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Winter 2007 • \$7

# Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED



# Front Porch

Dear Readers:

Among the press traveling with Harry S. Truman's presidential campaign in 1948 was *New York Times* photographer George Tames. The campaign stopped in Grinnell, long enough for Truman to make a few spirited remarks to the crowd and for Tames to search for a good shot. Here's how he told the story years later.

"The photographer is always looking for some gimmick to photograph the President to show the area where we were. I was standing back below the train, below the President there, and I noticed this little girl about two or three years old, and she had an ear of corn in her hand. I said, 'Hello.'

"She said, 'Hello,' back. Her father was with her.

"I said, 'Is that for the President, the ear of corn? Do you have something for the President—a present for the President?'

"So she looked at me with these great big eyes, not saying anything, and her father said, 'Yes, yes, that's for the President.'

"... I went over and got one of the Secret Service agents and I said, 'Look, here we are in Iowa, corn, little girl, ear of corn, gift for the President.' I said, 'What a combination for a picture; why don't we get her to go up and give the President the corn and then we'll get this nice shot.'"

"He said, 'Wait a minute, I'll talk to him.' He goes up, and the President says, 'Sure, hand her up.'

"So we handed her up, and here's the little girl, the corn, the President and his smile. The President says to her, 'Well, I understand you have a gift for me, this ear of corn.'

"And she said, 'No, sir, I happened to be walking past the pigpen and picked it up.' And with that he let out a real roar, and we got a wonderful, wonderful smiling shot."

That shot by George Tames appears in our opening article, in which author David Balducci reveals more behind-the-scenes moments on Truman's campaign in Iowa. Some of the most intriguing and enlightening history is what happens behind the scenes, and this issue takes you there. "One in a Million" looks at the state guide books written through

the New Deal. Truman's campaign drew upon these books to add local color to his speeches. Another article takes you behind the scenes in the White House, and what it was like during the Hoover administration.

Here at the State Historical Society of Iowa, I've had the privilege to work with many Iowans whose behind-the-scenes labors are essential to our state. I'm talking about historic preservationists. It's easy to forget that some of the most beloved structures and sites in our communities and countryside are still extant because of historic preservationists.

There's nothing quick and easy about saving an old building or bridge or water tower. Preservationists routinely go out on a limb to save a property, dipping into their own savings to reroof a structure to stall deterioration, risking discord with fellow citizens who see only an eyesore with rotting timbers and a crumbling foundation, brainstorming at the eleventh-hour on how to halt the bulldozer. Then there are the hours of research, unearthing the story behind the structure, to convince the doubtful and uninformed that the structure has something to tell us about how things used to be, and why that's important to know.

Preservationists rally their own energy and stamina to repair century-old windows when their own houses desperately need painting. They rally support and money, and volunteers, and then more money (some of it in grants from the State Historical Society of Iowa, I'm proud to say).

This issue features 20 of these historic sites that Iowans have saved and that are now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. You may be surprised at the range of properties and their stories: an athletic field, a synagogue, and a roadside café, for starters. Then there's the tiny brick storefront from which a major midwestern grocery chain was launched, and the elaborate masonry of an Italian immigrant known as Professor Araah. Enjoy these stories and the sites, thanks to the preservationists who resurrected them.

—Ginalie Swaim, editor

## Iowa Heritage Illustrated

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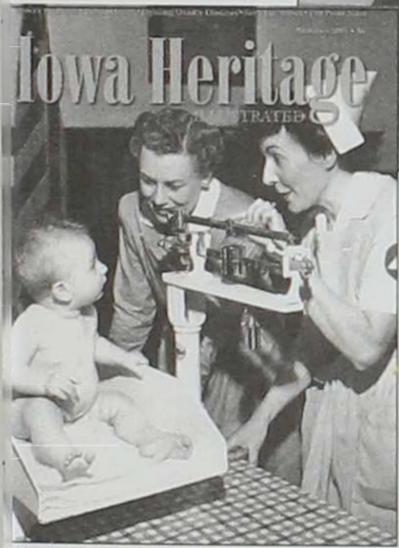
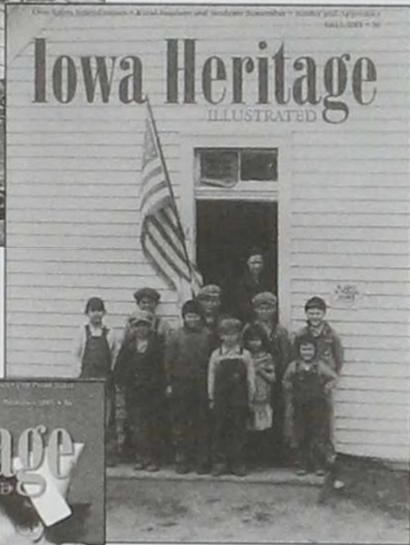
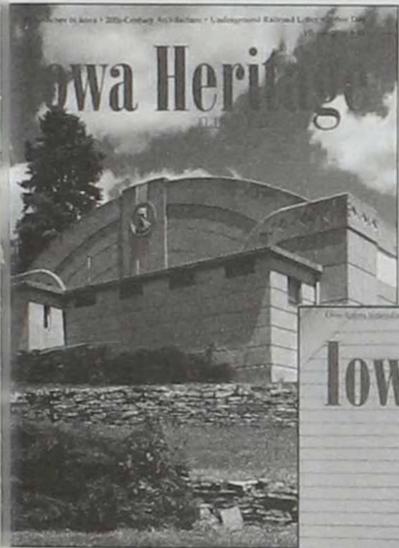
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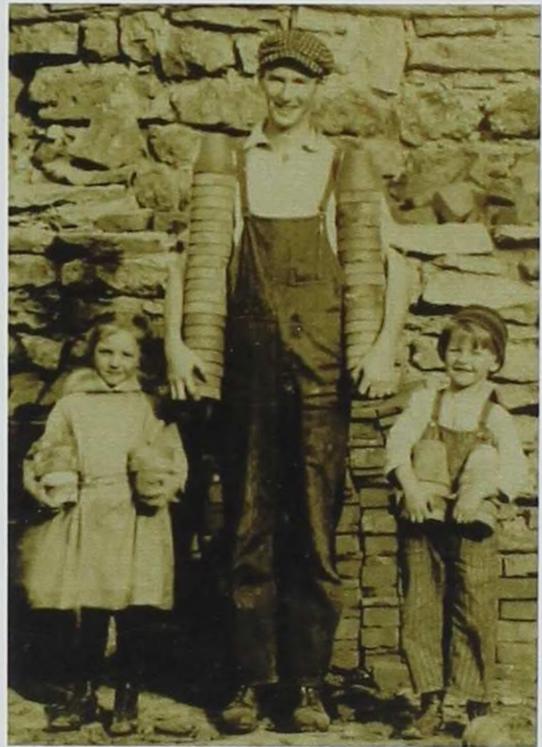
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You're holding  
the best tour guide  
you can find  
for traveling into  
Iowa's past.

## Iowa Heritage

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Rare photos  
and rich history  
in every issue.

Common type of utilitarian  
houses. What distinguishes this  
one is the words "YOUNGVILLE",  
which indicate, the churn  
was built by William R. Goddard and dated  
to his first firing. The handwriting  
on Goddard's deeds

# Iowa Heritage

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PHOTO BY JOHN ZELLER.  
CHURN FROM COLLECTION OF MARK AND KATHIE CELLOTTI.



## On the Cover

Churns were among the most common type of utilitarian stoneware made in Iowa potteries. What distinguishes this one is the cobalt drawing of a kiln, a pottery building, and an American flag (far left). As the words indicate, the churn was made by Muscatine potter Tilden R. Goddard and dated April 5, 1881, perhaps to mark his first firing. The handwriting on the churn matches the signature on Goddard's deeds to his land.



From the back platform of the Truman Special, the president beams as his daughter, Margaret, accepts a bouquet from Julia Ferguson. Iowa City was one of several whistle-stops on Truman's one-day campaign trip across the state.

# Tall Stalks and Plain Talk



## *Truman's 1948 Whistle-Stop Campaign in Iowa*

by David E. Balducci

From dawn to sunset on a hot September day in 1948, incumbent Democratic presidential candidate Harry S. Truman challenged rock-solid Republicans in the Tall Corn State to vote for him. Delivering a hard-hitting speech outside Dexter, and whistle-stop speeches in seven other Iowa towns, he was fighting hammer and tongs to retain the presidency.

The small-town Missourian whom President Franklin D. Roosevelt plucked from the Senate in 1944 as his running mate had served only 83 days as vice-president before assuming the momentous responsibilities of the presidency upon Roosevelt's death in April 1945. Now, in 1948, the plain-spoken Truman was seeking the presidency in his own right. His opponent, New York governor Thomas E. Dewey, was heralded as a shoo-in to end 16 years of Democratic rule of the White House. Dewey chose Earl Warren, the popular governor of California, as his vice-presidential nominee. Both were moderates from powerhouse electoral states. For Republicans, Dewey-Warren was a dream ticket.

Truman's prospects looked bleak. In the spring, Io-

wan George Gallup's national poll showed that only a third of the public approved of Truman's handling of the presidency. The *New Republic* grumbled that the Democratic Party was dying under Truman, that he lacked strength and vision, and that he should quit. Much of the establishment press, as well as pundits and politicians, thought like former Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce who, at the Republican National Convention in June, said Truman was "a gone goose . . . a man of phlegm, not of fire."

But Truman was a tireless campaigner, conveying boundless vitality and confidence in his handful of major policy speeches and dozens of brief whistle-stop appearances. Instead of defending his own policies or attacking Dewey and other moderates, Truman went after the 80th Congress. Voter frustration over industrial strikes, mounting inflation, and rising prices had resulted in a Republican takeover of Congress in 1946. Now the Truman administration and the Democratic Party cast Congress as unwilling to enact economic and social legislation, solve postwar housing shortages, and provide for the needs of U.S. farmers and

workers. Particularly relevant to the Farm Belt, Congress extended the Community Credit Corporation but eliminated the provision for leasing or purchasing additional grain storage bins. Farmers anticipated a bumper crop in 1948, but without sufficient storage, they would be forced to sell in a depressed market instead of waiting until prices rose. It was in this atmosphere that Truman would bring his meet-the-people campaign to the Midwest.

The catalyst for Truman's whistle-stop trip across Iowa in September was a personal invitation to the National Plowing Match in Dexter, 40 miles west of Des Moines. On April 27, Truman was scheduled to welcome at the White House the National Association of Radio Farm Directors, in town for an annual conference. Jake More, chair of the Iowa Democratic State Central Committee, had requested through presidential aides that Truman grant a few private moments to two midwestern directors, Melvin Hansen, of WOW Omaha, and Herb Plambeck, of WHO Des Moines, which sponsored the plowing match. Howard Hass, Plambeck's assistant, and Howard Hill, Iowa Farm Bureau president, were also there. Plambeck later wrote, "We were given five minutes . . . but Mr. Truman, apparently happy for a momentary break from overpowering world problems, entertained us with earthy small talk for 12 minutes before I could extend the invitation to come to our Conservation Field Day and National Plowing Matches in September." The president tried to dissuade them, indicating that his presence would cause planning and security issues that they may not have banked on. "I felt it was his way of letting us down easy."

During the summer, however, Jake More apparently had continued his efforts to convince the White House to accept the invitation. Only three weeks before the September event, the plowing match organizers were notified that Truman would appear. The president desperately needed to carry the Farm Belt, and this was an excellent venue for Truman—just as the campaign approached full throttle and the crops were nearing harvest.

At a September 9th news conference, Truman sketched out his campaign tour to the West Coast and back, with whistle-stops in Iowa and a major speech in Dexter. "I expect to be in Des Moines—Dexter, just outside of Des Moines, on the 18th." A reporter remarked, "The Democrats out in Iowa say that you are going to make your first stop on the 18th at 6:30 in the morning,

at Davenport." The president crisply replied, "Well, this is not unusual," inviting a wave of laughter. Truman was an early riser. Having farmed for 13 years in Missouri, he was used to getting up with the chickens.

How to pay for the cross-country trip was still unresolved. Four days before departure, a group of wealthy Democrats were invited to the White House and ushered into the Red Room. According to the memoirs of his daughter, Margaret Truman, the president got up on a chair and informed them that without some instant cash, "the 'Truman Special would not get beyond Pittsburgh.' Two men immediately pledged \$10,000."

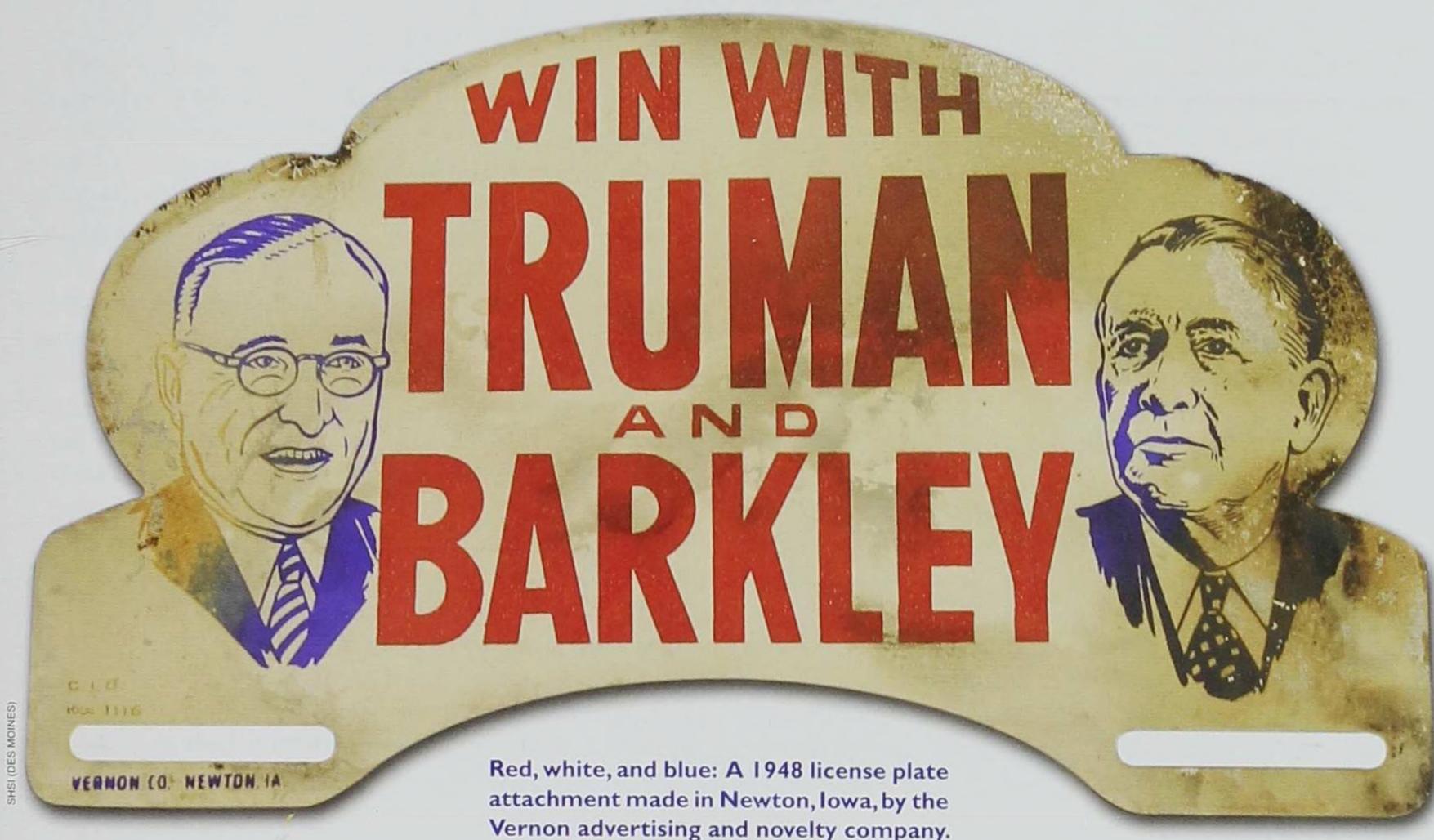
The speech in Dexter would be his first major campaign speech on farm policy. It developed slowly from drafts by Truman, Clark Clifford, special counsel to the president (and later, in 1968, secretary of defense), and other aides. On the 14th Truman wrote in his diary that it had been "another hell of a day" and that he "had the gang in at 6:00 p.m. and worked on farm speech for Des Moines."

For the president's briefer remarks at whistle-stops, William L. Batt Jr. had set up a six-man research division by June. "We were looking for generalists," Batt explained, and "exceedingly knowledgeable guys who knew the issues before the country and who were also good at research and good at writing." For each campaign issue, the researchers developed or summarized policy papers, talked to federal, state, and local politicians, and pieced together scraps of intelligence about opponents' positions.

"The President wanted to get in some local color," Batt added. For that, the researchers drew upon the WPA American Guide Series, prepared for each state by the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration during the Great Depression. The researchers got a complete set out of the Library of Congress for the president's train, and purchased another for their office. "The WPA Guides are a gold mine about every community of any size in the United States. . . . We had a quick sketch of the town; and the history of the town; and the geography of the town; and the sociology of the town, which we pirated out of the WPA Guide."

The research division reported directly to Clifford and Charles S. Murphy, assistant general counsel. Clifford's assistant George Else said the researchers "worked like dogs and ground out an incredible amount of material." From this, top political aides prepared an outline—a "rhetorical blueprint," in the words of speech professor Halford Ryan—which fit well with the president's off-the-cuff speaking style.

