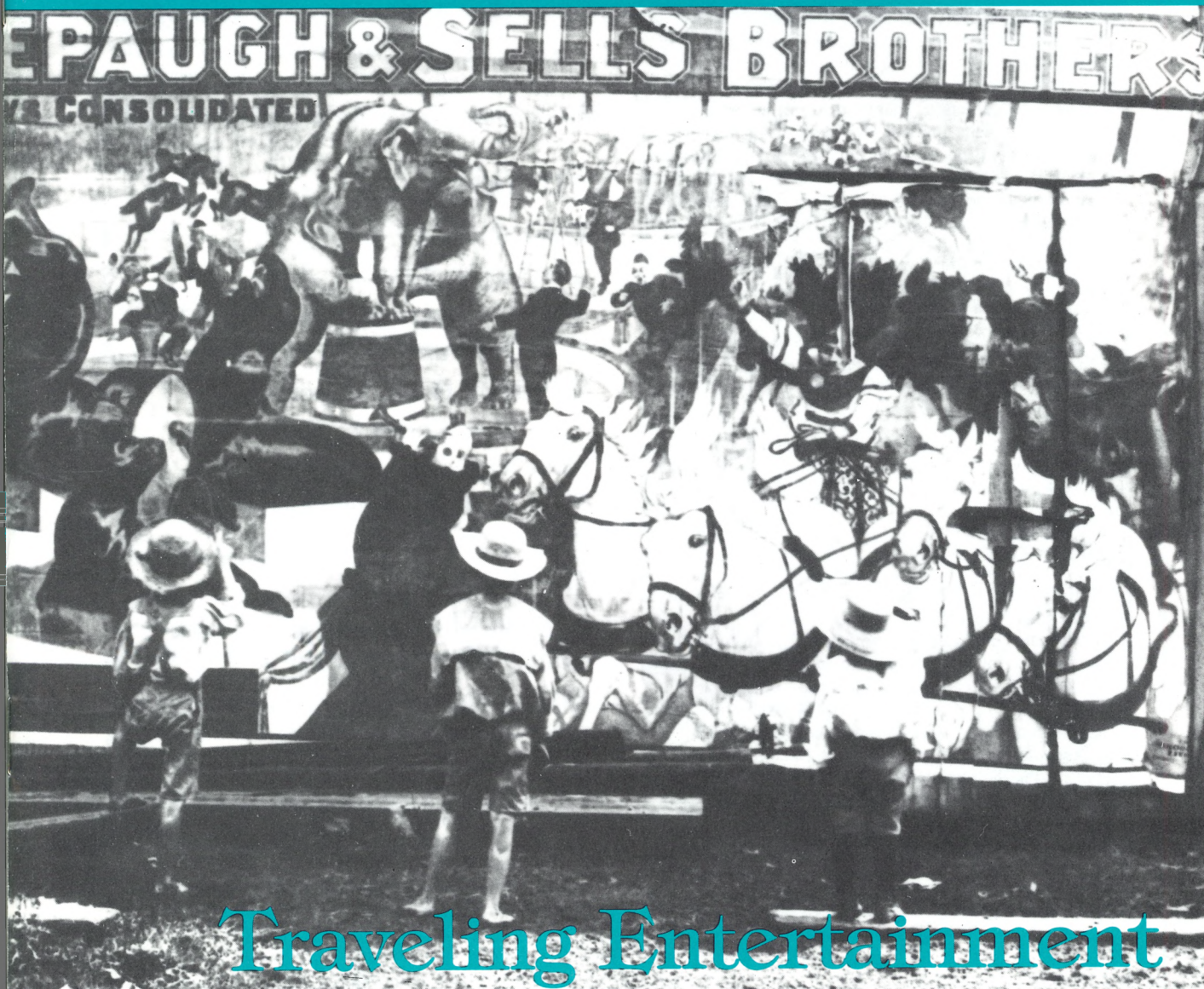


# *The* **Goldfinch**

Volume 7, Number 3  
February 1986



# The Goldfinch

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Editor, GINALIE SWAIM

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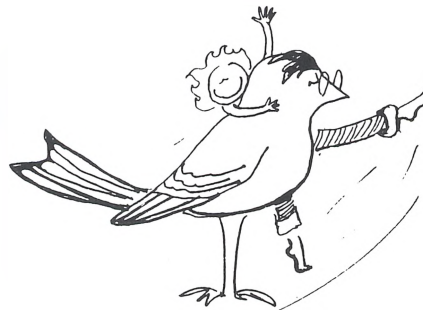
**Acknowledgements:** Thanks to Caroline Schaffner and Michael Zahs for interviews and photographs, and to the students in Iowa History III at Washington Junior High School (Washington, Iowa) for their contribution to the History-Makers section. Editorial assistance provided by Deborah Gore. The ads on page 9 are from 1904 issues of *The Opera House Reporter*, a weekly trade newspaper for opera house managers that was published by James S. Cox and Company, Estherville, Iowa. The excerpt on page 16 is from a manuscript by Celia Margaret (Carr) Bonney in the Manuscript Collection of ISHD, Iowa City. The characters of Wild Rosie and Goldfinch are drawn by Jenny Wren.

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THE GOLDFINCH (ISSN 0278-0208) is published in September, November, February, and April by the Iowa State Historical Department, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240 (telephone: 319-338-5471). Available by yearly subscription: 4 issues for \$5 (single-copy rate) or 30 copies of 4 issues for \$25 (classroom rate). Gift subscriptions are available. Also available through Family or Benefiting Memberships in the State Historical Society of Iowa. Second-class postage paid at Iowa City, Iowa.

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to: THE GOLDFINCH, Iowa State Historical Department, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.



Meet  
**Wild Rosie,**  
your official  
“Goldfinch Tour Guide”

