

THE COW WAR OF 1931

Tanya Demmel
Museum Coordinator
Cedar County Historical Society
Tipton, Iowa



BOVINE TUBERCULOSIS

- Not human TB
- 1883 science = 2 strains
- Debated transferability for decades
- TB cases 1900's proved transferability
- In 1917 15,000 documented cases of death from TB = infected meat and milk
- Eradication of “reactor” animals



THE PLIGHT OF THE FARMER

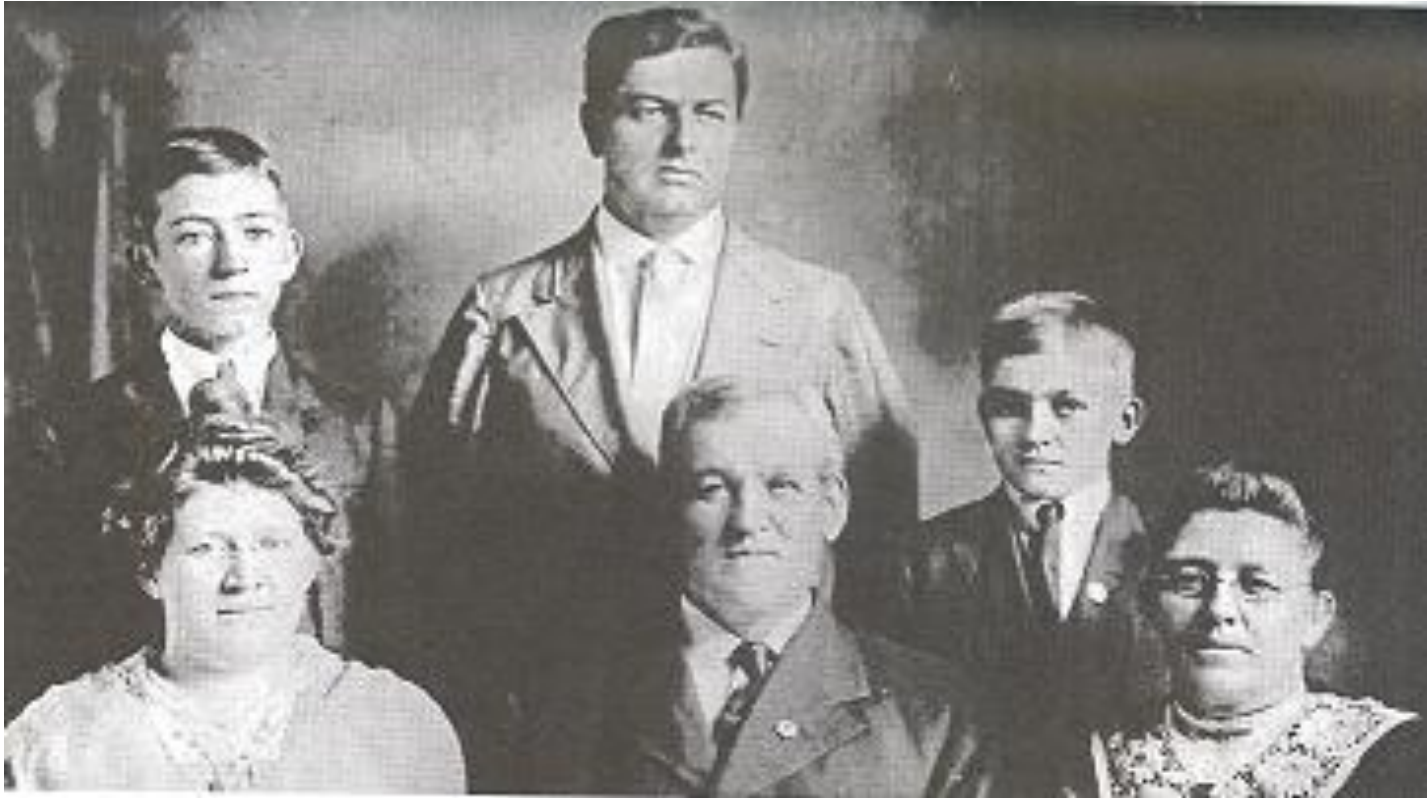
- 1920's economy grew
- Except for the farmer
- 1926 farm depression began from post war deflation
- 1929 the stock market crash
- 1930's almost 60% of farms were mortgaged
- By 1931 1 in 7 foreclosed



