

Weddings • Shivarees • Mormon Trail Diaries • Frontier Kanessville's Editor • Roadside Art

SUMMER 1996 • \$6

# Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED





# Front Porch

Dear Readers:

Let's continue to use this entry point to the magazine as Iowans have traditionally used a front porch, as a place to converse. Thanks for your many letters and comments about the new look and name of the magazine. We've printed some of them below.

Two sesquicentennial events this summer tie in with this issue. In the last month, wagon trains have wended their way across southern Iowa, commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Mormon trek. In this issue, diaries of Mormons who crossed Iowa in 1846 speak vividly of obstacles encountered. We also explore Kaneshville, the Mormon settlement where elder and editor Orson Hyde held sway, and we consider the Mormon legacy to this state.

Coming this August 22-25 to the State Capitol grounds is the Festival of Iowa Folklife. In this issue, we meet several Iowans who have adapted their occupational traditions and skills to make some amazing creations.

If sometime this summer you're sitting in a church pew waiting for a wedding to begin, take the time to contemplate the changes weddings have undergone in your lifetime, or in your ancestors'. This issue showcases a colonial wedding dress from our collections, explores the roots of the commercialized wedding, and recalls the raucousness of neighborhood shivarees. Send us your memories of shivarees, and we'll print some of them here in the Front Porch. Include the year and location (town or county) of the shivaree. Write us at 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.

Ginalie Swaim, editor

## From our readers

The radical change from *The Palimpsest* must have taken courage. I had a soft spot for the journal and its name, but the

new version is quite splendid and a real gift to Iowa's sesquicentennial and beyond.

Jane Zaring  
Ames, Iowa

I am very grateful to you for mailing to me a first copy of *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*. My membership [to the State Historical Society of Iowa] dates back to about 1930 when I was teaching in the Prescott High School. I have always enjoyed *The Palimpsest*.

Mattie Daggett  
Alcester, South Dakota

Despite your reasoning for changing *The Palimpsest* to *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*, I can't help thinking you've exchanged the unique for the ordinary. A commonplace name like *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* doesn't stir curiosity or imagination. You've exchanged Ben & Jerry's Wavy Gravy for plain vanilla.

Roy C. Neumann  
Iowa City, Iowa

We've just received the first issue of *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*. Congratulations! I read with interest the various letter reactions to the new name in the Front Porch feature. My own feeling is that it is a good and a very progressive revision. I understand the nostalgia of those who preferred *Palimpsest*, but times change, and I think that the new title properly captures the intent and mission of the magazine.

Richard W. Peterson  
Council Bluffs, Iowa

The spring 1996 issue is the best issue ever. I really like all the artifacts in it, and there's more photography. I like the size better and I even like the new name better. And it's more practical (though I always got this feeling of effete snobbery by being able to pronounce it correctly). Looking forward to the next one. You're doing a great job.

Laurie Robinson  
Coralville, Iowa

I love the name change. I've been waiting for this for years. It's a good way to let more people know about the State Historical Society of Iowa.

Steve Marquardt  
Des Moines, Iowa

It was a pleasant surprise to see the large picture of the Steamer *Capitol* in the spring issue [page 32]. I have fond memories of excursions on her out of Burlington, dancing to the Fats Pichon band out of New Orleans. They played everything from "St. Louis Blues Boogie Woogie" to "Three Little Fishes." I can still remember the sounds of the calliope and the paddle wheel chunking away.

I have the impression that the river towns generally have little memory for the heritage of the river. Its potential as a recreation asset seems unrecognized.

Recognition should be given sometime to an excellent painter of river boats, Ralph Law, who died over 20 years ago. There is very little artwork or frameable photography pertaining to the river available that I have seen.

My father founded the Des Moines County Health Dept. (later Southeast Iowa) in 1937 when there was typhoid, polio, smallpox, raw milk, 1,200 privies, and 150 dumps in the city limits of Burlington. The town's sewage flowed untreated into the river for Fort Madison to recycle again. A lot was accomplished.

Frederick C. Sage  
Boulder, Colorado

I should have thanked you long before now for the first issue of *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*, particularly as I have rarely seen as handsome an article as "Wings Over Iowa." As a teenager I was active in the Civil Air Patrol, took flying lessons, and have always loved old planes. Photographer Chuck Greiner did a stunning job. Every success with the new version of the magazine.

Elizabeth Monroe  
Indianapolis, Indiana

Editor: Ginalie Swaim  
Subscription Coordinator: Carol Carey  
Membership Manager: Ruth Messer

In 1920, the State Historical Society of Iowa founded one of the nation's first popular history magazines—*The Palimpsest*. The magazine was renamed *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* in 1996, the year of Iowa's 150th anniversary of statehood.

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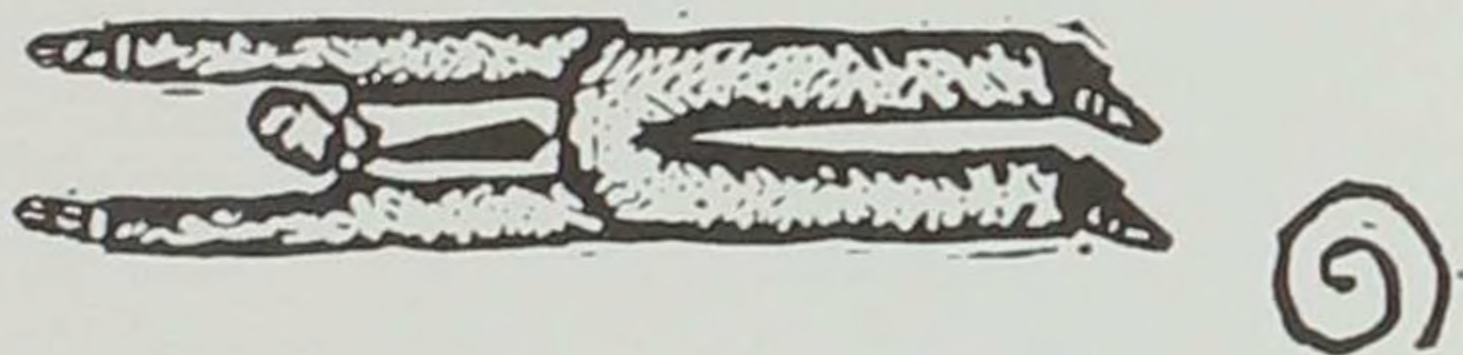


# age

TED

1996, Vol. 77, No. 2

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The Socialization of Weddings in the Rural Midwest** 50

*Elison*

Wedded weddings in surprising (and simple) ways.

**Midwestern Welcome to Marriage** 66

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"I'll be here until after the shivaree was over."

**"What I Had Yet Witnessed":  
The Mormon Cross Iowa in 1846** 70

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They had flooded streams, rattlesnakes and tears.

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What is his legacy in Iowa, 150 years later?

**Work Is Done:  
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Rolling colters and sprockets.



*When they were married in 1945, they were at the beginning of a trend: Midwesterners wedded. No longer content with the "best" wedding dresses, brides opted for simple and gift registration—all part of the new wedding in America. Our thanks to the Youngs for being photographed by Chuck Greiner.*

\* off the single-copy price



# Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED

Formerly The Palimpsest

Summer 1996, Vol. 77, No. 2



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## From the Farmhouse Parlor to the Pink Barn: The Commercialization of Weddings in the Rural Midwest

by Katherine Jellison

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"You weren't safe until after the shivaree was over."

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When Grace Larew and Dick Young married in 1945, they were at the beginning of a major shift in how rural midwesterners wedded. No longer content with home-baked cakes and "Sunday best" wedding dresses, brides opted for professional caterers, photographers, and gift registration—all part of the commercialization of rural weddings in America. Our thanks to the Youngs for loaning the gown and portrait. Cover photographed by Chuck Greiner.



# *From the Farmhouse Parlor to the Pink Barn*

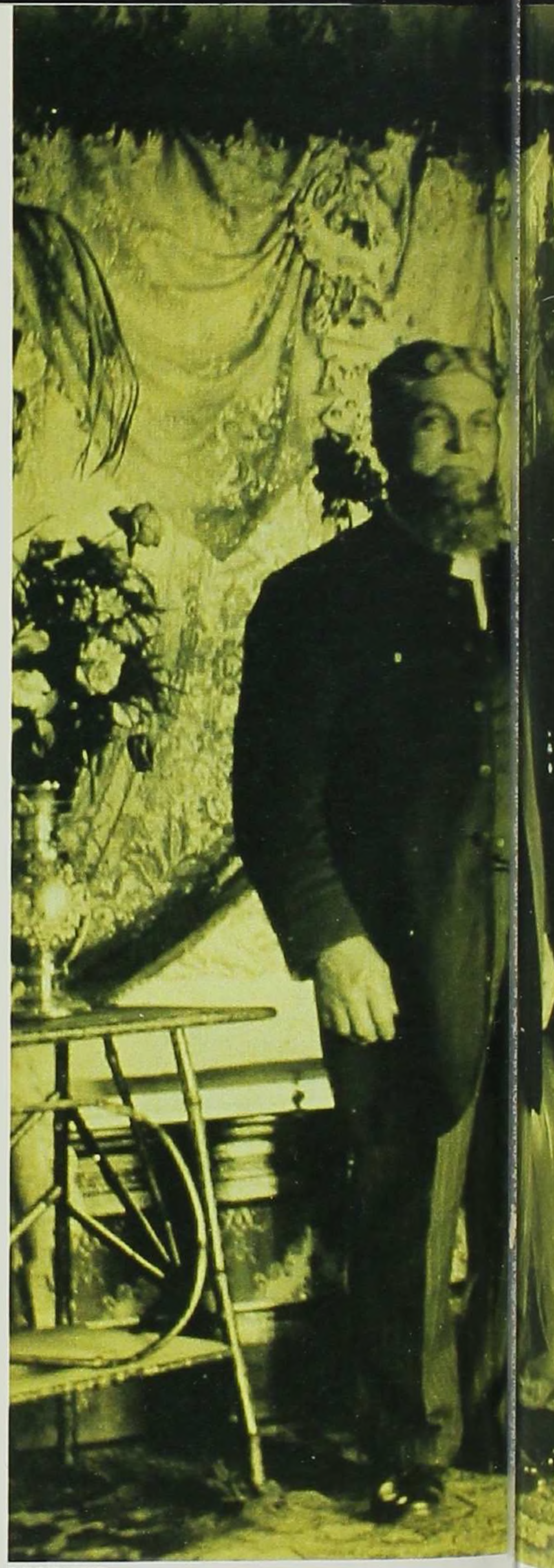
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## The Commercialization of Weddings in the Rural Midwest

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*by Katherine Jellison*

*Like* many other farms that grace the landscape of eastern Iowa, Diane and Mark Niebuhr's farmstead features a large dairy barn. Unlike the other barns in the area, however, this one is painted pale pink and houses not dairy cattle but hundreds of bridal gowns, bridesmaid dresses, and prom frocks. In addition to cultivating their 155 acres, the Niebuhrs own and operate Hope's Bridal Boutique, one of the top selling bridal shops in the Midwest. Their customers travel from within a two-hour radius to spend an average of \$550 on their bridal gowns—even during periodic downturns in the state's farm economy—and many of these young women confide to Diane Niebuhr that they have "always



SHSI (DES MOINES)





**F**armhouse parlors, like the one above, were the typical setting for most weddings of rural midwesterners into the 20th century. Friends and family helped organize and host the ceremony and celebration. By mid-century, however, brides began to turn to professional wedding consultants, catering services, and bridal shops, such as Hope's Bridal Boutique, located in a converted Iowa barn painted pink (right).

COURTESY THE AUTHOR





# From the Farmhouse Parlor to the Pink Barn

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by Katherine Johnson

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SHSI (DES MOINES)

**W**ith little fanfare, a bride and groom depart from a Boone, Iowa, general store, below a sign announcing “Marriages Solmized Here By Elder Samuel McBirnie.” Rural midwestern marriages were also solemnized in parlors and churches, but seldom in the elaborate “white” weddings staged by urban Americans.

dreamed” of purchasing their wedding dresses at the pink barn. One may reasonably ask how a business located in the middle of an Iowa cornfield could achieve such reputation and success. The answer lies in rural America’s acceptance of the commercialized wedding ideal.

In the United States, the concept of weddings as gala social events originated in the early 19th century with members of the northeastern elite. By mid-century, members of the white, native-born, urban middle class had joined the elite in their practice of such rituals, and all the elements of the modern “white wedding” were in place: the church setting, the bride dressed in white gown and veil, the best man and bridesmaids, the elaborately decorated wedding cake.

Brides in rural areas, however, continued to have relatively simple ceremonies long after their counterparts in cities had adopted all the elements of the formal white wedding. A typical 19th-century bride in America’s heartland married in the farmhouse parlor rather than a church and frequently wore her “Sunday best” rather than a “once-in-a-lifetime” wedding gown of white.

Although in the early 20th century, rural midwestern weddings increasingly took place within a church setting and featured a bride attired in white, they continued to be relatively simple affairs. Professional wedding consultants, catering services, and bridal boutiques such as the pink barn did not yet exist; family members continued to organize the wed-



ding ceremony themselves and provide the necessary accoutrements. Inclusion of other members of the rural neighborhood usually occurred only after the wedding ceremony, often at a wedding dance or dinner. Wedding dances, which were particularly popular in German and Czech farming settlements, typically featured home-brewed beer and music provided by neighbors and relatives. Community participation in a new marriage also occurred via the shivaree, an informal ceremony in which members of the rural neighborhood noisily surprised a young husband and wife in their new home and demanded cigars and sweets. Couples who did not provide the rural neighborhood with a dance or some other community celebration following their weddings could be sure that their shivarees would be particularly large and boisterous. In these ways, the small-scale, home-produced weddings of the early 20th century nevertheless became communal events.

Weddings were such popular community affairs in the early 20th century that many rural and small-town residents did not even bother to wait for the real thing and instead produced mock weddings for entertainment. These events frequently took place under the auspices of a local school or church and could revolve around any number of themes. For example, a group of young Iowa women played all the roles in a



**Above:** Newlyweds and their attendants pose before an outdoor arch supported by pillars. (One wonders how the attendant on the right supported her bouquet.) **Below left:** A loveseat and arch draped in white was the "wedding corner" for newlyweds identified only as "Ellen & Oscar" on the stereographs. Note the white paper wedding bells at the top of the photo. **Below right:** Another view through the tasseled doorway shows the "wedding table" at Oscar's sister's home. Small weddings and receptions in the home were typical.



ALL PHOTOS THIS PAGE: SHS (IOWA CITY)





BOTH PHOTOS: SHSI (IOWA CITY)

**“Womanless weddings”** were popular community events. This one took place in Traer, Iowa, probably in the 1920s. On the back of this photo are written the words: “Here is your girl.” As with many social customs, community-based forms of entertainment like womanless weddings eventually gave way to more commercial, mainstream forms.

mock wedding held during the “man shortage” period of World War I, with the faux groom attired in top hat, tails, and an artificial pot belly. Another motif was the “Tom Thumb” wedding, in which young children played the roles of bride, groom, best man, and bridesmaid.

The most popular theme for these pageants, however, was the “Womanless Wedding,” in which men

played all the men’s and women’s parts. Typical of these “Womanless Weddings” was one held in 1947 at the Washington Country School near Nortonville, Kansas, where local farmers masqueraded as bride, bridesmaids, and flower girl wearing their female relatives’ discarded clothing and jewelry. Like box suppers, cake walks, and authentic wedding celebrations, it was an opportunity for neighbors to get to-





gether for amusement and fellowship, and like most such occasions, this mock wedding took place during the slack period that followed the fall harvest. This particular mock wedding, however, was one of the last such entertainments held in the Nortonville area. By the late 1940s, a variety of rural community events—from threshing bees to box suppers and shivarees—were on the wane. Just as the cooperative neighborhood threshing bee gave way to the practice of each family hiring professional “custom cutters” or purchasing its own combine, the mock wedding ceremony gave way to more commercial entertain-

ments—such as viewing Hollywood movies or network television programs.

Along with such rural recreational practices, rural wedding celebrations underwent a transformation in the postwar era. Statistics on wedding receptions reported in newspapers that served residents of rural Minnesota demonstrate the changes that occurred in wedding celebrations during the course of the 20th century. In 1925/26, 95 percent of the wedding receptions mentioned in the daily *Albert Lea Times* took place in private homes, 5 percent in a rented hall or restaurant, and none in a church-related building. Only 20 years later, those trends had reversed, with the vast majority of wedding receptions in the area being held in public places rather than private homes. And finally, by 1975, only 9 percent of receptions in the Albert Lea area were held in homes, while 24 percent were held in halls or restaurants, and 67 percent in church-related buildings. Statistics gathered from the weekly Thief River Falls (Minnesota) *Tribune* demonstrate similar trends for the same 50-year period.



**W**omen played the roles of groom and best man in this 1917 mock wedding held in Clayton County, Iowa.





BOTH PHOTOS: SHSI (IOWA CITY)

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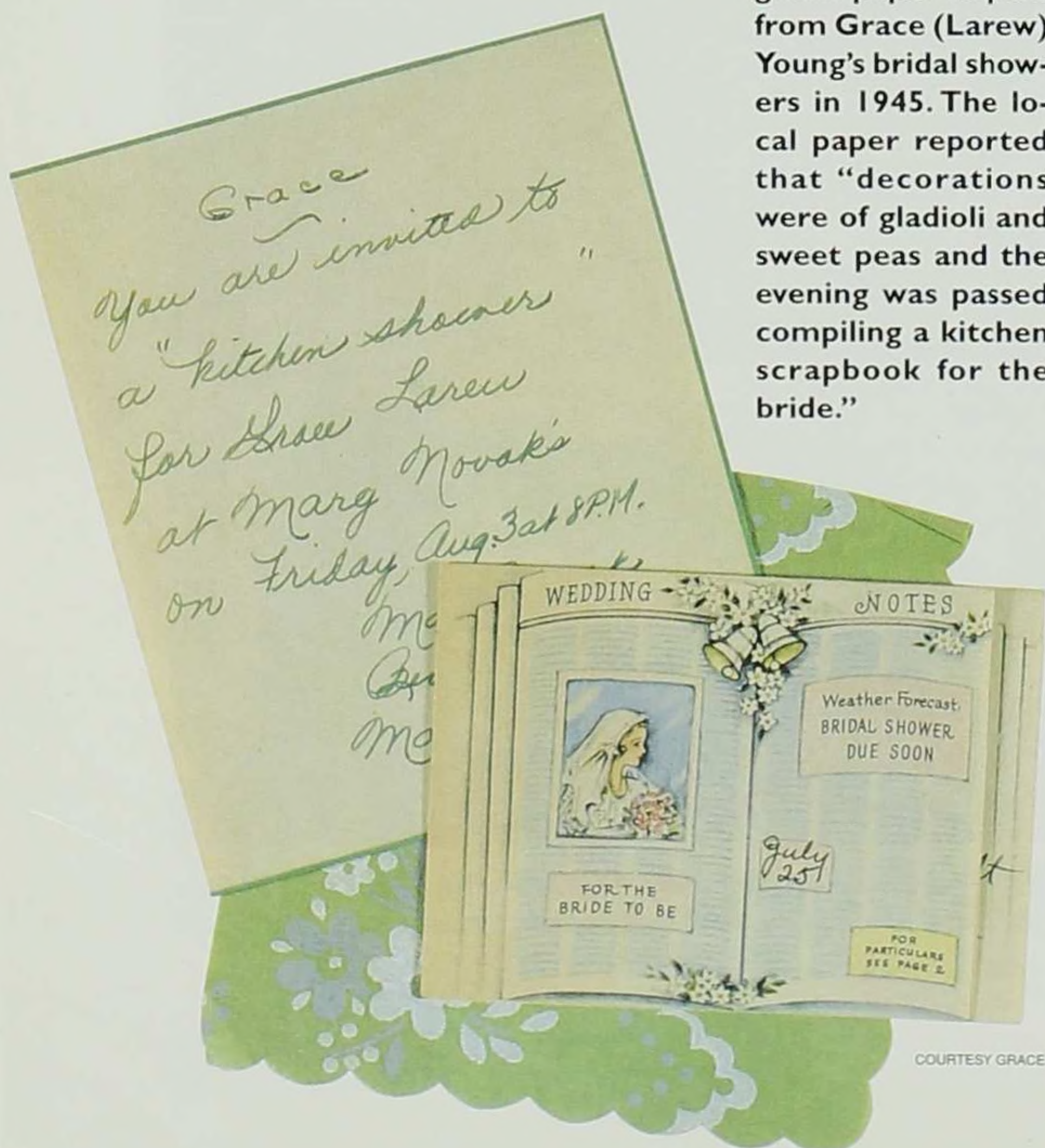


SHSI (DES MOINES)



**T**he Van Meter Junior Women's Club demonstrates how to have a bridal shower at its "School for Brides" in 1938. The school idea originated with the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs. In Van Meter, the *Des Moines Register* reported, "dozens of carefully marcelled girls" listened to a minister, doctor, and home demonstration agent advise on the sacredness of marriage, the importance of Wassermann tests, and the best choices for a hope chest. From left: Arlene Killam, Alice Smith, Alma Lily, Hariett Davis, and Ethel Strober.

