

My Weekly Reader

“Two Men Who Want To Be President” Newspaper headlines like this one are commonplace with the current presidential election picking up steam. In September of 1944 this headline from *My Weekly Reader* accompanied a story on a presidential election that was winding down. *My Weekly Reader* was started by a single teacher in 1902 for his own class in Massachusetts. The first national issue was introduced on September 21, 1928 and was intended to keep students informed about issues in the current American government including presidential elections.

The main focus of this particular issue was the election of 1944 which at the time was approaching the finish line. The issue consists of two main articles on the front page which introduce students to the two candidates, Franklin Roosevelt and Thomas Dewey. The articles focus on the childhood of each candidate in order to help students connect better with the two men one of whom would be leading their country for the next four years.

This *My Weekly Reader* was donated to the Johnson County Historical Society by Della (Wenman) Hartvigsen of Coralville who was a student in Coralville during the 1940s. Coralville teachers used *My Weekly Reader* and other material geared toward kids to help their students learn about events and connect them to their own lives. The 1940s was arguably one of the most important eras in American history and what was going on in the world was definitely affecting the lives of young people in Coralville. Their families felt the effects of World War II food and supply rationing and many had a parent or a relative fighting in the war. *My Weekly Reader* helped to keep them informed of the larger events that shaped their daily routine.

In addition, students were seen as an integral part of the American war effort and publications like *My Weekly Reader* were also laden with information on how students could help their country. Little tips such as “Save High-Grade Paper Pulp for V-Boxes” and “Take a Shopping Bag to the Store” in order to save paper bags fill the gaps between articles and culminate with “Oscar’s Victory Hints”, a short story about how war stamps purchased by students could help buy a jeep. All of this was in order to remind students that the actions of every person, even students in Coralville, Iowa, were important to winning the war.

In a 2005 interview conducted by 5th graders at Coralville Central Elementary School for the Johnson County Historical Society, Doug Goodfellow of Iowa City who also attended school in Coralville during the 1940s, remembered some activities to help the war effort that they did together as a school. “We went in big groups and would go up north of town and collect hemp which was used to make rope and the milkweed pods...to make life preservers for the troops,” he said.

Did your school participate in the war effort? Was *My Weekly Reader* part of your school day? If so, we would love to hear from you. Send us a note with your memories or e-mail us at leighann@johnsoncountyhistory.org.

Want to learn more about rural schools during World War II? Beginning this summer, visitors to the Coralville Schoolhouse Museum will have a chance to explore what going to school in the 1940s was like in the restored second-floor classroom. A few 1940s era items are still needed to complete the classroom including a teacher’s desk, record player, drinking water crock, and teacher’s bell. If you have items, you would be willing to donate contact JCHS at 351-5738.