Late on the morning of the 17th, Truman and 24-



Red, white, and blue: A 1948 license plate attachment made in Newton, Iowa, by the Vernon advertising and novelty company.

year-old Margaret departed for Union Station. (First Lady Bess Truman would join them in Des Moines.) They boarded the 17-car Truman Special, with various cars devoted to White House staff, a physician, Secret Service and U.S. Signal Corps men, dozens of reporters and photographers, and various state and local politicians who would accompany the president for parts of the trip. The First Family was quartered in the last car, the armor-plated car that Roosevelt had christened the Ferdinand Magellan during his presidency. The car had air-conditioning, three-inch bullet-resistant glass, four bedrooms, a dining room, and a wood-paneled observation lounge (Margaret called it the "sitting room"). The rear door opened to a platform with brass railings.

Truman's vice-presidential nominee, Kentucky Senator Alben Barkley, was at the station to say good-bye. As the president boarded, Barkley hollered, "Go out there and mow 'em down." A smiling Truman responded, "I'll mow 'em down, Alben, and I'll give 'em hell." A *Time* reporter overheard Margaret admonish her dad, "You ought not to say 'hell.'"

Else boarded the train "with briefcases filled with notes and outlines." He was in charge of the back-platform remarks. They would be drafted en route and would follow a basic format. Truman

would be introduced, and then he would make a humorous remark, allude to some local color or issue, endorse the state candidates, jab at the Republican Congress, and exhort the crowd to vote. Nearing the end, if his wife was on the train, he would introduce her as "the Boss," and then Margaret, "as the Boss's Boss." Margaret later recounted that Bess, beneath her smiles, did not appreciate those introductions. Margaret told her father about her mother's objections, perhaps hoping to prevent a potential domestic brush-up. Truman unhesitatingly replied, "It gets a good laugh," and the introductions remained.

**S**eptember 18, Saturday, Rock Island, Illinois, 5:45 a.m., back platform of the Truman Special. The train had left Chicago before dawn, after stops in Baltimore, Pennsylvania, and Ohio the previous day. Now it pulled into the Rock Island train yard. Three thousand early risers stood waiting to see their president. Truman stepped out from behind a dark blue velvet curtain and up to a lectern adorned with the presidential seal. He wore a dapper French blue, double-breasted suit with a darker blue print tie. Loud speakers atop the car broadcast his remarks. After commenting on

how startled he was to see such a large early-morning turnout, Truman warmly endorsed Senate candidate Paul Douglas of Illinois, and former Iowa Senator Guy Gillette, who was seeking a Senate seat again. Then he promptly took aim at the Republican Congress. "You know the issues in this campaign are not hard to define. The issue is the people against the special interests, and if you need any proof of that, all you need to do is to review the record of this Republican 80th Congress. You remember in 1946, when everybody said he wanted a change, that he thought the country had had enough, . . . you elected a Congress that I think has given you enough! Now, if you are going to stay at home again—if you are going to shirk your public duty again, that is what you will get again, and that is just exactly what you will deserve. Thank you very much."

Attacking the Republican Congress in Iowa would take some nerve. In 1948 Iowa was living up to its Republican tradition. Its governor, two senators, and eight members of the House of Representatives were all Republicans, and Republicans dominated its state legislature.

*Davenport, Iowa, 6:10 a.m., back platform.* Batt's researchers would have read in the Iowa WPA guide that the first train into Iowa crossed the Mississippi at Davenport in 1856. Now the Truman Special crossed into Iowa. The president spoke for two minutes before a crowd of 3,000 to 4,000. He said he had been surprised to see so many people "get up so early" in Illinois, but not in Iowa—"the greatest farm state, I guess, outside of Missouri." Warming up for the afternoon's major speech, he declared, "Today at Dexter, west of Des Moines, I am going to tell you just exactly what my program is on the farm and the farmer, and then you will have a chance to make a choice between Republican and Democratic forward-looking administrations. . . . You know, in 1946 a little over one-third of the population voted, and look at what you got! . . . If the people turn out and express their will, then we have the Government which is intended by the Constitution. If you don't do that, . . . you are liable to continue something like the 80th Congress."

In a clumsy bit of timing, just as Margaret, wearing a blue and black silk dress with a pearl necklace, appeared for her introduction, the train pulled out. (The engineer had been instructed to stay on schedule.) Unfazed, the president's party retreated to the sitting room. Truman postponed breakfast to talk with area politicians (several had boarded the train in Rock Island). Others met with press secretary Charles Ross to go over the Dexter schedule.

*Iowa City, 7:25 a.m., back platform.* After an introduc-

tion by state senator Leroy Mercer, Truman stepped forward to address a crowd of 4,500. He expressed immense satisfaction at having "good Iowa Democrats on the train with me." Drawing from notes prepared by Elsey and based on material from the research division, Truman gave his audience an unexpected history lesson. "One of the first things that those ancestors of ours who settled this part of the world thought of was education. The first thing that they set up was a church. The next thing they set up was a schoolhouse. The University of Iowa is one of the first of the educational institutions set up. . . . You know, Missouri and Iowa were from the same territory, first Louisiana, then Missouri territory, then Iowa decided they wanted to become independent and became the great State of Iowa where the tall corn grows. . . . I have been fighting with the Congress of the United States in an effort to get an educational bill through that would be helpful to all those universities that are overcrowded. . . . When our educational program breaks down, then we are fertile field for 'isms.' Education is the best defense against totalitarianism."

Truman dotingly introduced Margaret, who was given a bouquet of red carnations by Pi Beta Phi sorority sister Julia Ferguson of Shenandoah.

*Oxford, 7:49 a.m., back platform.* Only a few miles west of Iowa City, Iowans came out to see Truman in hefty numbers, perhaps a few thousand. The president said, "I don't have to stand here and convince you . . . that the Democratic Party stands for what is best for the farmer. I am going to elaborate on that down in Dexter, which I understand is a hotbed of Republicanism. . . . I want to urge you people who live in the great farming communities to remember that the Government of the United States is a Government of the people. . . . In fact, you are the Government. In order to implement that Government and make it work as it should, you must exercise the greatest of all privileges, the privilege of voting."

Truman complimented the six bands that had greeted him, and then introduced Margaret. When she spoke, the train's public address system failed. As the locomotive pulled out, the Truman troop waved and headed west to the next stop, 54 miles away.

By now, readers of the *Des Moines Register* would have seen that morning's editorial cartoon, by J. N. "Ding" Darling. The cartoon perhaps reflected the sentiments of many Iowans. Titled "WE WILL ALL BE LISTENING MR. PRESIDENT," it depicted Truman on a stage framed

**Eager to hear the president, curious crowds gathered early at railroad stations for Truman's brief stops. Right: Iowa City, about 7:30 in the morning**

SHSI (IOWA CITY); IOWA CITY PRESS-CITIZEN, SEPTEMBER 18, 1948



by cornstalks addressing an enormous crowd representing the rural West. Thus far, many had been listening to "Mr. President," but nowhere would Truman find a better turnout than at the National Plowing Match.

*Grinnell, 8:55 a.m., back platform.* Seven thousand people, the largest whistle-stop crowd of the day, were waiting in every available spot. Some perched on telephone poles and railroad signposts. Introduced by Samuel N. Stevens, president of Grinnell College, Truman called himself "a synthetic alumni," warmly noting that the first honorary degree he had received was from Grinnell (in 1944), and that he treasured "it above all the others I've received since." He introduced Margaret earlier than usual, perhaps in light of the failure of the public address system in Oxford.

Truman told the crowd that Iowa was a wonderful state. "I was raised down here in Jackson County, Mo., which is just like this Iowa country. It has black soil, raises corn and wheat and oats and alfalfa and lespe-deza [for pasture and hay] and soybeans and most everything else . . . and I'm happy to see the prosperity as I come across this great State." Bumper crops of wheat and corn were vital, he told them, "for we have been under these emergency conditions, responsible for keeping millions and millions of people from starving to death." (Beyond the Marshall Plan, the president had ordered the Berlin airlift that summer.)

Like all of Truman's whistle-stop remarks, those at Grinnell lasted only a few minutes. But he reminded the crowd of his afternoon speech at Dexter, to be broadcast by radio, for more on his farm program.

Glenn Meldrem boosted his five-year-old daughter, Kathleen, up to the back platform, and she presented Truman an ear of corn, a symbol of Iowa's abundance. Photos of a beaming president, holding an ear of corn on his left, and Kathleen on his right, soon appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* and other papers.

*Des Moines, 10:20 a.m., back platform.* The Truman Special arrived on schedule in Iowa's capital. It halted between 4th and 5th streets. A small contingent of politicians boarded and disappeared behind the velvet curtain backdrop into the car's sitting room. Among the group was Bess, wearing a slate blue suit, white blouse, and dark blue accessories. She had arrived in Des Moines at 6:30 a.m. from Independence, Missouri, and waited at the Hotel Fort Des Moines.



**GRINNELL CORN FOR TRUMAN** — President Truman received an ear of Iowa corn as one memento of his dawn-to-dusk trip across the state Saturday. Kathleen Meldrem, 5, is shown presenting the ear to the president as he stopped at Grinnell.

*New York Times* photographer George Tames shot this ideal campaign image—a smiling child held by a smiling president—in Grinnell.

The temperature stood at 80 degrees as Truman spoke to what a local reporter called "a relatively small morning crowd." But Truman's remarks were twice as long as his other speeches that morning. Again using only notes, Truman recognized the Des Moines Bruins baseball team for winning the Western League pennant, adding that he still hoped that Kansas City would someday win the American Association pennant. He declared that the bumper crops over the last years made a tremendous contribution to winning World War II. Then he recollected that "land on which I used to raise 60 bushels of corn an acre is raising 100, and I understand up here you are now raising 165 bushels of corn an acre. That's the most wonderful thing in the world, and I want to see that kept up. I want to see that prosperity continue which has been the result of a Democratic policy so far as the farmer and the workingman and the little businessman is concerned."

After Mayor Hector Ross presented Truman with

the Des Moines Order of the Golden Plow, someone in the crowd yelled, "All you need now, Harry, is a mule." Others cried, "Pour it on, Harry." Those voices were probably Truman's aides. Years later, Clifford disclosed that he and others would often go out among the whistle-stop crowd and shout such exhortations to fire up the crowd, if it did not occur naturally. According to Elsey, those in the president's party wore a blue lapel button with a white star, which was enough to get through the police lines and reboard the train. It was after 11 a.m. when the train left Des Moines for the 40-mile ride to the plowing match at Dexter.

The Truman Special arrived at the Dexter depot as the local high school band played "The Missouri Waltz." Wearing a grey fedora, the president bounded into the back seat of a green Cadillac convertible, joining Plambeck and Ross Oliver, district conservationist. Iowa Highway Patrol officers lined the route. A 37-car motorcade drove a mile north to the 160-acre model farm owned by Lois Agg and rented by Roland Weesner and his wife. Plambeck later recalled that Truman was in a "jovial mood," talking about farming and politics, pleased to be away from "the prison" (as he sometimes called the White House) and "ecstatic" to see the huge crowds.

More than 20 committees and 1,000 Iowans had worked to prepare for the annual plowing match and soil conservation demonstrations. Just as the president had warned Plambeck and the other organizers, the decision to speak at Dexter prompted the Secret Service to get involved—although Plambeck later said that little of the general plan was actually changed.

Plowing matches of the previous two years had attracted 50,000 spectators each. Organizers now allowed 100 acres for parking, in anticipation of 35,000 vehicles, plus an area for small aircraft. The president's party drove slowly past spectators lined 12 deep. "We were going down rows of airplanes," *New York Times* photographer George Tames recalled. "I'd never seen so many airplanes, parked on both sides of the road with farmers sitting either on the wings or on the struts or somewhere, watching the President come by. They were very stoney-faced, no reaction, just watching him. The President was looking at them and when he stopped and he got out of his car, he said, 'Those farmers are not going to vote against me; they're making too much money under me.'"

Truman spent nine minutes greeting dignitaries. Mrs. Lloyd Mitchell of Van Meter greeted him with a red

carnation, a gift from Iowa farm women, and pinned it to his suit lapel. Across the road at the Weesner farmhouse, eight Iowa women were finishing preparations for a sit-down dinner after the speech. Starting up the stage steps, Truman halted to shake hands with Claudia Lee Atherton, as George Crane, former state sales tax chief, pushed her wheelchair forward.

A breeze rippled the U.S. flag and 10 state flags atop a huge scoreboard for plowing match scores. As the president reached the stage, Bess resolutely got up from her folding chair, walked over to him, and moved the carnation from his right lapel to his left, to the momentary glee and applause of nearby onlookers.

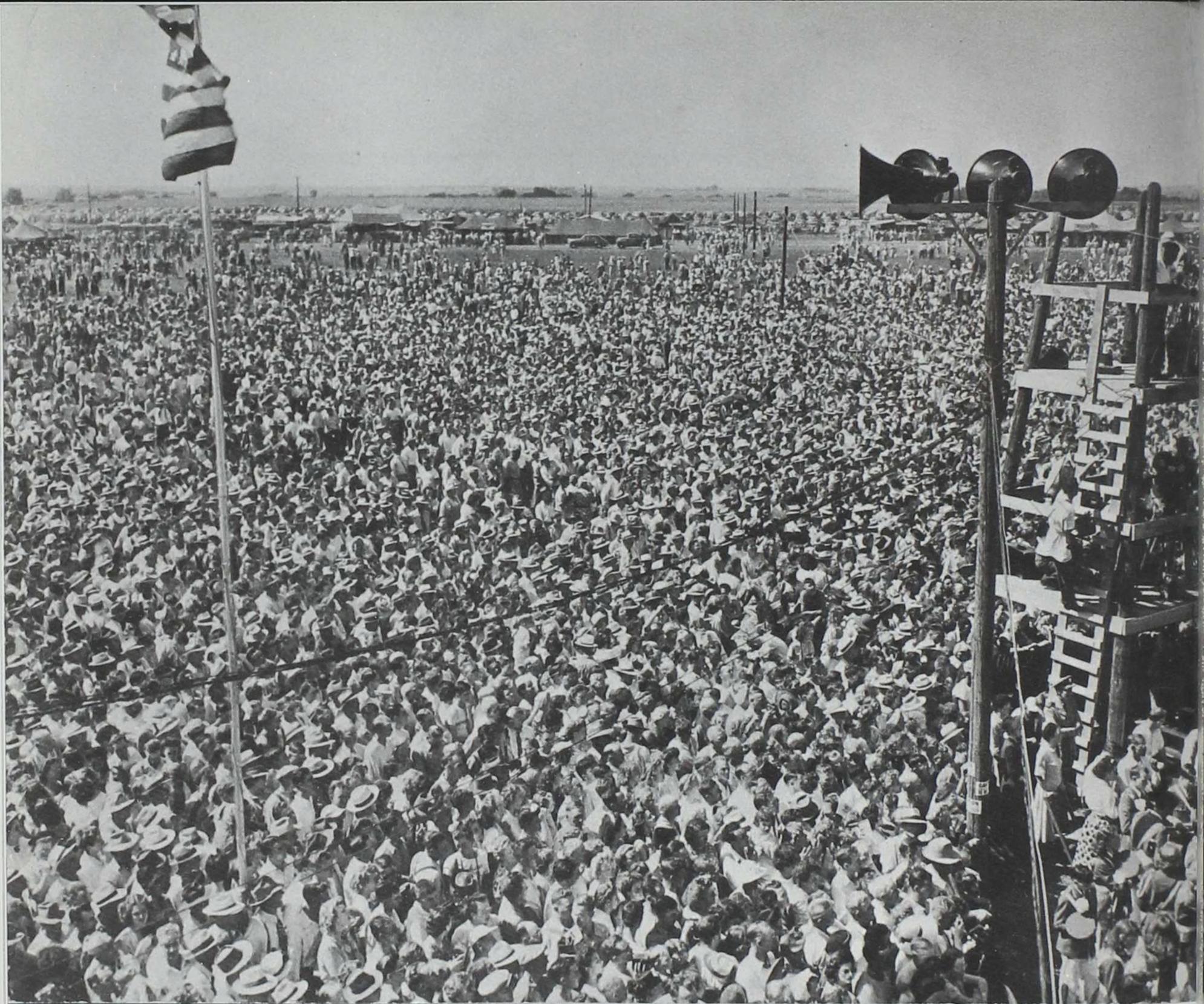
In his autobiography, Plambeck recalled, "I had been chosen to introduce the President, but no one told me how. Thus, instead of the traditional, 'Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States,' I proceeded with my carefully scripted, radio timed 55 second introduction which apparently set a new world record for breaking rules about Presidential introductions."

Just before leaving his chair, the hatless Truman took out green sunglasses from his suit jacket and placed them over his spectacles. He was greeted with booming applause as he shook hands with Plambeck and looked out upon what must have been a breathtaking sight. Before him was an enormous congregation spread fanwise on ten acres of alfalfa.

With the sun blazing, the cocky Missourian who had pledged to "give 'em hell," proceeded to do so for 25 minutes. Truman had made a few hand-written edits to the speech and added a few remarks during delivery, but he otherwise stuck to the prepared text, which was an unabashed frontal assault on Republican governance. His underdog message began with the nexus between peace and prosperity. Then, he launched into a scathing attack.

"You remember the big boom and the great crash of 1929. You remember that in 1932 the position of the farmer had become so desperate that there was actual violence in many farming communities. You remember that insurance companies and banks took over much of the land of small independent farmers—223,000 farmers lost their farms.

"... There is every reason for the American farmer to expect a long period of good prices—if he continues to get a fair deal. His great danger is that he may be voted out of a fair deal, and into a Republican deal. . . . The Wall Street reactionaries are not satisfied with being rich. They want to increase their power and their privileges, regardless of what happens to the other fellow. They are gluttons of privilege."



The Republican-leaning throng did not react to this blatant swipe at the GOP. The redoubtable Truman took another jab with the same invective. "These gluttons of privilege are now putting up fabulous sums of money to elect a Republican administration.

"... The Republicans are telling industrial workers that the high cost of food in the cities is due to this Government's farm policy. On the other hand, the Republicans are telling the farmers that the high cost of manufactured goods on the farm is due to this Government's labor policy. That's plain hokum. It's an old political trick. 'If you can't convince 'em, confuse 'em.'" The crowd responded with faint laughter.

