowa governor; served 16 years, the longest tenure in state history.



GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER, born into slavery, became noted Iowa State University agricultural researcher and inventor of hundreds of food and plant products made of peanuts, pecans and sweet potatoes.



ROY CARVER, Illinois-born industrialist founded Bandag Inc., the national tire-retreading company headquartered in Muscatine, later became one of Iowa's biggest philanthropists.



JOHN CHRYSAL, Coon Rapids banker, Democratic political activist, expert on agriculture in former Soviet Union.



ARTHUR A. COLLINS, founder of Collins Radio Co., now part of Rockwell International, in Cedar Rapids.



A.B. CUMMINS, three-term Iowa governor at beginning of 20th century, three-term U.S. senator, co-organizer of Iowa Progressivism.



BISHOP MAURICE DINGMAN, led the Des Moines Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church for 19 years, instrumental in the 1979 visit of Pope John Paul II to living history farms in Urbandale.



PAUL ENGLE, Rhodes scholar and internationally acclaimed poet, writer and teacher from Cedar Rapids, developed the Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa from a small class to one of the world's most influential creative-writing programs.



BOB FELLER, Cleveland Indians pitcher, National Baseball Hall of Fame member, Van Meter native.



ROSWELL GARST, the Coon Rapids farmer who played host to Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in 1959, leading to the first in an American-Soviet relations after World War II, noted for his sales of hybrid seed corn.



EDNA GRIFFEN, Des Moines civil-rights leader who challenged a drug store's refusal to serve blacks at its lunch counter.



CLYDE HERRING, governor of Iowa during the Great Depression, creator of aid to senior citizens, noted for his tough law-and-order stance during times of near-anarchy in the Depression.



HERBERT HOOVER, West Branch native, mining engineer, millionaire, food administrator, U.S. president during Great Depression.



HARRY HOPKINS, Sioux City native and Grinnell College graduate, key adviser to President Franklin Roosevelt, national director of the Work Progress Administration.



FREDERICK M. HURRELL, Des Moines businessman, founder of Equitable of Iowa life insurance company, founder of Des Moines' first water company and first streetcar line, and occupant of Terrace Hill, which later became the governor's mansion.



HARVEY INGHAM, Algona-area native, newspaperman, editor of the Des Moines Register and Leader.



NILE KINNICK of Adel, University of Iowa football star who won Heisman Trophy in 1939, killed in World War II airplane crash. The U of I football stadium now bears his name.



ANN LANDERS, Sioux City native, syndicated newspaper advice columnist.



ALDO LEOPOLD, Burlington native credited as a pioneer of land stewardship, author of landmark conservation-ethics book, "A Sand County Almanac."



Henry A. Wallace picks the first tomatoes of the season out of his victory garden back in July 1942. He was vice president then.

Scientist, politician changed farming

By Perry Beaman
REGISTER STAFF WRITER

Agriculture giant Henry A. Wallace has been chosen as the most influential Iowan of the 20th century. A 10-member committee arranged by The Des Moines Register picked Wallace from a list of 50 people nominated by panel members. The candidates represented medicine, athletics, industry, academia, agriculture, publishing, religion, music and other fields.

Register editor Dennis Ryerson asked the group to pick the top 10 most influential Iowans, then vote for the most influential of all. You will find the nine runners-up listed on the previous page in alphabetical order. On this page is a list of the remaining nominees.

HENRY A. WALLACE

Born in a two-story farmhouse near Greenfield in 1888, Wallace eventually colored the history of the country, not just Iowa. The Register's panelists decided he was the single-most influential Iowan in the 20th century.

There is not a cornfield in the country that is not touched by the work of Wallace, a plant scientist who developed hybrid corn seeds. Wallace founded Pioneer Hi-Bred International Inc. and his work on early hybrids is largely responsible for a corn-growing boom that eventually quadrupled the 60-bushels-per-acre yields of his time.

As U.S. secretary of agriculture under President Franklin Roosevelt, Wallace designed New Deal farm programs that rescued farmers from the Great Depression. Some of his farm-support programs lasted until the recent Freedom to Farm Act moved to disband them. The Iowa State University graduate became vice president in Roosevelt's third term and also served as commerce secretary.

In 1948, Wallace ran for president as the Progressive Party's candidate, losing to Harry Truman. Wallace's early support of stronger ties with the Soviet Union, and Communist support of the Progressive Party, distanced him from much of the Washington elite after that campaign.

Wallace, at one time or another, was a farm-magazine editor, plant scientist and economist. As vice president, he worked on programs that addressed soil conservation, school lunches, and food aid, domestic and foreign. He was a leader in liberal political thought in his time.

Reporter Perry Beaman can be reached at (515) 284-0530 or beaman@dmr.com

The 50 Most Influential Iowans of the century

The Wallace Influence

BORN: On Adair County farm on Oct. 7, 1888. Moved to Des Moines in 1895.

EDUCATION: Bachelor of science degree, agriculture, Iowa State College, 1910.

POLITICS: Served as U.S. agriculture secretary, commerce secretary and as vice president under Franklin Roosevelt. As vice president, he led the Democrat Party's liberal movement.