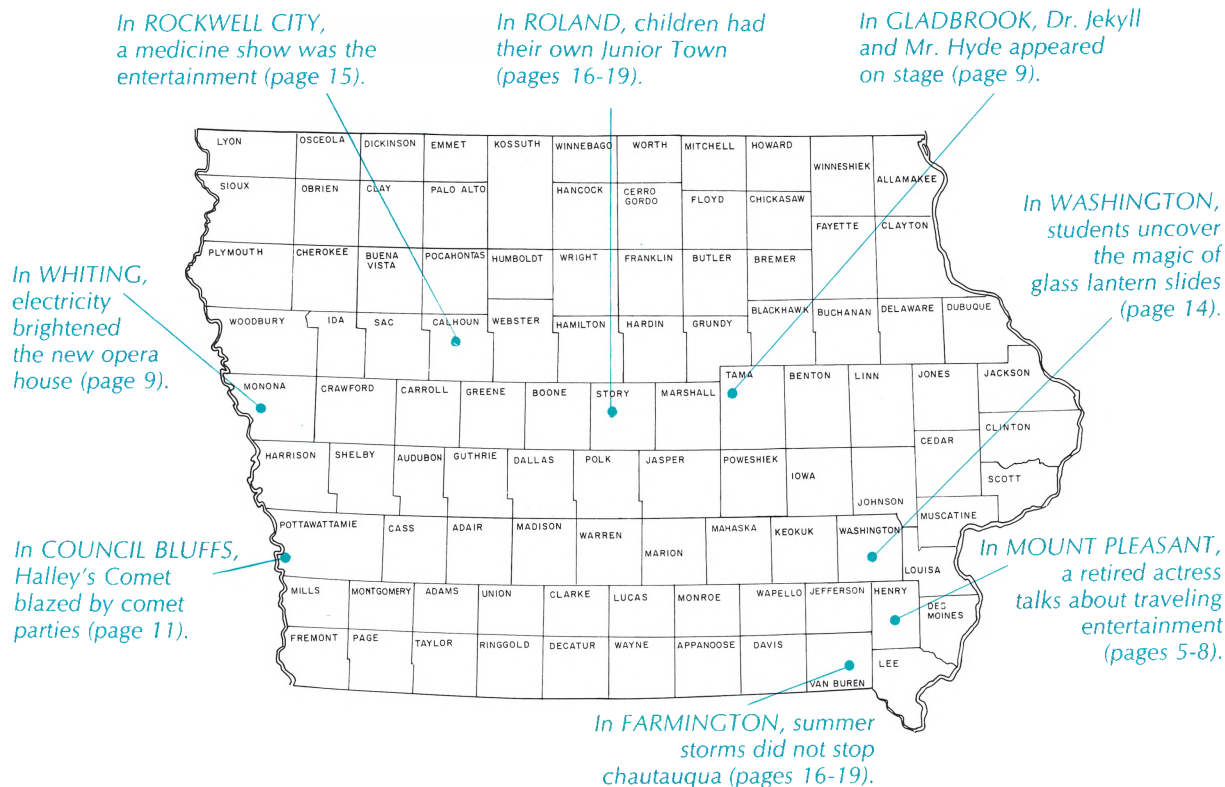
*for a trip into Iowa's past. This map  
shows some places we'll visit in this issue.*

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**ON THE COVER:** *Three boys study a gigantic circus poster on a barn in Iowa Falls at the turn of the century. Like many traveling entertainers, the Adam Forepaugh & Sells Brothers Circus performed in hundreds of Iowa towns. (Photo from Foster Collection, ISHD)*





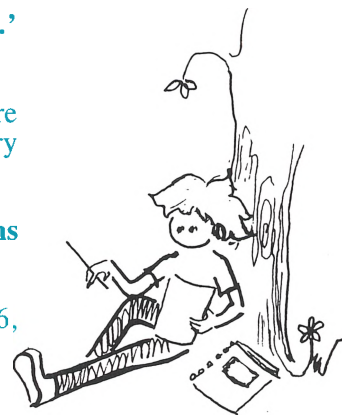
## ASK WILD ROSIE

**“Rosie, why did people call the theaters in their towns ‘opera houses.’ Did they go there to see operas?”**

“People liked to call the theaters ‘opera houses’ because it seemed more elegant and proper to them. Operas were performed there, but not very often.”

**“Rosie, are there any Iowa towns that still have chautauqua programs in the summertime?”**

“Sac City in western Iowa is planning a chautauqua this year, July 4-6, with a children’s program on that Saturday.”



# Entertain Us!

**P**USH the button. Turn the knob. Switch the channel. At almost any moment we can enjoy movies, cartoons, or music. Entertainment travels into our homes through television, radios, and stereos. It travels to our theaters through movies. Today's *technology* (tek-NOL-uh-jee) gives us instant entertainment. Technology is how research and inventions are used in everyday life.

A century ago the technology in Iowa was very different. There were no movies or televisions, of

*Many kinds of entertainers performed in Iowa, including a one-man band in Chariton (right), and jubilee singers from Southern black colleges (below).*



course. But Iowans a century ago were like Iowans today and like people everywhere: they wanted to be entertained.

Entertainment lets us laugh and forget our problems. It feeds our imaginations and offers new ideas to think about.

By the 1880s Iowans were finished with the hard work of settling the state. They had plowed the prairie into farms and had built towns and railroads. New products made life easier. People had more free time for entertainment.

Entertainers of all kinds traveled across Iowa and the nation, performing for eager audiences. Thousands of talented people worked as traveling entertainers—until new technology brought new kinds of entertainment, like phonographs, radios, and movies. □

# The People of Iowa

The *Goldfinch* went to Mount Pleasant, Iowa, to learn more about traveling entertainment from retired actress Caroline Schaffner.

Caroline Schaffner worked in show business over 40 years. In 1921, she began her career as a reader with the *lyceum* (lie-SEE-um). People attended lyceums to hear lectures and concerts.

In 1925 she married Neil Schaffner, an actor and playwright. They formed an acting company

called The Schaffner Players.

For many years the Schaffners performed in Iowa and the Midwest. They retired in 1962. Neil died in 1969. Today Caroline is the curator of the Museum of Repertoire Americana in Mount Pleasant.

Caroline adds her memories of traveling actors to our story below. "Forget the world today," Caroline insists. "Close your eyes. See the ticket boxes. Admission for the show: 10 cents . . ."



Deborah Gore

Caroline Schaffner

## Acting in Opera Houses

by Deborah Gore

A HUGE banner across the street announced "TONIGHT! NEW PLAY AT OPERA HOUSE!" Children handed out advertisements of the play to folks strolling down the street.

Down at the train station the actors had arrived, dressed in fine clothes. The men carried canes and the women wore furs and jewels. A man unloading trunks asked, "Which way to the opera house? I have to get the costumes and scenery up there right away."

By the 1880s and 1890s, towns all over Iowa and the United States had built their own opera houses. An opera house was a theater, often on the second story of a building above stores or offices. Opera houses were closed during the summer because they were too hot to sit in during



Foster Collection, ISHD

An acting company waits for a train in Iowa Falls.





a long performance. But when autumn brought cooler weather, the opera house became the center of entertainment.