"... This Republican Congress has already stuck a pitchfork in the farmer's back." As he spoke, Truman turned to his right and chuckled, seemingly conceding

this soapbox exaggeration. Again, the crowd laughed.

"They are preventing us from setting up storage bins that you will need in order to get the support price for your grain. When the farmers have to sell their wheat below the support price, . . . they can thank this same Republican 80th Congress that gave the speculative grain trade a rake-off at your expense.

"... In this 20th century, every great step forward has come during Democratic administrations of the National Government. Every movement backward has come under Republican auspices, and it is the people who have paid dearly for these reactionary moves." With this comparison, Truman received his only boos.

"I'm not asking you just to vote for me. Vote for yourselves! Vote for your farms! Vote for the standard of living that you have won under a Democratic administration!



SHSI (DES MOINES)

Get out there on Election Day, and vote for your future.”

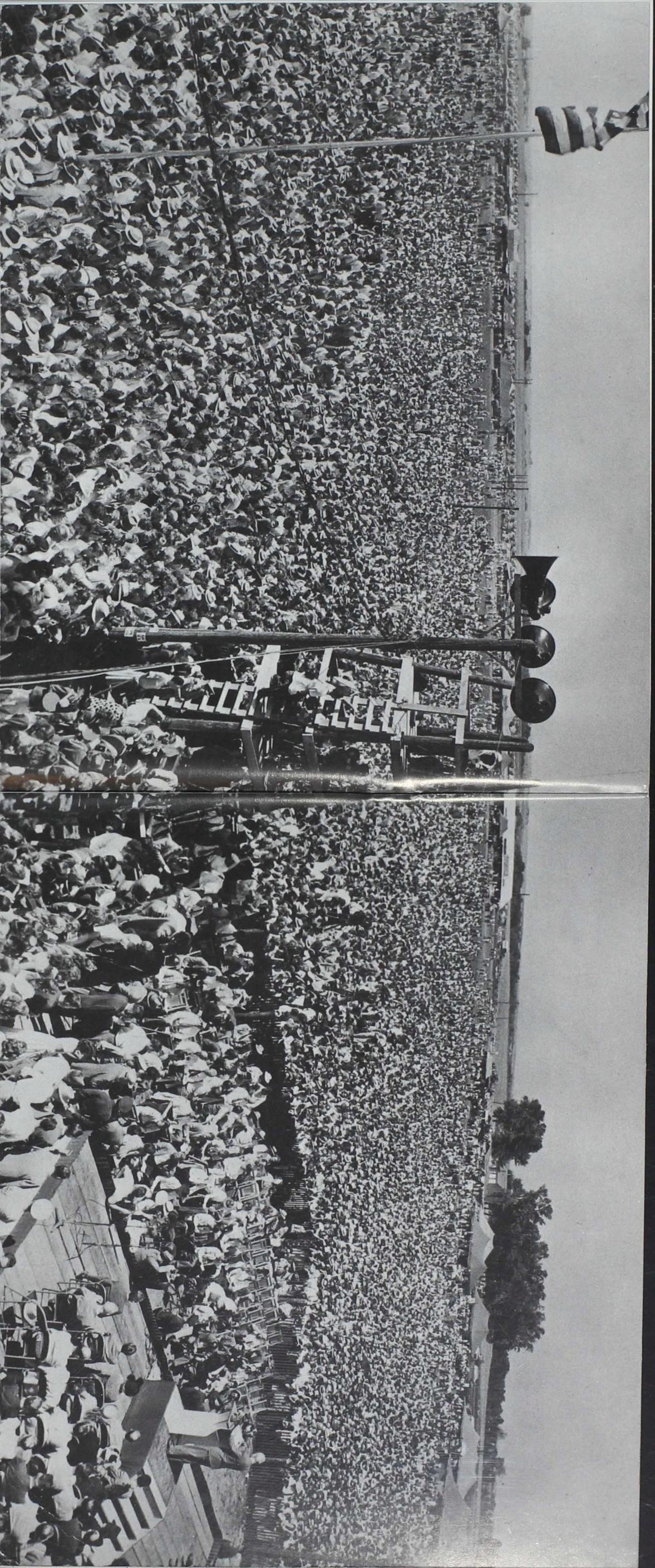
Truman received applause 13 times during the speech (and used the phrase “gluttons of privilege” seven times). The audience was friendly, but not enthusiastic. It was not a partisan gathering, and unlike at some later whistle-stops, Truman’s remarks did not bring people to a cheering frenzy. The president was speaking to down-to-earth people—a multitude of farmers (a few wealthy but most not), city dwellers, working-class families—who mainly had come to the plowing match for a good time, and to see an American president in person.

Years later, Esther Peitzman of Johnston recalled coming for just that reason. She and her husband, Herbert, walked nearly a mile from a parking lot, carrying blankets and thermoses of water. Accompanied by

**To woo the farm vote, Truman sought common ground with the plowing match audience of 75,000 to 100,000: “I don’t need to tell you how long it takes to get a good crop, and how big the dangers are. . . . At the last minute, a sudden drought or flood can wipe you out.”**

Gilbert and Mabel Collins, who farmed near Johnston, they stood 100 yards directly in front of the main stage. Peitzman thought that Truman sounded decisive and “said what he thought.” As Democrats, the Peitzmans hoped Truman would win. After the speech, they watched farming demonstrations. It was dusk before they got home.

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SHIRI ODES MONIES

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After the speech, state committee chair Jake More and others escorted the perspiring Truman from the scorching hot stage to a stifling hot tent. The temperature was nearly 90 as the guests sat down at tables spread with red and white checkered tablecloths, set with white china and cut glass, and adorned with vases of zinnias. Truman sat between farmers Howard Walker of Dexter and Ralph Mortimer of Dallas Center, with Bess and Margaret a few seats away. B. J. Palmer,

president of WHO Radio (Des Moines) and WOC Radio (Dayton) sat down directly across from the president and hollered, "Anyone who doesn't take off his coat has got a dirty shirt." Truman laughed, and promptly shed his suit jacket. Reporters noted that everyone "ate heartily of fried chicken, mashed potatoes, buttered corn, baked beans, tomatoes, relish, cheese and coffee," with huge slices of apple pie for dessert. Truman talked about the delicious food and the large turnout, but not politics.

During the meal, a few of the president's staff played a prank on Margaret, telling her that local leaders had requested she sing "Ave Maria." Her father was in on the joke. Margaret, who had been trained as a concert singer, was nevertheless justifiably anxious and unprepared to sing on a stage in an open field. After a few moments of fretful contemplation, she marched over to her father and asked him to call it off, which he did.

Following lunch, an ebullient Truman was photographed with Jean Carter of Dallas Center, queen of the plowing match, and he then set out to view farming demonstrations. Walking briskly over a newly plowed terrace, he spotted a woman fidgeting with her camera. He paused so she could snap a photo. "I hope it turns out for her," he remarked to Plannbeck.

Back near the stage, Plannbeck was urged to hold an impromptu interview on stage. The president "grinned widely" while the crowd gathered and the press corps scrambled back to their seats. Truman talked warmly about his farm days, a device he used in many interviews. Plannbeck brought up his reputed ability to "plow one of the straightest furrows of anyone in your community." "That statement was made by a very prejudiced witness," Truman replied. "That statement was made by my mother. I did have a reputation though, of being able to sow a 160-acre field without a skip place

in it. My father used to always raise so much fuss about a skip place on an oat field or a wheat field." Truman had begun the trip with an aching throat. "The dust at Dexter, Iowa just west of Des Moines, didn't help it any," he wrote later. "Dr. Graham just sprayed, mopped and caused me to gargle bad tasting liquids until the throat gave up and got well."

**D**es Moines, 4:10 p.m., back platform. In high spirits, the president boarded the train as the Des Moines Moose band played the state song. He had returned to Des Moines in a 50-car motorcade from Dexter, waving to 80,000 spectators along the way. Now he savored the turnout at the plowing matches. "I estimated that there were 10 acres of people, and there are 43,560 square feet to an acre. Now you figure how many people were there! I judge that there were at least 100,000 out there, and it was a most cordial and pleasant place to be."

Despite the big crowds in Iowa, *Time* and *Life* magazines did not give the underdog Truman much credit. *Time* reported that Truman's Dexter speech had sounded "frantic—and just a little ludicrous. The performance was interesting, but since Mr. Truman has never shown much capacity for leadership, it promised little of accomplishment." *Life* published a photo of a small group of farmers at Dexter, which included a woman shading her eyes from the sun and an elderly man holding a straw hat, but it was without context, thereby downplaying the huge turnout, which most reporters estimated between 75,000 and 100,000.

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to wake up to the situation. . . . Now, there are people in this United States that would like to go back to that condition, when labor was receiving an average of 45 cents an hour and when the farmer was getting 3 cents for hogs and 15 cents for corn and burning the corn because it wasn't worth the price. The same people now have made an attempt to do away with the price support program which is responsible for this immense production which we have had in the last 7 years and which has kept millions of people in this world alive. . . . I have come to the conclusion that the people in Iowa like their President and appreciate what he's trying to do for the common people."

As at other whistle-stops, the throng responded most enthusiastically when Truman asked if they would like to meet his family. Then, with the platform full of Trumans, the president noticed Steven Carter, the Fourth Congressional District candidate from Leon, standing nearby, whom he had intended to introduce earlier. Carter recalled, "Two boys came alongside the car with an ear of corn in each hand. Not knowing that they were my own boys, for nothing had been said to him, he, while his protectors were shuddering, separated the crowd and beckoned the two little boys to come forward. He picked them up in his arms and held them and took from each their ear of corn. I told him they were my boys."

Carter continued, "At that instant he turned to me and he said: 'You know, today I won the election at Dexter, Iowa.'"

**T**ruman made later stops that day in Missouri at Trenton, Polo, Kansas City, and his hometown of Independence. A sleepy president went to bed near midnight at 219 North Delaware, where he had lived since marrying Bess in 1919.

Most reporters were nonplussed about the Iowa crowds and agreed that Truman's assault on Republicans was the desperate act of an inept leader to frighten voters. Commentary by the *Washington Post's* Joseph Alsop typified that of most political pundits: the "flatly unemotional President is almost comically miscast in the old role of William Jennings Bryan," the great orator and Democratic Party populist who lost three presidential elections.

Two days after Truman left Iowa, continuing his 15-day tour out west and back, Republican nominee Thomas Dewey campaigned in Des Moines in his only Iowa appearance. According to Truman's staffer Matthew Connelly, the New York governor made a tactical

mistake in dogging Truman cross-country, practically following the same route. Dewey came off as arrogant and urbane, a city slicker. In contrast, Truman was down-to-earth and straightforward. A reporter from the Dewey train told Batt that Dewey's speeches were all the same, while Truman's were alive with local lore and issues.

Truman ended the campaign tour on October 2. In 15 days he had traveled 8,600 miles, made 124 campaign stops, and delivered 134 speeches. In mid-October, a Gallup poll indicated that Dewey was still leading in 20 states, Truman in 10, and Strom Thurmond in 4. *Newsweek* polled 50 leading political reporters (including Richard Wilson of the *Des Moines Register and Tribune*). They unanimously predicted a Dewey victory.

But Truman shocked nonbelievers on Election Day. Contrary to conventional wisdom, he carried 28 states, including Iowa, and received 303 electoral votes. In his memoir, Truman proudly pointed out that he carried the large agricultural states: Missouri, California, Iowa (by 3 percentage points), Illinois, Texas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Ohio. Despite splits at the extreme ends of the Democratic Party, where ultraconservatives defected to the States' Rights (Dixiecrat) candidate, Strom Thurmond, and ultraliberals to the third-party progressive candidate, Iowan Henry A. Wallace, the combative Truman had harnessed enough of the old Roosevelt coalition of liberals, laborers, minorities, and farmers to win.

Over the years, journalists who witnessed the campaign have recounted and reexamined their impressions of who would win. News correspondent Robert G. Nixon, who rode on the Truman Special throughout the campaign, began to "question all the political wise-aces who were saying that Truman had not a chance to win," when a farmer in Dexter told him, "What [Truman] says and how he says it makes sense." Robert Donovan of the Republican *New York Herald-Tribune* thought Dewey would be elected but afterward believed that Truman won the election at the National Plowing Match. James Reston of the *New York Times* said that the 1948 election was "a case of who got it wrong more, the Republicans or the reporters." According to CBS News reporter George Herman, post-election mail from people who had participated in Roper polls revealed that they had changed their minds for three reasons: (1) they couldn't vote for a guy with a mustache; (2) Truman had run so hard they just could not vote against him; and (3) their grandparents or parents were Democrats, and they couldn't bring themselves to vote for a Republican. Truman biographer David McCullough tells of a Guthrie County, Iowa, farmer

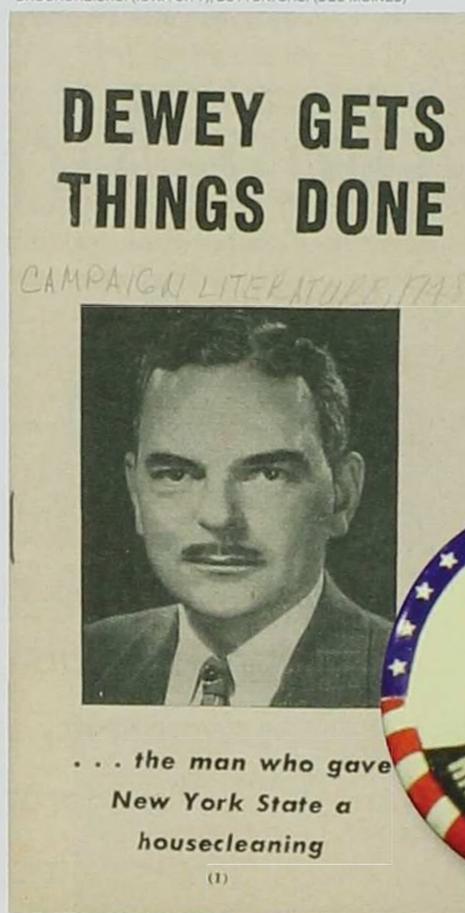
who was going to support Dewey, "but when voting time came, I just couldn't do it. I remembered . . . all the good things that have come under the Democrats."

Historians, too, have debated the role of the whistle-stops and the Dexter speech on Truman's victory. In Iowa and throughout the Midwest, Truman was idiomatic, sure-footed, and hard-hitting. His unmerciful attacks helped convince voters that moderates were not in control of the Republican Party and that conservatives could not be trusted to ensure prosperity.

Perhaps the people's common-sense calculation that they had no reason to throw out a Democrat was as persuasive as declining grain prices and Truman's dire forecast of another Republican depression. Certainly the immense turnouts in the Tall Corn State provided political adrenaline to Truman's whistle-stop odyssey.

The hot oratory of the Democratic campaign may have had adverse policy consequences. A half-century later, in a letter between two members of the research team, Frank Kelly told Batt, "I [later] worked for the Senate and encountered some thoughtful Republicans who felt that Truman's hard blows in the campaign had been a factor in the atmosphere of bitter partisanship that made it difficult to get bipartisan support for Truman's [Fair Deal] proposals." Even so, Truman's luckless Fair Deal plans were the foundation for some later New Frontier and Great Society programs, and his foreign policy the blueprint for victory in the Cold War. ❖

BROCHURE: SHSI (IOWA CITY); BUTTON: SHSI (DES MOINES)



Claims of what Governor Thomas Dewey got done in his home state were trumped by what Harry Truman got done on Election Day.



Author David E. Balducchi works for the U.S. Department of Labor in Washington, D.C., where he became acquainted with individuals who participated in the whistle-stop campaign. This article is dedicated to Albert Balducchi, Iowan and World War II veteran, who voted for Harry S. Truman.

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

The Harry S. Truman Library Web site at [www.trumanlibrary.org](http://www.trumanlibrary.org) offers a wealth of primary sources related to Truman's 1948 campaign; these include speeches, press conferences, and oral history interviews with David C. Bell, John Franklin Carter, Oscar Chapman, Joseph A. Fox, Charles Murphy, Robert G. Nixon, and George Tames. The author interviewed the following: William L. Batt Jr. (October 16, 1990); Jack Bright (March 3, 1998); and Esther Peitzman (October 3, 1998). Lectures by and interviews with Robert J. Donovan (May 9, 1995), George Elsey (November 17, 2005), and George Herman (December 7, 2003) were also helpful. An unpublished letter from Frank Kelly to William Batt Jr. (February 23, 1998) is in the author's possession.

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Detailed annotations are in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files, State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City).