IOWA BOVINE TUBERCULOSIS LAW OF 1923

- The County Area Plan for the Bovine Tuberculosis Law of 1923
- 51% of farmers signatures in Cedar County raising dairy and breeding cattle were collected by September 1924
- Signatures continued to be collected reaching 75% of cattle owners
- Cedar County eligible for Accredited Area Plan with compulsory testing
- Farmers Defense League of Iowa formed; J.W. Lenker, Wilton Junction –President
- August 5, 1926 Dr. Peter Malcolm, Chief of the Bureau of Animal Husbandry declared Cedar County enrolled in the Accredited Area Plan
- Not the Secretary of Agriculture as stated by the law





**J.W. LENKER &
FAMILY**



OBJECTIONS TO COMPULSORY TESTING

- Fear of the disease being introduced to a healthy animal
- Test results were inaccurate
- Thought to cause abortion in tested cattle
- Farmers lost approximately 1/3 of the value of a “reactor” cow
 - Cow valued at \$300 tests positive
 - The farmer would get 2.25 cents per pound from the meat packer (\$25 for a 1,000 cow)
 - The meat packer provision would be deducted from the value leaving \$275
 - From this the state, federal government and the farmer each lost 1/3
 - The farmer felt cheated out of \$100-\$130 per “reactor” cow
- Farmers felt it was within their right to own a cow testing positive and that their rights were being violated



PEACEFUL RESISTANCE

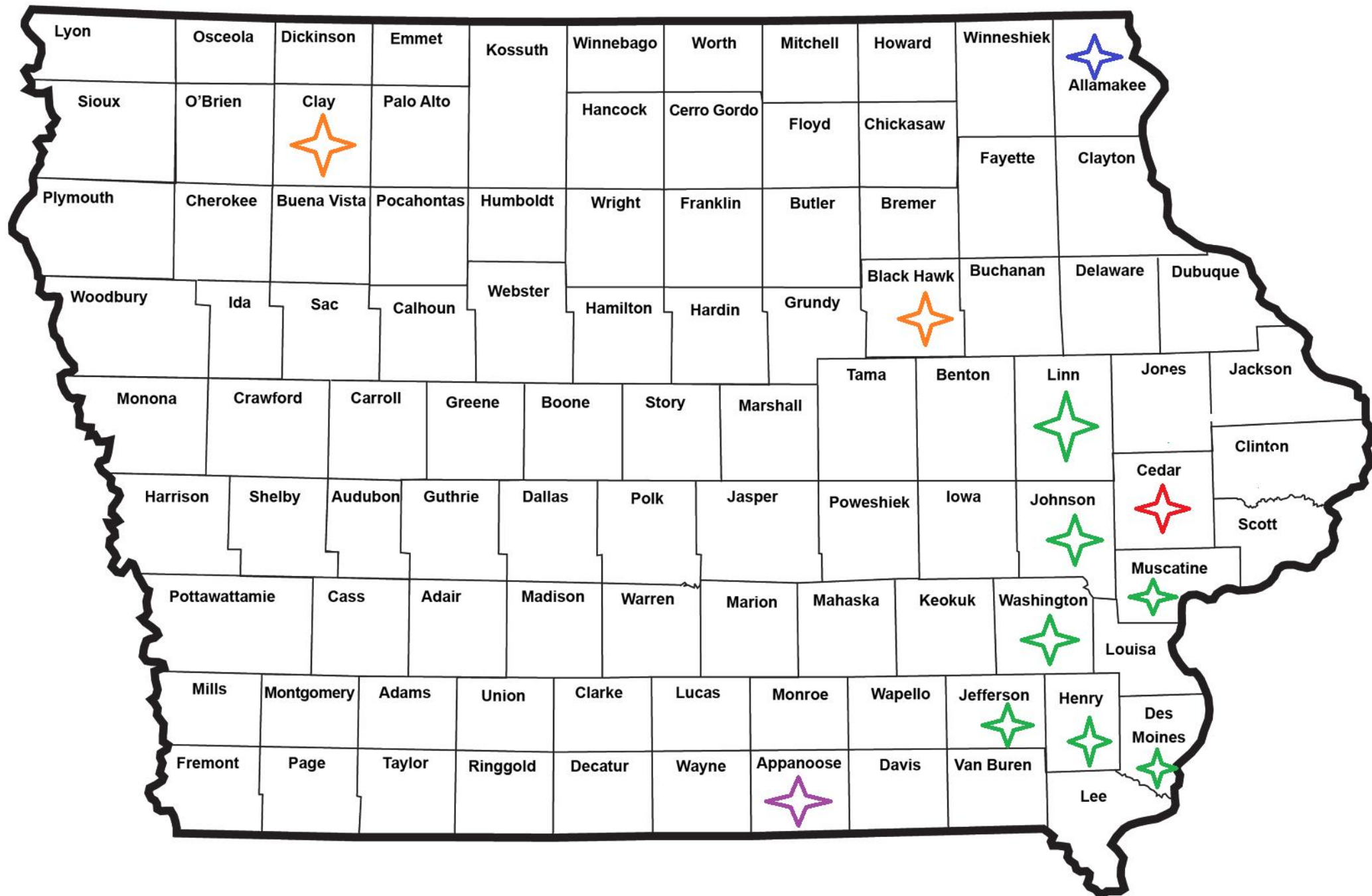
- Petition filed to restrain Department of Agriculture
 - George Thede, Lenker, Adam Dach, & Herman Schroeder
 - Stated law was unconstitutional
 - The required 75% of signatures were not obtained
 - Dr. Malcolm did not have the authority
- Hearing on March 17, 1928 before Judge Moffit ruled against the restraint
- April 9, 1928 Iowa Supreme Court overruled Moffit in that Malcolm was without authority
- 1929 Iowa legislature strengthened the law requiring compulsory testing state wide
- November 16, 1929 an injunction again filed against compulsory testing
 - By the Farmers Defense League with 302 signatures on petition
 - March 15, 1930 overruled motion against the petition but left the case open for trial
- All legal attempts to stop the testing failed but delayed compulsory testing for over 4 years



