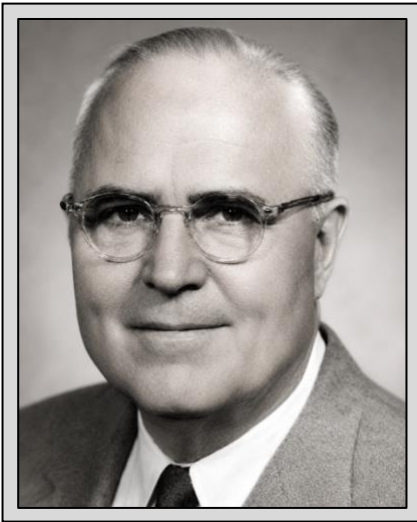




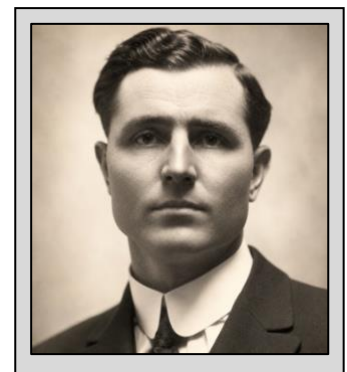
Harry Lee Welty

Seventh Superintendent of the South Dakota School for the Deaf (1920–1925)

Harry Lee Welty served as the seventh superintendent of the South Dakota School for the Deaf from 1920 to 1925. During his administration, the school experienced steady educational growth through expanded vocational training, increased enrollment, campus improvements, and a vibrant student life. Although his tenure ended amid a public disagreement with the State Board of Charities and Corrections, his five years of leadership helped strengthen the educational foundation of the school and prepare Deaf students for successful and independent lives.

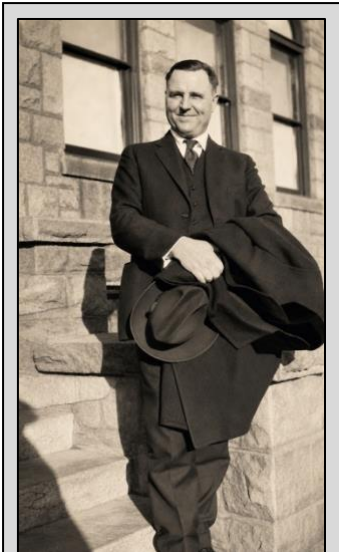
Early Life

Harry Lee Welty was born on October 24, 1882, in [Meadville, Linn County, Missouri](#), to George Howard Welty and Elizabeth Welty. After teaching in rural public schools, he traveled to [Northampton, Massachusetts](#), where he studied methods of educating Deaf children before beginning a lifelong career in Deaf education.



Career Before South Dakota

Before coming to South Dakota, Welty gained valuable experience in Deaf education, including service as principal of the [Nebraska School for the Deaf](#). His background as both a classroom teacher and school administrator prepared him for the leadership of the South Dakota School for the Deaf when he succeeded Howard W. Simpson on January 1, 1920.



Superintendent Harry Welty stands ready to lead a new chapter in Deaf education during the early 1920s.

Superintendent of SDSD

During his five years as superintendent, Welty emphasized practical education and vocational training while strengthening existing academic programs.

Among the accomplishments of his administration were:

- Expanded vocational education
- Reopened the printing department
- Increased enrollment from approximately 80 to nearly 95 students
- Improved dormitories and campus facilities
- Expanded educational opportunities for deaf-blind students
- Encouraged athletics, student activities, and community involvement
- Supported Professor N. E. Hansen's nationally recognized horticultural research on the SDSD farm

Unlike earlier administrations that focused on constructing new buildings, Welty concentrated on improving educational programs and enriching campus life.

Educational Philosophy

Welty believed Deaf students should receive an education that prepared them for productive and independent lives.

Throughout his administration he promoted:

- vocational education
- manual training
- domestic science
- printing
- speech and lip-reading instruction
- individualized teaching.

Newspaper accounts described Welty personally teaching lip-reading to adults who had recently lost their hearing, illustrating his hands-on approach to education and his dedication to helping students develop practical communication skills.