# New to the National Register

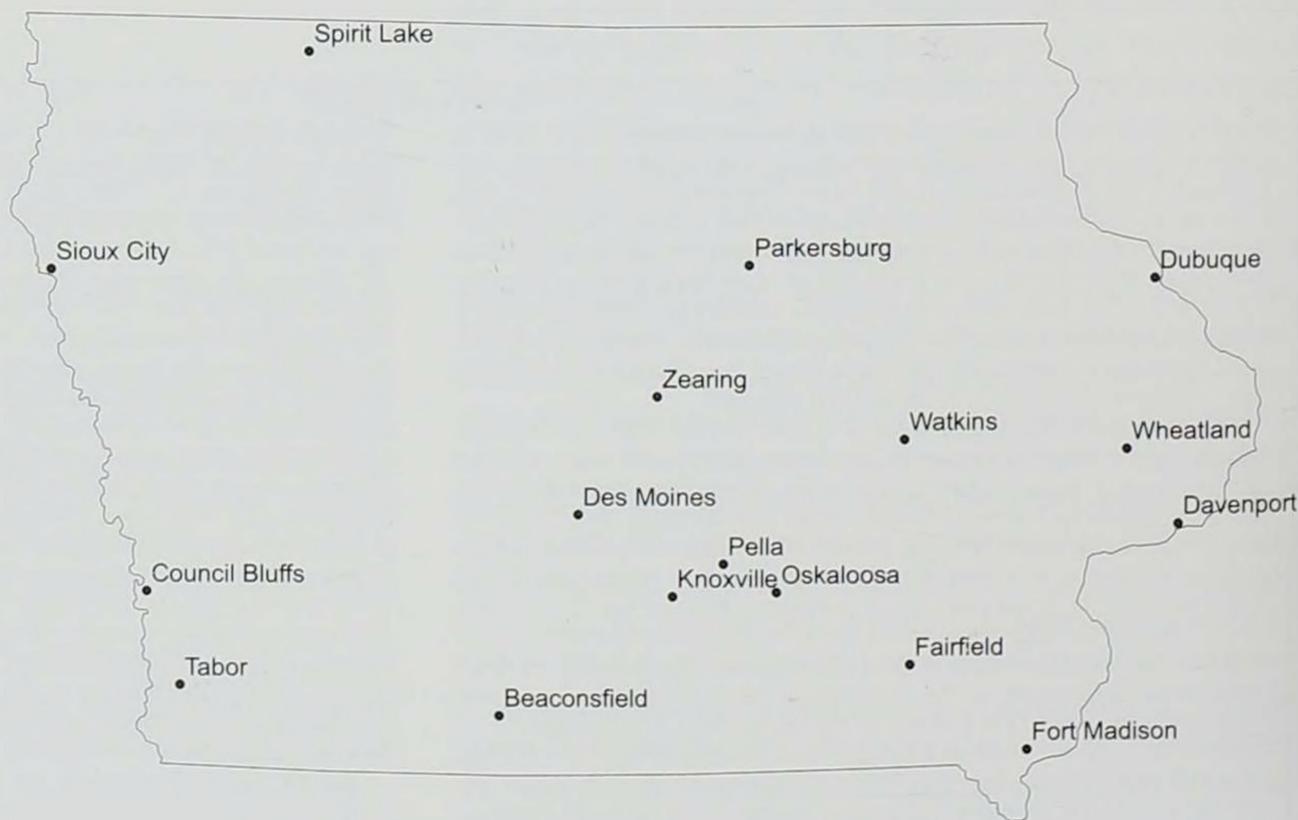
by Barbara Mitchell,  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer



The National Register of Historic Places is our nation's list of properties that are considered most worthy of preservation. The properties are tangible links to community, state, and national history.

Iowa properties listed on the National Register for 2007 are located across the state and represent a wide range of types: rustic, rural, and religious; commercial buildings and hotels; the homes of famous individuals; buildings used as advertisements; a brewery; and a stop on the Underground Railroad.

Curious about the National Register of Historic Places — and other matters related to historic preservation? The staff at the State Historical Society of Iowa can assist you.  
[www.iowaHistory.org/preservation](http://www.iowaHistory.org/preservation)  
Phone: 515-281-8743.  
600 E. Locust, Des Moines, Iowa 50319





### Netcott-Pfeiffer House

The Netcott-Pfeiffer House in Parkersburg is an Italianate double house, exhibiting the high artistic values of a master builder. Built in 1894, it is a fine early example of the work of the Netcott family, a well-known architectural and contracting firm in the region. The Netcotts were actively working in Parkersburg during a growth spurt and housing shortage after the city's disastrous 1893 fire. The house served as the Netcotts' residence and possibly their base of operations. In 1896, it was purchased by brothers Gustavus and Paul Pfeiffer, who were Cedar Falls druggists whose joint venture and partnership in Parkersburg would eventually become Pfizer, one of the world's largest pharmaceutical companies. Although their company would not see large success until after they moved to St. Louis, the brothers continued to support Parkersburg throughout their lives. Other renowned residents of the property included Edwin Thomas Jaynes, an international leader in statistical physics and probability theory; and Pauline Pfeiffer-Hemingway, who was but a toddler in this house, and later married Ernest Hemingway. Melodie McLean prepared the nomination and owns the house.

### Beaconsfield Supply Store

The name Hy-Vee is ubiquitous throughout Iowa and neighboring states. The Beaconsfield Supply Store was the first home of the grocery chain with the "helpful smile in every aisle." Built in 1916 to serve the small town of Beaconsfield in southern Iowa, the modest brick building was purchased by Charles Hyde and David Vredenburg—Hy and Vee—around 1930. Although both men had other retailing experience, this building represents their first partnership. For three years it provided food and general supplies while operating under three different managers. All the while, Hyde & Vredenburg were opening stores in Iowa and Missouri. After they closed this store in 1933, other retailers operated out of the building until the Beaconsfield Telephone Co-op bought it in 1956. Today, Hy-Vee is Iowa's largest private employer and operates stores in seven states. Beaconsfield, on the other hand, is Iowa's smallest incorporated city with a population of just 20. This building stands as a rare remnant of Beaconsfield's role in Iowa's Golden Age of Agriculture. It is listed at both the local and state levels of significance. Marilyn Gahm, Hy-Vee History Center Coordinator, prepared the nomination for the City of Beaconsfield.



### Williges Building

Sioux City's Williges Building, built in 1930, represents one of the great preservation successes of 2007. Threatened with demolition in early spring, the building became the focus of local, state, and national preservation groups, who banded together to convince the building owner to sell rather than demolish. The building is nationally significant as a late manifestation of early Prairie School commercial architecture in the United States. Designed by William Steele and his partner George Hilgers, the building exhibits an enduring allegiance to the architectural ideas of Louis Sullivan, who advocated the integration of function and rich architectural ornament rendered in terra cotta (see opposite page). It is the last building William Steele designed for Sioux City and one of the few commercial buildings by him to survive. It is also significant as one of the last surviving examples of a manufacturing and retail facility for Sioux City's fur industry, represented on the facade by terra cotta capitals ornamented with stylized animal pelts set in foliage. The nomination was prepared by Matthew W. Anderson and Glenda Castleberry of SiouxLandmark, with assistance by Paula Mohr and Barbara Mitchell of the State Historic Preservation Office.



ALL PHOTOS PROVIDED BY HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE, SHSI (DES MOINES). MAP BY DON HIRT

### D. S. Chamberlain Building

The D. S. Chamberlain Building in Des Moines is the earliest surviving automobile salesroom and garage designed by Iowa architects Proudfoot, Bird, and Rawson, Iowa's preeminent architectural firm from the early 20th century. Proudfoot and Bird first worked in Kansas and Utah before settling in Des Moines in 1896. Within five years, they gained statewide prominence with several university commissions and the design of the Polk County Courthouse. Des Moines was once a state and regional wholesale and manufacturing center, with auto sales exploding after 1910. Once a common property type in downtown Des Moines, the auto salesroom and garage is now rare—even along "Auto Row" on Locust Street just west of downtown. By 1917, when the building was constructed, Iowa led the nation in auto ownership. Over 100 motorcar-related businesses were located in Des Moines, including dealers, garage/repair, accessory sales, and manufacturers. Jim Jacobsen of History Pays! prepared the nomination as part of a historic preservation tax credit project.



### Hunter School

In the rural area outside of Tabor, Hunter School is the only remaining of 11 country schools in Green Township, Fremont County. The common one-story, gable-front school is augmented here with an asymmetrical vestibule and belfry. Built in 1901 to replace an earlier rural school nearby, Hunter School was designed and constructed by a local contractor, G. W. Clark. It served as a school until 1920, when the Tabor School District was consolidated and students began to be bussed to Tabor. Until 1990, the building continued to serve as a township meeting and polling place, but without modern restrooms, running water, and electricity, it recently fell into disuse. Today it remains a local landmark, preserved by the community for the history it represents. Although it has been covered in vinyl siding, the original wood remains underneath and it still very much reads as the quintessential one-room country school. Patricia Eckhardt of Eckhardt Research prepared the nomination. Jane Dwornicki is the owner.

### Evergreen Ridge Stock Farm Historic District

South of Fairfield, the Evergreen Ridge Stock Farm Historic District calls attention to the importance of draft horses for powering farm equipment before mechanization. In 1910, Jacob Maasdam and Edward Wheeler expanded an existing farmstead on this site to import, breed, and sell Percheron draft horses, America's most popular workhorse for breeding from the 1880s to the 1930s. The design of the buildings is attributed to the Loudon Machinery Company of Fairfield, a leader in the Progressive architectural movement of the early 20th century. Extensive use of poured concrete, efficient floor plans, and labor-reducing mechanical devices all point to Loudon Company's work. Loudon



equipment, door hangers, and overhead tracks are also found in the buildings. Today, Evergreen Ridge Stock Farm is situated on a portion of a recreational trail. The Maasdam Barn Preservation Committee is rehabilitating the buildings as an educational center to demonstrate the role of draft horses in the development of regional agriculture. William C. Page prepared the nomination.

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### Lincoln Township Mausoleum

The Lincoln Township Mausoleum in Zeoring is architecturally significant as one of the first monolithic concrete buildings in Iowa. It is also a rare example of a public mausoleum in a small Iowa town. The mausoleum was built between 1911 and 1912, when the use of poured concrete as a building material was not quite as ubiquitous in America as it is today. Rather than leave the concrete exposed with seam lines from the wood formwork, the builder covered it with stucco and painted it white. Originally the buttresses were left a natural concrete color. The interior, which holds over 200 crypts, is faced with white marble. The building was probably designed and built by the Iowa Mausoleum Company of Waterloo, and blends several architectural styles including Mission, Late Gothic Revival, and Classical Revival. The mausoleum was built with the enterprise and energy of the Lincoln Township Mausoleum Association, which raised the funds by selling vaults in the small town of 461. William C. Page prepared the nomination for the Cemetery Trustees, who are working to preserve the historic building.



### Julius and Anine Oversen House

The Julius and Anine Oversen House in Sioux City is an excellent local interpretation of the Italianate style. Located in the Morningside neighborhood, the property retains its original carriage-house, hitching posts, cistern, and retaining wall. Built around the turn of the last century, the house may have been designed and constructed by Julius Oversen himself; the home of a builder often served as an advertisement for his work. A bricklayer and mason, Oversen was locally known for having been in charge of purchasing materials and constructing the Sergeant Floyd Monument, today a National Historic Landmark. As the *Sioux City Journal* of 1901 noted, "A few deft turns of the trowel in the hands of Julius Oversen and the little piece of Kettle River sandstone had found its resting place for unknown years to come." The Oversen House is a very late example of the Italianate style, exhibiting a low-pitched roof with decorative brackets and tall, arched windows. The wrap-around porch—not typical for an Italianate house—more than likely represents Oversen's personal tastes. Two smaller houses built by him in the neighborhood feature the same Italianate features paired with wrap-around porches. Glenda Castleberry of SiouxLandmark prepared this nomination for the owner, Patricia Glisar.

### First Christian Church

The First Christian Church, built between 1858 and 1862, calls attention to an unstable time in the religious and social history of Pella. Dutch immigrants had begun settling in Pella in 1847 under the leadership of Henry P. Scholte, who had managed the business and religious affairs of the immigrants since before their departure from Holland. The immigrants, dissenters from the state Reformed Church in the Netherlands and suspicious of centralized authority in the church, sought no affiliation with existing denominations in the United States, Reformed or otherwise. Instead, they formed the "Christian Church." By the mid-1850s, frustrated with Scholte's leadership in secular matters, the church removed him from the pulpit. The ensuing split in the church, exacerbated by a national schism among Dutch Protestants in the U.S, resulted in the founding of the "First Christian Church." The split shattered Pella's otherwise religious homogeneity and plagued the community throughout the rest of the 19th century. The church is the only Pella religious building surviving from this period of great divide. William C. Page prepared the nomination for the Historic Pella Trust, which purchased the building in 1995 to protect its future.





### Youngville Café

Built in the early 1930s as a one-stop roadside business on the transcontinental Lincoln Highway, the Youngville Café near Watkins is a great example of the new options available to female business owners in the early 20th century. Built by Joe Young for his widowed daughter, Lizzie Wheeler, the café developed a family-friendly atmosphere with fried chicken, homemade pie, live piano music, groceries, and even a few slot machines. Three small rental cabins completed the operation but are no longer standing. It also served as the living quarters for Lizzie and subsequent operators who ran the business for her when she moved to Cedar Rapids. The Youngville Café was in operation until 1967, when it could no longer accommodate the number of cars, trucks, and buses that stopped there. Designed in a Tudor Revival style, the distinctive building features a dynamic roof shingle pattern and bright red trim. The facility was recently reopened, featuring a museum, café, and farmers market. Leah Rogers of Tallgrass Historians L.C. prepared the nomination for the owner, the Youngville Highway History Association.

### Louis C. and Amelia L. Schmidt House

The Louis and Amelia Schmidt House in Davenport is an excellent example of the middle-class interpretation of the Queen Anne style of architecture. The Schmidt House has a standard core of a two-story, hipped roof box with lower projecting gables. This asymmetrical arrangement is augmented with other Queen Anne elements, which provide further interest and detail, including fishscale wood shingles, dentils, beads, and multi-light windows. The interior of the Schmidt House reflects the style and craftsmanship of the original owner, with turned spindles, decorative newel posts, and carved detailing on the stairs, as well as large pocket doors, and a built-in china cabinet. Most likely built by Louis Schmidt in 1895, the house may also have served as an advertisement for his construction business. The later porch addition exhibits the Craftsman influence of the 1910s and 1920s, when Schmidt likely constructed it, too. Louis and Amelia Schmidt lived in the house until their deaths in the 1940s. Rebecca McCarley of SPARK Consulting prepared the nomination. She is also the proud owner of the house.



### Chevra B'nai Yisroel Synagogue

The Chevra B'nai Yisroel Synagogue in Council Bluffs is significant as a notable example of a public building designed by local architect J. Chris Jensen and for its significant association with the settlement and evolution of the Jewish religious and ethnic community in the Council Bluffs-Omaha region. The building was constructed in 1931 to replace the city's first synagogue, destroyed by a disastrous fire. The building's design is subdued and somewhat stylish with its tripartite facade and projecting main entryway. The architect was born in Denmark in 1873 and was working in Omaha by the time he reached his early 20s. One of only 14 remaining synagogues in the state, Chevra B'Nai Yisroel represents what was once a thriving Jewish community. The prosperity of the congregation required the building to be enlarged in 1962, but today it struggles to maintain membership. The synagogue is one of the longest-lasting and most prominent symbols to represent the Jewish heritage of Council Bluffs. Leah Rogers and Megan Masana of Tallgrass Historians L.C. prepared the nomination for the current B'nai Israel congregation.



### Edmundson Park Historic District

Oskaloosa's Edmundson Park is named after James Edmundson, who grew up in Oskaloosa and became a prominent lawyer and businessman in Council Bluffs. The park is significant as an example of a local public works project, accomplished through the New Deal's Works Progress Administration, and as a fine example of landscape design by noted landscape architect Ray Wyrick. Wyrick was well known in early 20th-century landscape architecture. He served on the Des Moines Boulevard Committee and drew plans for several green spaces in Des Moines and cemeteries throughout Iowa. In 1936, Wyrick developed the park's natural amphitheater so that it could be used for outdoor plays, concerts, and meetings, and planned the rustic stone and log entrance gates, bridges, shelters, and fireplaces, built by the WPA. A bathhouse and swimming pool finish out the park design. Today a new recreational trail links the historic and modern features of Edmundson Park. Molly Myers Naumann prepared the nomination for the Oskaloosa Historic Preservation Commission.

### Lincoln-Fairview Historic District

The Lincoln-Fairview Historic District in Council Bluffs represents over 100 years of residential design and development, beginning with the establishment of a burying ground for Mormon migrants who died on their way west in 1846. The picturesque Fairview Cemetery includes a monument to commemorate Abraham Lincoln's 1859 visit to Council Bluffs, and the cast bronze Black Angel, memorializing Ruth Anne Dodge, wife of Grenville M. Dodge. Located along a south-facing hillside of a high bluff, the historic district includes over 200 properties, including several architect- and contractor-designed homes built by prosperous merchants, contractors, politicians, and professionals. Eight of the homes belonged to people associated with the Woodward Candy Company, which at its peak was the town's largest employer and was thought to be the largest candy business west of the Mississippi. Most of the homes were built between 1880 and 1920 and represent the typical architectural styles and house types of that period: Gothic, Colonial and Tudor Revivals, Italianate, Queen Anne, and Craftsman, as well as vernacular foursquares, cottages, and double houses. Leah Rogers of Tallgrass Historians L.C. prepared the nomination.



### City Hotel

This colorful 1893 building in Wheatland was designed and built by an Italian artist who worked as a photographer, carpenter, mason, and self-taught architect. Antheona Araah immigrated to America in 1859 at the age of nine and in 1881 married a native Iowan. By then, he was already working as a photo-artist under the name "Professor Araah," and traveling from town to town in eastern Iowa with his photo-gallery wagon in tow. When he worked in Wheatland in the early 1890s, it was a hustling market stop on one of Chicago & North Western's main lines. Wheatland was experiencing growth but was also plagued by fires, which set in motion civic improvements including waterworks and a new brick-and-tile plant. This hotel replaced one destroyed by fire just months before. Professor Araah was given the job of rebuilding, using local brick. His creative use of colored brick, curving forms, and skilled masonry techniques created a functional and aesthetically pleasing design based in the late Victorian era of its construction. Jan Olive Nash with Eric Lana and Amy Smothers of Tallgrass Historians L.C. prepared the nomination for owner Kenneth Rohling of Rohling Enterprises.





### Todd House and Tabor Antislavery Historic District

Built in 1852, the John Todd House was first listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 as the most visible building associated with Tabor's involvement in the Underground Railroad. The nomination was amended last year to recognize the property's broader national and regional significance and to include Tabor City Park as a key element in the Tabor Antislavery Historic District. In the 1850s, national unrest revolved around the creation of Kansas Territory, and hostility broke out between proslavery groups and antislavery settlers, known as "Free Staters." In 1856, Tabor's location in southwest Iowa and its antislavery populace, including Reverend John Todd, made it the ideal destination for Free State settlers, a safe harbor for Free State fighters, and a storage site for weapons and supplies. By 1857, John Brown would adopt Tabor as a training ground for his men, working on plans that would conclude in his attack on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry in 1859, cementing his legacy and leading to his execution for first-degree murder, treason, and inciting a slave insurrection. The district will be nominated for designation as a National Historic Landmark in the coming year. Rebecca McCarley of Spark Consulting prepared the nomination, which was edited by Lowell Soike.