“At the turn of the century there wasn’t a town, city, or village that didn’t have an opera house,” explained Caroline Schaffner, retired actress. The

*Above: The Missouri Valley Opera House was over a barber shop. Below: Many opera houses, like this one in Traer, had balconies and box seats.*

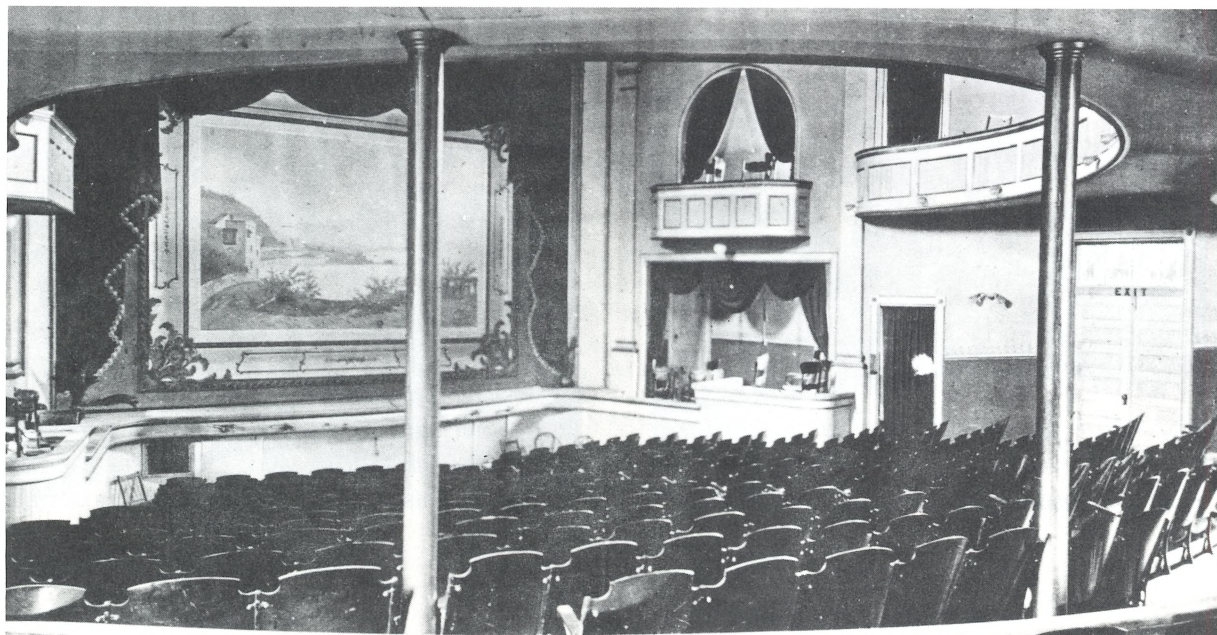
opera house was considered just as important as a store or hotel.

Many kinds of performers appeared on the small wooden stages of opera houses. Famous people gave speeches. Singers, musicians, and dancers performed. Travelers talked about their adventures in foreign lands. Magicians amazed audiences with their tricks.

Acting companies performed often at the opera houses. In an acting company ten to fifty actors traveled as a group from town to town, putting on their plays. To the townspeople, actors led exciting and glamorous lives, like movie stars today. But their jobs were not easy.

Each company had a group of plays called a *repertoire* (REP-er-twar) that might include serious plays and funny ones, plays from Shakespeare and “modern” plays popular in New York and Europe.

If a company stayed in a town for six nights, each night they would perform a different play



from their repertoire. An actor had to remember the lines, costume changes, and movements of several characters. Sometimes actors only had a few rehearsals before performing a new play.

“As actors, we considered ourselves professionals,” Caroline said. “One of the tools of the trade was a very quick memory.”

Actors constantly traveled. They did not return to their homes for several months. They grew weary of sleeping in hotels and riding on trains.

They knew that every opera house would be a little different. Some opera houses had the newest technology—electric lights. But others had gas or kerosene footlights. Dressing rooms were often cold and crowded. Stages were different sizes.

Earning a living depended on an actor’s talents. In a small town, the company had to keep attracting an audience all week long, night after night. If the audience did not like the first night’s play, fewer people might buy tickets for the other nights.

Between acts, a few actors performed “specialties” such as singing, dancing, or telling jokes. “People who could play in the orchestra, do specialties, and do parts [in the plays] were the highest paid,” Caroline explained. “Every company had an orchestra. It might only be three pieces—the piano, the player, and the stool—but it was an orchestra,” she laughed.

While the opera houses were closed during the hot summers, acting companies performed outside under large tents. Then the company had to transport a huge tent, besides rolled-up scenery and costume trunks.

About 1,000 people could be seated on chairs and benches in the average-sized tent show.

## ENTERTAINMENT!

---

### Opera House, THURSDAY EVENING MARCH 22d.

---

Music, Recitations,  
Mother Goose in Pantomime,  
Shadow Pictures,  
The Story of Cinderella,  
The Ballad of Mary Jane,

---

AN AMUSING FARCE,

## Slasher and Crasher

---

“Families came early before the show to visit,” Caroline remembered. “Children played. They bought popcorn outside of the tent. There were more children at the tent shows in the summer.” Young people could stay up later at night because there was no school the next morning.

“Children were the most wonderful audience, in the tent especially . . . The first two or three rows were almost always full of children. Usually right back of them sat Papa and Mama,” Caroline smiled, as she recalled playing characters for a young audience. “The children just lived it right with you. You could just feel the hush. And you *must* have real tears.”

Although acting companies attracted large



*Actors often tolerated cold and crowded dressing rooms backstage in opera houses. In this exhibit at the Museum of Repertoire Americana, costume trunks and make-up boxes fill the dressing room.*



Deborah Gore

audiences, new technology was competing with them. Some families bought phonographs, player pianos, or radios for their homes. Then they did not need to go to the opera house or summer tent for entertainment.

By the 1920s many of Iowa's dirt roads now had gravel on them. In their new automobiles people could more easily drive to a town with a "moving picture" theater. They did not have to worry about getting stuck on muddy roads. Some movie theaters were air-conditioned—much cooler than a tent show on a hot July night.

"I loved the picture shows," Caroline admitted. "Neil [her husband] didn't. He told me, 'You're helping the people put us out of business.'"

Meanwhile the farm depression of the 1920s meant that Midwestern farmers were not getting good prices for their crops. Then in the early 1930s the Great Depression meant that millions of

Americans lost their jobs. People did not have much money for entertainment.

New technology and the Great Depression ended the need for many traveling entertainers. But The Schaffner Players were lucky. New technology actually brought them more fame and success. In 1935 a radio station hired them to perform short comedy routines. Neil and Caroline played two characters named "Toby" and "Susie."

Now the Schaffners "traveled" on radio waves to the homes of millions of Americans for more than ten years. They continued their summer tent shows, too. People who heard "Toby" and "Susie" on radio wanted to see them in person. Their plays attracted large crowds, until they retired in 1962.

But for most traveling entertainers, the days of traveling from town to town were over by the 1930s.