Superintendent Harry L. Welty (center) poses with members of the South Dakota School for the Deaf faculty during the early 1920s. The photograph reflects the close-knit educational staff who worked together during his administration.

Family

On December 31, 1917, Harry Lee Welty married Jane Jennie Esther Jones. Together they raised three children while Harry devoted his career to Deaf education.

Their children were:

- Elizabeth Lee Welty, who later married and became Elizabeth Mayer of California.
- Robert L. Welty, a U.S. Navy fighter pilot who was killed during World War II while flying a mission over Kyushu, Japan, in 1945.
- Arthur Fredrick Welty, who later made his home in Lincoln, Nebraska.

During Harry's years as superintendent, the Welty family resided on the South Dakota School for the Deaf campus. Their daughter Elizabeth was born shortly after the family arrived in South Dakota, and in July 1923 they welcomed their son Robert at [McKenna Hospital](#) in Sioux Falls. The family remained an active part of campus life throughout Welty's administration.



The 1925 Faculty Controversy

The final months of Welty's administration were marked by a public disagreement with the State Board of Charities and Corrections over faculty appointments.

The dispute centered on the proposed reappointment of Mrs. O. C. Ellison, daughter of Delos A. Simpson and niece of former superintendent James Simpson.

When the Board announced that it had accepted his resignation, Welty publicly disputed the announcement, stating:

"I did not hand in my resignation. I was fired."

Eleven faculty members announced they would resign if Welty left the school, demonstrating the confidence many teachers had in his leadership. The disagreement ultimately ended his five-year administration in July 1925.

A Brief Respite

Shortly before beginning the next chapter of his career, Welty took a fishing trip to [Yellow Lake](#) near Webster, Wisconsin, with Olaf and Clarence Hanson.

Newspapers reported that the group returned home after enjoying "good pike fishing." Although only a brief mention, it offers a welcome glimpse of Welty away from administrative responsibilities and reminds us that beyond the headlines, he enjoyed the outdoors and the companionship of friends during a period of major transition in his life.

Later Career

Following his departure from SDSD in 1925, Welty accepted a teaching position at the [Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind](#) in [Colorado Springs](#). He later returned to the Midwest, where he devoted more than three decades to teaching at the [Iowa School for the Deaf](#) in [Council Bluffs](#).

Welty remained closely involved in classroom instruction rather than returning to administrative leadership. A 1952 newspaper feature showed him working patiently with a deaf-blind student named Eddie Davis, demonstrating that even late in his career he continued to value individualized instruction and personal relationships with students.

Welty eventually retired after more than four decades in Deaf education. He remained active in [Grace Presbyterian Church](#), where he served as an elder, and continued living in the [Council Bluffs](#) area until his death in 1954. His obituary described him as a retired instructor who had devoted over forty years to the Iowa School for the Deaf.

An Unexpected Incident

After retiring from active teaching, Harry Welty continued living near the Iowa School for the Deaf in Council Bluffs. In January 1954, a trash fire he had started accidentally spread into nearby dry grass after strong winds carried sparks beyond control. Approximately 100 students from the [Iowa School for the Deaf](#) were called from their classes to help battle the blaze, which burned about 35 acres before being brought under control. Although the school was never threatened, Forrest Huston, a teacher and assistant coach at the Iowa School for the Deaf, suffered a broken arm after falling while attempting to cross a fence during the firefighting effort. The incident received front-page coverage in the Daily Nonpareil and became one of the more unusual events associated with Welty's later years.



Students battle a grass fire near the Iowa School for the Deaf, 1954.
(AI-assisted reconstruction image).
Click the image to read the full story.

Death and Legacy

Harry Lee Welty died on June 21, 1954, in Council Bluffs, Iowa, following complications from a broken hip suffered after a fall while trimming a tree. He was 71 years old and was buried at [Cedar Lawn Cemetery](#).



Although Harry Welty served only five years as superintendent of the South Dakota School for the Deaf, he devoted nearly his entire professional life to Deaf education. From rural Nebraska classrooms to leadership in South Dakota and many years of teaching at the Iowa School for the Deaf, his career reflected a lifelong commitment to educating Deaf children. His greatest legacy was not found in buildings or titles, but in the thousands of students whose lives he helped shape over more than four decades of service.