### Knoxville WPA Athletic Field Historic District

The Knoxville WPA Athletic Field Historic District is one of the great preservation "wins" of the last few years. Thanks to the Save Our Stadium Committee, Knoxville citizens, school board members, and a lot of hard work, the Athletic Field is not only listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it will be preserved for future generations of athletes and fans. Locally significant as a well-preserved and notable example of a make-work project of the Great Depression era, it is also a unique example of an Iowa recreational facility executed in a Medieval-inspired version of Rustic architecture. It is one of only two known examples of WPA high school stadiums in Iowa to use native stone and the only known Iowa example to use rustic stonework in a castle-themed design. Built on a former city reservoir, the athletic field takes advantage of the existing basin and is situated below the surrounding ground level. A public pool also took advantage of the basin until it was filled in several years ago. The bathhouse and mother's pavilion remain, along with the city water tower, a stone storage building, stone gateways, retaining walls, stone seating areas, a track, and a playing field. Leah Rogers of Tallgrass Historians L.C. prepared the nomination for the Save Our Stadium Committee.

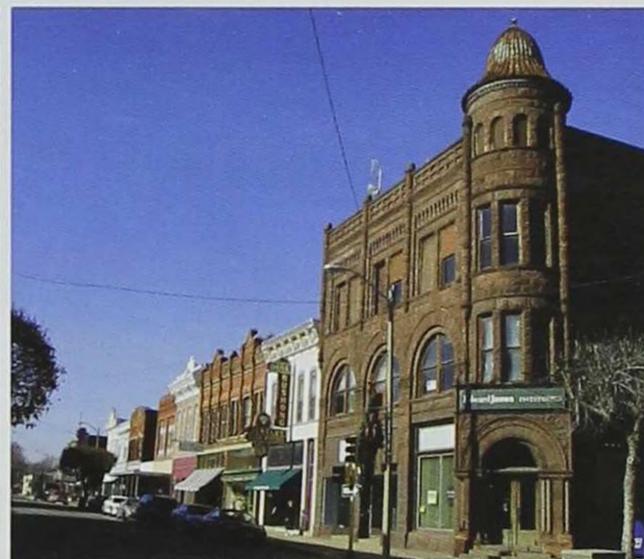


### Antlers Hotel

Antlers Hotel represents early 20th-century railroad tourism in Spirit Lake and the Iowa Great Lakes Region. Beginning in the late 1880s and continuing to the early 1920s, a coalition of railroad companies, local and national entrepreneurs, and sportsmen turned northwest Iowa into an upscale tourist destination. The Antlers Hotel was built in 1902, during the heyday of this tourism boom, and was widely regarded as the finest hotel in Spirit Lake and the surrounding communities. Increasing tourism throughout the early 1900s resulted in an addition to the hotel in 1910. As the automobile culture took over in the 1920s and later, however, Iowa Lakes tourism evolved and the railroad-era resorts began a steady decline. Today, the Antlers Hotel is one of a small number of surviving buildings directly associated with the railroad era's tourism in the region. Sam Erickson of Community Housing Initiatives prepared the nomination as part of a historic preservation tax credit project.

### Fort Madison Downtown Commercial Historic District

Situated at a bend on the Mississippi, Fort Madison developed east to west along a natural plateau between the river and the bluffs. Though Fort Madison's rich history reaches back much earlier, the oldest buildings within the Downtown Commercial Historic District date to the 1850s. River traffic and the eventual arrival of the railroad helped Fort Madison evolve into a vibrant commercial and industrial center. The historic district remained the heart of the community even as other commercial nodes developed to serve the growing city. Fort Madison's commercial district has stylistic attributes dating from all of the architectural periods through which construction spanned: Federal and Greek Revival during the early years, Romanesque Revival and Richardsonian Romanesque during the late 1800s, Queen Anne and various Revival styles at the turn of the last century, and Craftsman, Art Deco, and Streamline Moderne during the early 1900s. The architecture also illustrates postwar attempts to improve the district with new street lighting, storefronts, and general modernizing. Rebecca McCarley prepared the nomination for the Fort Madison Historic Preservation Commission.



### Dubuque Star Brewery

Dubuque was home to a large number of brewers beginning from its earliest years, perhaps due to the city's prime location on Iowa's northern reaches of the Mississippi River, a natural source for ice before modern improvements in pasteurization and refrigeration. Representing a late phase of brew-complex design and construction, the Dubuque Star Brewery has statewide architectural significance for its Romanesque styling by Chicago architect Fred Rautert—a German, of course. His design integrated the chimney of a previous distillery on the site, allowed for future expansion, and, naturally, included a saloon. The Dubuque Star Brewery is also significant for its role in the brewing industry in Iowa. Built in 1899, it was the first Iowa brewery to reopen after prohibition ended in 1933, with Dubuque's Mayor Mark Kane filling the first keg for shipping directly to Governor Clyde Herring. For years Dubuque Star was Iowa's only functioning brewery before the re-emergence of microbrews. Jim Jacobsen of History Pays! prepared the nomination as part of a historic preservation tax credit project.



# Made from Mud

## *Iowa Potters & Potteries*

### 1830–1930

Leander T. Stuart sat down one day in 1850 to write a friend in Indiana. Stuart owned “eighty acres of Prairie and forty of timber,” but his land held even more promise. “I have a bank of stone ware clay on my land the best I have ever seen. I have a kiln that you would say was first rate.” He continued, “In May, June & July I burnt five thousand gal. of stone ware which I sold at the kiln at 7 cents per gallon cash. I will burn four or five thousand gallon more between this and cold weather and then I will have to stop until the latter part of April.”

Blessed with abundant beds of clay, Iowans developed a thriving pottery industry in the 19th century. Leander Stuart, like all potters, knew that when fired to maturity, clay becomes extremely durable, harder than many metals. It undergoes an irreversible transformation and assumes a new utility, beauty, and value.

Most of Iowa’s potteries were small enterprises that produced about a dozen kinds of vessels—pitchers, churns, preserve jars, butter pots, jugs, milk pans, cream pots, chamber pots, and flower pots, as well as items made to order. Pottery was the near universal container in 19th-century America. For holding and storing food and liquids, there were few other options.

*by Michael O. Smith*  
*Photography by John Zeller*

Iowa potteries were concentrated where deposits of clay and coal (for kiln fuel) were available, especially in the Des Moines River valley or around Fort Dodge, Davenport, Des Moines, and Sioux City.

The first step in stoneware production was to mine and prepare the clay, described in an 1869 Iowa newspaper as “dirty work and no more enticing to a dandy than coal mining. The mines here are drifts or levels, being entered by an opening on the side of the bluffs. The clay is not soft and pliable when taken out, but is a soft stone. It is . . . soaked about two days in water till it softens down to a workable state. It is first ground by the same process as brickmakers employ, then it is kneaded and ‘spanked’ by hand while all impurities are detected by skilled means and picked out. The air is also worked out by this means, the same as the baker uses to get air in. It is then taken to the turner’s and moulders’ wheels in balls weighed out in such sizes as are necessary for the particular utensil they are to form.”

Potters also prepared clay in pug mills.

Clay and water in a tank were mixed by paddles attached to a center rotating post, which was powered by a horse or a mule.

Stoneware decoration in 19th-century Iowa was decidedly Germanic, with motifs that could be traced back hundreds of years to the Westerwald region. Even Iowa potteries owned by non-Germans used variations of tulips, with vines, swags, swirls, dots, X’s, lines, and bands.

Cobalt oxide was the preferred colorant. “Figures and tasteful flourishes in blue . . . adorn much of pottery ware. These stripes and designs are done by hand, each piece in its own turn. The ‘bluer’ takes a jar on his lap, and, holding a quill box, . . . makes by his eye the outline of design. It is a steady hand and true eye that can scratch off rapidly and so accurately these pictures, each being so near like its fellow that one at first supposes a pattern or stencil plate had been employed. . . . The blue marks soon dry on and are ‘fixed’ by the burning in the kiln.”



A four-gallon churn and a large pitcher bear Germanic motifs in cobalt on a salt glaze. The churn, circa 1870s, is marked "Cedar Falls Iowa" near the rim. The pitcher was made by Smith Kelsey, Des Moines, in 1863. Pitchers were challenging to produce because the spout had to be lined up with the handle for an even pour. Because of daily use, most pitchers eventually broke and were discarded. Relatively few from the 19th century have survived.



Firing the kiln was the most exciting part of stoneware manufacturing, and also the riskiest. A good firing resulted in profit, a bad firing in wasted labor, clay, and fuel.

The first step was to “set the kiln,” placing the pieces perfectly perpendicular so they would not fall or warp, and evenly spaced so that vaporized salt would circulate uniformly for the glaze.

Most Iowa potters traditionally fueled kilns with wood until the 1880s, when many switched to coal, which is generally found in the same areas as beds of clay.

For the first 12 hours, the kiln was kept at 200 degrees to allow moisture to escape. More fuel was added to the fireboxes to increase the temperature to the desired 2,300 degrees. Especially large kilns (some as high as 36 feet) might need several days to reach that temperature. Small pieces of clay suspended by wire into the kiln were pulled out to determine if the fuel needed to be redistributed for an even flow of heat.

After three days of cooling, the pottery was removed and inspected.

*Above: Calvin Brinton and children hold flowerpots by a down-draft kiln at Maxwell Clay Products, Turkey River, circa 1916.*

Five-gallon butter churns, like this one, were the most common size of churns, although some were twice as large.

Stoneware must be glazed to be impervious. Until the mid-1880s, salt glaze was commonly used. The tradition of salt-glazed pottery in Iowa can be traced back to New England and the Mid-Atlantic states, and dates back to the 14th century in Europe.

To create a salt glaze, the potter threw rock salt through side portholes in the kiln, where it vaporized and reacted with the silica in the clay. The result was a glassy surface, with a texture like that of an orange peel.

Albany slip became a popular glaze in the 1880s. Dark brown clay was mixed with water to the consistency of fresh cream and then applied. Albany slip was often used on the inside of stoneware (as it was on this churn) because the surface was easier to clean than a salt-glazed surface.



Most Iowa stoneware was not decorated, so this peacock "scratch" design in cobalt is particularly unusual. Scratch designs were either scratched directly on the clay or through a slip glaze before firing. This churn was made by Montpelier Pottery in Muscatine County, circa 1890. The exterior is salt glazed; the interior, with Albany slip.



COLLECTION OF LOWELL AND CORRINE REED

Besides churns, jugs, jars, and pitchers, potteries made garden products, such as flowerpots and hanging baskets. Colesburg Pottery Company in Colesburg specialized in flowerpots beginning in the 1880s (left). To meet a growing demand, the company installed steam-powered molding machines, and by 1905, it was producing 10,000 flowerpots a day and doing business in more than 16 states. But the Colesburg pots had to be transported by wagon over eight miles of hilly dirt roads to the nearest railroad, in Osterdock. Partly because of such transportation problems, the plant closed in 1916.

*Opposite: The molded letters on this Stich Bros. flowerpot may have been added to advertise the business, which operated in Livermore. The flowerpot with the shiny brown Albany slip was made at White's Pottery Works in Fort Dodge (1882–1892). The blue-rimmed pot is attributed to Fort Dodge Stoneware (1892–1906).*



TOP LEFT: COLLECTION OF MARK AND KATHIE CELLOTTI. RIGHT: COLLECTION OF LOWELL AND CORRINE REED. BOTTOM: SHSI (DES MOINES)

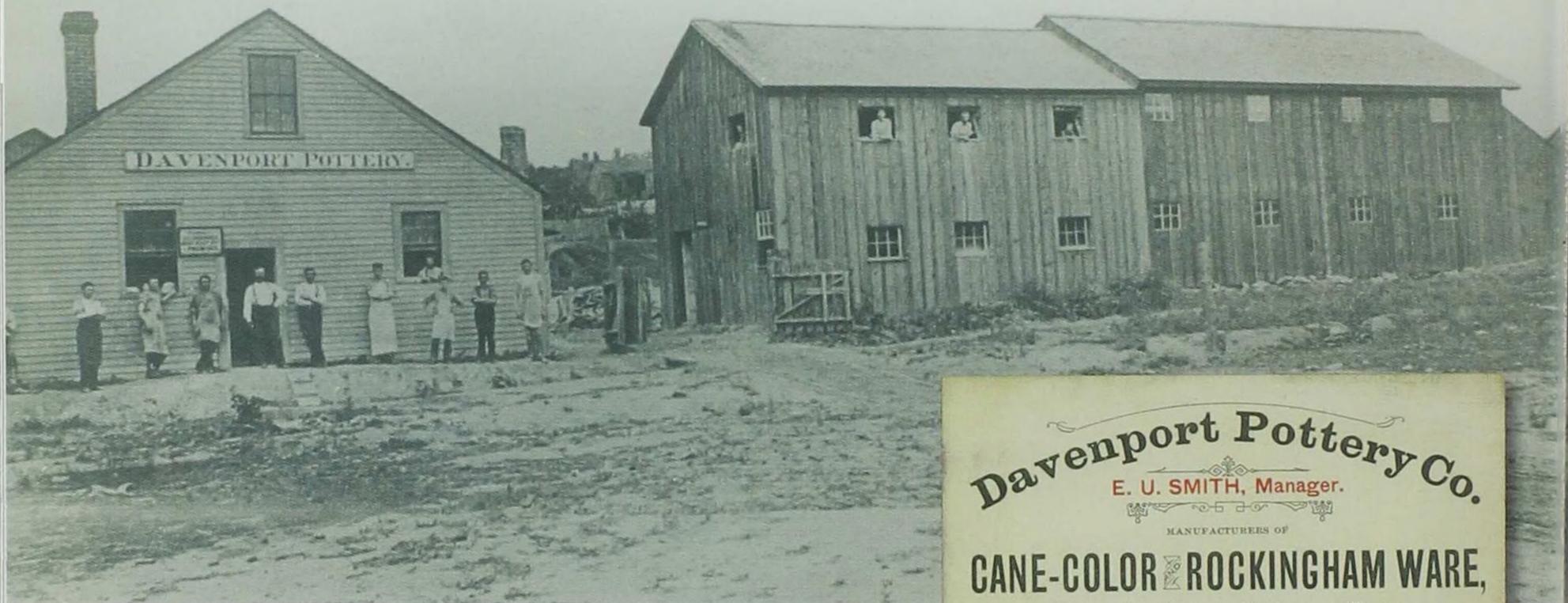
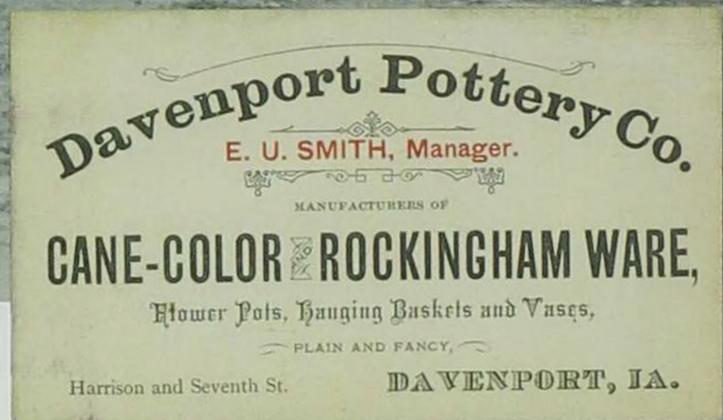


PHOTO: COLLECTION OF GEORGE GOELDNER; PITCHER AND BUSINESS CARD: COLLECTION OF DWIGHT MILLER



The number of Iowa potteries peaked in the 1880s, from 17 listed in the 1865 state gazetteer, to 34 in 1885. What had begun as a traditional craft evolved into a mechanized, technologically complex industry with full-time, specialized workers.

One of the more specialized manufacturers was the Davenport Pottery Company, established in 1880 by a diverse group of investors. Its cluster of buildings and two beehive kilns were located near several brickyards in downtown Davenport. The mottled brown pitcher (left) is one example of its work.

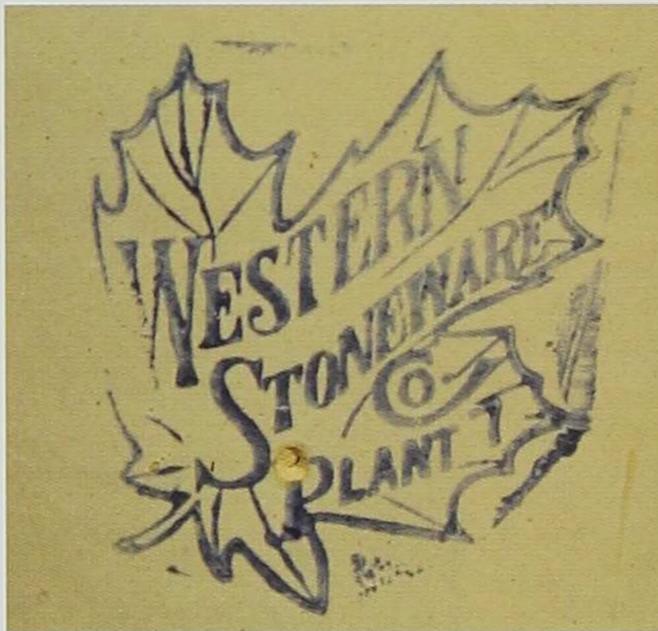
The company cast a wide net for workers, contacting potters in the Midwest, the East, and England. By 1888 it had failed, perhaps because of growing competition from Ohio and eastern potteries.