□





Traveling entertainers and opera house owners read the *Opera House Reporter*, a newspaper published in Estherville, Iowa. Can you answer the questions below after reading these “want ads” from 1904 issues?

(Answers on page 23.)

Our new opera house will . . . seat 250, [has] 3 good dressing rooms, electric lights, full outfit of red, green and white foot and border lights, a set of modern scenery . . . Write: E.M. CASSADY, OPERA HOUSE, WHITING, IOWA

Have booked . . . Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde . . . Company managers take notice of Gladbrook when billing through Central Iowa. It’s a good show town and we have bountiful crops hereabouts. Write: T.E. MANN, OPERA HOUSE, GLADBROOK, IOWA

Any company playing [eastern Nebraska] will make a big mistake if they pass up Elgin for they have a nice opera house, seating about 500 and as clean as a new pin and best of all, the manager, Mr. McClain, is a hustler and he does all he can to make it pleasant and get the coin . . . Write: HEMSTREET, MIND READER AND HYPNOTIST

Wanted! A good sober, reliable Stage Carpenter . . . to take full charge of stage, scenery and props—and play small part—must be experienced, thoroughly competent, a good dresser and not afraid of work. Write: FRANK G. KING (MANAGER, KING-PERKINS ACTING COMPANY) ESTHERVILLE, IOWA

1. In which opera house would the audience see the play *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What do you think Hemstreet means when he says Mr. McClain is “a hustler” and “gets the coin”? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What kinds of responsibilities does a stage carpenter have in the King-Perkins Acting Company? \_\_\_\_\_
4. If Hemstreet travels to Iowa from Nebraska, which opera house will he reach first: the one in Whiting or the one in Gladbrook? (Clue: Use the map on page 3.) \_\_\_\_\_
5. Which opera house boasts about its new technology? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Why does T.E. Mann mention the “bountiful crops” of Gladbrook? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Pretend that you are one of the following people:
  - A carpenter who needs a job.
  - Hemstreet. You want to perform your mind-reading act in Iowa opera houses.
  - The owner of an opera house. You are hiring traveling entertainers.
  - An actor who needs a job and knows a little carpentry.

Write a letter answering one of these ads. Be as convincing as possible.

# The Circus Comes By Rail

*Right: Ringling Circus arrived by train in Algona.  
Left: A tightrope walker in the Orton Brothers Circus.*



Foster Collection, ISHD



CIRCUSES traveled to Iowa soon after settlement began in the late 1830s. Many early circuses were small, simple shows, with a few trained ponies and dogs, and acrobats, jugglers, and bareback riders. The circuses traveled in wagons on dirt roads.

By the 1870s, railroads stretched across Iowa. Several circuses started traveling by train. They could reach more towns and not worry about traveling in rainy weather on muddy roads.

Circuses were growing much larger, too, with more acts and animals. Some circuses used over 50 train cars to carry the animals, cages, parade wagons, costumes, tents, performers, and crew.

Circuses also brought small traveling zoos called menageries (me-NAJ-e-reez). A menagerie is a collection of unusual animals. Today many cities have zoos. But in the nineteenth century America did not have many zoos. The only place to see animals like giraffes, hippos, and camels was in books—until the circus and its menagerie came to town. □



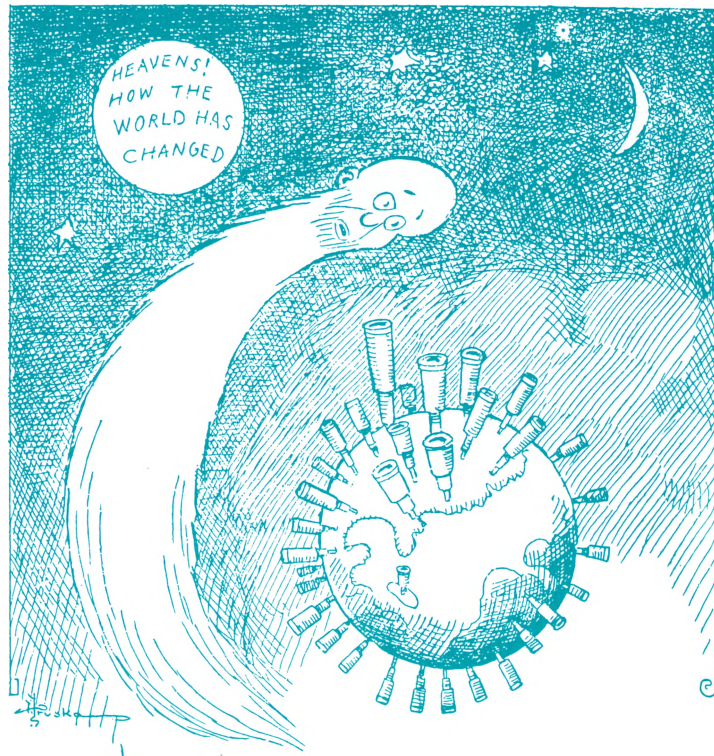
# Good Times



Halley's Comet was one entertainment that "traveled" to Iowa in 1910. Some Iowans had "comet parties." Friends gathered on rooftops or hillsides to watch for the comet. The last time it had passed by Earth was 76 years earlier, in 1834, before Iowa was a state.

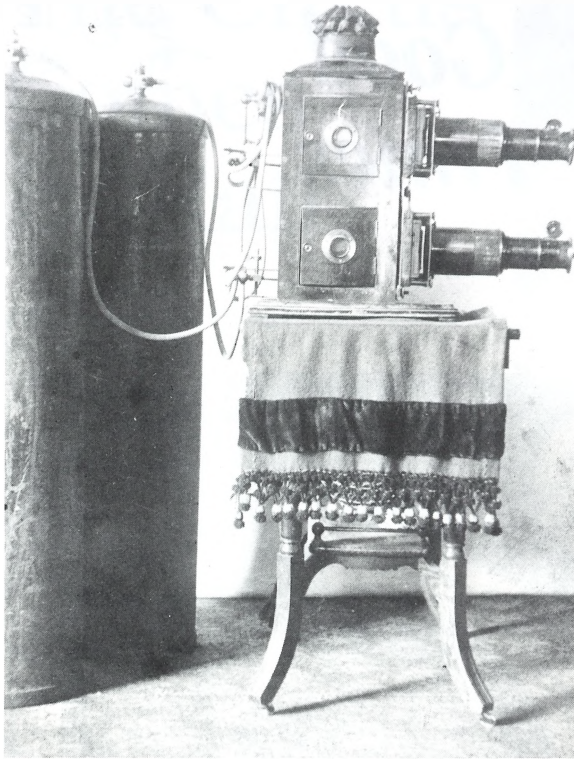
At a Council Bluffs comet party, one person said the comet was "larger than the sun and fiery red in color, redder than any star I have ever seen . . . We were all astonished by its size and brilliancy."