**T**wo invitations and green paper napkin from Grace (Larew) Young's bridal showers in 1945. The local paper reported that "decorations were of gladioli and sweet peas and the evening was passed compiling a kitchen scrapbook for the bride."



COURTESY GRACE YOUNG

As these statistics indicate, rural wedding celebrations became increasingly formal, public, and commercial in character during the postwar era, owing to the rise of the American wedding industry. The prosperous postwar period saw the establishment of a vast network of clothiers, florists, caterers, bakers, engravers, photographers, and other business people who made their living in the wedding industry. And following two decades of depression and war, young Americans were eager to marry and purchase the services of this growing industry. It was an era that glorified domestic bliss. By 1950, one in every three American women was marrying by the age of 19. The experts who dispensed advice on wedding practices told these young postwar brides that they should freely purchase the goods and services of wedding professionals. For example, the *Emily Post* guide to wedding etiquette instructed brides on how best to plan and execute weddings that ranged in price from \$500 to \$4,000.

Popular magazines, movies, and television programs helped promote the commercialized wedding from coast to coast. *Bride's* magazine, which had begun publication in the 1930s as a wedding guide for East Coast society brides, expanded its circulation in the postwar era to take its fashion layouts and wedding industry advertisements to brides of all regions and social standing. Characters played by Joan Bennett and Elizabeth Taylor in the 1950 film *Father of the Bride* argued that an acceptable wedding could not be staged without a professional caterer, a \$400 wedding cake, and a "candid" camera man to record the "spontaneous" moments of the big day. *The Bride and Groom Television Show*, broadcast on NBC in the 1950s, offered winning couples the chance to be married on the air with all the appropriate professional services and accoutrements. The elaborate white wedding, which now increasingly included the goods and services of wedding professionals and commercial establishments, was thus urged upon Americans from all walks of life, including the nation's farm families.

Manufacturers, advertisers, journalists, and retailers also joined forces in the postwar era to encourage brides-to-be to acquire household products through bridal registries and prenuptial showers. In 1949, the Fostoria glassware company distributed a countertop Bridal Gift Display to retailers throughout the country, including the Hess Brothers' Department Store in Rockford, Illinois. The display featured the image of a 1940s pinup girl dressed in a Victorian-style wedding gown and urged consumers to purchase Fostoria products for the bride of "Today, Yesterday, & Every-



day." By 1950, *Good Housekeeping* magazine had joined the campaign to encourage the purchase of expensive wedding gifts by featuring a monthly advice column devoted to the selection of appropriate gifts for the bride-to-be. As a result of such marketing schemes, by 1953, the typical prospective bride could expect to attend from one to six showers in the months immediately prior to her wedding. Rural as well as urban brides now expected to receive elaborate household items as wedding or shower gifts, even if such presents often remained impractical for the farm home. For instance, in a survey conducted by *McCall's* magazine in the early 1950s, one newlywed who had received goblets, sherbet glasses, candlesticks, and a fruit bowl in her chosen crystal pattern admitted that she rarely entertained formally in her farm home but that she and her husband used her "good dishes and good silver" when they dined alone at Sunday dinner.

Rural Americans' embrace of the commercialized wedding resulted from a number of postwar factors. Their loss of rural schools and churches, increased reliance on store-purchased items, expanded employment in off-farm jobs, and extensive use of the automobile meant that rural dwellers now had greater regular contact with the residents, institutions, and cultural standards of urban America. One product of this increased contact was a change in rural marriage patterns. Working in an off-farm job, serving military duty in a faraway location, or attending a distant college on the GI Bill increased the likelihood that a young man would return to the family farm with a bride from a nonfarm background. At the same time, increased off-farm employment and educational opportunities for young farm women reduced the pool of potential farm-reared brides. According to one midwestern study, by 1955 one in every three women residing on a farm had grown up in a town or city, and these urban brides brought with them the standards and practices of urban life.

The greater mobility of postwar rural residents and the wider range of potential marriage partners also resulted in greater intermarriage between members of different ethnic groups, which in turn led to the breakdown of certain ethnic wedding customs and their replacement by practices associated with the commercialized wedding of "mainstream" America. Additionally, after two decades of agricultural depression, farm incomes had trebled during World War II and remained high afterwards. For the first time, many farm families were able to afford items and services that were already commonplace in middle-class urban households. Increased farm income, contact

with urban institutions, and marriage outside of one's own ethnic group all led to rural residents' greater participation in the American wedding industry.

As a result of these changes, mothers who had married in simple, home-produced wedding celebrations prior to World War II now saw their daughters patronize new commercial services. For instance, in 1930, when Ella Bischoff had married A.W. Winkelmann in rural Nebraska, the few purchased items included the bride's wedding gown, a bakery cake, some greenhouse flowers, and invitations printed at the local newspaper office. Only family members had attended the church ceremony, but the celebration had been extended to other members of the local German Lutheran community via the wedding dinner—held in the bride's family home and cooked by her mother and sister—and by way of the traditional shivaree. The practice of "showering" the bride with prenuptial gifts was unknown in the community at that time, but neighbors and relatives had presented the couple with a few simple gifts following the wedding.

In contrast, when the Winkelmanns' daughter Jean married farmer Bob Hardy in 1959, the "do-it-yourself" ethnic wedding celebration was not only considered unfashionable but it did not accurately reflect the social contacts of postwar youth. In the case of Jean Winkelmann and Bob Hardy, the bride had attended college far from home, and the groom had served in the military during the Korean War, so their social network extended well beyond the local German-American farming community. Wedding ex-



COURTESY GRACE YOUNG

**Iowan Grace Young recalls that commercial greeting cards, like these congratulating her on her engagement, began replacing handwritten notes about 1945. She also recalls the "five-pound parties" at which she and her fiancé announced their engagement to college dormitory friends over a five-pound box of candy.**





**G**race Larew and Dick Young's wedding on August 12, 1945, reflected the shift from home-based, small-scale weddings to more elaborate, commercialized weddings with professional catering and photography, gift registration, and a store-bought gown. Grace partially credits her friendships with college dormitory friends from all over Iowa as influencing her choices. Yet the war had an opposite effect: paper shortages made paper napkins difficult to find, and because of gas rationing, they chose an Iowa City church. Thus, Iowa City friends could more easily attend the wedding than if it had been in North Liberty.

penses for the couple included the services of a professional caterer, who served a dignified brunch in the reception area of the local Lutheran church. There, guests of diverse ethnicity presented the couple with a variety of gifts to add to those the bride had already received at her two wedding showers. By the time the Hardys' daughter Ann married farmer Steve Vrana in 1985, the commercialized wedding celebration had further expanded to include a total of four bridal showers and a honeymoon cruise to the Bahamas.

The experiences of this Nebraska family were typical of those of other rural residents in postwar America. Only those groups that resisted modernization and consumerism in general—such as the Old Or-

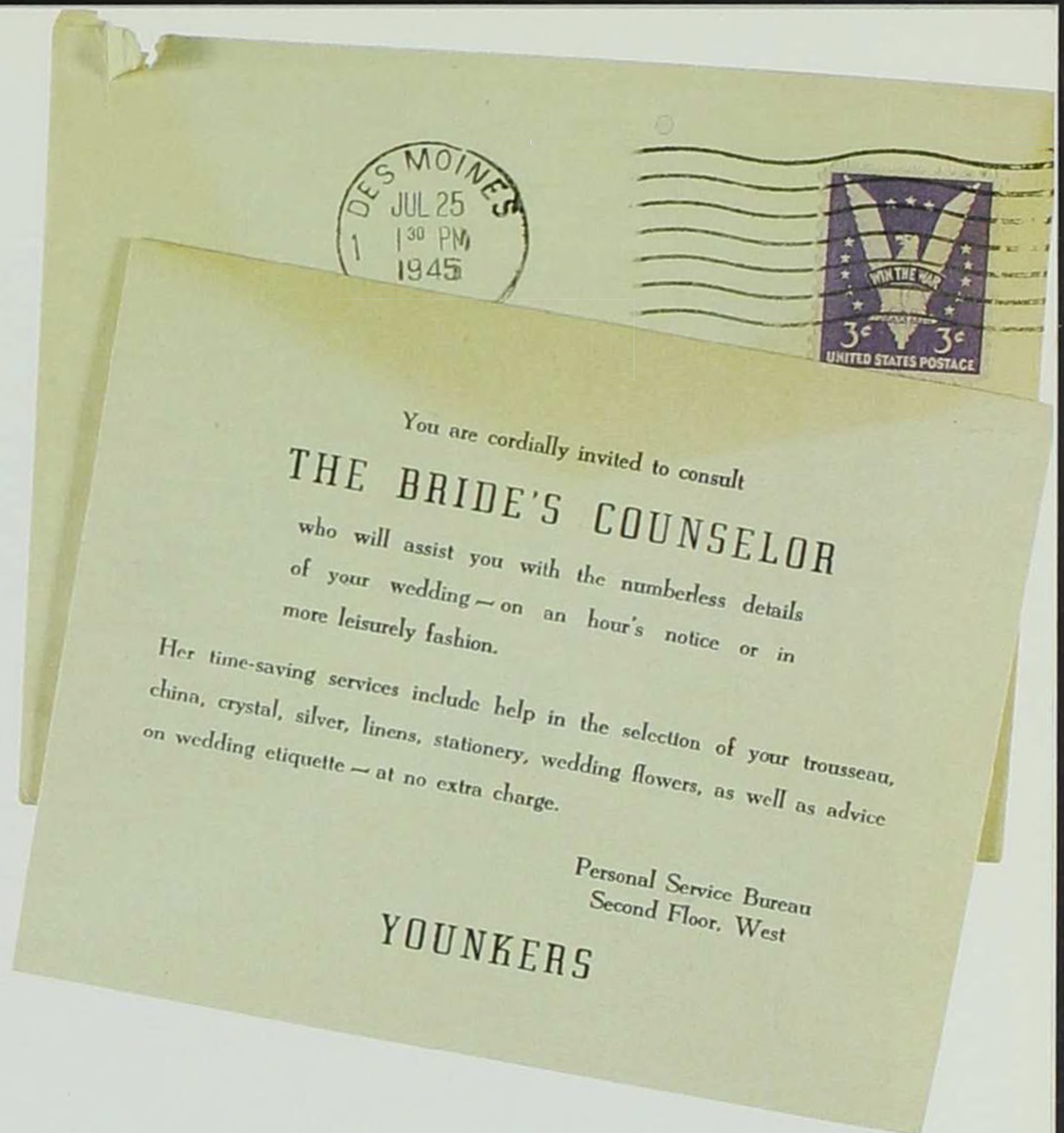
der Amish—continued to hold weddings in the farmhouse parlor, to maintain the celebration strictly within their own ethnic community, to rely on relatives and neighbors to prepare the wedding feast, and to provide the young couple with only a few practical gifts. Otherwise, rural Americans increasingly relied on commercial services for their wedding celebrations, responding to the efforts of the growing wedding industry to cultivate a market for their wares.

Brides-to-be in rural areas, however, sometimes found it difficult to achieve all aspects of the commercialized wedding ideal when they lived some distance away from a boutique, department store, or caterer. For many prospective brides and their families, fre-



quent shopping trips to a major commercial center remained impractical. The experiences of Elva Allen were typical of many postwar brides in the rural Midwest. A native of Seattle, Allen had never considered the possibility that she might marry a farmer and move half a continent away, but while serving in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, she had met a GI named Orville Heinz and by January 1946 was preparing to marry him and begin a new life as a Wisconsin farm woman. In her move to the rural Midwest, however, Allen had brought along her urban, middle-class standards, which included her desire for an elaborate church wedding. She and her future sister-in-law traveled to a Green Bay department store to buy an appropriate wedding gown but upon return to the farm realized that they had not purchased matching stockings. They could not travel all the way back to Green Bay, and stores in the surrounding small towns did not carry fancy white stockings, so the sister-in-law improvised by modifying a pair of her husband's white dress socks, which Allen proudly wore down the aisle of the local Presbyterian church.

In response to situations such as Allen's, some enterprising rural residents started their own businesses to take advantage of the desire for commercially produced weddings in the countryside. For example, Goldie Smith, who prepared the wedding brunch for Jean Winkelmann and Bob Hardy, was a Nebraska



**“You are cordially invited to consult THE BRIDE'S COUNSELOR who will assist you with the numberless details of your wedding—on an hour's notice or in more leisurely fashion,”** reads a card that bride-to-be Grace Larew received from Younkens in July 1945. These “time-saving services” included help in selecting crystal, stationery, and flowers, and “advice on wedding etiquette”—all reflections of the commercialized wedding. Below: More Larew-Young wedding scenes.

BOTH PAGES: COURTESY GRACE YOUNG





BOTH PHOTOS: SHSI (IOWA CITY)



**Not all postwar weddings were elaborate events, as seen in this wedding photo labeled “November 18, 1945. To Reverend Hanscom. Compliments of Mr. and Mrs. Norman Paukert, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.”**

farm woman who ran a catering business on the side. Hope Kolsto, who would eventually found Hope's Bridal Boutique in the early 1970s, also started out on a small scale, selling wedding cakes to her rural neighbors from her Iowa farmhouse. Because her farmstead was on an isolated gravel road, however, her customers often had difficulty finding her, so Kolsto gave the farm a distinctive appearance by painting all the buildings pink, including the barn that would later serve as a wedding boutique. For rural women like Hope Kolsto, the growing popularity of commercialized weddings provided a new way to help supplement their families' farm income.

Perhaps the ultimate expression of rural America's acceptance of the commercialized wedding was the 1954 appearance of a young farm couple on NBC's *Bride and Groom Television Show*, broadcast live from the network's Radio City Chapel every weekday from 11:00 to 11:15 a.m. Central Time. Each program featured the marriage of one couple, chosen from the dozens who sent letters to the producers each week outlining the stories of their meeting, romance, and

future plans. Based on these letters, and enclosed photographs, winners were chosen for their telegenic qualities and the uniqueness of their courtship saga. For couples who won the opportunity to appear on the show, the program provided rings, the clergyman's fee, flowers, photographs of the ceremony, and a honeymoon trip. Well-known household appliance, silverware, carpet, and cosmetics companies sponsored the show and presented their products to featured couples as wedding gifts.

At the time of their wedding—March 17, 1954—Earl Stiles was a 20-year-old farmer, and Claudine Smith was 19 and working for the Agricultural Extension Service in Lee County, Arkansas. Apparently the novelty of having a farm couple appear on the New York-based program was one factor in the producers' choice of Stiles and Smith as the couple who would marry on their St. Patrick's Day show. The bride had certainly emphasized the couple's rural roots in her letter of application to the program, stating, “Earl and I were both born and raised on the farm. He plans to continue to farm, and we live in the country where the



air is freer." Now on the set of the *Bride and Groom* show and far from rural Arkansas, the bride wore a wedding dress borrowed from a New York City store, and she and the groom repeated their vows in front of a Methodist minister, the show's master of ceremonies, its house vocalist and musicians, and the program's studio audience. Back in Lee County, Arkansas, their friends, parents, and other family members gathered around the area's few local sets to watch the televised ceremony.

The Stileses' televised nuptials illustrate a number of characteristics of the postwar rural wedding. Their wedding certainly represented the continuation of community involvement in the ritual, although now family and friends were strictly observers rather than participants. As people back in Lee County, Arkansas, gathered around television sets located in private homes and in the window of the local department store, they were able to witness this significant rite of passage in the lives of two of the community's young people. The fact that the wedding was televised nationally, however, certainly allowed persons beyond the local community to share in the event. Friends and relatives across the country who would not have otherwise been able to attend a ceremony at the Stileses' home church in Arkansas were now able to witness it—as were millions of total strangers. Similarly, the Stiles ceremony continued the tradition of weddings as entertainment. Now, however, it was commercialized entertainment—complete with sponsors' advertising—rather than a community-orchestrated mock wedding ceremony.

The Stiles wedding also further served to educate rural Americans in the appropriate way to wed in the postwar era. In its dignified staging of the ceremony, the *Bride and Groom* program instructed its audience that a simple ceremony incorporating professional musicians was preferable to a boisterous ethnic celebration. And although producers of the *Bride and Groom* show informed couples that they could have their wedding performed by the clergyman of their choice, the fact that an interview with the couple and the wedding ceremony were both to be completed within 15 minutes meant that the program lent itself more to a simple Protestant ceremony than to traditional Catholic or Jewish rites. Non-Protestant couples who married on the show obviously had to modify their rituals somewhat to accommodate the limited time frame, making their ceremonies more closely resemble those performed within Protestant denominations. The program also relayed the message that expensive household wares were superior gifts to home-



*It's just a little message  
But most sincerely sent  
To say how much  
your charming gift  
And thoughtfulness have meant*



**Here, Connie and Walt Koehn of Clinton contemplate their six-tiered wedding cake on thank-you cards sent to their wedding guests. Custom photography and printed invitations and thank-you cards characterized the commercialized wedding.**

made quilts and linens. In fact, advertisers for the show would have been happy to know that when the Stileses returned to Arkansas from their New York adventure, their neighbors were most interested in hearing about the "prizes" the couple had "won" from the show's sponsors.

Although the Stiles wedding illustrates postwar trends in exaggerated form, the central message it sent to viewers of the time was one they were increasingly coming to understand and accept: an American wedding celebration was a public event, not something produced and witnessed by family and neighbors alone. As such, it now required the services of a variety of professionals and commercial institutions: florists, photographers, musicians, jewelers, travel agents, and manufacturers of household wares. Back in Iowa—where 54.9 percent of farm households owned television sets by 1954—many rural homemakers may well have watched the Stileses tie the knot on late morning TV, and these viewers no doubt had ab-





SHS (IOWA CITY); JOAN LIFRINGZUG COLLECTION





sorbed the program's message. Their daughters too should marry in this fashion and procure the services of wedding professionals.