NOTICES SERVED

- February 16, 1931 G.G. Walton, Anton Schroeder, Wm. Butterbrodt, E.C. Mitchell (All of Tipton)
- Notices required testing to be completed within 15 days of being served
- J.W. Lenker (Wilton Junction) was served a few days later
- Cedar County officials hoped to talk Lenker into agreeing to testing before being served
- The Department of Agriculture selected these heads of opposition to bring the situation to a head.
- February 21, 1931 a meeting was held in Cedar County Courthouse and brought people from as far away as Black Hawk and Clay counties and the courtroom overflowed with objecting farmers and the afternoon session was moved to the Tipton Consolidated Schools auditorium
- An address was given by Paul Moore (West Branch) a Farmer's Union organizer, in the morning session and Norman Baker spoke at the afternoon session





NORMAN BAKER



Norman Baker

Courtesy of the Grossheim Collection,
Musser Public Library, Muscatine, IA

- Broadcaster at KTNT of Muscatine
- Long standing protestor of the testing
- Thought to advise the leaders of the objectors
- Was regarded to be the cause of the strife between Farmers and State in the area because of his inflammatory broadcasts
- March 5th, 1931 Broadcast license renewal was denied



“WOOD TO CUT AND HAY TO PITCH”

- After the February 21st meeting an organization was formed to call protesters to a specific location at a moments notice
- A sentinel was assigned to each rural telephone line who would then alert others on the line
- “wood to cut and hay to pitch” meant bring your axes and pitchforks
- The efficient system could rally 300-1000 people to protest at various farms



THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 1931

- Wm. Butterbrodt's cattle were tested by state veterinarians assisted by local officers
- The veterinarians and local officials moved on to the E.C. Mitchell farm and were met with over 100 protesters who prevented the test
- Pickets were set in place to protect farms that were served notices





MONDAY, MARCH 9, 1931

- Veterinarians returned to read the test at the Butterbrodt farm and were met with approximately 1000 protestors
- The blockade remained through out the day
- Twin calves were said to have been aborted by a cow after the administration of the test and were put on display that day



TUESDAY MARCH, 10, 1931

- Mass meetings were held at 5 other farms
- The “Farmers Protective Association” was formed with Lenker as their leader
- Local officials were becoming increasingly worried about the protests and concerned the state did not understand the degree of resistance that was put forth by the farmers



Governor Dan W. Turner
Courtesy of State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines.