This cartoon was published in the *Cedar Rapids Gazette* in 1910. How old were your grandparents in 1910? Have you seen Halley's Comet this year? When the comet returns in 76 years, how old will you be? What do you think Iowa will be like in the year 2061? Draw a cartoon or write a newspaper article about the comet in 1986 or 2061.



OH, YOU COMET!

# Frank Brinton's Magic Lantern Shows



Courtesy of Michael Zahs

*Frank Brinton (right) and one of his projectors (left). In opera houses without electricity, he used kerosene and acetylene in bulky tanks to illuminate the slides.*



**F**RANK Brinton did not let new technology stop him from being a traveling entertainer. He loved new inventions and was an inventor himself.

Frank Brinton lived in Washington, Iowa. He and his wife, Indiana Brinton, traveled to many Midwestern towns with their magic lantern show in the 1890s and early 1900s.

Magic lantern shows were very popular in America a hundred years ago. A magic lantern was an early kind of slide projector. Large, thick

glass slides were inserted into the projector. The lens projected the image onto a wall or screen.

The effect was magnificent. Exotic scenes from foreign countries gleamed with bright colors. Frank and Indiana had traveled around the world. As Frank inserted slides and described them, Indiana modeled costumes from that country. After the show they sold souvenirs from foreign countries.

Other slides showed battle scenes from the Philippines and Cuba, where the Spanish-



American War had been fought in 1898. The last slide was the American flag. The opera house pianist played the “Star-Spangled Banner.”

Some pictures moved as if by magic. Acrobats tumbled across the screen. A steamboat churned down the river as smoke billowed out of the stacks. A skinny gentleman grew fatter and fatter until he nearly exploded.

Frank made the pictures move by inserting two slides into the projector at once. On slides with kaleidoscope designs, he turned a tiny crank that rotated one piece of glass. The “fat man” slide had two panels. Sliding one panel made the man “grow.” Images that moved amazed Frank’s audiences, who had never seen movies or any moving pictures before.

Frank added new technology to improve his

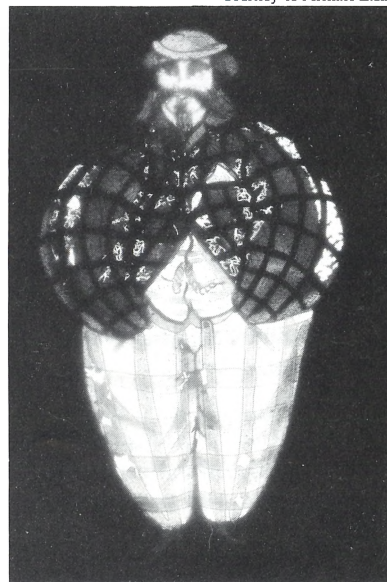
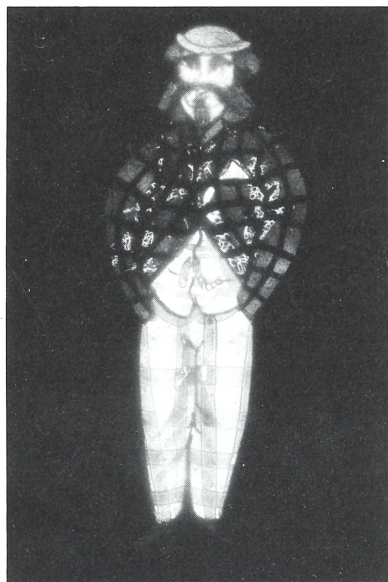
magic lantern show. In opera houses with electricity, he used electric lights to illuminate his slides. Sometimes he used his phonograph for music, or brought his early model of a moving picture projector. He lectured on flying machines. He advertised a “singing” player piano that he had invented.

At his home in Washington, Iowa, he invented flying machines—“airships,” he called them. He designed his house with a flat roof (in case his airships ever actually flew and needed a landing strip). He also designed his house so that it could be heated by solar energy.

New technology ended or changed the jobs of many traveling entertainers. But Frank and Indiana Brinton added new inventions to their magic lantern shows. □

*This glass lantern slide has two panels. Sliding one panel makes the man “grow” fatter.*

Courtesy of Michael Zahs



# History-Makers



DEAR READERS: Be a history-maker! The *Goldfinch* is a magazine about the history of Iowa. Wild Rosie wants to know what you've discovered about Iowa's past. Did your class work on special projects for Iowa History Month? Are you helping to save something

that's old? Have you found an old letter, diary, photograph, or object that tells something about the past? Send your stories, letters, or artwork to the *Goldfinch*, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240. If we can we'll print them in the History-Makers section.



*Cleaning glass slides requires care and patience. Under the dirt students find detailed scenes, like the picture below of Washington, D.C. (Photos courtesy of Michael Zahs)*

Sometimes history is almost under your nose. Less than one block from our school in Washington, Iowa, several hundred magic lantern slides were discovered in a basement. The slides had once belonged to Frank Brinton. They had been there over 70 years. The slides had not been stored properly. They were covered with coal dust, and mice had lived with them for years.

The slides must be cleaned very carefully before they can be viewed.

They are made of an image (picture) between two pieces of glass. We carefully brush off dust from the slides with soft brushes. It is fun to see what picture is under the dirt. We do not rub the dusty slides because this could scratch the glass. Some slides need to be repaired, too.

Many of the slides are black and white, but some have hand-colored pictures. Some sets of slides tell a story, or teach the words of a song,

or show how people lived in other places in the world. Certain slides that have moving parts make the images move on the screen.

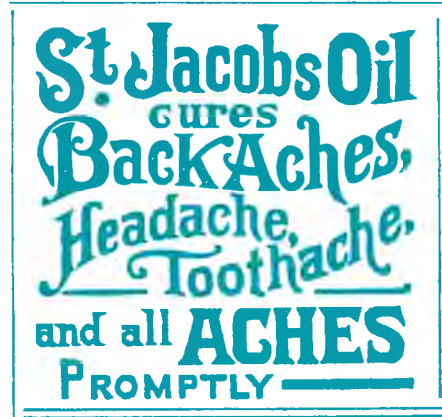
After the slides are cleaned and sorted, they are carefully stored in clean boxes in a cool, dry place. We often get very dirty when we clean the slides, but "history dirt" is fun. Look for history stored around you, but be sure you know how to take care of the material before working with it.

Sarah Evanovich	Kim Martin
Cathy Chelsvig	Carmen Roberts
Jenny Kauffman	Stacy Dykema
Holly Neff	Jenny Shindelar
Becky Scheibe	

(Iowa History III students at Washington Junior High School. Michael Zahs, teacher)







# The Medicine Show

**W**HEN a commercial interrupts the television program you are watching, what do you do? Do you get up and leave? Or do you watch the commercial until the program returns?