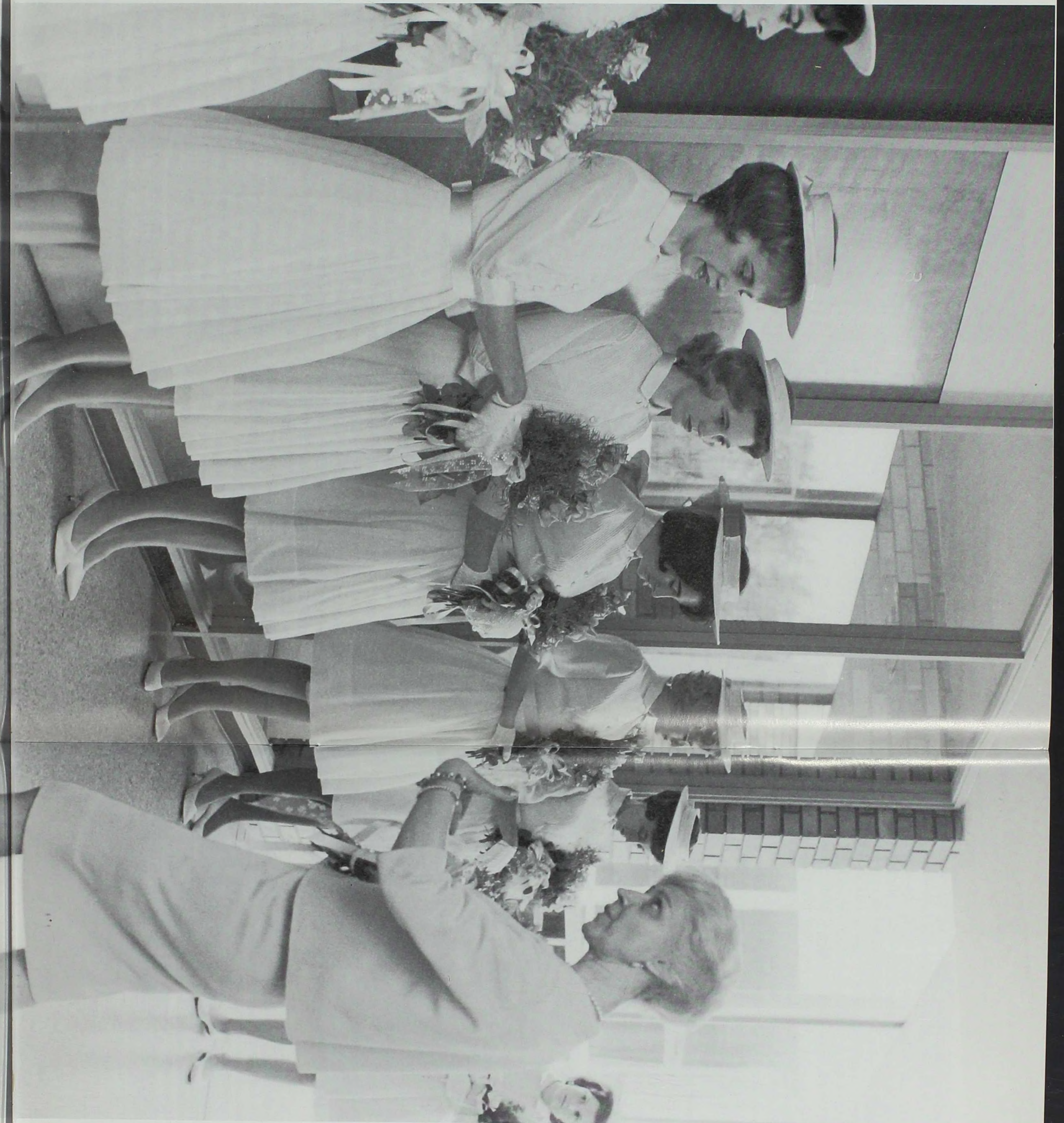
It was within this atmosphere of acceptance that Hope Kolsto began her wedding cake business. Taking advantage of her contacts in the local rural community, Kolsto sold her cakes to willing friends and neighbors. Eventually, capitalizing on the concepts of homemade quality and rural thrift, she was able to extend her business to sell cakes to nearby urban residents looking for attractive cakes at reasonable prices. When she expanded her business to include wedding dresses, "quality at low prices" remained the motto. And what could serve as a better symbol of Kolsto's commitment to those principles than to sell her merchandise from a sturdy barn that she herself had painted, carpeted, wired, and transformed into a bridal boutique?

In fact, Kolsto's location became a distinct advantage by the 1980s, as the youngest members of the baby boom generation reached marrying age and the postwar wedding industry reached its peak. By 1984, a record two and a half million American brides were seeking the services of wedding professionals, and as a result, many more retailers entered the trade. In an increasingly competitive market, where the nation's bridal boutiques all carried virtually the same gowns and its caterers displayed identical cakes, the wedding retailer had to sell the best quality product at the lowest possible price. Located in the family barn and hiring local farm women as her saleswomen and seamstresses, Kolsto kept her overhead and labor costs down and was thus often able to sell a dress to a customer for a significantly lower price than the prospective bride would have paid for an identical item at a shopping mall in Cedar Rapids or Des Moines. Rural brides, who typically chose to spend less on their gowns than their urban counterparts, certainly benefited from this situation, but many urban brides also began to seek out places like Hope's Bridal Boutique or the Cameo Bridal Shoppe—located in a barn in upstate New York—where brides-to-be pursued the mystique of rural thrift and "homemade" quality and in the process frequently found some real bargains.

One might thus argue that Hope's Bridal Boutique not only represents rural midwesterners' acceptance of the professionally produced wedding but also

**Iowa** photographer Joan Liffing-Zug captured numerous aspects of the commercialized wedding ideal, including this candid moment in which a wedding planner instructs bridesmaids at All Saints Church in Cedar Rapids in 1963.





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**Iowa photographer Joan Liffring-Zug captured numerous aspects of the commercialized wedding ideal, including this candid moment in which a wedding planner instructs bridesmaids at All Saints Church in Cedar Rapids in 1963.**





SHS (IOWA CITY); JOAN LIFFRING-ZUG COLLECTION

**A** young bridesmaid shields her eyes from hairspray as an identically clad teen stands her ground. Such candid wedding photos by Joan Liffring-Zug testify to the level of detail and preparation behind the elaborate “white wedding,” which became the American ideal in this century.

serves as an excellent symbol of the contemporary wedding industry as a whole. In an era when half of the nation’s marriages will end in divorce, the average American bride currently spends \$16,000 on her wedding, even in the uncertain economy of the mid-1990s. On the surface, these statistics simply do not seem to “add up.” Young women and their families continue to spend scarce resources on what one might argue is a “fifty-fifty proposition.” Obviously, the resiliency of the postwar wedding ideal is evident. The groundwork that wedding professionals laid in a more prosperous era has had real staying power. As their grandmothers and mothers did in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, today’s brides, whether living in rural or urban areas, continue to believe in the professionally produced wedding. And in the highly competitive wedding market, where since the mid-1980s the number of retailers has increased and the number of brides has decreased, wedding professionals have to keep their prices down but continue to present a quality product.

At Hope’s Bridal Boutique, most of the employees continue to be local farm women who schedule their hours in the boutique around their farm chores, just as Hope Kolsto did over 20 years ago when she turned the family dairy barn into a bridal shop. Since that time, Kolsto has retired to Arizona and sold the farm

and bridal boutique to Diane and Mark Niebuhr. A major highway now passes the farmstead, making it easier for customers to find, but the barn, farmhouse, and outbuildings retain their coating of pink paint. On any given day, a steady stream of young women and their mothers, sisters, friends—and an occasional father or fiancé—may be seen coming and going from the pink barn. Here at Hope’s Bridal Boutique, a woman can purchase the wedding gown of her dreams. As Diane Niebuhr is fond of saying, the pink barn offers “big city selection and big city service” but in a rural environment. The wedding practices of the “big city” have indeed come to the midwestern countryside.

As the history of rural weddings over the past 50 years indicates, many of the changes that characterized postwar farming practices also distinguished rural cultural rituals. Decreased dependence on cooperative family and neighborhood arrangements, and increased reliance on cash expenditures and professional services affected both agricultural production and rural cultural traditions such as weddings. As with postwar innovations in agricultural production, postwar changes in rural wedding celebrations had their origins in the interwar period, when, as historians have noted, access to automobiles, radios, and motion pictures exposed rural residents to the standards and institutions of urban middle-class life and sometimes contributed to the breakdown of certain ethnic customs and patterns of interaction. These trends accelerated in the immediate postwar era, when high farm incomes allowed rural residents to become full-scale members of the American consumer culture. They, too, could now afford the status symbols and leisure pursuits of the urban middle class—including the commercialized wedding. The commercialized wedding was thus on its way toward becoming a fixture of rural midwestern family life. ❖

*Katherine Jellison is an associate professor of history at Ohio University in Athens. She would appreciate hearing from any readers who would consent to being interviewed about their own wedding experiences. She thanks the Iowa Sesquicentennial Commission and the State Historical Society of Iowa for a Sesquicentennial grant that helped fund this research.*

**IOWA**  
**150**   
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# Three Weddings and a Shower

From parlors to paper plates, the diaries of Iowan Mary Eleanor Armstrong Peet trace subtle changes in weddings. These entries, from the diaries at the State Historical Society of Iowa, have been edited slightly. —*The editor*

"Wed. 14 Feb. 1900. . . . Rose early. Swept sitting room, cleaned celery, made potatoe salad and a big pan of escalloped oysters. Dote came up this morning and put chiffon in neck of my tan dress. . . . Had a fire in parlor all day. Tried to heat the upstairs. Arranged things in parlor. . . . We set the table and about 4 oclock I commenced to get my trousseau ready to don. Dote waved my back hair and fixed me up in general. Lydia and I just went downstairs to warm when Claude came. Others commenced to come so I sneaked upstairs and Claude soon followed. I was pretty nervous. Could hear the people arriving. . . . [To] 'General Tom Thumb's Grand Wedding March' . . . Mrs. Soper, Claude and I marched downstairs and took our places in the bay window and the ceremony proceeded. It was a short ceremony followed by congratulations from all. Even from Lorene, she came right behind

Lora. . . . The supper was nice. The guests invited all came except (three) . . . making a total of 35. The presents were uncommonly nice it seems to me. Mr. Soper gave us a beautiful wedding album with certificate and Etc. inside. All the guests wrote their autograph in it. . . . The last ones went home between twelve and one oclock."

"Wed. Nov. 25, 1908. Claude took Merle & I to Ma's. Took our clothes for tonight. 2 jardinieres, smilax & vines. 2 roses, chrysanthemums, some dishes & the chickens & dressing. Went over to Cora Garetson's. Beat the eggs for 2 angel foods. Cora baked 3 of them for Eve. Helped Eve decorate parlor & dining room. Made escalloped oysters. . . . About 7 oclock the invited guests arrived & Mae played a wedding march & Mr. Post, Charles & Eve came downstairs & stood before the decorated corner & were married. Congratulations followed & supper was served. . . . Jen & I served assisted by Claude in the kitchen. As soon as it was dark the house seemed to be surrounded by men, women & kids trying to see in. Could hear them scuffling on the porch & whispering during the ceremony & as soon

as congratulations were over they let loose.

. . . . On Monday night the girls & women gave her a 'shower' at Jake Newman's. Gave her a lot of little presents with an appropriate verse on it."

"Sat. Oct. 4, 1952. Jack's wedding day. . . . at Kenwood Park M. E. church at 2:30 P.M. It was a simple, pretty wedding. A bride's maid and best man. Marjorie played the organ. The father, Mr. Merrifield, gave the bride away. She looked very pretty and nice & Jack looked manly. There seemed to be more of Jack's relatives and friends than her side of the house. After the ceremony the bridal party lined up in the vestibule & received congratulations. Some pictures were taken & and as the bride & groom came out to go to their car rice greeted them from every side. . . . We went to S.W. Cedar Rapids to the home of the Merrifields' where after a long wait (they went back in the church for more pictures) the bridal group arrived. The bride & groom cut the first slice of a 4 tiered cake & . . . [then] opened their presents & . . . expressed their thanks to all. Then refreshments [on?] paper plates was passed. . . . Finally bride appeared in going away costume & [they] started on their tour." ❖

## NOTE ON SOURCES FOR "FROM THE FARMHOUSE PARLOR TO THE PINK BARN"

The author thanks the Iowa Sesquicentennial Commission and the State Historical Society of Iowa for a Sesquicentennial grant that helped fund research. Much of the information here is from the author's interviews with rural married couples and wedding industry professionals. On the general history of courtship and marriage practices, see: John Modell, *Into One's Own: From Youth to Adulthood in the United States, 1920-1975* (1989); Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (1984); Regina Lee Blaszczyk, "It's a Cinderella Story': The Home Furnishings Trade, Brides-to-Be, and the Construction of Domesticity, 1945-1960," in *Gender, Consumption, and Technology*, ed. Roger Horowitz and Arwen Mohun (forthcoming); Simon Charsley, *Wedding Cakes and Cultural History* (1992); Ann Monsarrat, *And the Bride Wore . . . : The Story of the White Wedding* (1973); and Marcia Seligson, *The Eternal Bliss Machine: America's Way of Wedding* (1973). On Amish weddings, see Stephen Scott, *The Amish Wedding and Other Special Occasions of the Old Order Communities* (1988). For more on weddings in the Winkelmann-Hardy family, see Katherine Jellison, "Getting Married in the Heartland: The Commercialization of Weddings in the Rural Midwest," *Ohio University College of Arts and Sciences Forum* 12 (Fall 1995), 46-50. On the history of rural midwestern family life, see Deborah Fink, *Open Country Iowa: Rural Women, Tradition and Change* (1986); Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* (1993); Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (1995); and Jane Marie Pederson, *Between Memory and Reality: Family and Community in Rural Wisconsin, 1870-1970* (1992). The major work consulted on post-World War II family life is Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (1988). For those wishing further information on the sources employed, an annotated version of the manuscript is in this magazine's production files.



# Shivaree

## A Midwestern Welcome to Marriage

by Gordon Marshall

For many Iowans earlier in this century, the melodious echo of wedding bells was later drowned out by the irreverent cacophony of a shivaree

A shivaree is a discordant, noisy procession and serenade by which neighbors and friends greet a newly married couple, and which commonly continues until the husband pays the group to stop or offers refreshments. The custom, with many variations, was still practiced in the rural Midwest at least through the 1950s.

Historian Loretta Burns has studied the shivaree's European roots; the word comes from the French word *charivari*. In Europe in earlier centuries, the *charivari* was often punitive, its victims widows or widowers who remarried. The community expressed its unofficial disapproval of the upsetting of local tradition by raucously promenading the bride and groom on a donkey through the village to humiliate them. (In Britain, the *charivari* was called "rough music" or "mock serenades"; the donkey procession, a "skimmington.")

*Charivaris* did not focus only on those who remarried, but also on adulterers or "anyone who challenged the social order," Burns explains. European *charivaris*

served both as rites of passage and as public censorship, reflecting the community's belief "that it had the right and even the responsibility to reinforce custom, or at least to remind the community of custom."

As the *charivari* immigrated to America and became the shivaree, it gradually lost its punitive and sometimes violent overtones and focused only on newlyweds, but it could still be crude and rough. Banging on pots and pans or shooting a shotgun blast could be just the opening gambit for friends and neighbors. Making the groom wheelbarrow the bride down Main Street, or short-sheeting or salting the marriage bed (amidst the confusion of a surprise shivaree) were typical pranks.

Shivarees varied from community to community and changed over time. Yet the shivarees in Ida County, where I grew up, shared several common elements with shivarees recalled in 1978 by northwestern Iowans in oral history interviews (from which I quote excerpts). One of the main elements in most shivarees was to catch the couple off guard.

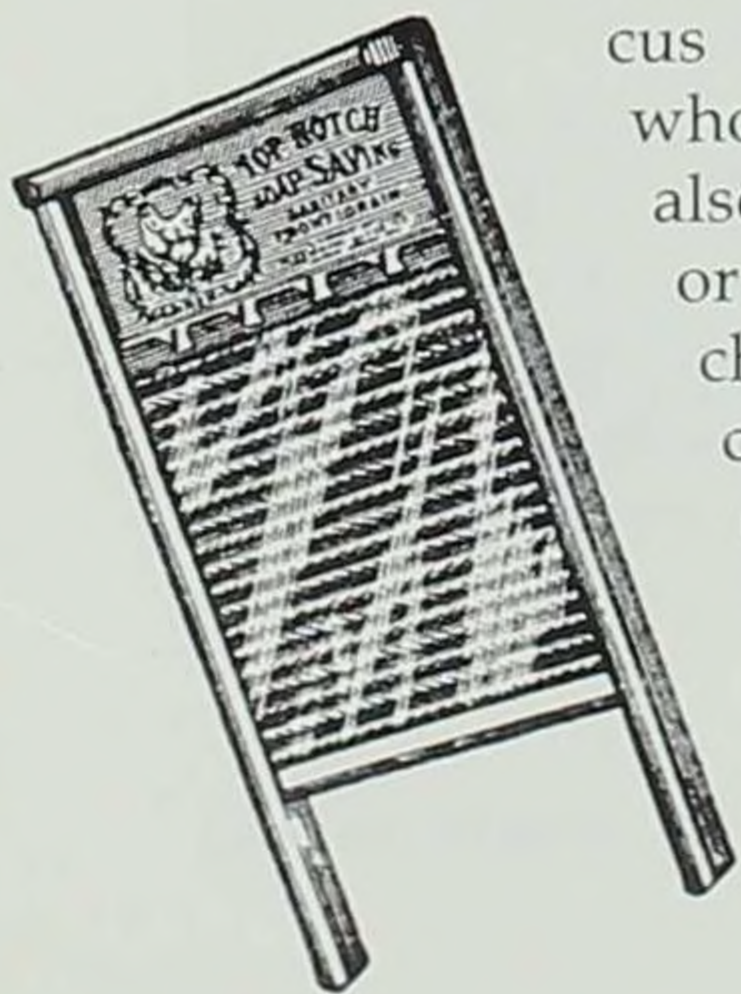
"It was a game, a surprise," explained Gerald Goodwin, who married Fay Utesch in 1933. "They'd even stop their cars or horse and buggy at a neighbor's place and walk in. Maybe you could guess, maybe you couldn't. Sometimes, if you got wind of it,

you'd trick them and leave home, and they'd have to hunt you up again."

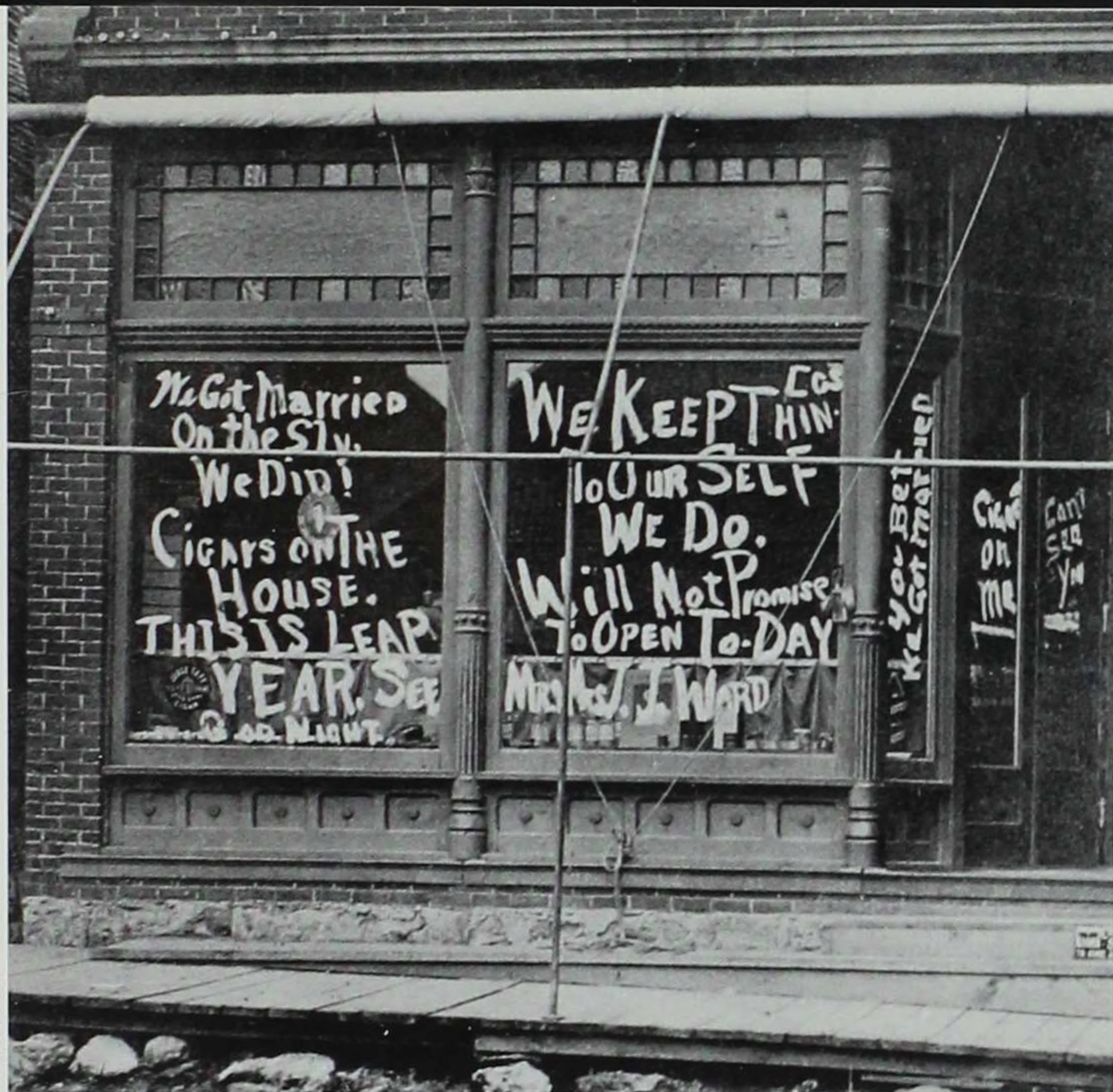
"Usually it was within two weeks to a month [of the wedding] that they tried to shivaree you," Fay added. "Sometimes they liked to catch you in bed. Sometimes it was earlier. Probably never before eight."