MARCH 19, 1931

- Lenker and Paul Moore led a march on the state capital to confront the legislature, the governor, and Secretary of Agriculture
- The group consisted of over 1500 people from all over the state of Iowa
- The Cedar County delegation alone was three blocks long with 438 farmers from 25 counties in Eastern Iowa
- Their number overflowed the house gallery and halls of the capital
- A meeting that afternoon with the chair of the animal husbandry committee and Governor Dan Turner was held in the House of Representatives because of the groups size
- Governor Turner informed the group he would uphold the law



AFTER THE MARCH ON THE CAPITOL

- Farm Bureau's and Doctor's around the state express their support for the law and its enforcement
- Orders were given by Governor Turner and Attorney General, John Fletcher to use all peaceable methods to enforce the law
- E.C. Mitchell was arrested and after the jury couldn't decide the case, he agreed to the testing and assisted the state veterinarian in the process
- **BUT**, protest leaders were told that Mitchell's cattle were tested by force and without consent during his incarceration
- The test was scheduled to be read Saturday, April 11, 1931



SATURDAY, APRIL 11, 1931

- Dr. Malcolm and state agents arrived at Mitchell's to read the results
- Over 100 farmers were there to eject him from the property
- Sherriff "Red" Guffenbaugh of Appanoose County drew a line with his toe and told objectors not to cross after drawing his gun.
- Several farmers crossed the line
- The officers left and reported the incident to Governor Turner
- Governor Turner mobilized the state militia in Cedar Rapids and told them to "stand by"

