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Historic local fight over free speech is subject of program

Explore the early 20th century controversy surrounding the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W), popularly known as the Wobblies, at the Tuesday Twilight Talk, **Sioux City vs. The Wobblies; the Fight for Free Speech** on Tuesday, August 18 at 6:30 p.m. at the Sioux City Public Museum.

Presenter Michael Melnichak will chronicle how the constant influx of unskilled migrant workers into Sioux City was a natural attraction for Wobblies, whose main goal was to organize the harvest workers, and other migratory laborers. The presence of the Wobblies had a dramatic effect on the citizens of Sioux City- some of whom were not ready for the I.W.W.'s brand of radical labor politics and revolutionary rhetoric. One particularly cold winter, as food became scarce and unemployment was on the rise, the Wobblies began to attract more attention from both the unorganized migrants and city leaders who saw the Wobblies as a threat. Some influential members of the city tried to stop the I.W.W. and the resulting clash in the winter of 1914 ended in a fight, not just for the right to organize, but a fight for basic freedom of expression.

Melnichak is a graduate of the history department of Briar Cliff University on a path toward a graduate degree in history. His long-time interest and extensive research of radical labor history included a presentation on the Wobblies at Sioux City History Day in 2004.

Housed in the historic John Peirce Mansion at 2901 Jackson Street, the Sioux City Public Museum offers monthly Tuesday Twilight Talk programs featuring topics of regional historic interest. For more information, call the Sioux City Public Museum at 712-279-6174 or visit www.siouxcitymuseum.org. Admission is free.