**M**auck & Son pottery, founded in 1880 in Boone County, may have marked this jug with the the company name, location, and date to commemorate its first firing. Jugs were one of the commonest forms of pottery and were seldom decorated, although this one bears straight and wavy lines. Fingerprints at the bottom reveal where the potter held the jug as it was dipped in glaze.

Jugs were used to hold toxic liquids like kerosene, turpentine, and acid, as well as cider, wine, water, vinegar, and oils.

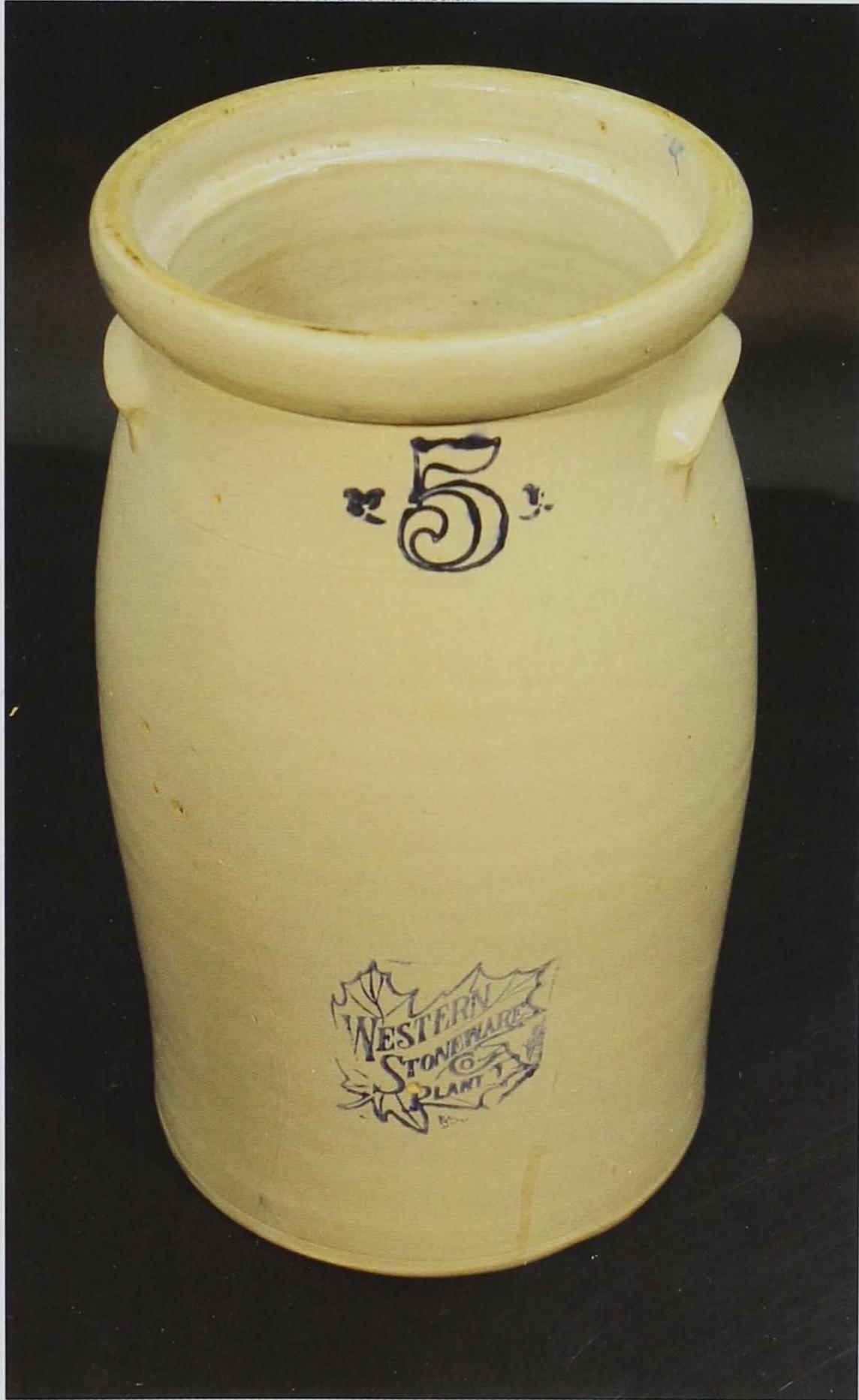


COLLECTION OF GEORGE GOELDNER



**F**ire was a continuing threat to potteries. A blazing hot kiln was an accident waiting to happen. In 1837 William Welch's Van Buren County pottery burned down before his first kiln load was even fired. In 1857, David Roberts lost his first pottery in Colesburg to flame. The Des Moines Pottery burned twice, in 1873 and 1882. County histories record many more.

The most destructive fire in an Iowa pottery took place on the night of December 17, 1906, at the main plant of the former Fort Dodge Stoneware Company. Founded in 1870 by Martin White, the Fort Dodge Stoneware Company became Iowa's largest producer of stoneware. In April 1906 it was purchased by the Western Stoneware Company and designated as Plant 7. Based in Illinois, Western Stoneware was a conglomerate of potteries trying to compete with the mammoth Red Wing Stoneware in Red Wing, Minnesota. Western Stoneware operated its Plant 7 in Fort Dodge only six months before it was destroyed by fire.



The name "Plant 7" in the stenciled maple-leaf logo confirms that this five-gallon churn was made in Fort Dodge in 1906, when Western Stoneware operated there. Its shiny white Bristol glaze was made by mixing feldspar, whiting, zinc oxide, kaolin, and flint. By the turn of the century Bristol glaze had replaced Albany slip as the most common glaze. Because it was opaque and shiny white, it appeared more sanitary, at a time when sanitation was both a health reform issue and a marketing tool.

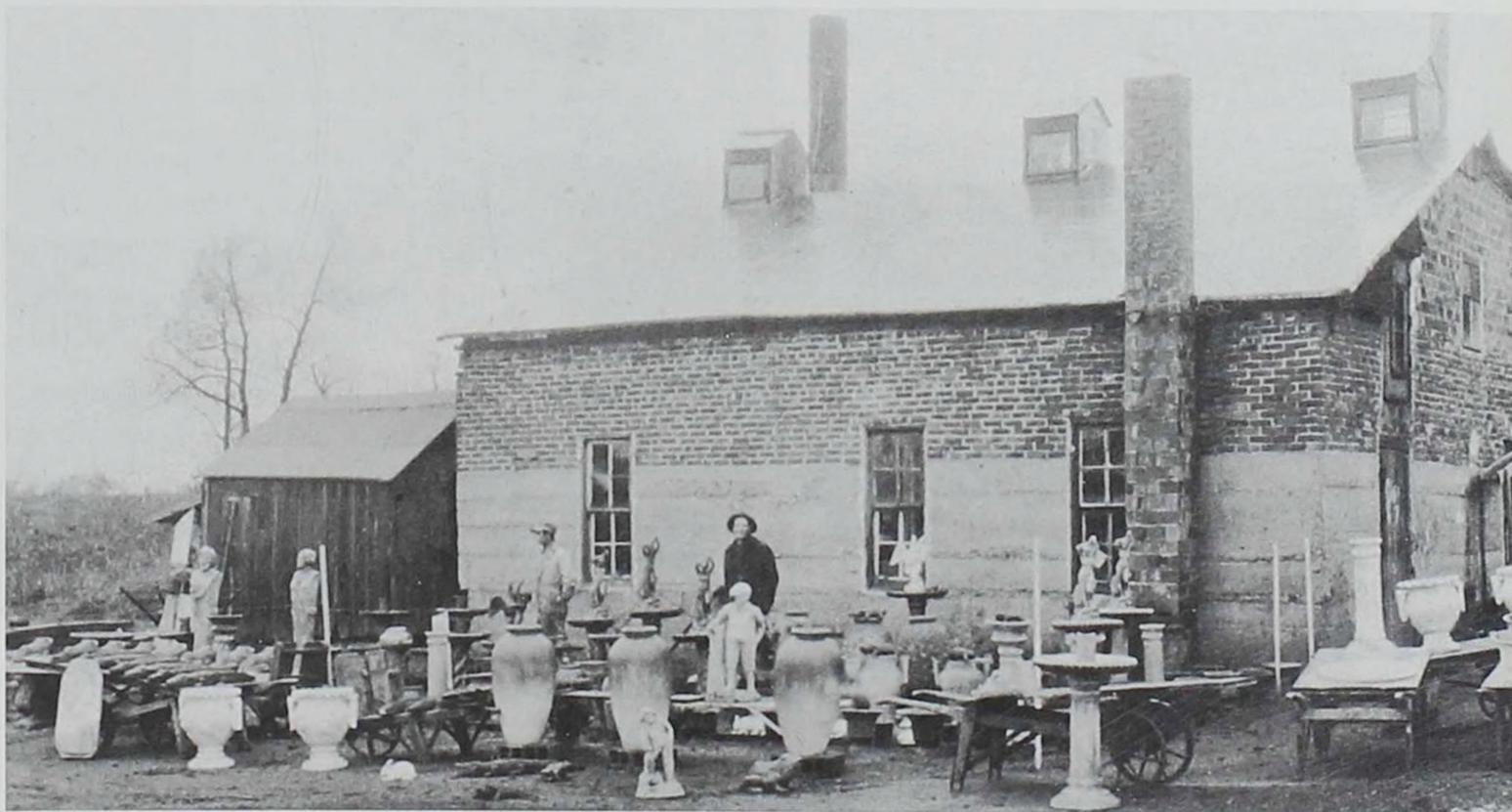


Still throwing pots at age 79, Johnnie Nelson (*right*) grew up in Red Wing, Minnesota, and at the age of 13 began working in the Red Wing plants. In 1912 he moved to Iowa to work at the newly founded What Cheer Clay Products in What Cheer, in Keokuk County. The town lay in Iowa's coal-mining region, with rich beds of clay 15 to 60 feet deep.

After five years, Nelson and his sons began their own pottery (*below*). The sons focused on drain tile, fire brick, and building blocks, but Nelson was drawn to more fanciful creations—giant toadstools and bird baths; large urns and fountain figures; imitation fruits, vegetables, and nuts; flowerpots and vases of all sizes; and replicas of Mexican and Sicilian water jugs. Customers bought his lawn and garden art for their rock gardens and goldfish and lily ponds.



*Left: Using a simple clay sewer pipe, What Cheer potter Johnnie Nelson created this decorative umbrella stand for Drs. Tarana and Albert Dulin, who practiced in nearby Sigourney. Nelson made the storks from a mold he brought with him from Red Wing Pottery in Minnesota, where he had worked as a young man.*



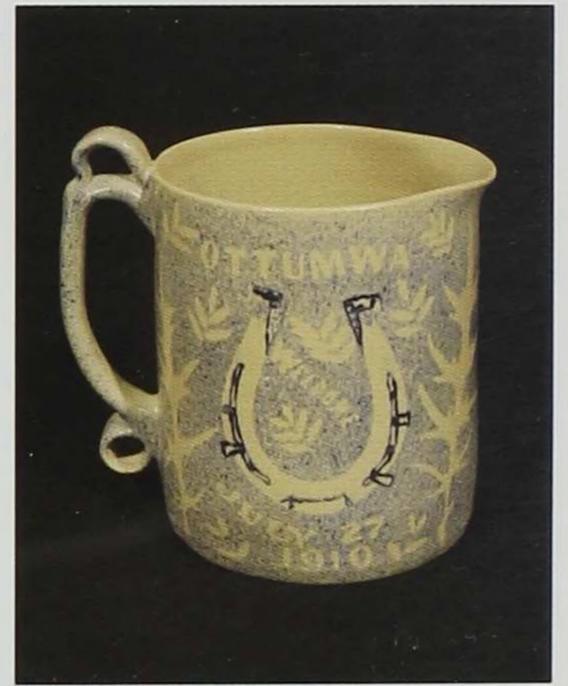
BOTH PHOTOS: WHAT CHEER—100 YEARS (1965)

Commemorative, novelty, and souvenir stoneware, like these examples, occupied only a very small part of the pottery market. By the early 1900s, utilitarian stoneware production was in steep decline. Glass containers, especially canning jars, were more sanitary, lighter weight, and less costly than pottery. Preserving meat and vegetables with salt in stoneware was gradually replaced by shipping fresh food in refrigerated railroad cars and keeping it cold in household ice-boxes.

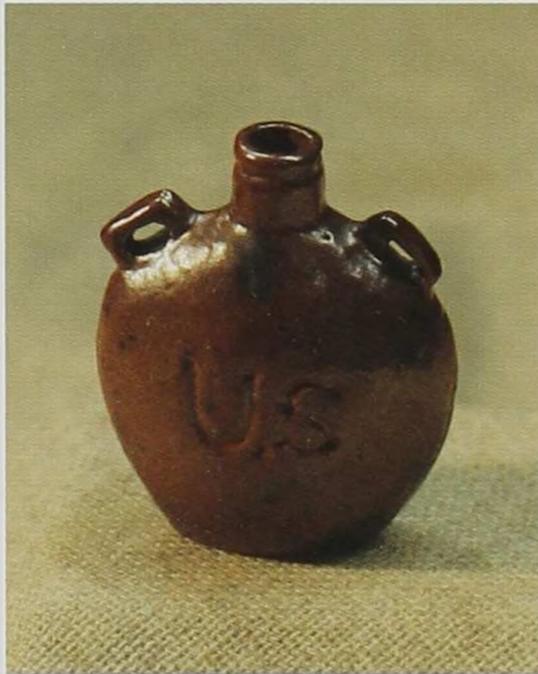
The 1903 *Directory of Clay Workers in Iowa* listed 303 ceramics manufacturers; only six of these produced pottery. All the others made sewer pipe, tile bricks, and drainage tile.



COLLECTION OF TOM SOUTHARD



COLLECTION OF LOWELL AND CORRINE REED



COLLECTION OF GEORGE GOELDNER



COLLECTION OF LOWELL AND CORRINE REED

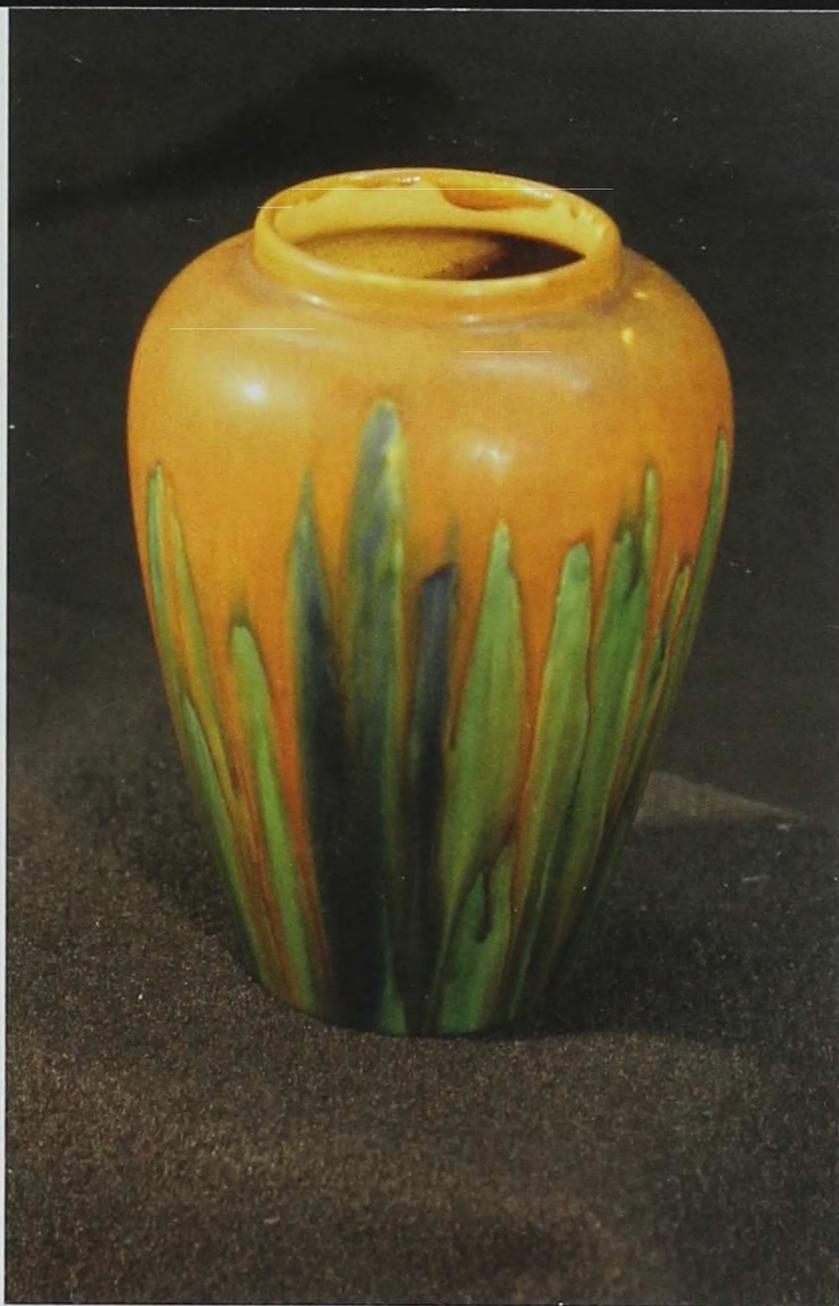


COLLECTION OF LOWELL AND CORRINE REED

Clockwise, from top left: Found in the ground near an old Eldora hotel, this unusual clay object was probably made for a smoker. Perhaps matches were stored in the short corncobs and struck on the rough half-circle surface. The mug commemorates the Iowa Democratic Convention, on July 27, 1910. Made by Ottumwa Clay Products, it has a stenciled donkey on the back and an unusually ornate handle. The miniature jug was made by Fort Dodge Stoneware and marks a national convention. What Cheer potter Johnnie Nelson made the miniature canteen, as well as 600 miniature lions (left) for the Sigourney Lions Club.

