



*Pieces of Iowa's Past*, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides weekly during the legislative session, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All historical publications are reproduced here with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

**March 4, 2015**

**THIS WEEK:**

**Speech Offered Regarding the Nation's Bicentennial**

**BACKGROUND:**

The 66th Iowa General Assembly convened for the first session, January 13, 1975, and adjourned June 20, 1975, a 159-day session. The second session of the 66th General Assembly convened January 12, 1976, and adjourned May 29, 1976, a 139-day session. There was a 150-member legislature. The Senate had 26 Democratic members and 24 Republican members. The House of Representatives had 61 Democratic members and 39 Republican members. Lieutenant Governor Arthur Neu presided in the Senate and Dale Cochrane was the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Robert Ray was Iowa's Governor having been inaugurated January 16, 1969, at the age of 40. The 1970 federal census showed Iowa's population at 2,825,368.

**Speech Offered Regarding the Nation's Bicentennial**



**John W. Warner**

*From the House and Senate Journals in 1976: the Joint Convention to hear remarks by the Honorable John W. Warner the Administrator of the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration.*

*Mr. Warner delivered the following address:*

Thank you, Governor Ray. President Neu, Speaker Cochran, Mr. Chief Justice, Members of the Senate and House of Representatives, Members of the Supreme Court, Members of the fine Bicentennial Commission of this Great State, and Ladies and Gentlemen:

As I walked down the aisle a lady looked at this and said, "Oh, gracious, is that his speech?" No, it is not. I brought this from Washington with me —part of my responsibility under the law is to compile a record for the National Archives for future generations to look back and examine what was done during our nation's bicentennial, and this is what I call the interim copy of the National Record of the nation's bicentennial.

As of today, there are over 50,000 programs and events now cataloged for the bicentennial and it is growing at the rate of several thousand each month. I brought this rather weighty volume—perhaps a portion of four telephone directories—because in it Iowa stands number one. Congratulations.



It is surprising to think the nation's bicentennial is being celebrated back where all the revolutionary history took place in the original thirteen colonies, but I split it using the Mississippi River, divided east and west, and there is just as much activity west of the Mississippi as there is east of the Mississippi. You may ask why is that? There is a very simple reason, for me at least to answer because I have had the privilege in the past two years of traveling across these United

States, having now completed visits to some 47 states. Most recently a swing through the Pacific to visit Honolulu, Hawaii, Samoa and Guam, where again there is just as much bicentennial activity as to be found in Baltimore, Boston or Philadelphia, or the nation's capital.

The reason is America is honoring its past, honoring its present and looking toward the future. Of course I don't have time to go into this volume but you will find a range of programs which covers all possible imaginations and initiatives that our citizens can put together. And again, put together by and large with their own funds. When the Congress of the United States rewrote the law for the bicentennial two years ago, and I had the privilege of being appointed the first and I suppose the only administrator of this small agency, the people said we want the bicentennial to be celebrated equally in every town, village, Indian reservation, cities large and small in America, and that is precisely what is taking place.

On the cover of this volume is the national symbol of the bicentennial—the two stars, the white star and the red, white and blue star. It is the national symbol

representing 200 years of our country. That is now flying from your state capitol as it is from every other state capitol in the United States and over 11,000 communities proudly fly that flag. But in Iowa every single county is organized for the nation's bicentennial.

I was walking up with your state chairman, Mr. Dillon, and he was telling me the tremendous support he has received from the Governor, the Legislature, and most particularly from his commission. He said remember the adage, "Give me ten stout



hearted men, I'll give you 10,000 more." Well we have them—we don't have 10,000—there are over 100,000 people in the state of Iowa actively involved in the nation's bicentennial. You are not merely having what you might call just parades, fireworks, rhetoric—all of those things will take place and should take place—no, your state program is laying down permanent cornerstones again for the future generations to look back and say that the citizens of this state and the citizens of the community cared enough about their nation to put down a

**The Magna Carta display in the Crypt of the United States Capitol features a replica of the English document whose principles underlie much of the Constitution of the United States. The entire display was made in England by the artist Louis Osman and was presented to the United States as a gift from the British government to celebrate the bicentennial of American independence.**

cornerstone. What comes to mind, of course, is the world food conference that will be internationally recognized, solving hopefully some of the problems and laying down the cornerstones for the solution of some of the most needed problems for the future. Again, the fifth grade history project where you are not just teaching any history, the emphasis is totally upon the history of Iowa.

Then, of course, I being a farmer at heart—and as soon as the bicentennial is over I hope to return to my farm —the Living History Farm, which I have visited, is another program which is more than just speech making, parades; it shows that this state has come together to put down some permanent reminders of the nation's bicentennial.