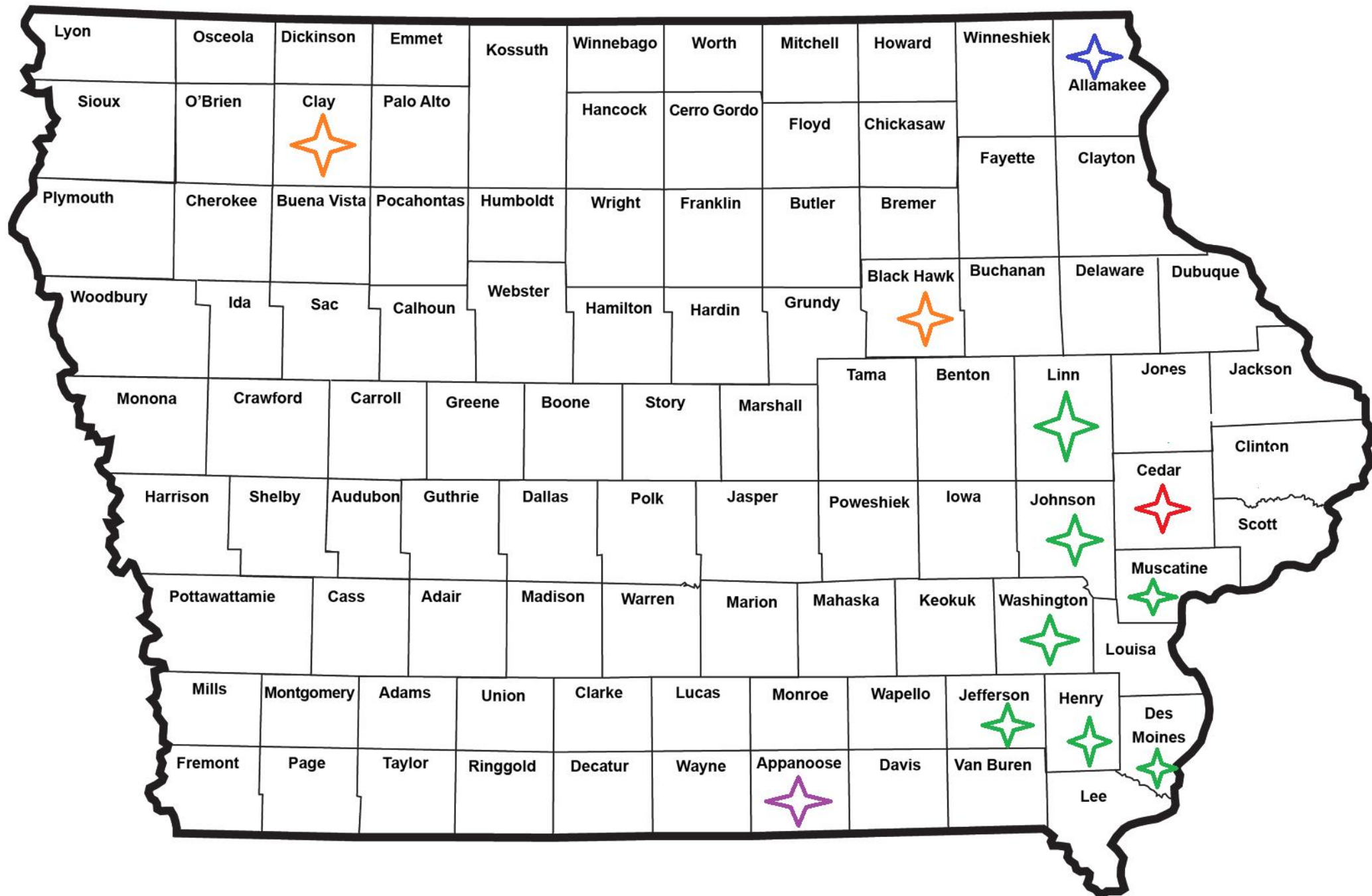


Hundreds of men congregated at the E.C. Mitchell farm on April 11, 1931 in protest of the reading of his cattle's tuberculosis test. In the pasture is the pile of posts where state men "drew the line." This picture was taken in late afternoon after word was received that the test had been postponed.

It was originally published in the *Northeastern Cedar County Post*, April 16, 1931.

Courtesy of Dorothy Sennett, Lowden, IA





A SUMMER LULL

- Monday, April 13, 1931 objection leaders met with Governor Turner and Attorney General Fletcher in Iowa City
- The leaders of the objectors consented to testing with the use of their own veterinarians (something that had been allowed all along)
- Some objectors started consenting to testing and many cattle were tested
- The Farmers Protective Association hired a lawyer, M.E. Stapleton of Muscatine, and file more injunctions which were almost immediately denied
- By the end of April almost 2/3 of the counties were accredited and the cattle in Cedar County were testing twice as clean as the cattle of the state as a whole



CONFLICT RETURNS — VIOLENTLY

- Lenker files another injunction in August
- An order is issued quarantining his herd and the herds of 44 other farmers in retaliation
- August 20, 1931 three state veterinarians return to do testing.
 - Dr. A H Joehnk was met at the door of Arthur Fogg's barn with a club. Fogg's wife and daughter threw rotten eggs, stones, and the contents of their chamber pots at him
- September 14, 1931 John Achey was arrested for attacking Dr. P.A. Weires
 - September 18 Lenker and 30-40 other men gathered around the jail
 - 40 more men were at the Farmers' Union
 - Authorities feared a breakout attempt of Achey but it did not occur the men dispersed peacefully



SEPTEMBER 21, 1931 — LENKER FARM

- 65 police officers led by Joe Newall, Des Moines, and Cedar County Sherriff Foster Maxson confront 500 protesting farmers
- At times it was hand to hand combat
- Their vehicles were vandalized
- They lost and fled the scene
- Dr. Peter Malcolm was on his way and had been told that everything would be handled by his arrival – he did not get an update of the events that occurred
- He manage to escape unscathed
- Governor Turner gives the order to call General Park Findley of the National Guard



TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 1931

- 3PM the first group of National Guard reach Tipton
- More National Guard troops would follow reaching a total of 1700-2000
- Camp was set up at the Cedar County Fair Grounds



National Guard troops marching up Cedar Street, Tipton, IA on September 22, 1931.
Courtesy of the State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.



WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 1931

- Governors proclamation to return order to Cedar County was read at the court house steps – it was met with silence



- Lenker broadcasted from the courthouse – “I am in this fight to the finish”