The American art pottery movement gained a brief foothold in Iowa in the 1920s, thanks to two ceramacists at Iowa State College, Paul E. Cox and Mary Lanier Yancey. Cox and Yancey were from Newcomb College, where women were taught both the aesthetics and the marketability of art pottery. Likewise, Cox and Yancey labored to convince Iowans that the state's rich deposits of clay had other uses than drainage tile and sewer pipe, and that art pottery had commercial possibilities.

Besides the Iowa State program, only a few art potteries existed in Iowa early in the 20th century: Shawsheen Pottery in Mason City; Farr Pottery, Oskaloosa; Artclay Company, Scranton; and, in Corning, a pottery of varying names (Spring Lake, Turner Pottery, and Corning Pottery).



COLLECTION OF DAVE JOHNSON

Above: This multicolored vase with a matt glaze represents the work of Charles L. and John M. Farr at Farr Pottery in Oskaloosa (1907–1915). Left: A trio of Iowa art pottery examples. The teapot is by Shawsheen Pottery. Trained at the Chicago Art Institute and the New York Art Students League, Edward and Elizabeth Dahlquist established Shawsheen Pottery in Mason City in 1907. The other two objects are by Artclay Company, in Scranton. Ed Sayre and Earl Adams started Artclay in 1929, with help from Paul Cox at Iowa State College. They created vases, lamp bases, and other items. The object in the foreground may have held a watch, in the hollowed-out center.

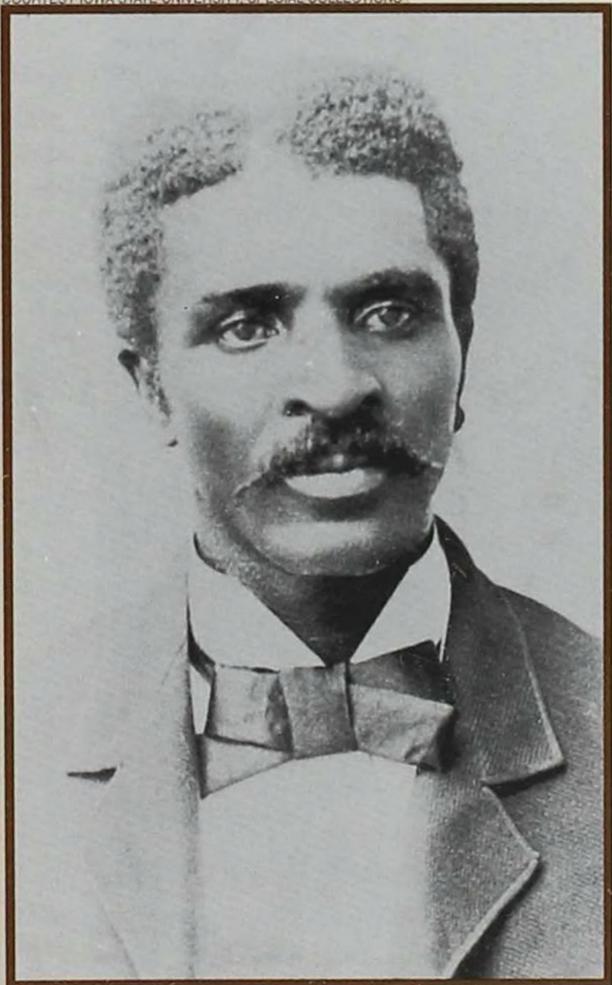
Michael O. Smith is chief curator at the State Historical Society of Iowa. John Zeller is a photographer and a historical researcher.



SUGAR BOWL: COLLECTION OF GEORGE GOELDNER. TEAPOT: COLLECTION OF MUSCATINE ART CENTER. WATCH HOLDER: COLLECTION OF MARK AND MARIE LATA.

**For the complete story of Iowa pottery and dozens of examples, visit the new exhibit "Made from Mud: Iowa Potters and Potteries, 1830–1930," September 13, 2008–April 12, 2009, at the State Historical Building in Des Moines. Check [www.IowaHistory.org](http://www.IowaHistory.org).**

# George Washington Carver,



BOTH SPECIMENS: COURTESY ADA HAYDEN HERBARIUM, IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY



Herbarium Iowa Agricultural College  
Ames, Iowa  
Accession No.  
*Rudbeckia hirta*  
Ames, Iowa.  
Coll. Geo. Carver. Date 1894

Herbarium Iowa Agricultural College  
Ames, Iowa  
Accession No. 13438  
Ames, Iowa.  
Coll. Geo. Carver. Date

# a life wrapped up in flowers

IT IS WELL KNOWN that at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, George Washington Carver's work brought about major economic and agricultural improvements in the rural South, through erosion control, crop rotation, composting, and research (especially with peanuts and cotton).

But it was at Iowa State College in Ames where his career began. He was the college's first African American student and faculty member and an assistant botanist at the College Experiment Station before he left for Tuskegee in 1896.

While Carver's scholarship and research at Iowa State focused on pathology and breeding of plants, he saw spirit as well as science when he looked at nature. It is not difficult to imagine Carver strolling with supreme pleasure and respectful curiosity through fields and woodlands, gathering plants to mount as herbarium specimens. And, as the 1896 article on the right suggests, we can almost hear him lecture, with quiet passion, to women whose "hunger for flowers is keen, and [whose] desire to learn regarding the sciences that relate to flowers, is pronounced." The Adams County Union summed it up: "Prof. Carver's whole life is wrapped up in flowers."  
—Editor

Carver's strong connections to Iowa are made clear in a traveling exhibit from the Field Museum. Titled "George Washington Carver," the exhibit is at the State Historical Building in Des Moines through November 2, 2008.

Plant specimens mounted by Carver over a century ago are in the collections of the Ada Hayden Herbarium, Iowa State University.

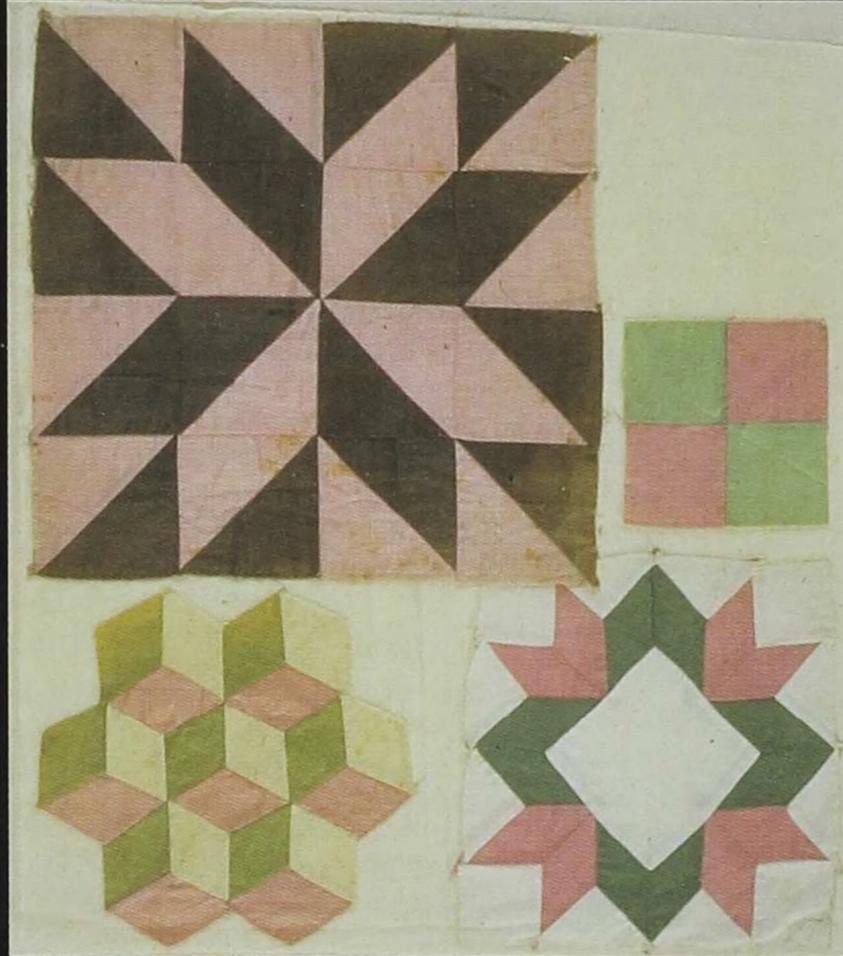


## Our Farmers Institute.

The coming Farmer's Institute Feb. 25, 26, 27, could have no feature more interesting or profitable than the talks of Prof. Geo. Carver, of the Agricultural college, on flowers and gardens. Perhaps you read what Prof. Wilson said in the Union's farm notes, last week. The novelty of it is that Prof. Carver is a colored man; perhaps that is an objection on the part of some. But Prof. Budd recently told the writer Mr. Carver was the highest authority in the United States on some lines of floriculture, particularly cross-fertilization. As Blind Boone is wholly devoted to music, so Prof. Carver's whole life is wrapped up in flowers. Yet he is a graduate of the four year's course of the college. Prof. Tama Jim Wilson says:

"The West Liberty Farmers' Institute added a new feature that was very successful and crowded an extra hall. Mr. George Carver, of the college was there to talk to the ladies about flowers. He is a graduate of the four-year course in agriculture, and has tastes along botanical lines that have been finely developed in the college laboratories. He spoke to the ladies of flowers in the home, in the window, the green house, the conservatory, the lawn and the garden. He elaborated fully and in an instructive manner, on ornamental bedding, growing exhibit plants, the way to originate new varieties, including cross-fertilization, etc. He explained how plants are grown from seeds, and from cuttings. Then he told them how to build a greenhouse, and manage an ordinary window. The ladies crowded the hall, from town and country, and became so interested that they formed an association, to meet monthly, for discussion. They first had in mind a cooking school, but failed to get a leader. We doubt whether that will succeed, for most Iowa matrons and maids, especially on the farm, are already expert cooks, but their hunger for flowers is keen, and their desire to learn regarding the sciences that relate to flowers, is pronounced. This kind of entertainment interests the city lady as much as her sister of the country. We suggest to the Institute organizers that they consider this feature. Florists can be found in most towns who could help. We predict that it would be a drawing card. Mr. Carver was there on trial. The West Liberty folks have engaged him again, a year in advance. College men attend for expenses of the trip and the state pays them.

Adams County Union, February 1896



"Patterns for Learning," featuring the collections of quilt historian Mary Barton, is on exhibit at the State Historical Society of Iowa through October 19, 2008.



## Patterns for Learning

### ❖ *The Mary Barton Quilt Collection* ❖

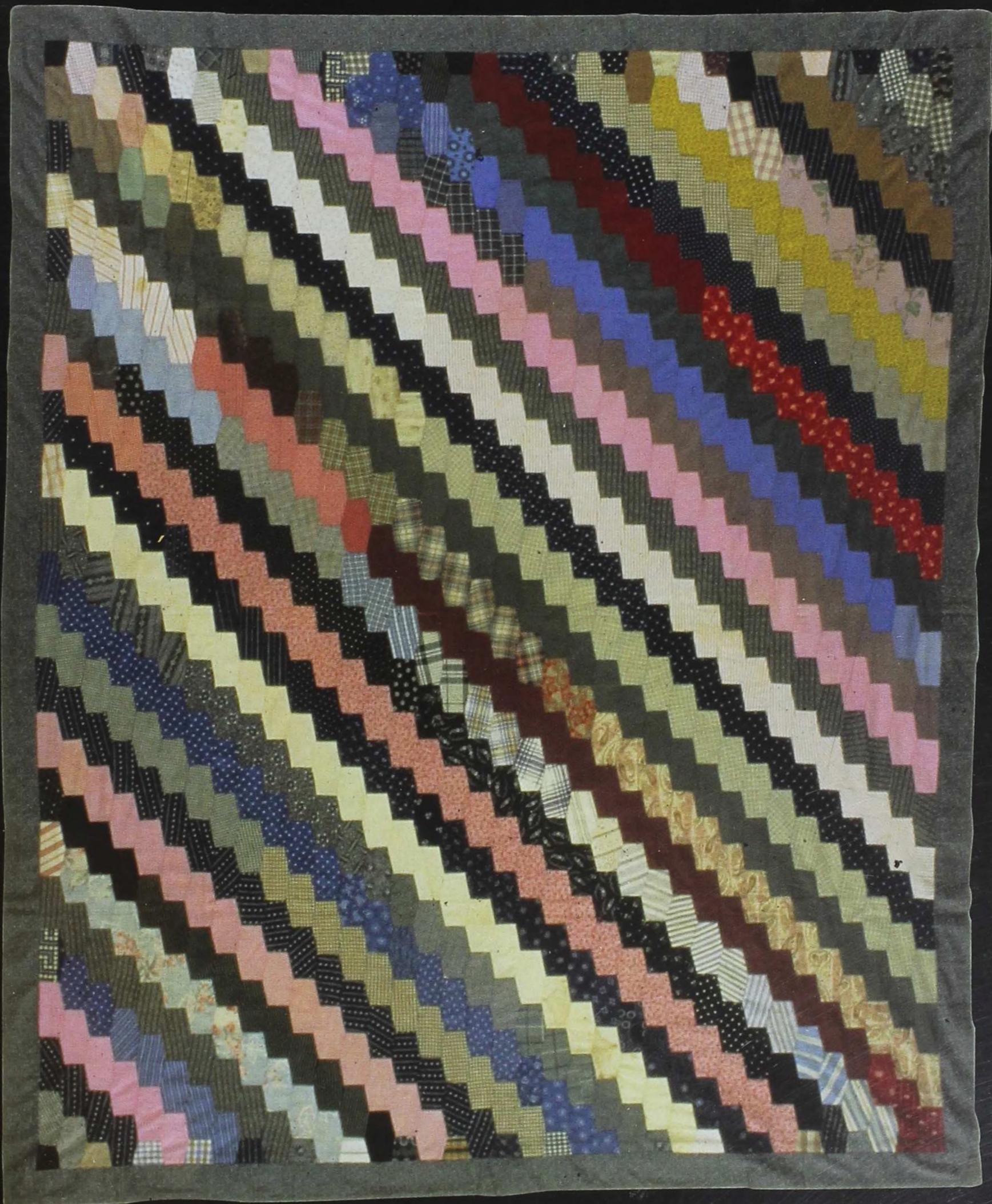
Between 1987 and 2001, Mary Barton of Ames, Iowa, donated more than 1,500 items to the State Historical Society of Iowa. Most of these items related to her work as an amateur historian documenting the life and times of 19th-century and early 20th-century quilting women.

Now, a new museum exhibit, "Patterns for Learning," features Mary Barton's quilt sample notebooks, fashion print collection, catalogs, a large number of her quilt study panels (see left), items from her clothing collection, and, of course, quilts.

A special feature will be the Mary Barton Heritage Quilt, which was voted one of the 20th century's Best American Quilts and exhibited at the 1999 International Quilting Show.

As a whole, the Mary Barton Quilt Collection presents a microcosm of quilting history. Beginning with the oldest quilt in the collection, a LeMoyne Star (circa 1940), and continuing through a plethora of quilting periodicals, one can see how quilting fell in and out of favor, changing back and forth from a necessary skill to a leisure activity in accordance with the times.

In addition to quilts, Barton assembled a world-class collection of materials and documentation that today helps us understand the quilting woman—what she read, what she wore, her choices in fabrics and patterns, the demands on her time, and how those demands changed with improvements in her way of life. ❖



# Such Orderly, Good People

## *Behind the Scenes in the Hoover White House*

HERBERT HOOVER PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM (WEST BRANCH, IOWA)



President Herbert Hoover and First Lady Lou Henry Hoover welcome wounded war veterans at a 1931 garden party. Social events like this one depended on dozens of White House staff working behind the scenes.

by Ginalie Swaim, editor

WHAT WE AMERICANS SEE of the White House is carefully selected and scripted. An elegantly appointed Blue Room is decorated for the holidays. A sparkling white portico serves as a reporter's backdrop. On the South Lawn the president romps with the First Dog. In the Rose Garden foreign dignitaries are greeted. These views are nearly as iconic as the White House itself.

What we do not see are the White House employees who vacuum the carpets, prune the shrubs, and serve the meals. The hundreds of individuals who work behind the scenes at the White House acquire unique perspectives on what it is like to work for the individuals we have elected.

This fall the State Historical of Iowa welcomes a new traveling exhibit that takes us behind the scenes—"The Working White House: Two Centuries of Traditions and Memories." And in this issue of *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*, we present the impressions and memories of a few White House employees who worked for President Herbert Hoover and First Lady Lou Henry Hoover, both born in Iowa.

These accounts are excerpted from oral history interviews housed at the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum in West Branch.

"The Hoovers were great believers in lots of help, domestic and otherwise," writes former White House Chief Usher Irwin Hood "Ike" Hoover (no relation to the president). "Servants simply fell over each other around the White House. Every department was the same, from the kitchen to the attic."

In his memoir, *Forty-Two Years in the White House*, he listed the employees during the Hoover years: "the Chief Usher and two assistants, the housekeeper, Mrs. Hoover's lady's-maid and two assistants, the President's valet, four Negro doormen, one man in the storeroom, one engineer, three firemen, one electrician. There are four regular butlers. In the kitchen are one head cook, three assistants, and one dishwasher. Two men take care of the ground floor, one man the parlor floor, four men the upper floors. There are also two maids who look after these rooms and two other maids who do general work about the house. One man polishes the hardwood floors and one carpenter with one assistant does repairs. Mrs. Hoover had two secretaries at all times and three during the social season. There is one man who checks at the public entrance and one who attends to the dogs. There are about ten employees attached to the social room and their duties are concerned principally with the White House proper. In addition to these who are on the job regularly there is the garden force of about ten men. . . . Extra employees are brought in for all the social affairs: waiters for the dinners and hatbox attendants for the receptions."

Such memories, along with those of five other staff, add complexity and dimension to our understanding of the couple who called the White House home from 1929 through 1933.