Brownie L. MacVey agreed that a shivaree happened "whenever they could catch up with the couple." He and his wife, Florence, explained, "See, you weren't safe until after the shivaree was over. It could happen six months after you were married—even a year if they hadn't caught you yet." The MacVeys were married in Pocahontas in 1944.

When my parents, William and Mabel Marshall, married in 1922, they anticipated that high jinks were in order. After the wedding in the bride's home, Dad worried that a gang of friends would be waiting at the Battle Creek depot for them. He had his new brother-in-law drive them to a town farther down the rail line to catch the train to Chicago for their honeymoon. For the time being they had evaded any pranks, and by March 1 the newlyweds were back from their honeymoon and had moved to a farm in a new neighborhood. Still, from their first night, my folks kept their clothes very handy when they went to bed. Within a couple of nights, the expected shivaree came off. They were already in bed when their new neighbors arrived banging on pots and pans. Since Mom's hair was in disarray, she shoved it under a hat. Later in the evening her new neighbor, Hertha, who would become her great friend, suggested that she take off her hat and stay awhile. My par-







SHS (IOWA CITY)

Outsmarting the shivaree crowd in Wellman, Iowa, 1904, Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Ward announce in the Wards Drug Store window that “We got married on the sly. We did. Cigars on the house” and “We keep things to our self. We do. Will not promise to open today.” Cigars and candy were customary treats from the newlyweds.

ents provided the usual treats—cigars and candy bars. All in all, it was a very sedate shivaree.

My aunt and uncle’s shivaree, however, was not so sedate and perhaps reflected more of its European roots. In 1933 Ed Campbell made his second marriage, to my aunt, Mary Marshall, who was 25 years younger. When they returned to Battle Creek from their wedding trip, his cronies on Main Street tried to capture him. Campbell was a big fellow and he easily broke away and ran down the street. A newcomer to the area saw the town worthies in pursuit of Campbell and obliged by tackling him.

Now captured, Campbell was locked up in a railroad boxcar on a sidetrack for nearly a half-day (the bride was held in more

teel quarters). Despite this prank, there was no monkeying with their home or marriage bed, thanks to Ed Campbell’s elderly next-door neighbor. Furious about how these “hoodlums” were mistreating his pal and political hero (Campbell had been speaker of the Iowa House of Representatives and a U.S. congressman), the neighbor had guarded the house.

This urge to capture the groom had not died out by my own time. When I was in high school in the early 1940s and living in Battle Creek in Ida County, I joined a gang of young people organizing a shivaree of a young couple. Riding in a half-dozen cars, with headlights off, we rolled quietly into their farmstead one night, all hot to capture the newly married couple for some now-forgotten prank.

Not the passive type, the

couple started running away from their house. As one of the pursuers, I, a gangly youth, was sprinting along in the cattle yard when I tripped and fell. Not hurt, I brushed off the cow manure and resumed the chase. We soon had the couple back in their house for the usual treats. I was the butt of some coarse humor, however, and nobody would sit very close to me. Although I scarcely knew the groom or the bride, for years after, whenever she and I met on the street, I thought I detected a smirk.

What happened at the actual shivaree often depended on how many other couples the groom “had made life miserable for,” explained Brownie MacVey. “Generally nothing real serious,” he noted, “but they’d tear up the house a little bit,” hide the couple’s clothes, or rearrange furniture. “After they got through raising the dickens,” Florence MacVey added, “they all got together and had lunch or dinner or [would] play cards the rest of the night.”

Agnes Dunham, who married in Crawford County in 1933, recalled that her neighbors arrived armed with horns or “anything that’d make a racket.” They would “hammer ‘til you come out and then they usually have a captain and after about so much jazzing around and candy bars—you better have plenty of candy bars and cigars and what have you on hand because you know they’re going to come—and then they’ll sit and visit for awhile.”

“I tell you what they used to do,” she elaborated. “They come in your house, they just come in and say, ‘We’ll have a little party.’ They just pick up your furniture. . . . They roll the rug up, take your





dining room furniture, living room furniture, everything out and set it in the yard. Bring in the orchestra and have a dance. In your house."

Like many couples, Gerald and Fay Goodwin handed out candy and cigars, but only after the revelers had earned it. Gerald explained: "They surround the house and make noise and when you figure they've made enough to earn their treats, you open the door and let them in. You introduce your wife and you'd better have some treats or they made it rough for you."

Goodwin recalled a shivaree of an elderly couple in his neighborhood when he was a child: "It was the second marriage for both of them. I went along with my dad. That was back in the cob and wood stove days and they used to shoot black powder shells and it was very customary for lots of guns [to be] a-booming. There were cowbells and they carried one of these big saw blades that you could pound on. That was noisemaking."

"Well," Goodwin continued, "this old couple, it was very cold that night, and they decided they wouldn't even let them in. Back in those days they lots of times loaded their own shells and we didn't put shot in, to save money, but it made a lot of noise. I remember a great uncle, Mother's uncle, and he was a lightweight man—they shoved him up on the roof. And up he went and he shoved a double-barrel ten-gauge shotgun down the chimney as far as he could and pulled the trigger. The lids came off the cook stove and fired into the room," Goodwin recounted, "and they were glad to invite people in to help put the fire out."



In our town in 1941, a leading farmer named Calvin, married Elizabeth, a high school teacher. Aware of which night the shivaree would happen, the newlywed Goodenows locked the doors, turned out the lights, and went to bed. Their friends, including some schoolteachers, made a little racket around the farmstead but went away—temporarily defeated. In a couple of weeks the gang returned, and they painted a few slogans on Calvin's car. Although Calvin was very proud of his Ford V-8, he wasn't particularly distressed about the graffiti and didn't wash it off right away. Eventually he realized that the group had mixed lime in their paint, and the finish on the car was ruined. Although the insurance company paid for the repainting, the moral of the story was: Don't try to outfox the shivaree crowd.

Fitting the definition of a shivaree as a community celebration but lacking the raucous spirit or element of surprise was the daytime shivaree of my country schoolteacher, Gertrude Gottberg Knoke, who had married into a well-known area family who owned a grain elevator at Knoke. Her father-in-law set the date and paid the bills for their daytime shivaree. Perhaps a thousand people came from all over the area, and cars were parked all over the tiny town. Plank benches were set up around the newlyweds' house, and barrels of ice cream and beer were served to an orderly crowd. As kids ran all about, adults visited under the trees.

Sometimes other planned events substituted for a shivaree. "We got married at eight in the morning," Ethel Tiefenthaler recalled about her 1941 wedding in

Carroll County. "Big wedding, big dinner, and a dance at night. If you didn't have something like that, then you got shivareed."

On the other hand, Myrne and Elmer Bogh hadn't expected a shivaree "because we had given the dance," Myrne recalled, "and we thought they'd be satisfied, but they came just for fun." The neighbors brought cake and sandwiches. "I remember I got so scared—all these people coming in," Myrne recounted. "I didn't have that much lunch on hand. I didn't know then they were bringing their own."

Whatever happened to the shivaree custom? In our area, one of its informal rules was that you could only shivaree the married couple if you weren't invited to the wedding. As the mid-century economy improved and weddings got larger, shivarees died out. After World War II, wedding dances sponsored by the married couple became very popular. This social event replaced the shivaree, because the desire for a party was met.

"Nowadays, things have changed considerably," remarked Gerald Goodwin in a 1978 interview. "Very seldom you'll hear of any noisemaking."

"It's more or less of a kind of open house now," Fay Goodwin added. "Years ago, they came, finished the treats and visited and smoked their cigars and the house was full of smoke and [we all] just had a good neighborhood visit."

Historian Loretta Burns assures us the shivaree is not completely a custom of the past. She has learned of a few genuine shivarees since the 1970s and notes that some amateur and professional historians have been





known to celebrate a colleague's wedding in this traditional way. In rural areas a wedding anniversary is occasionally observed by reprising the shivaree with the original participants.

For as much mischief or damage as a shivaree did, it was nevertheless a community ritual not to be ignored. When asked what would happen if newlyweds didn't open their door to a shivaree, Alma Pauline Langer, who was married in Denison in 1913, replied, "Oh, that wouldn't look very nice, would it?"

"You really were insulted if you didn't get shivareed," Agnes Dunham confided, "because then

you knew nobody cared about you."

When rural and small-town Iowans were more physically isolated and financially limited in social activity, a sense of belonging was conferred by shivareeing a newly married couple. Certainly the gathering could be corny, crude, or even rough, but it was a memorable welcome to married life in the community. ❖

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*Gordon Marshall now lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and enjoys writing about Iowa's rural past.*

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

Secondary sources are Loretta T. Johnson, "Charivari/Shivaree: A European Folk Ritual on the American Plains," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 20:3 (Winter 1990); Loretta T. Burns, "Memories of the Past: Minnesota Shivarees," lecture, May 5, 1991, Mankato State University; and John T. Flanagan, "Note on 'Shivaree,'" *American Speech* 15 (1940), 110.

The author interviewed or corresponded with Esther Fowler Shotwell, Stanley P. Marshall, Calvin Goodenow, and Gertrude G. Knoke. The excerpts quoting Gerald and Fay Goodwin, Brownie and Florence MacVey, Agnes Dunham, Ethel Tiefenthaler, Myrne Bogh, and Alma Pauline Langer are from oral history interviews conducted with rural northwestern Iowans for the 1978 Earthwatch Project, coordinated by Rebecca Conard. Earthwatch interviews are archived at the State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City), as is the Barney diary (see below). Some excerpts were edited slightly for publication.

## A Dubuque charivari in 1846 "The custom to make night hideous"

A century ago, attorney William Joshua Barney described a shivaree in Dubuque that echoed the more punitive overtones of earlier European *charivaris*. On May 20, 1846, Barney wrote in his diary: "Tonight hearing a tremendous noise going on up street which sounded like tin pans being beaten, bells ringing crackers being fired occasionally varied by the report [of] a cannon, I went to the place where the racket proceeded to ascertain its cause. I was told that it was a Charivari (pronounced Chivree) and that it was the custom thus to make night hideous under the windows of a newly married person when the match met with popular disapprobation. The Bridegroom can rid himself of this annoyance if he consents to treat the party who cause it. The present match was of a recently widowed woman to a man who stands in bad odour here. The marriage has been greatly disapproved by the family of the Bride and some members of it were among the performers of the Charivari. I staid near the house for a while listening to the noise which to say the truth was Infernal. The Bridegroom was obstinate, he would not treat, and his tormentors exercised every means of annoyance in the shape of noise that they could invent. Sleigh & Cowbells, tin pans, horns drums, fifes, firecrackers and even a cannon which they fired every few minutes. The concus-

sion of the frequent reports must have broken every window in the house. I heard one pane crack while I was [a] listener. Every now and then the mob raised their voices aloud in such a yell that it surpassed in hideousness all their instruments. This practice of Charivaring is common here though not peculiar to the West. Sanford & Crawford who were listeners with me told me that they had often heard them in some of the Atlantic States. In some cases the serenaders (if I may thus prostitute the term) have proceeded to unwarrantable lengths in their efforts to extort a treat. They have gone so far as to break open a house and drag the Bridegroom from his bed. Such provocation as this would, in my opinion justify a man in shooting some of the rioters. If I should marry here and be so unfortunate as to be Charivaried, no man shall enter my room without peril of his life. I should however, yield with as good a grace as possible to the compromise of a treat before the performance had commenced unless peculiar circumstances made me determined not to yield."

The next day Barney wrote in his diary: "I heard tonight that the man who was charivaried last night yielded to the necessity of the case and treated his [tormentors?]. He ought to have succumbed sooner or continued obstinate." ❖



# “The worst that I had yet witnessed”

## Mormon diarists cross Iowa in 1846

by Loren N. Horton

“As we journeyed onward mothers gave birth to offspring under almost every variety of circumstances imaginable, except those to which they had been accustomed—some in tents, other in wagons, in rainstorms, in snow storms. I heard of one birth which occurred under the rude shelter of a hut, the sides of which were formed of blankets fastened to poles stuck in the ground, with a bark roof through which the rain was dripping—kind sisters stood holding dishes to catch the water as it fell, thus protecting the newcomer and its mother from a shower bath as the little innocent first entered on the stage of human life.”

Eliza Snow, who wrote this reminiscence, was among the nearly 20,000 members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who abandoned their homes in Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1846, following the murder of their prophet Joseph Smith, Jr. in 1844 and subsequent mob violence and persecution. Leaving property and possessions behind, and huddling under insufficient shelter without enough to eat or wear, the Mormons migrated westward across southern Iowa.

A brilliant organizer, Mormon leader Brigham Young had divided the migrants into companies of hundreds, fifties, and tens, the number indicating adult males

in each company. He knew that the first companies must establish permanent camps or way stations for the thousands of Mormons who would later follow. It was mandatory that the Saints cross Iowa and move into the unsettled areas in the mountains west of the Great Plains. There, so they thought, they would be safe from persecution by hostile and jealous neighbors. Young expected to move west, but by what route and at what speed, no one knew.

The difficulties encountered tested the Mormons' resilience and adaptability, particularly that of the first groups in 1846. When crossing uninhabited territory, they had to seek out their own route and create their own trails and bridges over icy cold streams. When moving through inhabited areas, they sometimes encountered hostility from non-Mormon settlers.

Most Mormon migrants agreed that the months spent crossing Iowa were among the worst of the entire experience. Not only did they face an unknown and sometimes hostile environment, they also faced frigid temperatures, snow, rain, and clay mud that clogged the wheels. Traveling at the worst time of the year, the Mormons were crossing the Southern Iowa Drift Plain, characterized by a multitude of hills and valleys, rivers and creeks

and gullies, and much timber and brush. The trail was at right angles to the waterways, meaning frequent bridge-building and fording, and delays from spring flooding.

Their way stations and temporary camps served as oases for the migrants. They also served as burial grounds for the unknown numbers who died crossing Iowa. “Worse than destitution stared us in the face,” Zina D. Young recalled in her reminiscences. “Sickness came upon us, and death invaded our camp. Sickness was so prevalent and deaths so frequent that enough help could not be had to make coffins, and many of the dead were wrapped in their grave clothes and buried with split logs at the bottom of the grave and brush at the sides, that being all that could be done for them by their mourning friends.”

An amazing variety of Mormon diaries, journals, letters, and reminiscences vividly describe being dislocated from one's home. Mormon John Steele, for instance, wrote in his diary about departing Nauvoo: “I got up and left all my furniture standing as we were wont to use it. The clock hung on the mantel piece, and every thing as though we were just gone out on a visit, only the beds were gone but not the bedsteads. I wanted a hammer for something after I started and returned to the house and found three of our enemies quarreling who should have the clock. I opened my toolchest, took out my hammer, closed the lid and sat down upon it, and heard them awhile, then started on my journey.”

The Mormon accounts also describe traveling across unknown territory and difficult terrain. The sampling that follows of Mormon diary entries from 1846



paints a vivid picture of southern Iowa 150 years ago.

"It snows hard, the wind blows, no tent yet. Mr. Sessions sent \$1.00 yesterday for cloth to make the ends of our tent. It has come, but no twine to sew it with." *Patty Bartlett Sessions, February 19*

"The cold has been severe the past night; a snow storm this morning, which continued during the forenoon, blowing from the northwest. . . . Seven p.m., thermometer 12 degrees below zero, Fahrenheit. Mississippi River is frozen over above Montrose." *Brigham Young, February 24*

"On the first day of March, the ground covered with snow, we broke encampment about noon, and soon nearly four hundred wagons were moving to—we knew not where." *Lorenzo Snow, March 1*

"Mother is still failing. She says that she has been thinking that father wants her to come to him, and she thought it would be better to go now and be buried beside him than to go into

"A wet month generally," recorded non-Mormon Jonathan F. Stratton in his diary in 1846, "the streams is higher than they have been since I have been in the country." From his home in southeastern Iowa, Stratton observed that "the Mormons fill the road travelling west all this month some days from 80 to 100 waggons pass."

SHSI (IOWA CITY)

the wilderness and die by the way and be buried in some hole."

*Warren Foote, March 1*

"They gathered around the bonfires to hear Pitt's band that evening. Some of the band played for local residents of the area who were so delighted with the band that they donated 8 bushels of corn." *Orson Pratt, March 2*

"This morning President Brigham Young gave instruction to the teamsters not to crowd their teams or endeavor to drive over one another, realize and try to create friendships or they would not prosper." *John Lyman Smith, March 3*

"Sis. M. baked a batch of eleven loaves but the washing business was necessarily omitted for the want of water, an inconvenience the present location suffers more than any previous one." *Eliza Snow, March 9*

"About nine o'clock P.M. it began to roar in the west, and the wind began to blow. I stepped to the door of my tent and took hold

to hold it, but in a moment there came a gust of wind and blew the tent flat to the ground. My next care was to hold my carriage, which was under the tent, from blowing away. The rain came down in torrents so fast that it put out the fire. In a few minutes it was all darkness, and it was so cold that it seemed as though I must perish. I stood and held the end of the carriage about one hour. The rain wet me through and through, and I never felt in my life as though I must perish with the cold more than I did then." *Lorenzo Snow, Chariton River campsite, March 23*

"At 12 o'clock at night, wind west, rains hard through the night. Wind blowed down Brother Tanner's tent. Very muddy, unpleasant time. Streams high. All well." *William Huntington, April 2*

"I rose this morning, the sun shining with splendor which gladdens our hearts. Our wagon cover is frozen hard, and the mud and water is a little frozen. Froze our shoes in the tent." *Patty Bartlett Sessions, April 5*

May begins on Friday

a wet month generally the streams is higher than they have been since I have been in the country

not much corn planted until the latter part of the month

+ The Mormons fill the road travelling west all this month some days from 80 to 100 waggons pass





SHSI (IOWA CITY); PHOTO BY DEBBY ZIEGLOWSKY BAKER

**Mormon wagons crossed Steel Creek in Wayne County, then climbed this hillside, as evidenced by two sets of wagon-wheel ruts still visible.**

"About 2 o'clock in the morning I was called to go back about two miles; it then snowed. Rode behind the man and through mud and water some of the way, belly to the horse. . . . Her child was born before I got there. She had rode 13 miles after she was in travail. Crossed the creek on a log after dark. Her husband carried her over such things as was necessary." *Patty Bartlett Sessions, April 6*

"This day capped the climax of all days for traveling. The road was the worst that I had yet witnessed, up hill and down, through sloughs on spouty oak ridges and deep marshes, raining hard, the creek rising. The horses would sometimes sink to their bellies on the ridges. Teams stall going down hill." *Hosea Stout, April 6*

"The mud and water in and around our tents were ankle deep, and the rain still continued to pour down without any cessation. We were obliged to cut brush and

limbs of trees, and throw them upon the ground in our tents, to keep our beds from sinking in the mire. Those who were unable to reach the timber suffered much, on account of the cold, having no fuel for fires." *Orson Pratt, Locust Creek campsite #1, April 9*

"Heber and band came up and encamped on the same ridge which we were on. It formed a beautiful sight to see so many wagons and tents together and could be seen for miles on the prairie." *Hosea Stout, April 14*

"Today eight rattlesnakes were killed by our company, and two of the oxen in the same were bitten." *Horace Whitney, April 16*

"Our principal hunters, Brothers Higher and Smith, went out before starting this morning and cut down two bee trees, bringing into the commissary three pails of first rate honey; they also killed two deer and turkeys during the day which were distributed to the company." *Horace Whitney, Pleasant Point camp, April 17*

"Beautiful day, the birds begin

to sing, the grass to grow and everything assumes a pleasant aspect." *Horace Whitney, April 20*

"We will leave some here because they cannot go farther at present. They can stay here for a season and recruit, and by and by pack up and come on, while we go a little farther and lengthen out the cords, and build a few more stakes, and so continue on until we can gather all the saints and plant them in a place where we can build the House of the Lord in the tops of the mountains." *Brigham Young, Garden Grove camp, April 26*

"We arrived at camp at four P.M. about five or six miles. This was what was called 'the farm' then but was afterwards called 'Garden Grove.' When I came to the edge of the timber I found a number of men at work clearing and cutting house logs. It was a pleasantly situated place from the first appearance and presented a beautiful thick wood of tall shell bark hickory the soil uncommonly rich and so loose now that our teams could but draw their loads through." *Hosea Stout, April 27*



"A large amount of labor has been done since arriving in this grove; indeed the whole camp is very industrious. Many houses have been built, wells dug, extensive farms fenced, and the whole place assumes the appearance of having been occupied for years, and clearly shows what can be accomplished by union, industry, and perseverance." *Parley Pratt, May 10*

"I traded a feather bed for 127 lbs. of flour and \$1.10." *Warren Foote, May 16*

"Our treat was serv'd in the tent, around a table of bark, spread on bars, supported by four crotches drove into the ground; and consisted of light biscuits & butter, dutch cheese, peach sauce, custard pie & tea." *Eliza Snow, May 17*

"Many brethren have come up from Nauvoo. Taylor came home from Nauvoo. We went to see him but can hear nothing from our children by any one. I fear they will not get here until we shall leave. I know nothing when they will come. My feelings I cannot describe, but my trust is in God." *Patty Bartlett Sessions, May 23*

"Rain this morning again. Brother Kimball comes to the wagon, says I must not feel bad. I was crying when he came. . . . In the afternoon Sister Eliza Snow and Markham came up to the wagon, said they were glad to see me once more. It gave me joy for I had cried most of the day." *Patty Bartlett Sessions, May 25*

"Sister Rockwood gave me some tallow. I panned 17 candles. I thought it quite a present. Sister Kenneth Davis gave me a piece

of butter. Thank the Lord for friends." *Patty Bartlett Sessions, May 29*

"The wagon is long enough for both our beds made on the flour barrels, chests, and other things. Thales and I sleep at the back end, and F. and Irene at the forward end while we were travelling if we camped too late to pitch our tent." *Ursulia Hascall, letter, May 30*

"This place was called Mount Pisgah and the main settlement was situated on a long ridge running North and South. To the west was a large deep valley or bottom land of good prairie and groves were teeming with men and cattle engaged in the busy hum of improving and planting. The whole woods and prairie seemed alive to business and a continual stream of emigration pouring in which looked like the entire country would be inhabited as a city in a short time." *Hosea Stout, June 1*

"I got wet to my skin last night milking. I went to bed with my clothes wet. 12 o'clock the sun came out dried my bed and clothes but my tears will not dry up." *Patty Bartlett Sessions, June 1*

All of these obstacles did not deter the Mormons from proceeding on to the Missouri River, which they reached during the summer but too late to make the rest of the journey across the Great Plains that season. Hard times continued to prevail, as Eliza Snow noted on August 9, 1846: "It is a growling, grumbling, devilish sickly time with us now." The Mormons wintered over along both sides of the Missouri and some commenced

the rest of the trip the following year, 1847.