Additionally, we have another interesting chapter. Last night I was privileged in Washington, D. C. to join the vice president to honor the King of Sweden who has come over on the occasion of our bicentennial.



There are over seventy foreign nations who are now actively participating in the bicentennial. Their gifts range all the way from small ones such as stamp collections and medals to the giving of permanent scholarships at our universities, and the bringing of cultural events such as opera and ballet. Then, Great Britain, not surprisingly, is sending over on loan for one year that document, Mr. Chief Justice, which you know so well and which lays the foundation for all western law—the exact document to which King John affixed his seal in the year 1215—the Magna Carta. It will be brought to the United States in May of this year for a period of twelve months and placed in the rotunda of the capitol building in Washington, D. C. Just another example of the tremendous enthusiasm to be found not only in our United States but all over the world for the bicentennial.



The bicentennial is not without controversy, nor should it be, after all we are celebrating a revolution. Many times I have been asked, because

it falls in a political year, will it be used by politicians for their benefit? I have been privileged the past two years to appear on a number of occasions with our President, who totally supports and participates in the bicentennial, as well as Senators, Congressmen, Governors, state legislators, councilmen and mayors all over this nation and I have yet to see one single individual try to use the bicentennial for his or her personal benefit.

Then the question of commercialism—will this bicentennial go down as one gigantic “ripoff.” My answer clearly is no. What better example could I use than this state bicentennial commission, which has not indulged in manufacturing knickknacks to be sold.



They sold one item— the same item that the Congress of the United States directed me to prepare and sell to the people—a medallion—and from it they have gained



**President Ford boarding the Bicentennial Wagon Train.**

proceeds which have helped finance a part of the bicentennial program in this state. As a matter of fact, Chairman Dillon has explained to me that the bicentennial Commission has granted approximately \$500,000 and together with the help of the private sector and the citizens of this state that sum has been multiplied ten-fold into the millions of dollars to pay for your bicentennial. It is truly representative of a grass roots effort and this state, in my

judgment, is the model state of the nation's bicentennial. As a matter of fact, since we are all attuned to politics, I remember so well the adage back east, "As goes Maine in the presidential election, so goes the nation." Well the confidence I have in your bicentennial program I am willing to predict, "As goes the success of the bicentennial program in Iowa, so goes the success of the entire nation's bicentennial program."

I would like to close with a short personal story. Again, I have been privileged to address many state legislatures but I can't remember ever walking into a capitol building and being more struck with emotion than I was about an hour ago upon entering the lower lobby and coming up to the Governor's office. For there were two things that are very dear to my heart. Having joined the navy at seventeen and having risen to being its boss at the age of forty-two, only in America could that sort of story take place. I saw the old battleship Iowa, 61. I was aboard that ship briefly,

during the Korean War, as a young marine officer. Then passing on I saw the tattered flags of the regiments and states.

So, you might expect an old sailor to tell one sea story here in mid- America. And this is a true story that comes from the history of my state, Virginia. Let's go back to the turn of the century, and the United States, being a great naval power, then as it is now, invited from all over the world the finest ships and each head of state was to come with their ship.

Picture yourself seated on the balcony of the U. S. battleship—I don't remember the name, perhaps it was the Iowa. Behind each head of state, seated in a neat row, was posted a United States sailor. The sailor's function was to lean down very respectfully as each of the foreign ships passed in review and give the history of the ship and most particularly describe the flag. As they came by, one by one, the sailor would lean down and say, "That, sir is the ship which flies the flag of the Queen of England. She has the following guns, etc." One by one, the ships came by. "That, sir, is the ship which flies the flag of the Czar of Russia. That ship flies the flag of the Emperor of Japan." And so on. Finally, over the horizon, came the last ship flying Old Glory. The sailor leaned down and said, "That, sir is the United States ship, the length is such and such, etc." This particular monarch leaned back and said, "Lad, which monarch's flag does that ship fly?" The sailor replied, "No monarch's, sir, that ship flies my flag."

Thank you very much.

*A medley of songs was offered by the Van Buren County Bicentennial Singers.*

*President Neu invited all guests to join in the flag presentation and the charge of the Wagon Master of the Bicentennial Wagon Train Pilgrimage to Pennsylvania, immediately following the joint session.*

---



This is the Iowa Time Capsule located on the Iowa State Capitol Grounds. Sealed in July 1977 to commemorate the Nation's bicentennial, the time capsule is to be re-opened July 4, 2075. There are 58 items in the time capsule which were selected for their historical significance. The capsule holds approximately two cubic feet of materials.