Companies that advertise on television spend millions of dollars on commercials. They know that many of us will watch a commercial that is entertaining. If we enjoy the commercial, we might think the product is good. When we are shopping we might buy that product.

A century ago, traveling medicine shows used entertainment to sell something, too. A medicine show was run by a salesman who called himself a “doctor” or “professor.” The medicine he sold was often fake medicine, with alcohol in it.

This is how a medicine show worked:

On a pleasant summer evening, the “doctor” and his assistant drive their wagon into town. Eager to attract a crowd, they light torches and set up a platform. The assistant pulls out a banjo and

sings a few songs on the small stage.

After a large crowd has gathered, the “doctor” comes on stage. He gives a long speech bragging about the wonders of the medicine he is selling. “This medicine will cure everything,” he promises. “It’s safe for man, woman, and child—and your dog, too. Every bottle is brimming with good health. For only one dollar, you can buy eternal good health!”

If the crowd seems bored or starts to walk away, the assistant jumps up. He tells jokes or does a few magic tricks to pull the crowd back. Then the doctor continues his speech.

By the end of the show, the doctor has indeed convinced some folks to buy a bottle of the wonder medicine that will cure every illness.

But the doctor has not convinced everyone. Some folks refuse to buy the medicine. They keep their dollar bills deep in their pockets and walk home—after an evening of free entertainment. □



*Left: In the shade under the huge auditorium tent, adults listened to speakers at the West Branch chautauqua. Upper right: Musicians in folk costumes wait to perform. Lower right: Dressed in knickers, boys at the Columbus Junction chautauqua posed for the camera. Families rented tents and camped all week at chautauqua.*

# Glorious Chautauqua!

**C**ELIA Margaret Carr was a child in Farmington, Iowa, around 1900. Fifty years later she still remembered the summer chautauqua (shuh-TAW-qwuh):

“Each year a ten-day program was held in the park two blocks from us. A big tent was erected for the programs, and smaller tents were erected for people to rent and live in . . . Mother attended all the programs each day. Father hired a woman to do the cooking and cleaning so she could do this. We each had season tickets (cost

\$1.50) . . . Grandma Boler always rented a tent to stay in so she wouldn’t have to miss any programs. She had a coal oil stove, cot, table, chair, pans and dishes. She let us girls stay with her, one at a time. Often we had severe thunderstorms and the tents took a beating from the wind and lightning. But I don’t remember that any ever fell. It was a glorious interlude in our summers, and showed people were hungry to learn.”

Chautauquas were summer programs of education and entertainment. In the 1870s the first chautauquas were held in the woods by Lake



Chautauqua in New York. Going to college was impossible for most Americans. But many adults were eager to continue learning. At Lake Chautauqua, people met to study religion, literature, science, history, foreign languages, and the arts. Thousands of Americans, including Iowans, traveled to New York to attend the summer programs.

The idea—that study programs could be held outside in relaxing settings—traveled, too. Soon towns all over America, especially in Iowa and the Midwest, planned their own chautauquas. They set up tents and hired speakers.

In 1904 an Iowan named Keith Vawter tried out a new idea in Iowa. He would hire all the “talent” (the people who performed) and tent crews. He would buy the tents, seats, and advertising. He would organize a chautauqua that would travel from town to town, called *circuit* chautauqua. Each town would pay Vawter for organizing it. The town would sell tickets and help advertise.



Circuit chautauqua worked well. First came the tent crews, who set up hundreds of tents at a park or fairgrounds. Overnight a canvas village seemed to rise from the green grass of the park.

Families could rent the tents (along with cots and cooking supplies) and live in the park all week. At a dining tent they could buy fruit,





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sandwiches, lemonade, and ice cream.

Every day a different program appeared on the stage in the enormous auditorium tent. The chautauqua offered a variety of "talent"—explorers and travelers, scientists and preachers, actors and musicians, politicians and magicians.

Meanwhile the children enjoyed sports, nature studies, stories, and plays in junior chautauqua. Led by an adult supervisor, the children rehearsed a pageant for the end of the week. It might be a parade or circus, folk dances in native costumes, or the Court of King Arthur.

Children at the chautauqua in Roland, Iowa, in 1921 planned their own Junior Town. "This is an organization which is the children's from

beginning to end," the advertisement announced. "And the children are going to show the grown-ups just how much they know about carrying on a real town organization." Children were chosen to act as mayor, town clerk, and commissioners.

Advertisements for the 1915 chautauqua in North English, Iowa, told eager children that "The Supervisor has been lying awake nights planning lots of new wrinkles for you. Each of the following 'stunts' counts one 'Honor' for you. Look the list over. Pick out the ones you want to try for and be good and ready for the first session.

Bouncing a Rubber Ball 100 Times  
Without a Miss.



Basket Ball Throwing (two out of six trials).  
 An All Up Indian Club Race.  
 Hand Stand.  
 The Mastery of Playing Twenty Games.  
 60 Yard Dash in Nine Seconds.  
 Running High Jump.  
 Rolling a Hoop a Full Block.  
 Ability to Tie Four Kinds of Knots.  
 Cleaning the Teeth Every Day.  
 Swatting 25 Flies Each Day of  
     Chautauqua.  
 Making a Paper Drinking Cup.  
 Naming five Birds, five Trees, five  
     Flowers, etc.  
 Playing a Composition on the Piano.”

The children’s supervisor stayed at the same town all week. The other talent, who performed for the adults, kept moving on the circuit. As soon as a performer finished his or her act, that person

*Children’s chautauqua programs often included a storyteller (left) and sports like volleyball (below).*

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would catch a train to the next town on the circuit.

The constant travel and unpredictable weather exhausted the talent. They performed even on the hottest summer days. A sudden rainstorm could drown out a speech or a song. The wind could send the huge tent flapping and shuddering, and the audience scurrying away.