PUBLISHING: Edited Wallaces Farmer (Slogan: "Good farming, clear thinking, right living"). Wrote 17 books and many articles. Editor, New Republic magazine.

AGRICULTURE: Developer of hybrid seed corn, founder of what is now Pioneer Hi-Bred International Inc. Grew his first experimental hybrid seed corn on a Des Moines plot in 1904 and sold 10 bushels for \$50. The farm-aid programs he helped create had been debated for 20 years and lasted until the Freedom to Farm Act moved to disband them in recent years. Famous for discovering that the biggest ears of corn didn't necessarily provide best seed. Pioneer in predicting crop production.

FOOD: Promoted efforts to fight world hunger by offering food aid, which critics at the time called "globalism." Developed higher-yielding corn hybrids.

BRICKS AND MORTAR: Among the structures named for him is a room in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's main building in Washington, D.C., and the Wallace State Office Building in Des Moines.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE: The buzzwords of treating the land gently weren't around in Wallace's day, but he preached the same message. Today, Iowa State University has a Henry A. Wallace Endowed Chair for Sustainable Agriculture. Wrote Wallace: "People in cities may forget the soil for as long as a hundred years, but Mother Nature's memory is long and she will not let them forget indefinitely. The soil is the mother of man, and if we forget her, life eventually weakens."

FAMILY: Married to Browne in 1914. Sons Henry and Robert, daughter Leslie.

RETIRED: 1949, to a farm near South Salem, N.Y.

DIED: 1965

OTHER NOMINEES

in alphabetical order



E.F. LINDQUIST, Gowrie native and University of Iowa professor, pioneer in educational testing, creator of the nationally used Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, co-founder of the American College Testing program, inventor of first high-speed electronic scoring system.



MSGR. LUIGI C. LIGUTTI, Depression-era priest in Granger, known as "the pope's extension agent" for his advice on rural affairs; instrumental in creation of Granger Homesteads housing development while pastor of Assumption Parish there from 1926-1941.



FRED MAYTAG, farm-implement manufacturer, early maker of automobiles, founder of Maytag company.



GEN. HANFORD MACOMBER of Mason City, wounded in France during World War I and in the South Pacific in World War II, distinguished Service Cross recipient, banker, cement-company executive in Mason City, U.S. minister to Canada, assistant war secretary in the 1930s.



E.T. MEREDITH, founder of Meredith magazine publishing empire, secretary of agriculture under President Woodrow Wilson.



OLA BABCOCK MILLER, founder of Iowa Highway Patrol while serving as Iowa's first female secretary of state.



GEORGE "LEFTY" MILLS, former political reporter for The Des Moines Register and WHO-TV, widely known Iowa historian.



JAMES B. MORRIS, graduate of the U.S. Army's first officer candidate school at Fort Des Moines, well-known publisher of "Iowa Bystander" newspaper.



LOUISE NOUN, Des Moines author, historian, feminist, art-collector, philanthropist.



ROBERT NOYCE, Grinnell College graduate, co-creator of the integrated circuit, a key part of today's electronics, including computers.



B.J. PALMER, leader in chiropractic industry, Iowa radio and television pioneer, led Palmer School of Chiropractic in Davenport, WOC-TV in Davenport, WHO radio and WHO-TV in Des Moines.



JOSEPH ROSENFELD, Des Moines businessman, former Younkers chairman, Grinnell College graduate and trustee, philanthropist, largely responsible for Grinnell having an endowment fund that has exceeded \$1 billion.



JOHN RUAN, turned one-truck operation into huge transportation empire based in Des Moines; considered one of Des Moines' most powerful business leaders; runs charitable golf tournament benefiting the fight against multiple sclerosis.



JESSIE FIELD SHAMBAUGH of Shenandoah, teacher, school superintendent, creator of the 4-H Club youth program.



MARY LOUISE SMITH, Edyville native who became the only woman ever to head the Republican National Committee.



NEAL SMITH, long-time congressman from Altona, instrumental in development of Saynorville Lake and the Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge near Prairie City.



BILLY SUNDAY, born in log cabin near Ames, played professional baseball before spending 50 years, as one of the nation's best-known evangelists.



JAMES VAN ALLEN, retired University of Iowa physicist who discovered the radiation belts encircling the Earth that now bear his name.



"TAMA JIM" WILSON, Iowa State College professor, U.S. agriculture secretary from Triar.



MEREDITH WILLSON, Mason City native who wrote "The Music Man," a Broadway show featuring the song "76 Trombones," which brought worldwide attention to a fictitious River City, Ia.

Due to projected high renovation costs, the state opted to take down the Henry A. Wallace Building. State employees who once worked in the Wallace Building have moved to the former corporate offices for Wells Fargo on Park Avenue and the Hoover Building on the Capitol Complex. Fencing and construction equipment sprang up around the building before the Thanksgiving holiday and visible demolition was apparent before the Christmas holiday. Crews began the process of demolition by rehoming Cosmic Seed, the large sculpture that welcomed visitors and employees at the northeast corner of the Wallace Building, to the front of the Hoover Building.



Cosmic Seed rehomed near the Hoover Building; November 2025.