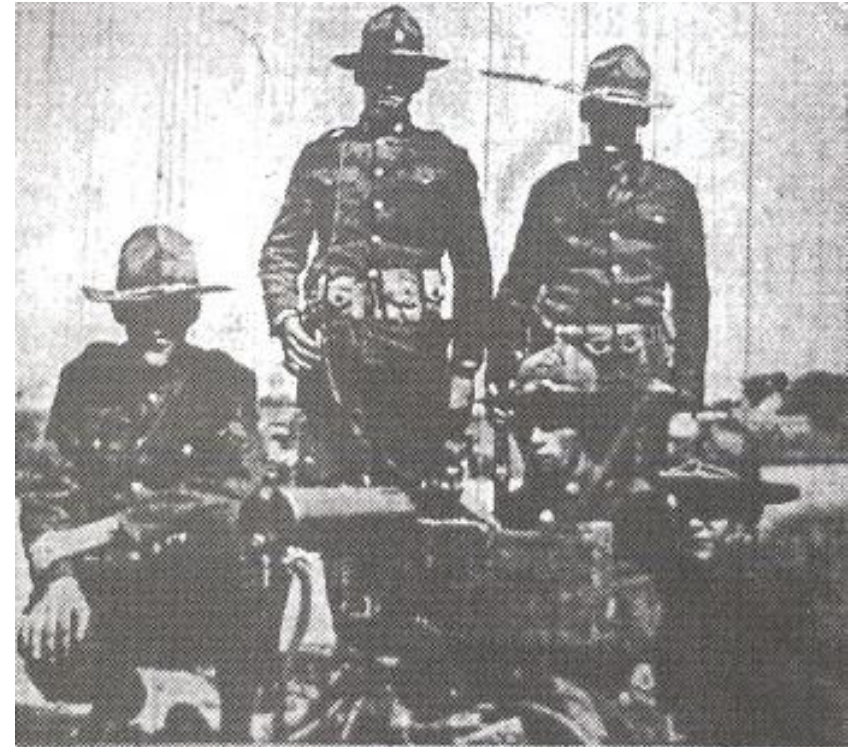


Jacob W. Lenker broadcasting from an office in the courthouse in Tipton
after the militia arrived.
Courtesy of the *Muscatine Journal*, September 24, 1931.



MARTIAL LAW

- G.B. Miller president of Iowa Farmers Union submitted a petition with over 2000 signatures from all parts of the state requesting testing be suspended until the situation could be investigated
- Ed Scorpil brought a calf to town that he said was aborted because of testing
- An angry mob of farmers escorted him to the courthouse where it was displayed
- Machine guns were mounted at country crossroads
- Passes were required to enter and leave certain areas



This picture shows a machine gun detachment of Iowa National Guardsmen in the road near the William R. Hogan farm near Durant while bovine tuberculin tests were being conducted.
Courtesy of Muscatine Journal, September 25, 1931



THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 1931

- 250 Guardsmen reported to the Lenker Farm
- 125 Cavalrymen established a 6 mile square blockade near Durant
- Lenker had sold his cattle, refused to tell to whom and where
- Lenker's cows were found in Muscatine County at Harry Duffe's farm that evening, the test was administered
- 700 farmers at Mount Pleasant drafted a resolution stating their refusal to pay taxes for the current and following year unless the troops were immediately removed from Cedar County



THE FOLLOWING WEEK

- Friday, September 25, state veterinarians tested 26 of the 44 quarantined herds
- Sunday, September 27, “Camp Bovine” was an entertainment attraction drawing over 21,000 people from surrounding counties and other states
 - 133rd Infantry of Fairfield led a review of the troops with Judge John T. Moffit as guest of honor.
 - Local businesses prospered from the influx of troops and tourists
- Sunday, E.C. Mitchell was arrested for selling a quarantined Black Angus at the Chicago Farmers Union on Friday
- Monday, September 28, 25 squads escorted veterinarians to read the tests
- Tuesday, September 29
 - Testing continued on the few remaining farms
 - 8 out 10 of Mitchell's cows tested positive for tuberculosis
 - Troops started to leave Cedar County
- Thursday, October 1, almost all Cedar County cattle had been tested and troops were pulled from the streets
- Saturday, October 3, The Cow War was over – Approximately 1% tested positive – the smallest percentage in the state.



CAMP BOVINE / CAMP MOFFIT



FINAL TIDBITS

- Troops held farewell party
 - Wrestling
 - Boxing
 - Speeches
 - Song dedicated to the cows of Cedar County
- Jake Lenker and Paul Moore convicted of conspiracy
- Sentenced to no more than 3 years at Fort Madison penitentiary
- Judge HC Ring of Jones County and Gov. Clyde Herring were petitioned to provide leniency to Lenker and Moore.
- Released Aug 16, 1934 - only served 40 days
- Each Iowa county was advised to enact a tax levy to pay for future testing. Cedar County had not by 1934.
- Cost the State of Iowa over \$150,000



QUESTIONS?