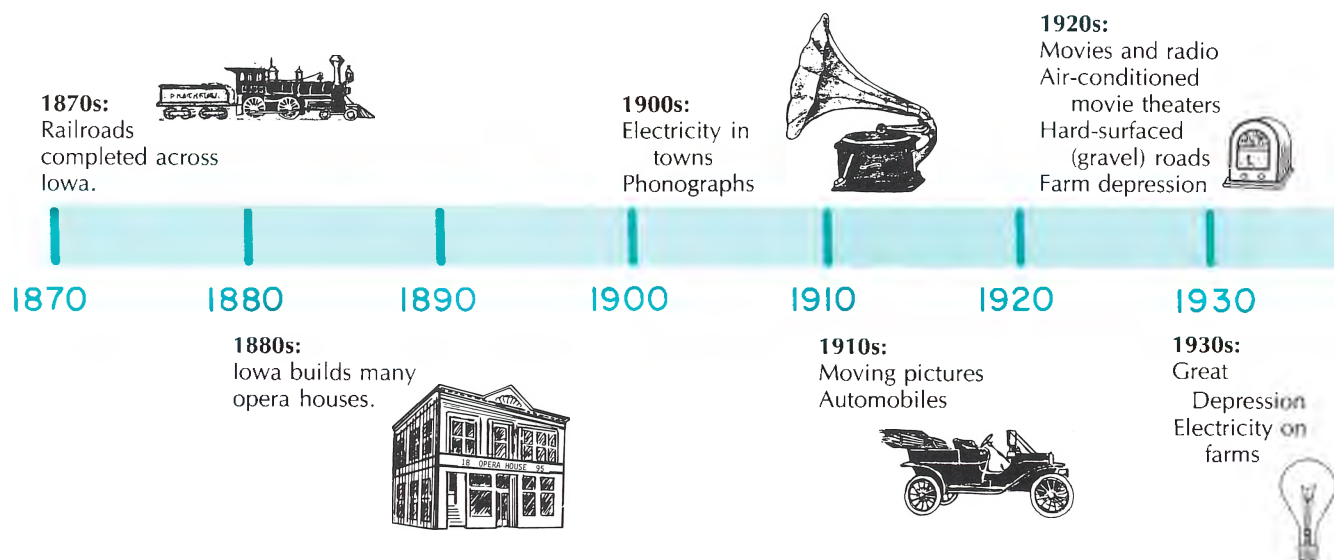
But chautauqua provided jobs for hundreds of talented people. It brought education and entertainment to thousands of small towns. Audiences heard about new ideas like allowing women to vote and protecting children from jobs in unhealthy factories. During World War I, chautauqua speakers described the war and told citizens how they could help.

For over two decades, chautauquas were extremely popular. In 1921, for example, almost 10,000 towns in the United States and Canada held chautauquas. About 4,000 people bought tickets in each town. Nearly 40 million people attended chautauquas that summer.

But by the late 1920s, Americans were losing interest in chautauquas. If they wanted to hear famous people speak, they could turn on the radio. If they wanted to hear music, they could listen to their phonographs and player pianos. With automobiles and better roads, they could jump in the car and drive to an air-conditioned movie theater. Or a family could drive out west for a summer vacation.

The farm depression of the 1920s (when farmers could not get good prices for their products) was leading into the Great Depression. People could not afford “extras” like tickets to the chautauqua. The appeal of education and entertainment under a tent was vanishing. □

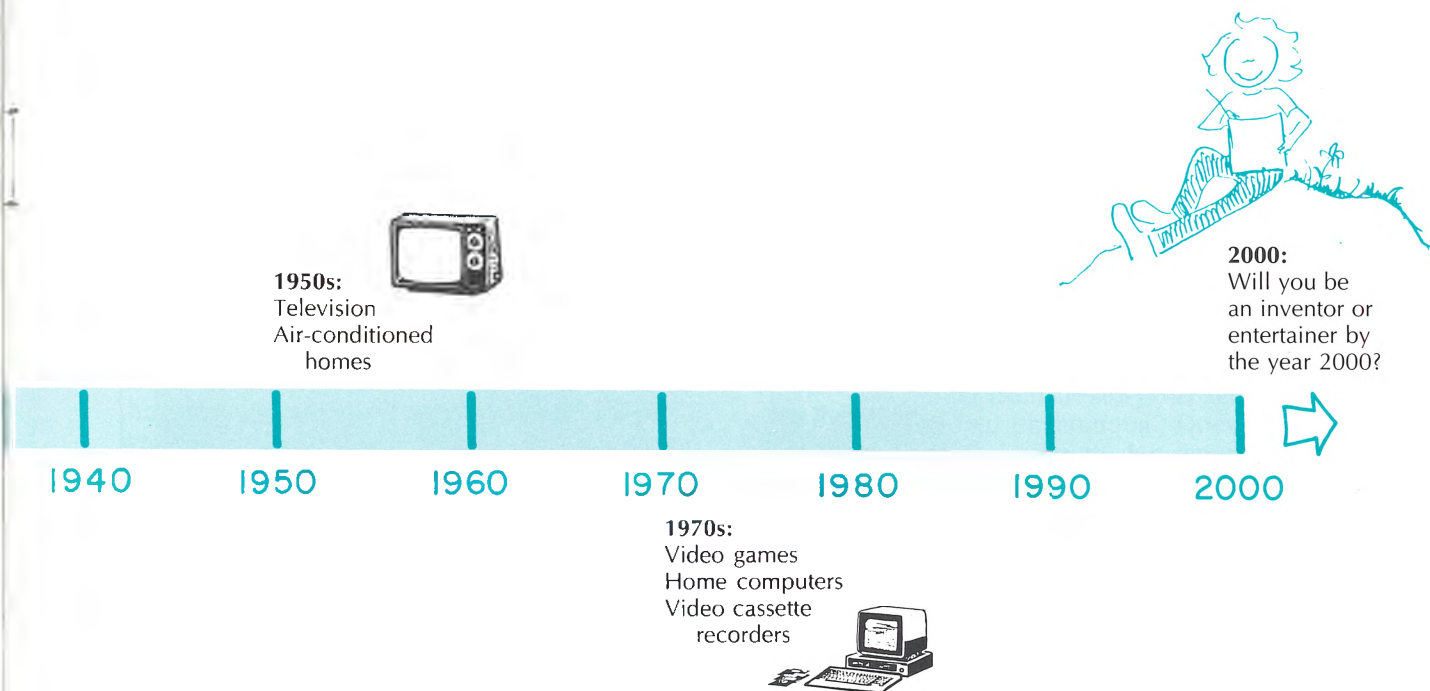
# Climb on the Time Line



This time line shows when new kinds of entertainment and technology became common in Iowa. But some of the events covered in this *Goldfinch* are missing. First, answer Questions 1-3. Then add the events from 4-11 to the time line with your own words or pictures.

1. By which decade could circuses travel by train in Iowa?\_\_\_\_\_
  2. Which kind of entertainment came first: phonograph or radio?\_\_\_\_\_
  3. In which decade were many of Iowa's opera houses built?\_\_\_\_\_
- (Answers to 1-3 on bottom of page.)
4. Mark the year when Neil and Caroline Schaffner began their radio show (1935).
  5. Mark the year when Frank Brinton might have first shown magic lantern slides of battle scenes in the Spanish-American War (1898, the year of the war).
  6. Mark the year when students at Washington Junior High School cleaned old magic lantern slides (1986).





