

# Cedar Falls as a Sundown Town

“Sundown Town” is a term used to refer to all-White cities, towns, or neighborhoods in the United States that excluded non-White members of the population from living in their community by means of local laws, intimidation, or violence. Sundown Towns rarely ever documented these practices on paper, and these practices were taken as unspoken rules. In *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism*, James Loewen investigates the various cities and towns throughout the United States that have

heterogeneous (as was the case in neighboring Waterloo), were less likely to be Sundown Towns but more likely to practice racial segregation. These patterns of the past have continued to impact life

BOWLES WILHELM S (colored), (Sarah), wood sawer, r 211 4th av.  
BOWLES Eddie (col), (Sarah), (Union Cleaners) r 404 W 2d.

1923 Cedar Falls City Directory listing for Eddie Bowles. The term “col” shows that non-White residents were being tracked at this time.

in these cities into the present, with Cedar Falls currently being less racially diverse than Waterloo.



“Cedar River, near Cedar Falls, Iowa, looking east”  
Sybil Lincoln Gardner Collection, Box 1, #19/40,  
University Archives, Rod Library, University of Northern Iowa

either been confirmed as past Sundown Towns or are assumed to have been ones. Cedar Falls is listed in his book as being a possible Sundown Town where discriminatory, racist actions may have taken place.

According to Loewen, communities where the White population had been more ethnically homogeneous, such as Cedar Falls (which Bowles described as having been “99% Danish” when he arrived), were more likely to be Sundown Towns. By contrast, areas in which the White population was more ethnically

When Eddie Bowles lived in Cedar Falls, he and his wife Sarah were among the only Black residents in town, dating back to their arrival in town in the 1910s. In David J. Gibson’s *The Book of Cliff*, Eddie Bowles reported that he had been “allowed to live in Cedar Falls.” It is unclear who he received permission from, but it raises the question of why he required it—which remains unanswered on the record. However, recent research shows that the Cedar Falls City Directory from 1923 (above) lists Eddie, Sarah, and one other Black man, each with the term “col,” which is noted in the directory as an abbreviation for “colored.” It is significant that information about non-White residents was being tracked and publicly recorded at this time.

Eddie Bowles lived his life in different regions in the U.S., experiencing Jim Crow laws in Louisiana and a Sundown Town in Iowa. Although there is no record of Bowles having complained about how he was treated (in fact, in one interview he said, “I never had no enemies”), it is difficult to fully account for his experience in these regions. Eddie Bowles was one of very few Black residents of Cedar Falls during this time, and it is impossible for us to know what he didn’t say regarding his experience.