This journey by the members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which began in February 1846, did not end until all of the members who wished to make the trip to Salt Lake City had done so. The last remaining members from Nauvoo finally made the trip across the Great Plains in 1852.

Even that was not the end of the story of the Mormons crossing Iowa. In 1856 and 1857 converts from Europe came as far west as the railroad went, to Iowa City. There they built handcars and pulled them on to Salt Lake City. This was an arduous journey of a different kind, but by 1856, and even by 1848, the trail was clearer, and the permanent camps or way stations were producing food and had repair shops to fix broken equipment. It was the so-called "Pioneer Trail" of 1846 where the most obstacles had been faced.

The story of the women, men, and children who made the trip from Nauvoo to Winter Quarters during 1846 stands as a wonderful example of faith supporting a group of people. It is one of the great stories of organized migration in the history of the American frontier experience. ❖

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*Loren Horton served in a variety of positions at the State Historical Society of Iowa since 1973, most recently as senior historian, until his retirement this year.*

NOTE ON SOURCES

These excerpts were gathered from published and unpublished diaries, journals, letters, reminiscences, and autobiographies housed in libraries and archives from Illinois to California.



# Orson Hyde's *Frontier Guardian*

A Mormon editor chronicles the westward movement through Kanessville, Iowa

by Jean Trumbo







SHSI (IOWA CITY). FROM ROUTE FROM LIVERPOOL TO GREAT SALT LAKE VALLEY, ED. JAMES LINFORTH (1855)

As the ink dried on four pages of rag paper on the morning of February 7, 1849, Orson Hyde became a newspaper editor. It was on that day, in Kaneshville, Iowa, that Hyde lifted the first issue of the *Frontier Guardian* off his flatbed press.

Kaneshville was a small, frontier settlement founded by Mormon emigrants in the area of Pottawattamie County that is now Council Bluffs. To the west lay the Missouri River and the Mormon Trail, vast western lands and California goldfields. To the east were thousands of emigrants fleeing religious persecution or personal disappointment, or simply seeking a better way of life. The story of Orson Hyde and the *Frontier Guardian* is the story of a great spiritual migration—and of a newspaper editor's vision of a great frontier town. Just as Kaneshville was positioned between the East and the West, so was Hyde caught between two roles—Mormon leader and frontier editor.

Hyde had little experience in journalism. He had started the *Frontier Guardian* to provide fellow members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the information they needed about their Church and their inevitable westward emigration to Utah. As an elder and one of the Council of Twelve Apostles (the governing quorum of the Mormon Church), he held a formidable role in Kaneshville and among his Utah-bound brethren.

Religion had long been a driving force in Hyde's life. It provided not only spiritual direction and comfort, but it had helped him rise from poverty to a position of influence and power. Born January 8, 1805, in Oxford, Connecticut, Hyde was orphaned at age eight and sent to live with a farm family. At 18 he left the farm with his few possessions in a knapsack and walked 600 miles to an Ohio woolen mill, saving his daily wages for his education.

Raised as a Methodist, he first served as a Campbellite pastor. But at age 26 he was converted to Mormonism and was baptized by Mormon founder Joseph Smith. His leadership ability—and perhaps a gift for salesmanship—enabled Hyde to shine as a preacher and a Mormon missionary.

In 1837 Hyde crossed the Atlantic to win converts in England. As a missionary in Liverpool, he served briefly as editor of the *Millennial Star* newspaper. Then

**“Entrance to Kaneshville,”** by artist Frederick Piercy, 1853. Piercy called the town “a very dirty, unhealthy place” but “a great place for bargains” because many emigrants already “sick of the journey by the time they have arrived at Kaneshville . . . sell out by auction in the street.”



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the chief publicity organ for the Mormon Church, the *Millennial Star* challenged anti-Mormon rumors promulgated by many English newspapers. Believing that such prejudice endangered Mormon lives, Hyde took his role as advocate and protector seriously during his four-month editorship. Later, he journeyed to the Holy Land, inspired by what he described as a vision of the Lord that came to him one evening "like clouds of light."

Returning to the United States, he reached Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1846, just as his fellow Mormons were fleeing violence and oppression and beginning a monumental trek to a yet unknown refuge in which they could practice their religion. Organized into companies of hundreds, fifties, and tens, Mormons had begun crossing southern Iowa, setting up temporary way stations and camps for others who would follow. They reached the Missouri River in June and settled first on the west bank, and then, when conflicts arose with the Omaha Indians, on the east. They intended to stay in the Kaneshville area only long enough to rest and collect the members still traveling from the east. But the war against Mexico took 500 Mormon recruits, leaving the remaining emigrants waiting for enough stamina and manpower to continue the trip.

Meanwhile, dozens of hamlets or clusters of farms developed up and down the Missouri. One of them, Miller's Hollow, was soon renamed Kaneshville (after Thomas Kane, a sympathetic non-Mormon, or "Gentile," from Philadelphia), and would become the hub of Mormon settlements. In April 1847, church leader Brigham Young started west with the first party of Mormons. Young entrusted Orson Hyde to preside over the remaining flock and to ultimately guide them to Utah.

**K**aneshville grew quickly in 1848, and by February 1849 Hyde had founded the *Frontier Guardian* as a conduit for Young's spiritual directives and as a unifying voice for the community. He positioned church affairs prominently in the newspaper, filling the front page with church

matters, theological discussions, missionary news, and epistles from leaders in Salt Lake. Typically, the epistles lauded the progress made in settling Salt Lake and urged the Kaneshville group to follow as quickly as possible.

"Being located on the extreme frontier," Hyde explained in the first issue, "the *Guardian* will be able to give the earliest reliable information from our settlement in California, and in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake." He intended for the paper to be the official beacon for Mormons. (Indeed, some 30,000 Saints would pass through Kaneshville between 1846 and 1853,

nearly a fourth of them from Britain.) And under the title of "President of the Church east of the Rocky Mountains," he intended "to give counsel to the Church in the State, and act as agent in many things, for the Church in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake." Hyde seemed fully aware of the importance of the *Guardian* and of his own editorial voice: "the matter that flows from our pen will . . . meet the eyes of thousands, friend and foe."

Hyde's influence extended to the secular affairs as well, for there was little distinction between the issues of the Mormon Church and the political, social, and economic issues of Kaneshville. Both Church and town provided refuge for the Mormons. Ideally, Gentiles would not interfere with the Mormons in far western Iowa. The fledgling state of Iowa

was only beginning to organize a government, so the Mormons were generally free to plot their own political course in their frontier community as they gathered for their trek farther west.

As community leader, Hyde was well suited to be an editor, because a local newspaper in the mid-19th century helped develop a town site, provided a community voice, and watched over the town's social, moral, commercial, and cultural growth. Hyde understood well the power of the printed word for uniting—and promoting—a community. For Mormon refuge or not, Kaneshville became part of the California gold rush. And through his enthusiastic guidance, the *Frontier Guardian* also became a "booster" newspaper, promoting Mormon businesses and encouraging both Gentile and Mormon emigrants to outfit their overland expeditions in Kaneshville.

SHSI (FROM COUNCIL BLUFFS NONPAREIL, JULY 24, 1932, P. 11)



**As Mormon elder and newspaper editor, Orson Hyde wielded considerable power in Kaneshville and the surrounding Mormon settlements.**



# The Frontier Guardian.

BY ORSON HYDE

KANESVILLE IOWA, FRIDAY MORNING, MAY 16, 1851.

VOLUME III.----NUMBER 8.

Through the *Guardian* pages, travelers and settlers learned about the weather, politics, local merchandise and prices. News of births, deaths, and weddings appeared, so did occasional fiction and poetry (some of Hyde's poems appeared under pseudonyms). Although Hyde was a celebrity in Kanesville and controlled what the paper published, he did not disclose much of his private life through the *Guardian's* pages. He was, however, generous in sharing his convictions, observations, and politics.

"The press is a powerful engine, for good or for evil, and calculated to make a deep and lasting impression upon the community where it is," he told his readers in the first issue. "The actions of both old and young, male and female, to a great extent, are directed and controlled by this agent that speaks with a thousand tongues. A wise head, a mind that knows not fear, and that will not be fettered, and a heart stored with 'good will to man' should be the fundamental qualifications of him who is destined, through the press, to give tone and color to public sentiment."

Hyde also considered the *Guardian* an important instrument for educating isolated Mormon youth. "Being situated upon the extreme borders of civilization, in a wilderness country," he continued, "where the means and facilities for improvement in science and learning are not so available . . . it will give us great satisfaction to aid, by all laudable means in our power, in an enterprise so important as that of the education of our youth."

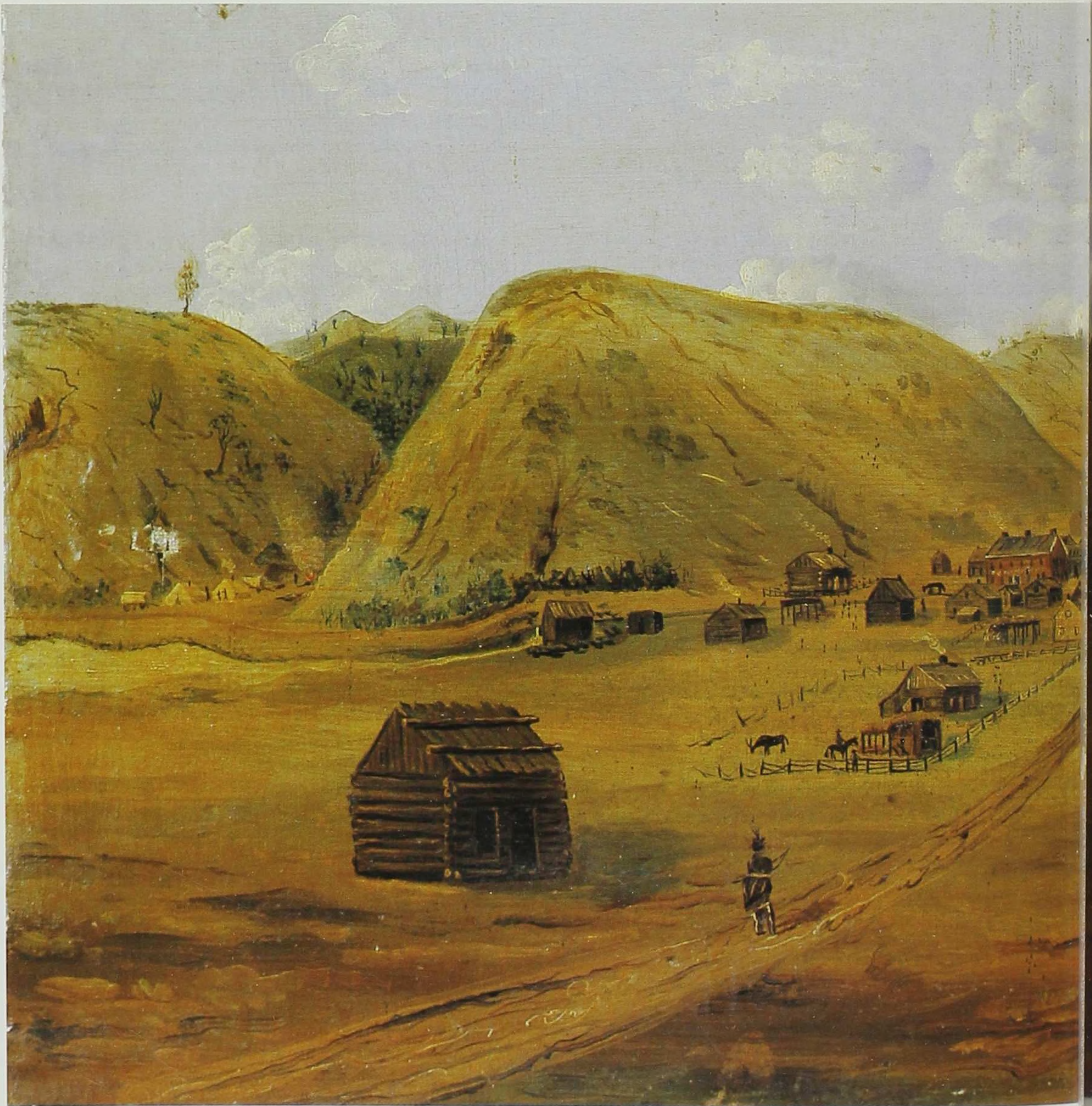
If Kanesville had any disadvantages, Hyde never mentioned them. The *Guardian* claimed that the area possessed "the richest soil in the state," noting that "several good judges, who have lately visited this section of country, have pronounced it the paradise of this state, for fertility and luxuriance." The newspaper also extolled Kanesville as an emigrant's utopia: "The climate here is very healthy also, as a general thing the atmosphere is clear and cool, and very bracing to the human system; these, with many other advantages too numerous to mention, we think cannot fail to be duly appreciated by any and every person who are on the move, in pursuit of a home in the west."

It is not surprising that the *Guardian* painted such a glowing picture of what was probably a grim frontier town. Editor Hyde was Kanesville's chief civic, economic, religious, and social architect. Given the amount of nurturing energy he devoted to Kanesville, it is fair to assume that he viewed it with little objectivity. But not everyone shared Hyde's rose-colored vision. Emigrant diarists described 1849 Kanesville as a "scrubby town of 80 to 100 log cabins" with "one tavern, one church and two groseries." Another writer found it a "very dirty, unhealthy place."

Paradise or mud hole, Kanesville had a newspaper, and it looked similar to many 19th-century newspapers. The four-page paper was about 14 inches wide, with six columns of dense, hand-set type. The type and even the headlines were small enough to draw a squint, even from readers with good eyesight. Every other Wednesday, the paper was printed and distributed to the predominantly Mormon community. John Gooch was the printer and typesetter. Hyde appreciated Gooch's dexterity; "his long, bony fingers can pick up type as fast as a chicken can pick up corn," Hyde wrote. And he valued his stability: "Is it not a miracle that a printer has remained in one county a whole year!" Apparently Gooch was not afflicted by the wanderlust that kept so many typesetters and printers on the move in the West.

Hyde hired Daniel Mackintosh as assistant editor in November 1849. Mackintosh took over when Hyde was on trips to Salt Lake. Mackintosh was capable, never failing to get the paper out on time, but he was reticent to take a stand when issues arose. In fact, Mackintosh apologized for not being as verbally skilled or as qualified to offer an opinion as Hyde. He also apologized for a lack of editorial material when Hyde was out of town, as if the wheels of Kanesville drew to a screeching halt when the colorful editor was gone. Whether modest or simply overshadowed by





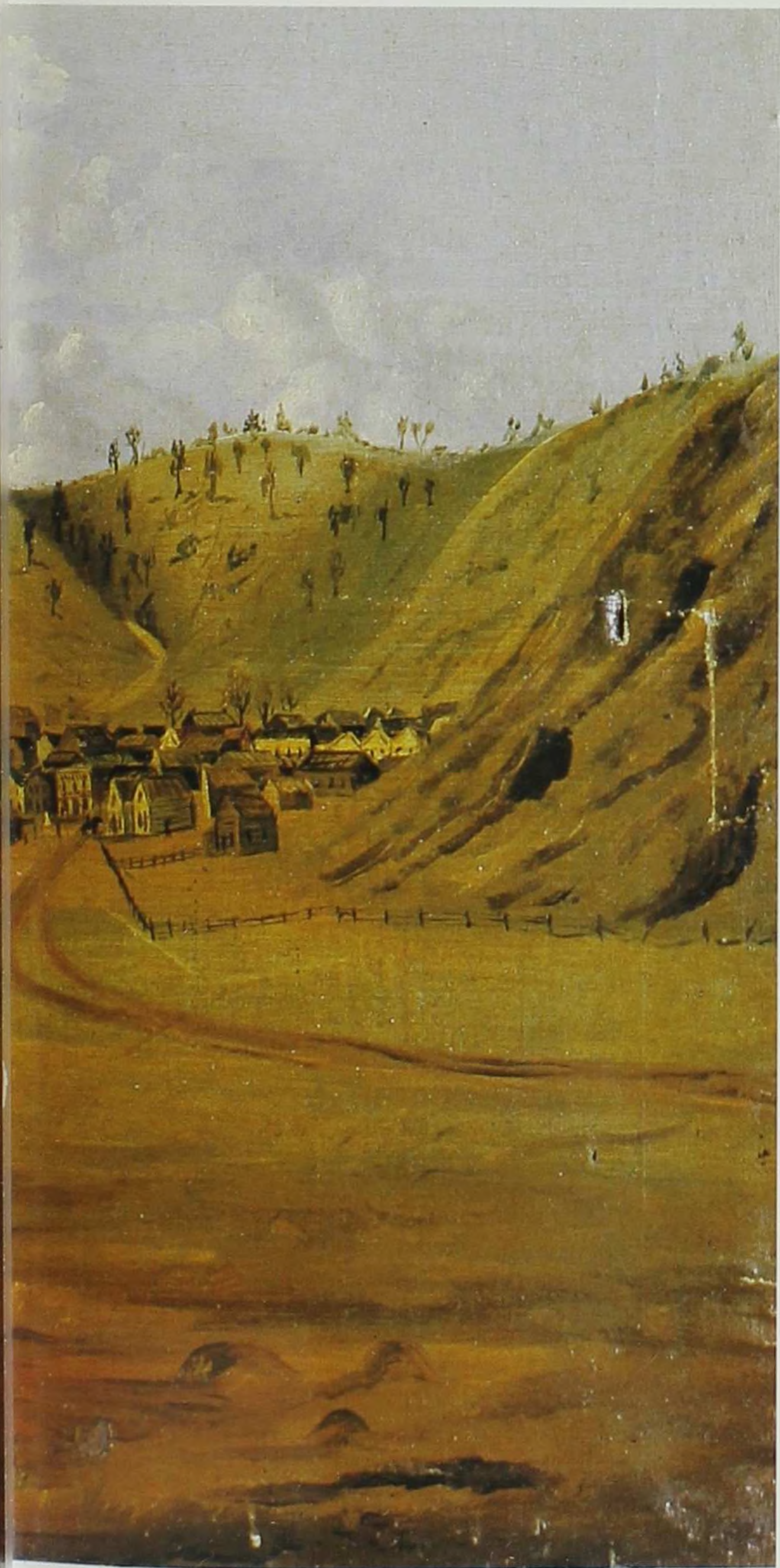
SHSI (DES MOINES)

**A**nother view of Hyde's community, probably soon after its name changed from Kanesville to Council Bluffs. Besides Kanesville, there were many, much smaller Mormon settlements tucked into the surrounding hills and valleys. This unsigned oil painting, attributed to Council Bluffs artist George Simons, is in the State Historical Society of Iowa collections. Simons painted and sketched numerous scenes of the area.