### *Alonzo Fields (head butler)*

"President Hoover was the most orderly man I've ever come in contact with. . . . I've talked to a number of butlers who had worked for them. They said that they were the finest people to work for. You had to be orderly. You couldn't slub around at no time. . . . In those days, you had a table for the help, and a table for the family. President Hoover wanted you to have what he had on his table. He would say, 'Has the rest of the family (he didn't call them "the help") had this? I'd like for them to taste it. I think it's very good.' You never had to go to Mrs. Hoover or the President and say, 'Fields is sick, and his wife is in poor condition, and they're in need.' Somehow or another, they always seemed to know it. And you would receive benefits without anyone pleading to them.

"Now the other First Ladies, true, if you went to them and told them the condition, naturally they would give a hand. But not with the Hoovers. . . . She seemed to know it beforehand.

"... [My recollections of her are] kindness, fairness, dignity. She wanted dignity in her home at all times. Of course, as I say, they had a routine. You knew the dinner hour. You knew that you set up for tea every afternoon at a certain time. And you were dressed and ready to serve the tea. If there were any social activities, that would be included, too. But dinner was always at eight o'clock. At eight o'clock, you announced dinner. Even if it was just he and Mrs. Hoover, the President would still have on his tuxedo. Perhaps he had learned that abroad when he was abroad so long. He would dress at dinner,

just like that old custom here in the Back Bay that people used to talk about. They were such orderly, good people, that's all I can say. They had their fun. . . . But you didn't find any bootleggers coming into the White House."

### *Agnes Thompson (personal maid)*

"Everybody tried to live as one big family. And Mr. Hoover's valet, Boris, would tell you this: 'Any little disagreement,' he said, 'don't let them know it, because this would make them very unhappy if they thought their household help couldn't agree.'

". . . I never worked for anybody before. As I said, I married young, so, of course, what little experience I had was with my needle—doing things on the side—so [Mrs. Hoover] said, 'Well, that part is all right. I can teach you,' and she did. She taught me well. Not only the things that I was to do as her personal maid, but the things to do to get along with people and to be able to work later. Those were the things that were instilled through just the contact that I had in serving her. And never a time when mistakes were made was I treated crossly. It was always in the capacity of a mother telling a child—explaining how they should be, and 'we'll try another time.' "

### *Irwin Hood "Ike" Hoover (chief usher)*

"When Coolidge reigned, we thought he was an odd person, but with the coming of Hoover we changed our minds by comparison. Coolidge was quiet and did queer

little things, but Hoover was even more peculiar. He would go about, never speaking to any of the help. Never a good-morning or even a nod of the head. Never a Merry Christmas or a Happy New Year. All days were alike to him. Sunday was no exception, for he worked just as hard on that day if not harder than on any of the others. There was always a frown on his face and a look of worry.

"... Of all the administrations, the hardest one to work for was that of President Hoover. Not that the hours were longer, for I have put in many more hours under previous administrations. But the Hoovers were dictatorial, attempted to do more than any of the rest, were extensive entertainers, stayed closer to the White House, were much easier of access to the outside world, seemed to know more people, felt they must entertain them, and generally were up and doing all the time.

"... I am told by a newspaper man that the reason things seemed so different around the White House during the Hoover Administration was because he was the first very rich President I had served under. That may be true, but I do not believe it. They were both very plain people. The President was apparently very modest in his ideas. It was only in his liberality toward Mrs. Hoover that led one to believe he had a great deal of money. . . . She was very liberal with her family and with supplies for the household and never seemed to question the amount or cost of the food consumed. In the way of furnishings for the White House, she was positively extravagant. In the first two years of her occupancy there was practically no limit to anything or any idea that struck her fancy.

"... When the Government of-

officials who had charge of the disbursement protested, their ruffled feathers were always smoothed and they were told not to worry; it was known there would be a deficit and it would be paid out of the President's pocket. And it was. Thousands of dollars were paid by the President for things that became Government property."

### *Katurah Brooks (maid) and Phillips P. Brooks (butler)*

*Phillips:* "All the time I served him I think he said something to me only two or three times. Once when I was there serving tea, I was so accustomed to serving her, then Hoover. One day he said to me, 'What kind of cheese is this?' I jumped. We just took it for granted that he didn't talk to us."

*Katurah:* "I never will forget one thing that Mrs. Hoover said to me. She said, 'Katurah, if you ever decide to build a house, be sure to have your kitchen on the southern exposure.' She said, 'You get the sun all day. It comes up and it comes over and you get it in your kitchen all day.' And we did. That kitchen was the coolest in the summer and the warmest in the winter. We get part of the sun all day. . . . She was the type of person who was always interested in anybody's project if it was worthwhile."

*Phillips:* "Those last days from the election all the way through were sad days; they were just blue, that's all. And those days back before the election weren't too good. And then he was defeated. It was bad! My wife was in Palo Alto on election night. She might be able to tell you something."

*Katurah:* "When the Roosevelts won? Yes. We stayed up and got the

returns by radio, and all of a sudden Mrs. Hoover said, 'Well, it's all over and we'll go to bed.'"

*Katurah:* "She had a friendly way of having us do things. I remember one Sunday I was on duty, and Mrs. Hoover came upstairs and knocked on the room and came in. She said, 'Katurah, that magnolia tree looks as though it's thirsty down there; would you mind to give it a couple buckets of water?' I did."

*Phillips:* "Mrs. Hoover used to love magnolia trees. She would get men to climb all the way to the top to get these big blooms. In the center of the dining room table in the state dining room—big, huge table—she would arrange this one bloom on this big, brass, round tray and put water in it and set this in the middle of the table, and it was a beautiful sight. She seemed like she knew everything."

*Katurah:* "We decided she had eyes in the back of her head. One afternoon she was getting dressed for tea. She had her back to me, and I was in the closet getting out this particular blouse, and without turning around she said, 'Not that one, Katurah; I'll take the one next to it.' It was frightening to death, but I know she couldn't see what I was doing, so we just decided she had eyes in the back of her head."

### *Lillian Rogers Parks (daughter of seamstress Maggie Rogers)*

"Each one who comes in wants to do everything her own way. Each First Lady wants to do everything her own way. Each President wants things his way. And you go along with the things that they want. . . . Well, you don't like changes. It's very hard to get used to a lot of

changes. It's hard for the cooks. It's hard for the butlers. It's hard for everybody to get used to drastic changes. . . . They try new things and you don't approve of it. But you can't say anything. And maybe after a while, they'll see that maybe it doesn't work. I should say the servants know more about a house like that than the people that come in. But still, you can't tell them. You don't dictate to them. If they ask you, or say where are such-and-such a thing, they'll see it your way sometimes.

"I liked Mrs. Hoover for her ways, her kindness, thoughtfulness, and the way she would run the house.

". . . Regardless of who was the President at that time, it was a bad time. Mr. Coolidge got out just in time. He certainly did. And it wouldn't make any difference, it could have been a Republican or a Democrat, anybody who came in there. . . . You couldn't blame him for everything. And Mrs. Hoover was so concerned. Those things used to upset her. The newspapers would write things. You could tell. If in the morning there was something that

she didn't like, Agnes would say to my mother, 'There's something in the paper this morning that I think has upset Mrs. Hoover.'

"You could tell when you'd go into her room in the morning, or when you were around her, like the maids, the personal maids, that she was upset about things that would be said about him. I remember the last words that she said to my mother when [Mrs. Hoover] was leaving the White House. That morning my mother blacked out leaning over a file cabinet. . . . And they brought my mother upstairs, and took her in the housekeeper's suite, and laid her on the bed for a while. So Agnes came up and she said, 'Mrs. Rogers, if you can, please come and tell [Mrs. Hoover] goodbye.' So my mother went from the third floor to the second floor and met her in the hallway. And she said, 'Maggie, my husband will come back someday to do great things.'

". . . Now, the oval room on the ground floor, a day or two before the Hoovers left the White House, Mrs. Hoover had all the employees come into that room. And she gave us a little talk to thank us for being

so kind to her. She said, 'Now, you have a uniform on. And when you put your street clothes on, you look different, when you put a hat on, a coat, or whatever. And perhaps I will pass you and won't recognize you. But wherever you see me, please speak to me.' Those were her parting words.

". . . If you really want to see how a hurricane goes in the White House, you want to be there when one family is going out, and another family's coming in. . . . They get up from bed, they have their breakfast, and you've got to get them out of there. Somebody else is coming in." ❖

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

The Herbert Hoover Presidential Library holds the following oral history interviews of former White House staff, all conducted by Raymond Henle: Katurah and Phillips P. Brooks (September 1, 1970); Alonzo Fields (July 24, 1970); Lillian Rogers Parks (February 12, 1970); and Agnes Thompson (November 16, 1966). All are copyright Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Association, Inc. This article also includes excerpts from Irwin Hood (Ike) Hoover, *Forty-Two Years in the White House* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1934). Thanks to the staff at the Hoover Library for their assistance.

## White House Exhibit at State Historical Society of Iowa

"The Working White House: Two Centuries of Traditions and Memories" offers a rare view of the inner workings of America's most renowned residence through experiences, firsthand accounts, and artifacts of the largely unrecognized people crucial to the everyday lives of our first families. It examines the occupational culture of this uniquely private yet public place, and addresses race and gender, the evolving nature of work at the White House, and how presidents and employees have viewed one another.

"The Working White House" runs through March 6, 2009, at the State Historical Building, 600 E. Locust, Des Moines. Details: [www.iowaHistory.org](http://www.iowaHistory.org). This traveling exhibition is from the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, developed with the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage and the White House Historical Association.

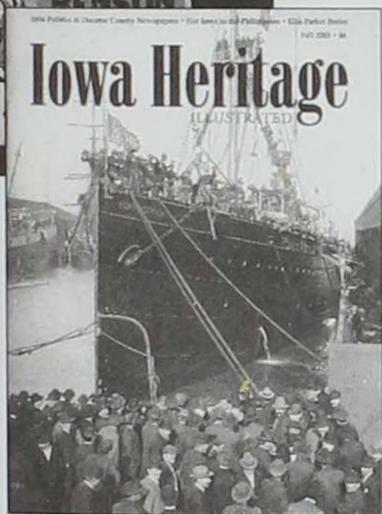
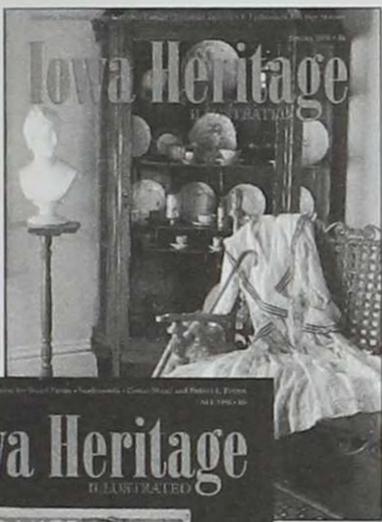
In connection with this exhibit, the State Historical Society of Iowa offers two opportunities to meet Barry H. Landau, author of *The President's Table: Two Hundred Years of Dining and Diplomacy*.

- "History for Lunch: Barry Landau, speaker," Thursday, October 23, noon-1 pm., Centennial Building, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City. Bring your own lunch. Limited seating. Details: 319-335-3911.

- "A Gala Evening at the President's Table," Friday, October 24, 6:30 p.m., State Historical Building, 600 E. Locust, Des Moines. Enjoy presidential wines and spirits and dine with Barry Landau. Presented by the Iowa Historical Foundation, which supports exhibits and programs of the State Historical Society of Iowa. Reservations to the black-tie gala are \$125 per person. Contact IHF executive director Barb Filer at [barb.filer@iowa.gov](mailto:barb.filer@iowa.gov) or 515-281-8823.

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# Iowa Heritage

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# One in a Million

Turn to pages 494 and 495 of *Iowa: A Guide to the Hawkeye State* and you'll learn that Dexter, Iowa, was once home to the inventor of a blood-transfusion device; that a sodium-vapor streetlight on the road to Stuart was being tested to decrease auto accidents; and that a factory in Atlantic produced \$5 million worth of army cots and folding stoves during World War I.

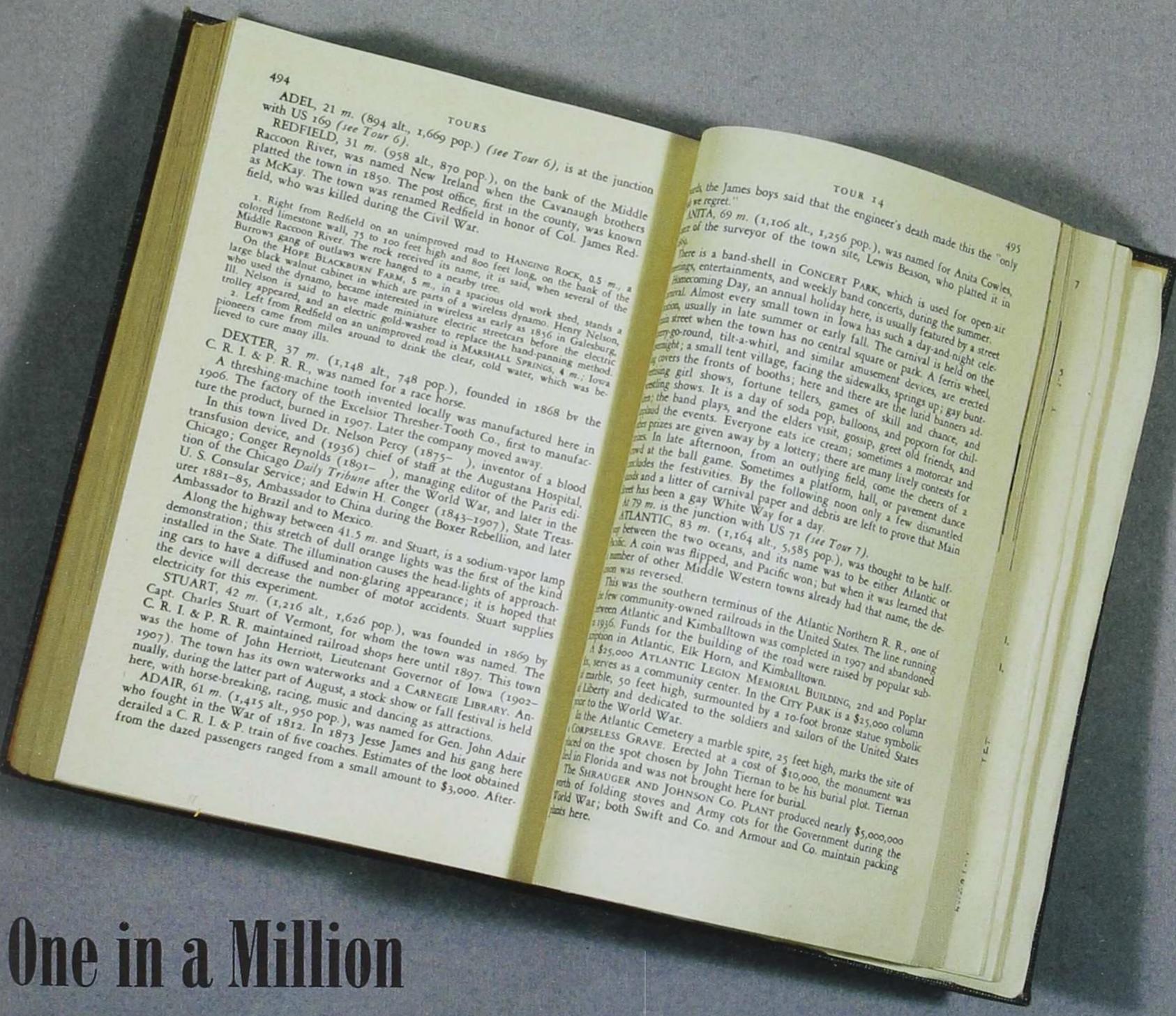
Such nuggets of local color and history fill each volume of the American Guide Series, created through the New Deal's Federal Writers' Project (FWP). The federal director envisioned the series as a "discovery of [America's] roots and a signpost of America's potentialities."

Published in 1938, the Iowa WPA guide comprises two dozen self-guided auto tours across Iowa and several essays about historical and contemporary Iowa—its agriculture and industry, religion and education, recreation and social customs, and so on. While a main objective of the FWP was to create jobs for unemployed writers (over 50 were hired in Iowa), historian Julia Mickenburg points out that the FWP bureaucracy "felt it unwise to give total creative freedom to writers [who] had become radicalized by the eco-

nommic devastation of the depression." As the FWP director in Iowa, Raymond Kresensky wrestled with how to portray the reality of farm foreclosures during the depression, while honoring Iowa's long tradition of agricultural success. He protested to a superior in Washington, "The farmers' worst enemies are not droughts nor plagues, but bankers, exploiters and economic tyrants." Compromise was the result, according to Mickenburg. "The guidebook's prose is measured, describing the plight of farmers, but avoiding any politics other than a pro-New Deal position."

Reprinted in 1986, the Iowa WPA guide still makes for interesting reading, partly because its "contemporary" portrait of Iowa in the 1930s is now 70 years old. And what a reviewer in 1938 said about it still holds true: "Even the native Iowan will learn so much about his own state and his home community that he will wonder where he has been all his life not to know these things." —The Editor

Julia Mickenburg's intriguing account, "Left at Home in Iowa: 'Progressive Regionalists' and the WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa," appears in the *Annals of Iowa* 56 (Summer 1997), published by the State Historical Society of Iowa.



SHS (IOWA CITY); PHOTO BY CHARLES SCOTT

COLLECTION OF GEORGE GOELDNER. DETAIL PHOTO BY JOHN ZELLER.



A border of flowers edges this stoneware umbrella stand, attributed to the Indianola Pottery Company. Stoneware potteries thrived in parts of Iowa in the late 19th century. Unlike this piece, most Iowa pottery was purely utilitarian and undecorated. For more examples, see our photo essay in this issue and the new museum exhibit in the State Historical Building in Des Moines.

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