7. Mark these chautauqua dates:

First chautauqua in New York (1874)

Keith Vawter began circuit chautauqua in Iowa (1904)

Chautauquas lose their popularity (late 1920s)

8. Mark the years when Halley's Comet appeared (1910 and 1986).

9. Find out when your parents and grandparents were born. Mark the years when they were your age. (Example: If you are now ten, and your grandmother was born in 1925, add ten to 1925. In 1935 she would have been ten years old.) What kinds of entertainment might she have enjoyed?

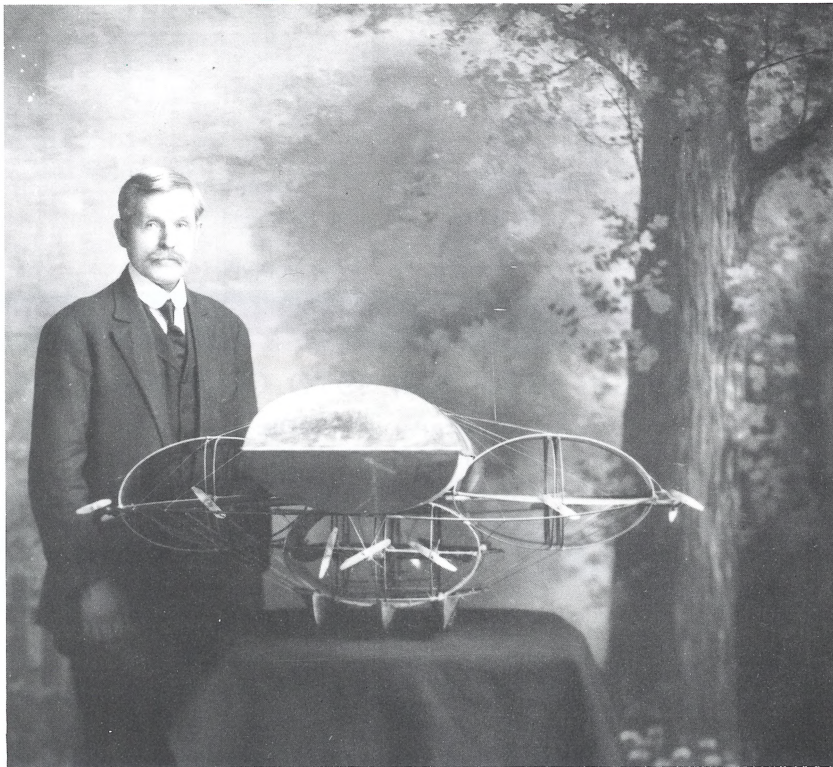
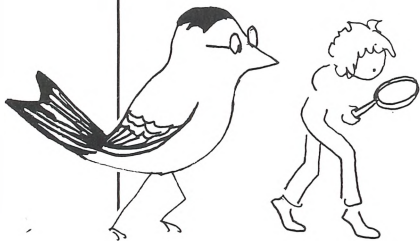
10. Mark the year you were born.

11. Add any new ideas in technology and entertainment that you imagine for the decade of the 1990s.

(Answers: 1. 1870s 2. phonograph 3. 1880s)

Time line drawn by Kay Chambers

# History Mystery



Courtesy of Michael Zahs

## CLUES:

1. This man appears in another story in this *Goldfinch*.
2. He is standing by a model of something he invented.
3. He predicted that his invention would someday “bridge” the Atlantic Ocean.
4. He began his experiments in 1893—ten years before two brothers succeeded on a similar invention in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

**Who is this man? What kind of invention is on the table?** (*Answer on page 23.*)





## Pass It On

*Pass this page on to someone who might share your interest in traveling entertainment. A teacher or parent, a grandparent or friend? These projects would be fun to do together.*

### Have You Seen the Stars?

Entertainers still travel in America. But today we must go to larger towns and cities to see them. Discuss traveling entertainment that you have seen (for example, circuses, concerts, plays, magic shows). Where was the performance? How was it like an opera house or auditorium tent of the past? How was it different?

### Step Right Up, Folks!

Imitate a "doctor" from a medicine show and try to sell a modern-day product. (The product does

## Answers

**Wanted, page 9:** 1. Gladbrook 2. Mr. McClain works hard at advertising and selling tickets. 3. The carpenter is responsible for the stage, scenery, props, and sometimes he plays small roles. 4. Whiting 5. Whiting 6. When crops are "bountiful," the community will have more money to spend on entertainment. 7. Why not send your letter to Wild Rosie here at the *Goldfinch*?

**History Mystery, page 22:** Frank Brinton stands by his model of an airship. (Read about his magic lantern shows on pages 12-13.) In 1899 he prepared to fly an airship, as 8,000 people watched at the Washington County Fairgrounds. All day Brinton waited for the hydrogen generators that he had ordered. Without the hydrogen, Frank could not inflate the balloons. The generators did not arrive in time. If they had arrived, Brinton's airship may well have flown above 8,000 amazed Midwesterners.

not have to be a medicine. It could be toys or snack food, for example). Use the same methods of a medicine show to keep your audience interested. Now imitate a television commercial and sell the same product.

### Make a Magic Lantern Show

Present a slide show of vacation slides. Talk about each slide as it appears, as Frank Brinton did in his show. After the show, display souvenirs or serve food native to that area.

### Plan a Chautauqua

Use the suggestions from the story on pages 16-19 and plan your own chautauqua. Does Junior Chautauqua seem similar to day camp in the summertime?

### Visit the Museum in Mount Pleasant

The Museum of Repertoire Americana is filled with costumes, scenery, play scripts, and advertisements from tent shows, chautauquas, and opera houses. Open by appointment: Route 1, Mount Pleasant, Iowa 52641. Phone 319-385-8937.

### Goldfinch Oldfinches

Read more about this time in Iowa history in earlier *Goldfinch* issues: "Iowa in 1885," "Automobile Age," and "Town Builders" (\$1.50 each, plus \$1 for postage. Address on page 2).

## Hurrah!

*Iowa schools have raised over \$4,000 for the new Historical Museum now being built in Des Moines. Students, teachers, and parents across the state participated in History Month last October by planning history and fund-raising projects. Wild Rosie thanks you for your work and hopes you had fun raising funds!*

# The Goldfinch

USISSN 0278-0208  
Iowa State Historical Department  
402 Iowa Avenue  
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

Second-class postage paid  
at Iowa City, Iowa

“Depressed prices for farm products existed years before the stock market break . . . By 1930 our family reached out all its hands to stay alive.”

(James Hearst,  
in *The Palimpsest*  
volume 59, page 70)

*In the 1920s and 1930s, Iowans faced hard times as a result of the agricultural depression. In the next Goldfinch, read how Iowans pulled together to survive economic crises.*