Hyde, Mackintosh seemed as insecure about his abilities as editor Hyde was confident of his own.

Confidence aside, Hyde was shrewd enough to realize from the outset that in order to survive, the *Guardian* had to be treated as any other business or investment. True, the *Guardian* was a Mormon paper





with church affairs positioned prominently on the front page, but church tithing could not cover the cost of producing a newspaper. Hyde needed subscribers. He relied most on his Mormon readers to buy subscriptions for \$2 or barter.

But Hyde had a larger audience in mind. As a con-

duit for Mormon news, the *Guardian* could serve the Saints scattered throughout the United States and Britain. Because Kaneshville was a gateway to the west, it could also serve non-Mormon emigrants planning their journeys. To reach these potential readers, the *Guardian* had assorted agents—one traveling between Kaneshville and St. Joseph, another through the southern states, some as far east as New York, and one in southern Texas. Because the attrition rate for agents was high, it is likely that the *Guardian's* distribution was somewhat inconsistent.

Yet hardly an issue slipped by without Hyde's pleas to subscribers. He promised truth based on a platform of independence. He promoted the printed word in ensuring freedom of speech and freedom from oppression. He provided information on the movements and policies within the Mormon Church. When all intellectual, political, and spiritual appeals were exhausted, he turned to heartfelt, personal pleas, reminding citizens that his role as a preacher was hardly lucrative, netting him less than \$40 in donations in four years. Certainly those who shared the benefit of his editorial and religious toils, Hyde cajoled, could find it in their hearts (and pockets) to subscribe so that their editor and elder might properly support himself.

Besides subscriptions, Hyde needed advertising revenue. The first year of publication was strictly hand to mouth. He charged \$1 for ads of 16 lines or less (or repeats for 50 cents) and 50 cents for marriage announcements. With only one-eighth of the pages filled with advertising (most of it local), Hyde could expect less than \$25 per issue from advertising revenue. Indeed, maintaining a staff of two on a budget based mainly on promises was a tremendous accomplishment. But by the next year advertising had doubled. Much of it targeted the emigrants—gold miners and settlers. Hyde accepted ads from towns as distant as St. Louis, and as competitive as the outfitting centers of St. Joseph and Independence, Missouri.

"The season of emigration will soon open," he reminded merchants in February 1849, "and outfitting for the mountains and 'gold regions' will soon commence. Our business men in all parts of the country would do well to advertise their business and prices, and if possible, put them so low as to induce new comers to postpone their purchases till they arrive at the Bluffs. 'A nimble sixpence is better than a slow shil-





SHISHI DES MONIES

Another view of Hyde's community, probably soon after its name changed from Kanesville to Council Bluffs. Besides Kanesville, there were many, much smaller Mormon settlements tucked into the surrounding hills and valleys. This unsigned oil painting, attributed to Council Bluffs artist George Simons, is in the State Historical Society of Iowa collections. Simons painted and sketched numerous scenes of the area.

Hyde, Mackintosh seemed as insecure about his abilities as editor Hyde was confident of his own.

Confidence aside, Hyde was shrewd enough to realize from the outset that in order to survive, the *Guardian* had to be treated as any other business or investment. True, the *Guardian* was a Mormon paper

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ling,' and we would gladly encourage the home trade, if we can do it without doing injustice to the new comer and emigrant."

Although there were competing routes west, Hyde promoted the route that would benefit Kaneshville the most—the north side of the Platte River Trail. Thousands of Mormons and Gentiles would follow this shallow, broad river that runs more than 1,000 miles. The banks on either side became the primary trail to Oregon, California, and Utah. Mormons bound for Utah stuck primarily to the north side, hoping to avoid mingling with Gentile gold seekers—the bachelors and absentee husbands who in the late 1840s joined the westward migration of farm families and Mormons. Historian Merrill J. Mattes estimates that between 1849 and 1853, some 60,000 emigrants chose this northern route.

The *Guardian* enthusiastically promoted the north Platte route (that closest to Kaneshville), arguing that it shaved several hundred miles off the trip and was free of cholera and other disease. "Pass along this extreme north route, and but few graves will be found along the line," the newspaper observed in January 1850, "but the graves on the more southern routes are not few nor far between." Hyde published numerous accounts from emigrants testifying that the north route provided safer passage through Indian territory, and lush vegetation to sustain livestock and teams.

Besides promoting the north Platte route, the *Guardian* gave more specific advice. Take two good oxen and one to three yoke of cows per wagon, emigrants read in Hyde's paper; oxen could best withstand the difficult trail conditions and were strong enough to pull prairie schooners. Take provisions of 125 pounds of "bread stuffs" per person and 25 pounds of bacon and sugar, the *Guardian* recommended; the average wagon could accommodate 1,850 pounds of freight and three people.

As far as Hyde was concerned, copies of the *Frontier Guardian* were also essential provisions. Those

who didn't bother to take the *Guardian* with them were asking for trouble. "Gold hunters, just think of this idea once," Hyde warned, "and then leave for those enchanted regions without a regular file of Mormon papers if you dare risk it. We tell you the Mormons found the gold there, and now don't call us superstitious if we ask you to supply yourselves with plenty of our papers as an essential part of your outfit."

Most of the advertising was designed with the California emigrant in mind. Advertisers promised "another chance for the gold hunter" and called their stores "ensigns of the west." Kaneshville merchant J. E. Johnson, for example, played on the momentum of the gold rush to promote his "Emporium of the West." His ad proclaimed: "More Gold Discovered! Tremendous Excitement! A New Variety Store!"

Hyde understood well the local business potential presented by "thousands and tens of thousands" of gold seekers needing provisions. "We have no hesi-

tancy in assuring our readers that every article needed in the Gold Mines, from a crowbar to a baconed porker, can all be had here at equally as low rates as can be purchased on the Mississippi," Hyde an-

nounced in 1849. "It is our candid opinion that he can purchase . . . his entire outfit in the little town of Kaneshville at a better rate than he can purchase them in St. Louis or in any other of the Eastern cities, considering the trouble, expense of transportation and risk."

At least one visitor disagreed, describing Kaneshville as "a very dear place to make an outfit for the plains, notwithstanding the assertions of holders of property and merchants there to the contrary. They assure emigrants that their wisest plan is to take their money there to purchase their outfit; but I hope few will believe them, for as there is not much competition they get prices the very reverse of their consciences."

The 1849 emigration season was Kaneshville's first experience as an outfitting town. When the last train left in June, Hyde marveled at the majestic site of wagons crossing the plains, taking with them "the Yankee

## MORE GOLD DISCOVERED! TREMENDOUS EXCITEMENT! A NEW VARIETY STORE.

J. E. JOHNSON, would respectfully inform the citizens of Kaneshville and adjoining counties, and Emigrants to Salt Lake, California and Oregon generally, and every individual person in particular; that he is constantly receiving and will keep constantly on hand for sale at his LARGE and commodious, NEW FRAME STORE, where he has just opened at the SIGN of

EMPORIUM OF THE WEST.

BOTH PAGES: FRONTIER GUARDIAN, MAY 1, 1850



Now's the time to Buy Cheap Goods.

**NEEDHAM & FERGUSON**  
OF THE  
**DESERET HOUSE.**

OR



Have just received their  
**Spring Stock of Goods,**

Consisting of a large and well selected lot of Prints, Ginghams, Alpaccas, Broadcloths, Cassimeres, Satinets, Jeans, Lindseys, &c., &c, of the latest Styles, which will be sold as cheap as can be bought in any city on the Missouri River. Also a great variety of Fancy Goods, Bonnets, Hats and Caps, &c., and the largest and best lot of **BOOTS & SHOES**, ever brought into this market. Also a large quantity of Groceries well suited for emigration to Salt Lake and California. Please give us a call, and we are sure our goods will recommend themselves.

Remember the  
**BEE HIVE.**

Where it is No Trouble to Show Goods.

N. B. A liberal reduction will be made to wholesale buyers, and those buying their outfit for Salt Lake.

Kanesville, May 1, 1850.

**WANTED.**

A good new milch cow wanted, enquire of Mr. Gooch, at this office. al7

**EPICURES ATTENTION.**

**G**ENTLEMEN and Ladies, can have Breakfast, Dinner or Supper for 15 cents per meal, (at the usual meal hours,) at Gooch's, 1st door east of the Printing office. Also two or three boarders accommodated on reasonable terms.

JOHN GOOCH, Jr.

Kanesville, March 6, 1850.

Advertisements from the *Frontier Guardian* (above and opposite page) lured gold miners with claims of goods "sold as cheap as can be bought in any city on the Missouri," and lured Mormons with liberal discounts for "buying their outfit for Salt Lake." The *Guardian's* typesetter and printer, John Gooch, apparently was seeking other income sources besides Hyde's wages. Note Gooch's small ads above selling a "good new milch cow" and advertising for boarders and "epicures."

with his machinery, the southern with his colored attendant—the Englishman with all kinds of mechanic's tools—the farmer, the merchant, the doctor, the minister, and almost everything necessary for a settlement in a new country." Hyde published optimistic emigrant letters that echoed his wonder at the "continual string of wagons" stretching as far as the eye could see, moving peacefully across the plains.

Yet even as Kanesville thrived as an outfitting town for the hopeful west-bound emigrant, the town also became a harbor for the "turnarounds" or "go backs." A good portion of those who "jumped off" in Kanesville never made it to their destination. In May 1849, the *Guardian* reported that more than 4,000 wagons had passed through Fort Kearney that season, but faced with high water on the Platte, many "turnarounds" were cutting their losses by selling wagons worth \$125 for only \$10. The next year, a cold, dry season made it nearly impossible for travelers to keep stock alive. Some who listened to the reports of suffering along the trail and disillusionment in the goldfields turned their wagons around and headed back east. The grim trail conditions severely strained even the most well-planned organizations. Even though wagon trains were often organized under written charters that established quasi-military leadership and strict rules, many disbanded when infighting broke out.

**H**ydé had done such a persuasive job of bragging about the many advantages of Kanesville for outfitting gold miners, that the hopeful and the greedy traveled to the Missouri banks by the thousands. But Kanesville's Mormons were unprepared for the encroaching sea of worldliness washing over their community as the gold rush gained momentum. Steamboats from St. Louis brought emigrants ready to buy provisions, but they also brought prostitution, whiskey, and cholera. "Gold-crazy men" and river gamblers left the Mississippi in favor of the booming gambling trade along the banks of the Missouri. The prosperity from trade and commerce with emigrating Gentiles threatened the Saints' hope for a tranquil place to worship.

Wrestling with this mixed blessing, Hyde struggled to present Kanesville as a lively, prospering outfitting community as well as a Mormon refuge where crime, depravity and vice would not be tolerated. The *Guardian* denounced the "unprincipled characters" who spent their nights stealing and their days



**ENSIGN OF THE WEST,****GRAND EXHIBITION**

AT THE

**NEW STORE**

OF

**J. A. KELTING & CO.**

Performances every day in the week—Sundays excepted.

**Admittance Free—Children half price.**

The subscribers are now receiving and exhibiting to an "admiring public" the best assortment of

**GOODS**

Ever offered to the citizens of the Independent State of Iowa. Among which may be found: Broadcloths, Cassimeres, Satinets, Jeans, Bleached and Brown Muslins, Gingham, Cashmeres, Prints, Alpacas, Linens, Cambrics, Laces, Edgings, Ribbons, &c., &c.

*Hats, Caps, Boots and Shoes,*

**READY MADE CLOTHING** of every description—from a three dollar suit up to the "Height of Extravagance," suited to the taste of the most fastidious old bachelor that ever cast sheep's eyes on the fair of the Land.

Also a splendid assortment of

*Fancy Goods, Hardware and Cutlery.*

**Salt Lake and California Emigrants,** Supplied with every article wanted on the journey, at as cheap rates as at any place west of New York,

In short they intend their establishment shall not be behind the first houses in the country in point of variety and cheapness. All in want of Goods are invited to call and examine for themselves, as nothing will be charged for showing goods at the

**ENSIGN OF THE WEST.**

Kanesville, (Council Bluffs,) Iowa, Jan. 15 1850.

From jeans and brown muslins to edgings and ribbons, the proprietor of Kanesville's Ensign of the West promised "the best assortment of GOODS Ever offered to the citizens of the independent State of Iowa." Obviously, Hyde depended heavily on advertising revenue, and the number of ads doubled by the *Frontier Guardian's* second year.

auctioning stolen property. Hyde warned that "loungers" were not welcome: "May the *Guardian* ever continue to encourage industry and economy—to suppress vice and promote virtue—to exalt the honest and industrious,—and to scourge and abase the vicious, the idle, and such as are too short of good and redeeming qualities!"

Despite his obvious frustration with Gentile "loungers" and his moral apprehension of the gold rush, Hyde continued to promote Kanesville as a full-service outfitting town. Those folks foolhardy and godless enough to seek worldly riches and forsake those found in the human heart went with Hyde's best wishes. After all, who could complain when ads filled a fourth of the *Guardian* by 1850, and all ten of Kanesville's larger stores sold virtually all of their merchandise during the emigration season.

**Y**et the *Guardian* often printed conflicting messages concerning the wisdom of venturing to the goldfields. One optimistic report stated that "chunks of gold in California grow bigger and more of them every day." More common were reports of the desolation—of 2,000 people living in tents or crude log huts, many dying of exposure before an ounce of gold was discovered. "But such is the excitement and rage for gold that they undergo the most unheard of hardships," the *Guardian* noted. Letters and articles reported abundant gold but "distress . . . for want of the common necessaries of life," of "men loaded with gold" but "clothed in filthy and tattered garments." Describing the violence and lawlessness, Hyde pondered, "Who will keep order among the miners?" Would no one grow food, he wondered, where miners were "famishing for a little bread while wading in gold dust." Amidst stealing, fighting, drinking, and shooting, he predicted, "blackeyes and bloody noses will be more common than bread."

As a religious leader, Orson Hyde was troubled by the greed inherent in gold digging, and his editorials often preached messages such as if "the true God of heaven" had been "sought with half the zeal and perseverance" as gold, the world would be united in one, big heaven-bound family. Gold, he feared, was disastrous to morality.

The church elders in Salt Lake shared Hyde's reservations. Brigham Young found it difficult to curb the enthusiasm of his followers tempted to forsake the Church in favor of the golden promise of California. He warned the faithful to stay put or their leave would



### Request.

Will the proprietors of all the ferries across the Missouri River on the western border of Pottawattamie county, keep an account of the number of wagons they cross over during the season, with the average number of men to each wagon as nearly as a close observation will allow them?

### Californians.

The number of these adventurers is far greater than the most enthusiastic among us anticipated.— We have ten large stores in the place, and our merchants received pr. last boats, liberal supplies: but they are now out of nearly all the staple articles, and are gone for more. There is one continual stream of emigrants pouring into this county.— They have many fine and valuable horses, oxen and cows without number. The weather is dry and generally very cold for the season, and no grass yet. What we are all coming to is rather difficult to tell. It is hoped that we may have rain and warm weather soon.

Two *Guardian* notices in May 1850 attest to the stream of emigrants through town, and Hyde's efforts to count them.

be permanent. This message was passed on to the Kaneshville Mormons through epistles in the *Guardian*.

Thus, over the course of a few years, as Kaneshville attracted more than Mormons, Hyde increasingly had to balance church doctrine with commercial concerns. Elder Hyde was a loyal, dedicated church leader committed to recruiting converts and leading the faithful to Utah. Editor Hyde, on the other had, was committed to Kaneshville, where his clout was considerable, and he grew reluctant to pull up stakes.

Meanwhile, elders in Salt Lake felt a growing sense of urgency to round up the Mormon emigrants straggling behind and to unite all in the Valley settlement. They feared that given the distance between Kaneshville and Salt Lake, with enough time and autonomy Hyde and his flock might settle permanently in Iowa. Although Hyde continued to encourage Mormons to move to Salt Lake, he seemed personally inclined to postpone and perhaps ignore the inevitable. That was until Brigham Young sent an epistle through the *Guardian* in late 1851, saying "We have been calling to the Saints in Pottawattamie, ever since we left them, to come away; but there has continually been an op-

posing spirit whispering, 'Stay another year, and get a better outfit.' . . . What are you waiting for? . . . We wish you to evacuate Pottawattamie."

The message was heard, loud and clear. Mormons in the Kaneshville area finally prepared to move to Utah. They would be leaving behind an established outfitting town with thriving businesses, and homesteads with acres of rich, cultivated land. To finance the trek, Mormon holdings would have to be sold. Editor Hyde now donned the hat of real estate broker and set about the business of promoting the area as an outstanding investment. In November 1851, the *Guardian* announced: "Pottawattamie County for Sale," including the "valuable claims and improvements of that portion of this County owned and occupied by the Mormon population." The *Guardian* emphasized: "Remember that Kaneshville is a valuable point. . . . destined to be the outfitting post on the western frontier for Oregon, Salt Lake, and California emigrants. The soil is productive, and a home market for everything that can be produced from soil."

In his most colorful booster language, Hyde exclaimed that Kaneshville was "the best point for producing in all the West, and the best market on the Frontier. Now is the time for purchasers:—Strike while the 'Iron is hot' and secure a fortune while you can."

In early 1852 even the *Guardian* was sold, to attorney Jacob Dawson. Hyde lamented that Dawson was not a Mormon, but he conceded that the new editor appeared to be "liberal minded." Starting in March 1852, Dawson would publish his newly titled *Frontier Guardian and Iowa Sentinel* as a weekly.

Hyde waxed poetic in his final "Valedictory" column: "Having therefore seen friend Dawson fully installed in office, seated upon the tripod, and wielding the goose-quill scepter, we feel like making our bow and withdrawing from the Sanctum, bequeathing our mantle and best wishes upon our worthy successor, after having managed and conducted the *Guardian* three years and one month. But this office, having enlisted our deepest interests and good will, cannot fail





SHSI (IOWA CITY). FROM ROUTE FROM LIVERPOOL TO GREAT SALT LAKE VALLEY, ED. JAMES LINFORTH (1855)



Eventually, Mormon elder Orson Hyde left behind Kaneshville, leading the remaining Saints across the Missouri River and westward to join Mormons already at the Great Salt Lake. Here, artist Frederick Piercy's engraving, "Council Bluffs Ferry & group of Cotton-wood trees."

to command our respect and attention while we remain in the country; and when nothing of more interest can be found to fill the columns of the paper, we may scribble a little now and then for the *Guardian and Sentinel*, to benefit, arrange and order our emigration,— and other matters that may be interesting."

In an 1850 *Frontier Guardian* editorial, Hyde had described the components of an editor as "the constitution of a horse, obstinacy of a mule, independence of a wood sawyer, pertinacity of a dun, endurance of a starving anaconda, impudence of a begger, and entire resignation to the most confounded of all earthly treadmills; and he must be a moving target for every body to shoot at, and is expected to know everything, and to assist 'busybodies' to pry into the business of their neighbors. If he does not come up to this description he cannot be thought a 'good editor.' "

Indeed, Orson Hyde had acquired most of these traits as *Guardian* editor. He was obstinate, independent, impudent, and happily resigned to the earthly treadmill of the frontier editor. He also recognized the role he and the *Guardian* had played in building a community, encouraging commerce, and inspiring his followers. He wrote: "Like the elements of animal life that are ever in motion, an Editor's pen often moves individuals, and sometimes whole communities."

Although the *Guardian's* religious purposes made it somewhat unique in frontier journalism, the *Guardian*, like hundreds of frontier newspapers, had helped meet the enormous need for information created by the mass movement of settlers across the nation. Rugged flat-bed presses made the overland trip with enterprising individuals, and newspapers served as the most basic reading material available to frontier Americans, second perhaps only to the Bible or almanacs. Certainly, the *Frontier Guardian* had earned its place among the great booster papers on the Missouri River. And without the *Guardian*, Kaneshville in all probability would have faded into obscurity as a temporary Mormon encampment

Though Hyde continued as a Mormon leader in the Southwest, he would never again publish a newspaper. And as Kaneshville evolved into the thriving non-Mormon town of Council Bluffs, the *Frontier Guardian* was replaced by the *Iowa Sentinel* and later the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*. Yet the *Guardian* is noteworthy for the slice of history chronicled on its pages. Through the eyes of editor Orson Hyde, the reader shares Hyde's vision of the mid-1800s, the gold rush and westward migration, and the lives of Mormon emigrants temporarily stranded on the banks of the Missouri. The vision is intensely personal, and like the newspapers of that era, seldom objective. ❖

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#### NOTE ON SOURCES

Besides the *Frontier Guardian*, 1849-1852, other major sources include Andrew Jensen, *Latter Day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 1:6 (1971); Howard H. Barron, *Orson Hyde: Missionary, Apostle, Colonizer* (1977); Utah Since Statehood, vol. 3 (1919); Charles H. Babbitt, *Early Days at Council Bluffs* (1916); Genevieve Powlison Mauck, "Kaneshville," *The Palimpsest* (Sept. 1961); Walker D. Wyman, "Council Bluffs and the Westward Movement," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* (April 1949); David J. Russo, "The Origins of Local News in the U.S. Country Press, 1840s-1870s," *Journalism Monographs* 65 (Feb. 1980); Thomas D. Clark, *Frontier America: The Story of the Westward Movement* (1959); "Pottawattamie County, Iowa: A Collection of Historical Sketches and Family Histories" (Pottawattamie County History Book Committee, 1978); Richard E. Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri, 1846-1852: "and should we die..."* (1987); Merrill J. Mattes, *The Great Platte River Road* (1969), "The Council Bluffs Road," *Nebraska History* (Summer 1984), and "Potholes in the Great Platte River Road," *Wyoming Annals* (Summer/Fall 1993); Joseph S. Hyde, *Orson Hyde: One of the First Council of the Twelve Apostles . . .* (1933); John D. Unruh, *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860* (1968). This article developed from a 1986 journalism and mass communications thesis at Iowa State University by the author (then Jean Marie Nederhiser). Annotations to earlier manuscript versions are in *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files.



# Iowa after the Mormon Exodus

by Bettie McKenzie

**W**hat did the Mormon trek mean to a newly organized and yet unsettled state? Did its impact end when the last wagon or handcart crossed Iowa's western state line? Were the deep wagon ruts across southern Iowa all that remained of the great exodus?

In 1936 Union County historian Mertle Brunson considered these questions, writing about the Mormons' temporary camp at Mt. Pisgah: "The spring of cold crystal water still called Pisgah Spring, the Mormon ford on Grand River, the stones on the A.C. White farm, the cemetery plot with its monument, the repaired log cabin and a few family names in the community are the only marks remaining of a once populated little village."

"The exodus of the Mormons was complete," Brunson continued. "And yet, the very pulse of settlement of Union County, the lives and history of its early people were influenced by the Mormon settlement at Mount Pisgah. Here our first permanent settlers bought cabins and land from the Mormons, locating here even before the Mormons pulled stakes for final exit. Here the first Post Office was located . . . [and the] first school, church, blacksmith shop."

Iowa clearly benefited from the ground-breaking efforts of the Mormons as they crossed Iowa. From the Mississippi to the Missouri they forged trails and marked the best river crossings, and they built bridges and mills.

To earn money en route or to work for food and supplies, Mormons helped non-Mormons build structures on farm and town sites. At their temporary camps like Mt. Pisgah and Garden Grove, and for 40 miles east of the Missouri River, they cleared and cultivated the land. Within four days of the advance company's arrival at Mt. Pisgah alone, 1,000 acres had been plowed, fenced, and planted.

Between 1847 and 1852, the years of the migration, all of the southwest Iowa counties were created, and most were organized. When the Mormons arrived in Pottawattamie County, there were only three trading posts in the area. During their stay, Kaneshville became a booming town and headquarters for thousands of emigrants. City government was established and the county was organized with Mormon officers. A post office was secured and residents became voting citizens of Iowa. Mormons founded the first school in 1849.

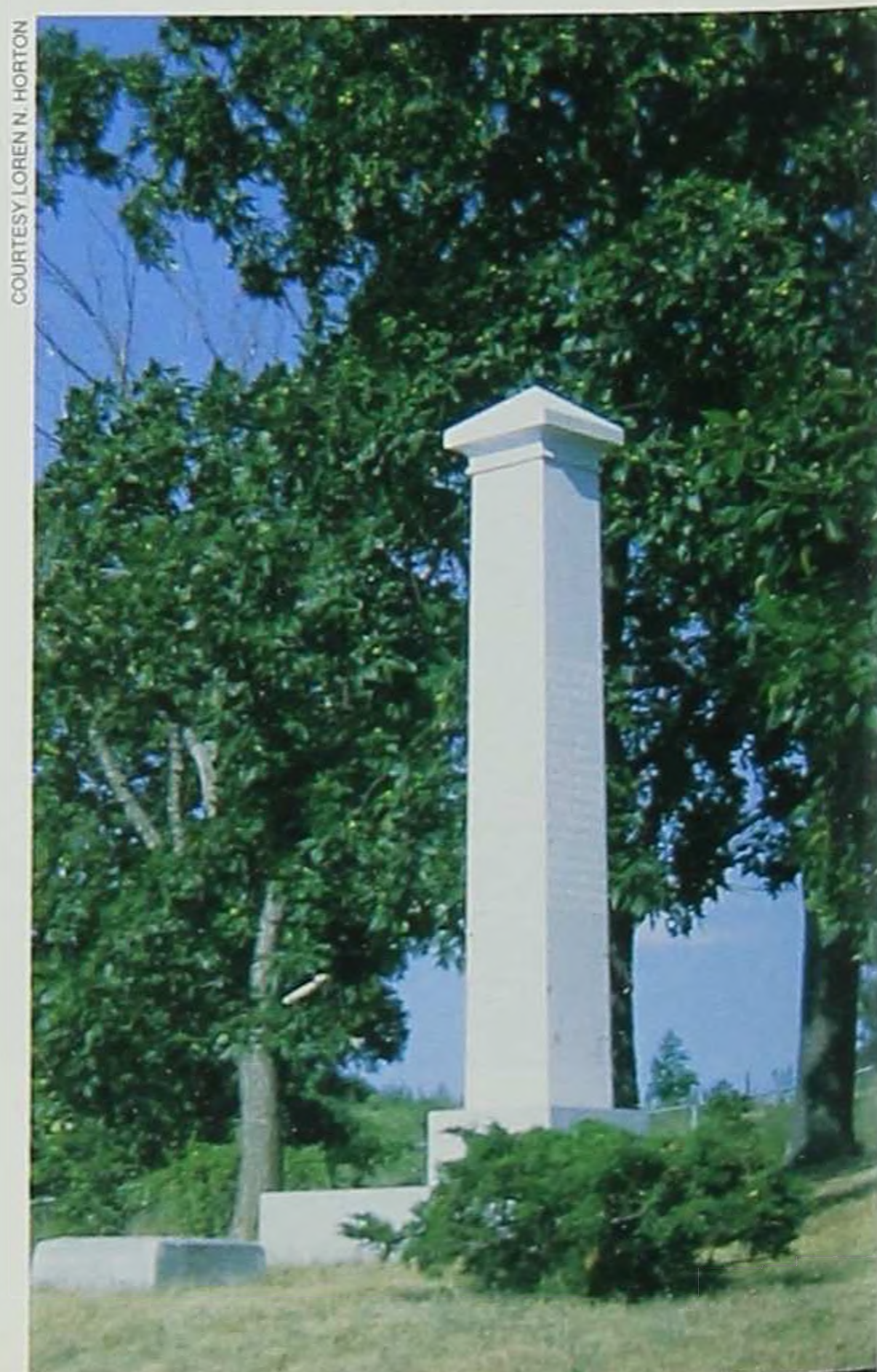
As the Mormons left Iowa for Utah, they left behind these improvements, which non-Mormons put to use to speed Iowa's transition from prairie to farms and settlements. However, the Mormon crossing of Iowa left behind more than a trail of physical improvements. While most of the faithful heeded the call to Utah, many did not. Scattered across southern Iowa were families who remained behind, and the careful reader will find occasional refer-

ences to them in county histories. In Shelby and Harrison Counties, for example, Mormon Jonas Chaburn in 1854 built the first sawmills, and wives of Mormon elders taught the first schools.

Scattered records also document groups who chose to follow religious leaders other than Brigham Young. In 1852, for example, a group of Mormons who did not wish to follow Brigham Young formed at Plano, Illinois, the first conference of what was later to become known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS). In 1859, Elders E.C. Briggs and W.W. Blair were sent across Iowa to organize congregations and to convey the message that Joseph Smith III, son of their prophet, would soon reach manhood and assume leadership.

Briggs and Blair located Saints in Lee, Van Buren, Harrison, Shelby, Fremont, Mills, and Pottawattamie Counties. In Decatur County, they found little of the early settlement at Garden Grove, but at nearby Nine Eagles (later Pleas-

**Monument to the Mormon dead at Mt. Pisgah, in Union County**





anton) they located several Mormons, including Austin Cowles, a prominent defector from Brigham Young's group. In 1861, another RLDS elder, Charles Derry, returned to organize those in western Iowa, including many "go backs," families who had returned from Utah to Iowa for various reasons. Not all congregations of the early RLDS missionaries survive today, yet the relationship to the early trail is evident. Of the 30 RLDS branches in Iowa, 21 are located across southern Iowa south of Highway 34.

Other splinter groups formed as well. For example, Charles B. Thompson established Jehovah's Presbytery of Zion in a community named Preparation in Monona County. In this experimental communism, Thompson controlled all community resources, even personal property and clothing. After several disputes with his followers, he was expelled and chased from the county in 1858. Yet descendants of the Preparation community still live in Monona County.

In Fremont County, Alpheus Cutler established a settlement named Manti. Formerly a captain of the pioneer company under Brigham Young, Cutler declined going to Utah and undertook missionary work in Kansas with the Indians. In 1852 he returned to Iowa with many followers and founded Manti, a village active on the trading routes of southwest Iowa. Eventually, many of his followers joined the RLDS Church after its 1860 reorganization, and others moved to Minnesota. When the railroad reached Shenandoah in the 1870s, many of Manti's businesses and buildings were moved there to be closer to the railroad.

Because many of the followers of Joseph Smith, Jr. were familiar

with Iowa, as the years passed they often found themselves drawn back to settle here and form new RLDS congregations. These families included "go backs" from Utah; followers of Lyman Wright in Texas; followers of the Strang break-away group in Wisconsin; Missourians who had remained near the Iowa border after the Mormons' 1838 flight to Nauvoo; and relatives, friends, and immigrants.

Today one of the important Iowa communities related to Mormonism is Lamoni in Decatur County. In 1870 the RLDS Church chose Decatur County for a unique cooperative farming organization, and the county eventually became the homesite of church leader Joseph Smith III. Lamoni was the early headquarters of the RLDS Church and its publishing company, Herald Publishing House. By 1895 the RLDS Church had grown strong enough to establish an educational institution, Graceland College. Today Lamoni remains close to its roots. It is still the home of the beautiful Graceland College campus and the site of Liberty Hall, the restored Victorian home of Joseph Smith III.

In Keosauqua, a new branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Utah church) was formed in 1945. Planning to expand their cattle operations closer to Chicago markets, a small group of Saints from Arizona chose the rolling farmland of Van Buren County partly because of its relationship to their own church history. Their ancestors had struggled mightily through rain, mud, and storms to cross Van Buren County in 1846. They had



Liberty Hall, home of Joseph Smith III in Lamoni

cut timber for local farmers and had buried their dead on the trail. In 1980 these ancestors were commemorated by a 50-mile trek by wagon and handcart from Keosauqua to Nauvoo.

Although 150 years ago the goal of the Mormon Church may have been to cross southern Iowa quickly and escape the pervasive anti-Mormon sentiment, the Mormons nevertheless left a trail of physical improvements. But their impact was greater than the bridges and mills and acres of cleared land. The pockets of Mormons and those who broke away, of those who stayed in Iowa or returned, contribute to the mosaic of religious diversity in our state today. ❖

*Bettie McKenzie was the organizer for the Iowa Humanities Board project "Song in the Wilderness" about the Mormon Trek. She lives in Red Oak, Iowa.*

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

Major sources include Lynn Robert Webb, *Contributions of the Settlements of Garden Grove, Mount Pisgah and Kanesville, Iowa to Mormon Emigration, 1846-1952* (1954); C.J. Colby, *Centennial Sketches, Maps and Directory of Union County, Iowa* (1876); Vern Ronald Jackson, ed., *Iowa 1850 Census Index*; Richard E. Bennett, *Mormons at the Missouri* (1987); Heman Hale Smith, *The Mormons in Iowa* (1929); Pearl Wilcox, *Roots of the [RLDS] in Southern Iowa* (1989); Steven Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration* (1990); Ford I. Gano "Historical Summary of the Keosauqua Branch, 1945-1980"; material in the RLDS Archives (Independence, Mo.); manuscript owned by Pauline Parrott; and an unpublished paper by Nancy Jaekel. Annotations are in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files.



# WHEN THE WORK IS DONE

## From Making a Living to Passing Time

Text and photos by Steven Ohrn

Over the last 20 years wandering the back roads of Iowa, I have encountered dozens of men making things that did not clearly reflect any particular ethnic or religious tradition. I was attracted by decorative fences made of old tools, horse hames, and discarded farm machinery; I marveled at clever whirligigs fashioned from used bicycle wheels and cream separator cups; and I admired whimsical mailboxes, bottle trees, and other lawn sculptures that attested to both imagi-

nation and skill. Visible from passing roads, the roadside art drew me off to take a look. Someone once told me that the first rule of getting good photographs was learning to stop the car. I can't remember how often I have found myself suddenly braking, U-turning, or backing up the shoulder of a road.

I remember stopping several times in Cass County after spotting a fence made from horse hames; I pulled over in Floyd County to give cowboy boots and

running shoes nailed on utility poles another look; in Wayne County I was drawn to a shop sign, "Fix Anything But a Broken Heart," painted on a windmill made from a water pump and radiator fan; outside Tama, near an abandoned tourist trap, I was attracted to huge pyramids made from cultivator wheels welded together and painted bright colors; my head spun around in Kinross when I spied a house completely covered with license plates and hubcaps; and in Hardin County I

**From left:** Boots and shoes on utility pole; fence of horse hames; house covered with license plates and hubcaps; pyramid of cultivator wheels. **Opposite page:** whirly-wheel; propane tank airplane; and "The Muffler Man."







stopped to photograph huge airplanes made from retired propane tanks. These roadside attractions had only two things in common on first sight: they were all made from discards cleverly reused, and they brought attention.

To learn more I had to talk to the makers. When I called about the propane tank airplanes, Ella Winters told me that her husband, Ken, called them "do dads," adding that he "gets these wild ideas" and "loves to work in the shop" on their farm. So much traffic was stopped by Winters' "do dads" that the highway patrol ordered him to tone down his display.

One sight that stopped me time and again was Lawrence Hradak's backyard display in Iowa City. For more than a decade beginning in 1973, the yard was a marvel of gaily painted windtoys. Most of his designs involved whirlybirds and ducks. Mail order patterns increased the variety to include animated figures such as a mule kicking a farmer or a man chopping wood. His most innovative yard art included recycled bi-



cycle wheels, scraps of wood, and tin cans. With scores of windtoys in the yard, Hradak had numerous visitors. He said that "people would go by and see them and stop in."

Oftentimes on the way to work, I would gawk at a sculpture I referred to as "The Muffler Man" outside an auto garage in downtown Des Moines. I wondered about it for some time until I had an excuse to stop and meet its maker, Jack King. King made the sculpture from car parts, plugged in its lightbulb eyes, and placed it outside his shop to attract attention. It didn't work as he intended, but it did attract folklorists who eventually arranged to have the piece purchased as part of the 1996 "Recycled, Remade" exhibit at the Museum of Interna-

tional Folk Art in Santa Fe.

It was these conversations that taught me that if the art was reflective of tradition, it was the tradition of occupations such as farming, construction, blacksmithing, welding, and other mechanically oriented work. The art was exclusively the work of men reaching retirement or who were well into it. These farmers and tradesmen were taking ideas, techniques, tools, and materials used in their work and turning them to artistic ends.

Going to work, having co-workers, and being productive are routines, associations, and satisfactions lost when employment is interrupted or ceases altogether. Illness, injury, old age, seasonal slowdowns, strikes, and economic recessions put people out of work. For persons with identities closely tied to an occupation, involuntary unemployment can be a crisis.

When I was finally able to chat with Hradak, for example, he told me that after an operation, he was idled for six weeks from his job as a carpenter. "I had to stay off work," he said, "but needed something to do." Hradak chose to make yard art from scraps he had around the house.

Obviously, there are countless other responses to feelings of uselessness and boredom. The workers I describe here successfully shifted from making a living to passing time: they resolved their dilemmas brought on by losing their occupational identities and found satisfactory ways to fill spare time and relate to people around them.

The men I interviewed lacked the camaraderie, feedback, and other support of fellow workers. Whether on a farm or in town, they usually worked alone in their garages or basement shops. They

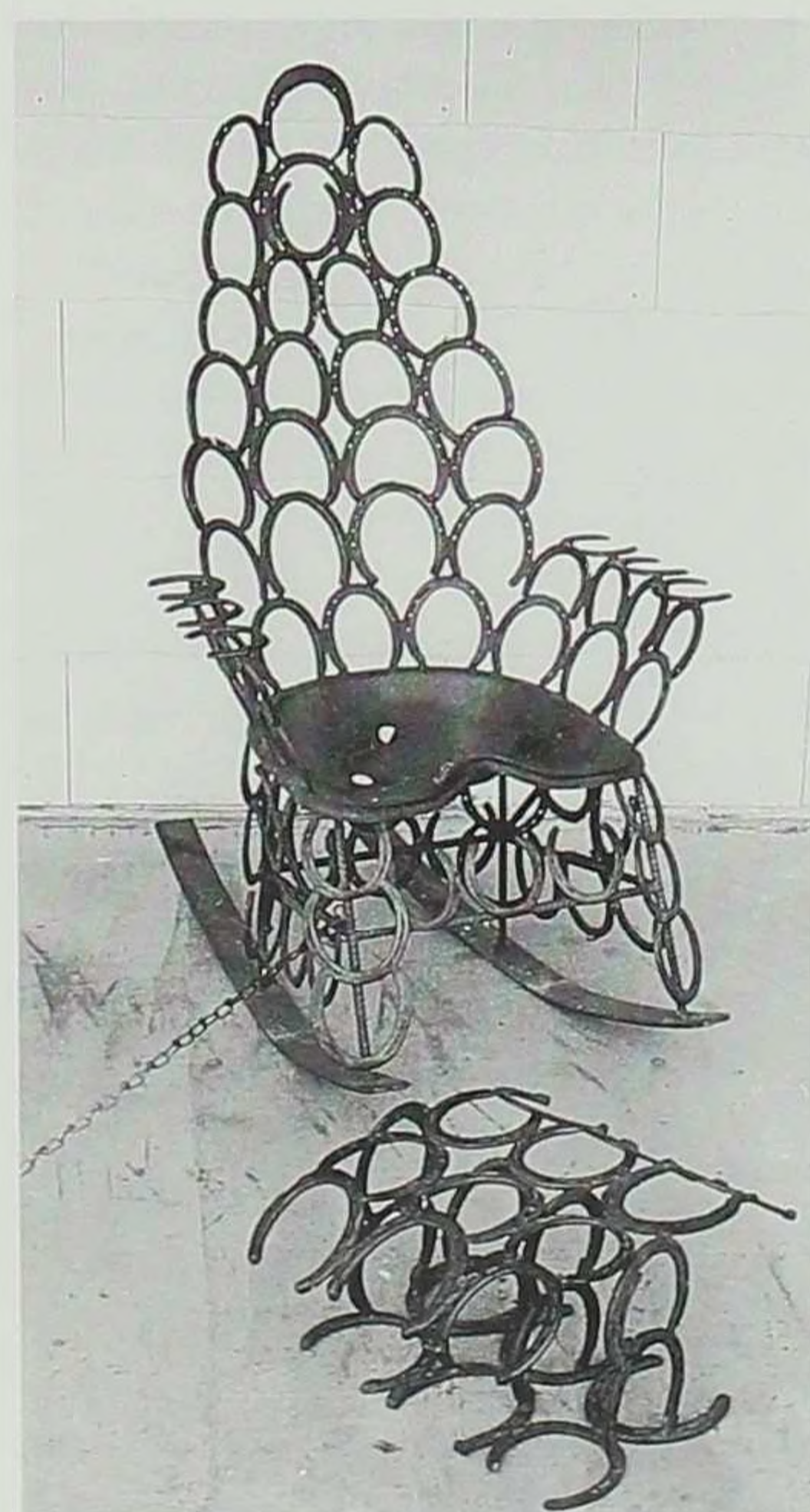


made things for their own satisfaction, and for the appreciation they received from family, friends, neighbors, or passersby like myself. They preferred to retain and even display outdoors what they made. Occasionally they gave pieces to friends. For the most part, the work was not for sale.

**O**n a porch just outside South English stood a marvelous rocking chair. Dick Harris, a farrier since he was in high school in 1944, had arc-welded scores of used horseshoes together with a tractor seat and buggy spring rockers. Though hefty, the chair



**Dick Harris** and his horseshoe rocking chair.



**Above: Ken Payne's "chiwara" sculpture, inspired by African art.**

was chained to the front porch post (until the house was recently demolished and replaced with a mobile home). Like many blacksmiths and farriers, Harris always has plenty of discarded material to fashion into tables, hooks, racks, and other functional items. He made the rocker in 1977, has had many requests to make more, but "hasn't gotten around to it" yet. Meanwhile, he's still sometimes identified as "the guy with the chair on the porch."

**W**ithout the positive rewards of making things as part of an income-producing job, the men describe their activities modestly as "something to do," "fooling around," or as "passing or killing time." Ken Payne, a farmer near Winterset, told me that he "whacks" sculptures out of scraps from around the farm to keep



from “going bananas” while waiting for spring plowing or fall harvest. I was drawn to stop by Payne’s thunderbird sculpture on his mailbox (see back cover). In his yard he displayed a “chiwara” figure inspired by an African art exhibit that Payne remembered seeing in Omaha.

None of the men I encountered has described his activities as “creative”; no one volunteered that he was an “artist” or “folk artist.” Charles Hickson, maker of an impressive junk fence enclosing his front yard, said, “That fence is the closest I’ve come to making art.” When I pressed him further, he told me, “I’m not much of an artist. I have no talent at all that way.”

These Iowa tradesmen and farmers are not intentionally making statements about their occupations, either. Like stories told and songs sung during and about work, the objects have roots in work experiences and reflect occupational concerns and identities. The objects are not, however, traditional in the sense that they are made as part of a traditional occupation. Rather, they are traditional in that they arise from the means and materials of a traditional occupation. Unwilling to let go of their identities as “workers,” these farmers and tradesmen continue to exercise their work skills on familiar materials, but employ them in new combinations. The resulting objects then become conversation pieces facilitating talk about work.

**W**hen visiting Mac Hatch in Oelwein, Iowa, I heard him speak proudly of his inventions made at John Deere where he worked as a master welder. He likewise was proud of his welding skills put to new use when mak-



**Mac Hatch and part of his welded patio set.**



ing a patio set from machine parts. The set illustrates the technological shift from horse to tractor farming. Hatch didn’t boast of his artistic achievements as much as of his abilities to weld unlike metals together. He was certainly appreciative of the changing technology he’d witnessed since the turn of the century in rural Iowa.

Compared to “real” work, the men view their artistic activities as frivolous; to them, the objects they are making have no economic value and little if any artistic merit. For persons used to hard work, such leisure-time activities are hard to take seriously. The fact that I expressed interest made me somewhat suspect. After all, it’s one thing to be frivolous—but to study it?

**I**n Vining, Iowa, I spotted a brightly painted “whirlywheel” turning smoothly in a front yard. It was a type I had been seeing in many parts of Iowa: a set of stainless steel cream separator cups attached to one or more bicycle wheels. The wheels were configured on steel poles in a variety of ways to catch the wind and turn one way or another.

I knocked on the back door to no avail, so I went to a nearby café and learned that the whirlywheel had been a 60th-anniversary present made by Milo Benda from nearby Traer. I drove over to Traer and found Benda, in part due to his mailbox being decorated with a tiny whirlywheel.

Benda, a farmhand just coming in from the fields, was amused by my visit. We talked as I photographed the creations in his yard. He told me that he had seen such “whimsies” in a neighboring town and began making them in the mid-1970s.

Benda’s creations combine several dozen recycled cream separator cups and new bicycle wheels; their sealed bearings make them run smoothly and silently. He carefully paints the cups bright colors coming straight from cans of Rustoleum. Despite all the care he puts into his creations, he still finds it necessary to completely disassemble them every four to five years in order to strip and repaint them.

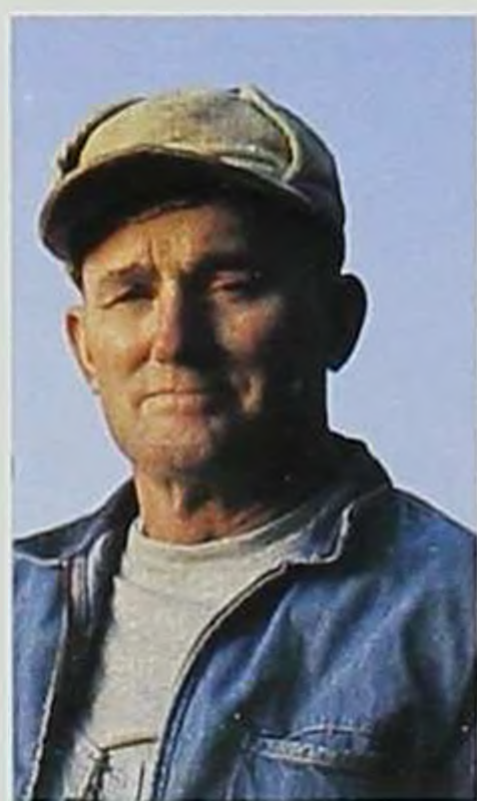
Benda thinks highly of his wind machines, but not so highly as to mistake them for art. He always seems happy to get some recognition for his whirlywheels, but he remains skeptical of my making too much of it.

Nevertheless, such artistic acts are more important and revealing than the participants are willing to admit. Rather than focus on the





**Milo Benda and one of his whirlywheels.**



"art" as such, I think it is helpful to see the objects as links to past ways of thinking and doing, as symbols recalling accomplishments of a working life. The machines used as tools by one generation can become historic symbols to the next, helping us remember and talk about the way we were.

**B**orn in Winneshiek County at the turn of the century, Clifford Foss learned as a farmer to be resourceful and inventive. His mechanical skills were not lost

when he retired from farming. Instead, he began to tinker with discarded objects, turning odds and ends into art. What drew my attention and pulled me into his drive was "Modern Art," which Foss envisioned in 1963. In part it is a tongue-in-cheek statement aimed at fine artists. More important, because it was made from bits and pieces salvaged from machinery Foss used when farming, it is a true conversation piece. Foss listed its parts: "Spring teeth from a quack digger, shovel from an old corn plow, sprocket from a fanning mill, rolling colter from a walking plow, rake teeth from a sulky rake, rake teeth from a Dane hay loader, reel shaft from a grain binder, seat from a manure spreader, wrench for a buggy wheel, wheel from a Hayes corn planter, wrench for a wagon wheel, disk from a grain drill, blade from a circular saw, combination wrench, nut from a wagon

wheel, rings from a neck yoke, teeth from a side rake, corn planter stakes, blade from a tandem disk, claw hammer, fence pincers, mower guards, manure fork, iron clevis, drag teeth, and an iron shoe from Molly, the old mule." Later, in 1989, when "Modern Art" was displayed at the Iowa Historical Building in Des Moines, I overheard visitors attempting to identify the different parts named by Foss. Thus, an unsightly pile of junk to his family and neighbors is a range of possibilities to the handyman with a "waste-not, want-not" outlook.

**O**ccasionally this difference in perception causes problems. Paul Williams, in violation of zoning ordinances, faced losing his treasure trove to a sanitary landfill in Plymouth County.

Williams lives on his parents' farm west of Hinton. A hint of what's there greeted me at the





Clifford Foss  
and his "Modern  
Art."





**P**aul Williams and his "Paul's OK Corral" sign (above) and dinosaur (below).

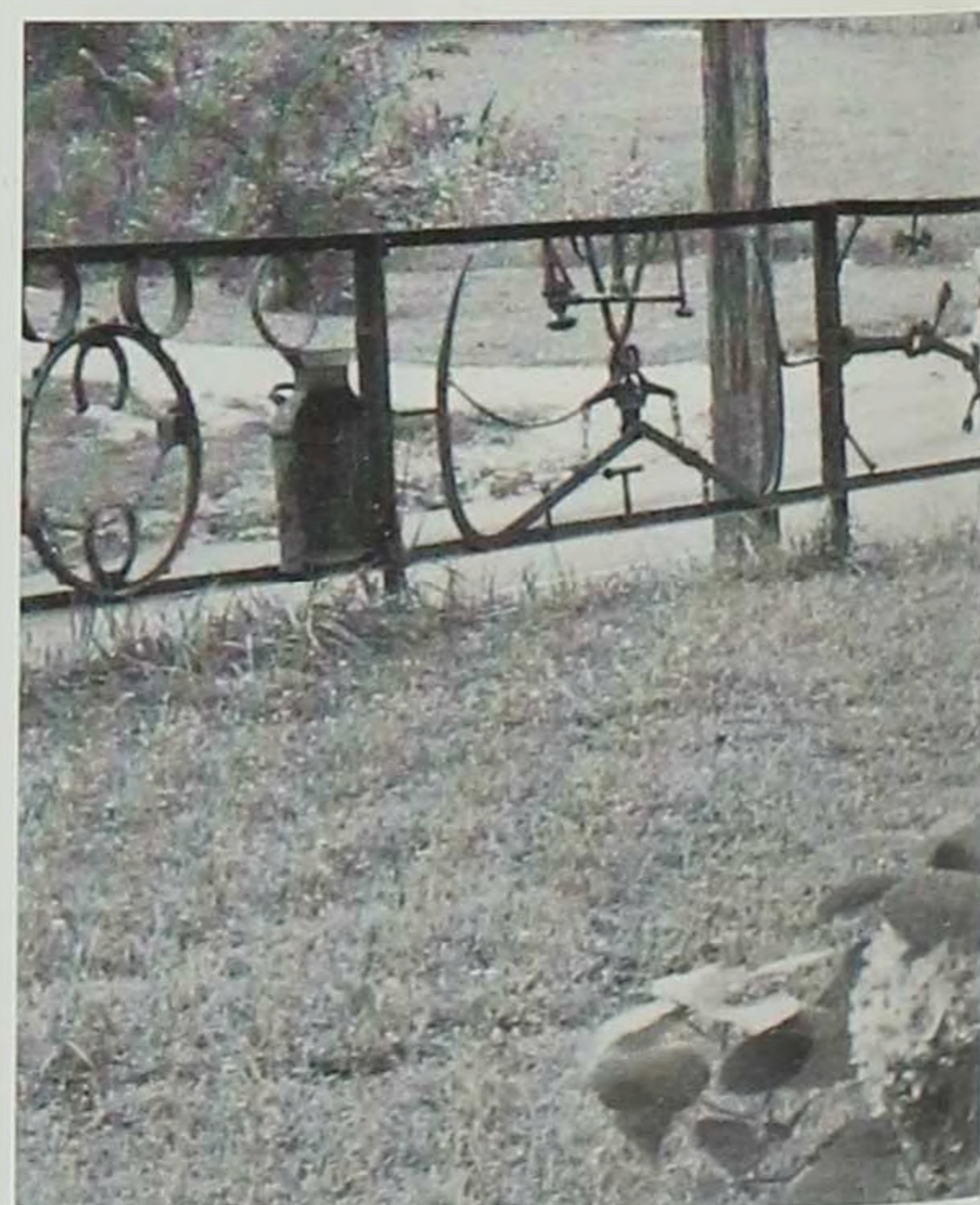


gate, marked by junk sculptures of "Wild West" gunfighters perched on the fenceposts with a sign reading "Paul's OK Corral." Further hints follow down a lane lined with all manner of discarded cars and other junk.

Williams inherited much of the junk from his father, who used scraps when working as a blacksmith. Williams continues that tradition when rummaging through

piles of machinery, imagining parts becoming pieces of a whole new thing. Sometimes he makes a dinosaur or a fanciful bird; other times he creates romantic images of Indians; and occasionally he fashions a fig-

ure like a blacksmith, personally familiar to him. The process of re-assembling past scraps into new configurations can be compared to storytelling. It's a tradition that Paul Williams has passed along to his own son.





In the case of Charles Hickson, accumulating tools led him to make a "junk fence." Until retiring in 1977, Hickson did auto body work. Having grown up on a farm, Hickson was fascinated with old tools and farm machinery. His fascination led him to auctions and a major clutter in and on his garage. Building whirligigs, a Ferris wheel, and windmills used some of the pieces, but a much more ambitious project was at hand. A visiting friend told Hickson about a fence "made of junk" he'd seen in Texas. Hickson went to work. He chose steel army cots from a garage sale as the structure of his fence: "They were uniform size, see, that's what I liked about them." He removed the bed springs and without a formal plan, arranged tools and parts of machinery to fill 23 frames and



**Charles Hickson and his "junk fence."**

nearly 140 linear feet. "As I saw it, I put it together," he explained. He painted the panels black and surrounded his front lawn with them. He told me that there's never been a complaint from the neighbors; in fact, "Everyone who has seen it has liked it."

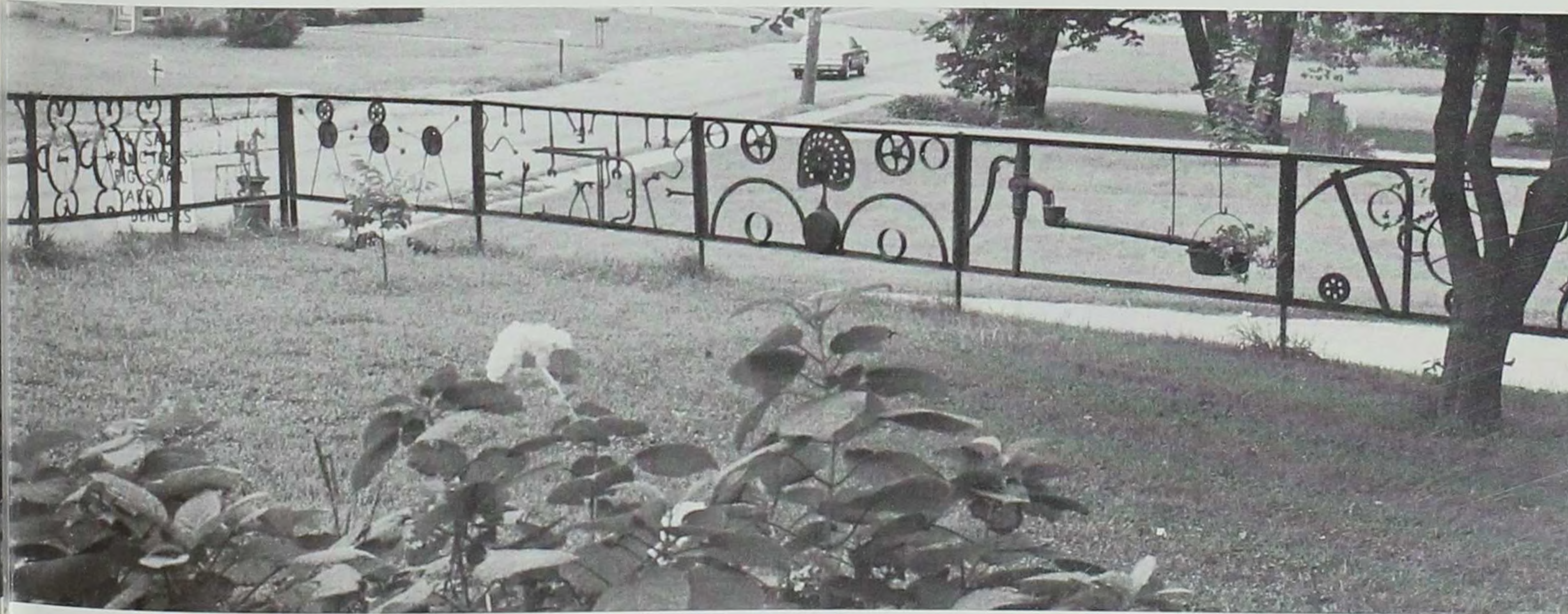
A huge horse and rider in Plainfield, along U.S. 218, has been a hit since David Limkemann put it on his front lawn in 1988. A welder by trade, Limkemann gathered 874 used horseshoes from farrier friends in Iowa, Minnesota, and Texas. The horse and rider are painted black.

Limkemann's spectacular horse is lit year round with Christmas lights. Seasonally, Limkemann changes the sculpture. At Christmas the rider holds a tree, on the Fourth of July he carries a flag, during the summer he holds a parasol made from aluminum horseshoes, at Halloween a ghost hovers overhead, and for Thanksgiving, the horseman carries a turkey made from horseshoes painted white.

After stopping and seeing the

horse and talking with Limkemann's daughter, I arranged a return visit to see and learn more. The horse dwarfs a modest house along the highway; the basement also holds a treasure of Limkemann's creativity. As we were going down, he confessed that there "must be something wrong mentally for someone to bring old junk into the house." I couldn't agree. Limkemann has reused nearly 7,500 old horseshoes to create a wide variety of furniture ranging from a filigreed canopy bed, a round table and benches, a dressing table and bench, and a rocking chair and stool. What distinguishes the furniture is that it is all made entirely of horseshoes—even the rockers.

Though smaller in scale, Limkemann's sculptures are even more remarkable. He began recycling his daughter's worn horseshoes in 1982, making a horse and rider. That was popular with her friends, and requests for more followed. The next year, he was laid off for a few months from his welding job. After working for 30 years, Limkemann found that he







**Paul Williams** and his "Paul's OK Corral" sign (above) and dinosaur' (below).



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**Charles Hickson** and his "junk fence."







**David Limkemann and his horse and rider.**



"had time on his hands." To fill that time he continued working with recycled horseshoes, making sculptures that recalled his growing up on a farm in the 1930s near

Castalia, Iowa. His farm memories include a bobsled and horse-powered machinery such as a manure spreader, side mower, and hayrack and loader. Other imagery came from rodeo events in which his son competed: calf roping, bull dogging, bull riding, clowning, and team roping. Other recollections include a couple in a horse-drawn sleigh, a man and woman fishing from a boat, and two old men throwing horse-

shoes. As a guitarist who enjoys jamming at bluegrass events, Limkemann also depicts musicians. A particularly complex piece includes a multitude of musicians playing for a pair of dancers mounted on a music box. The sculpture, which includes a clock, stands on the television. It was a 40th-anniversary gift to Limkemann's wife, Marian.

Despite his obvious talent, and the public setting for his monumental horse, Limkemann has been surprised by the "unreal" interest that people have shown: "It never entered my mind that it would attract so much attention." Publicity in such magazines as *Western Horseman* and *Truckers News* "really messed me up" because of orders, he told me. He's not doing it as a business, and orders make him nervous because he fears disappointing people. Limkemann is a modest man; a plaque on the horse says, "Only God Gave the Ability."

**T**he farmers and tradesmen I have met here in Iowa unintentionally signify and justify through their artwork their continuing worth, which in times of full employment was measured by a good day's work. They continue to use their skills and cleverness to create things that help them recollect what they used to do for a living. By staying busy with occupational skills and materials, they mimic work in leisure time. ♦

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*Steven Ohrn is historic sites manager for the State Historical Society of Iowa and author of books and articles on Iowa folklore. The Society is actively collecting items like those featured in this article; for more information, contact Ohrn at 515-281-7650.*



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# Iowa Heritage Illustrated



SHSI COLLECTIONS (IOWA CITY)



Photo by  
Chuck Greiner

## One in a Million

Among the millions of items in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa is this colonial wedding dress, veil, and painted silk capelet. Donated to the Society by Ruth Felt Byers in 1947, the dress had belonged to someone who once lived in Pennsylvania. Although little is known about the dress or the bride who wore it, it is lovely evidence of the historical fact that wedding dresses have, indeed, not always been solid white. —*The Editor*



PHOTO BY STEVEN OHRN



**C**reated by Ken Payne, this thunderbird sculpture atop a mailbox greets mail carriers and other passersby on this road near Winterset, Iowa. Inside, meet more lowans who have taken the tools and skills of their trades and turned them to artistic ends.