

Merchants' Carnivals • Water Power and Mills • Go-Hawks Happy Tribe during World War I

WINTER 1996 • 55

# Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED





# Front Porch

Dear Readers:

Using this space as a front porch, where we might converse before entering in, let me offer you this. Imagine if you can, the following description of a woman's costume:

"She wore a dress of black Henrietta cloth. The waist was heavily embroidered in Grecian designs from brass lamp chains. Brass rings formed the cuffs and epaulets. A steel dog collar was fastened around the neck with a brass padlock, and a fringe of keys. At the waist was a 22 caliber revolver. The skirt was dotted with silver and copper bars, a front panel of tin pans, egg beaters and nutmeg graters, girdle of brass chain with tassels [of] red tin pails. A right side panel was made of different sized screens, left side panel of various sized scissors, lappels of brass dish pans. She was equipped with a small rifle. A dainty little cap was seen on her head made of a tea pot stand lined with plush and chenelle trimmings. A beautiful pink and blue plush fan, hand painted, hung gracefully from her shoulder, with a large picture of Mr. Tupper. 22 kinds of hardware were represented in this costume."

Not exactly your typical late 19th-century stage costume! Miss Maud Munger wore this outfit, according to the *Mitchell County Press*, to represent G. C. Tupper's hardware store in Osage. The event was

an 1889 merchants' carnival. You'll find rare photographs of such costumes in the first article in this issue—though none to beat Maud's!

You'll also find wonderful photos of water-powered mills, culled from hundreds in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa. It seems that very few were taken that show the mills in operation. It makes one think about photographing today's work sites in their everyday settings. Imagine a century from now. Will there still be gas stations, grocery stores, convenience stores, and malls as we know them today? If not, will the only historical photos of them show their final days or their demolition, rather than showing them as they were part of 20th-century daily life? Think about it the next time you have a roll of film to fill.

The little World War I doughboy paper doll on the opposite page is one of many sent to Emilie Blackmore Stapp by John and Anita Packwood, two children among thousands who were smitten with "Go-Hawk Happy Tribe" fever in the decade of World War I. Tucked inside the little pouches and purses of the Packwoods' paper dolls were individual pennies, small but sincere donations to an amazing war-relief effort. Former "Go-Hawk" Louise Rosenfield Noun profiles Stapp in this issue.

I wish you the best the new year can bring. I know you'll enjoy the articles in this issue—but first, here's a letter from one of our readers.

Ginalie Swaim, Editor

## More on Patten's Center Street

Your article about Robert Patten in the Fall 1996 issue brought back many memories of my childhood in Des Moines, when I lived within a stone's throw of the Patten home on 14th Street. His printing business and his family were well known, as you would expect, and I often played with his twin sons Edward and Edwin, who were my age.

That fine report of Des Moines of the early 20th century illustrated quite well the environment for African Americans during that period, and I am pleased that the collection donated by his son has been preserved in a permanent collection. Memories are sometimes unreliable for recalling events and circumstances of the past, but those products of the Patten printing presses are a valuable supplement to the files of newspapers and magazines.

Another example of African-American culture in Des Moines between the two great wars is the opera (or operetta) *Heaven Bound*, produced around 1930 in the Princess Theater in downtown Des Moines. I do not know the identity of the composer, but I do remember that the producers and the cast were all African Americans. I had hoped to see an ad for that opera in the Patten collection, but they may have been printed in another shop.

Thank you for a valuable contribution to the public understanding of the history of African Americans in Iowa.

Philip Hubbard  
Iowa City, Iowa

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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.

*Iowa Heritage Illustrated* (ISSN 0031-0360) is published quarterly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, the historical division of the Dept. of Cultural Affairs, State of Iowa. © 1996 State Historical Society of Iowa. The Society operates from two centers: 402 Iowa Ave., Iowa City, IA 52240 (319-335-3916), and 600 E. Locust, Des Moines, IA 50319 (515-281-5111). Editorial and subscription offices are at the Iowa City center. **SUBSCRIPTIONS:** \$19.95 for 1 year; \$35.90 for 2 years. *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* is also available as a benefit to members of the State Historical Society of Iowa. **MEMBERSHIP OFFICE:** Iowa Historical Foundation, PO Box 6250, Des Moines, IA 50309 (515-281-3754). The State Historical Society of Iowa and the editor are not responsible for statements of opinion made by contributors. Printed with soy-based ink on recycled paper. Second class postage paid at Iowa City, IA. Postmaster: send address changes to State Historical Society of Iowa, 402 Iowa Ave., Iowa City, IA 52240-1806.

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1996, Vol. 77, No. 4

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or us, this woman "preserved" her cos-  
"Jacobs" of Oelwein, Iowa. Turn the page



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Formerly The Palimpsest

Winter 1996, Vol. 77, No. 4



172 Pennies for the war

## "The Brigade of Beauty in Advertising Costumes": Merchants' Carnivals in Iowa

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by Paul C. Juhl

Wearing ruffles of prunes and necklaces of cigars, 19th-century Iowa women step before the footlights to promote their communities.

## Floyd Nagler's Passion for Water Power

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by Cornelia F. Mutel

"I was recently at the town of Greene, Iowa," Floyd Nagler wrote, "and noted that you have discarded three water wheels which are now rusting in the pile of miscellaneous material behind your power plant."

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One of Iowa's leading technologies become picturesque ruins.



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## Emilie Blackmore Stapp and her Go-Hawks Happy Tribe: A World War I Children's Crusade

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by Louise Rosenfield Noun

An Iowa journalist mobilizes thousands of American children to donate pennies for war orphans in Europe.



PENNIES COURTESY OF A&A COINS & COLLECTABLES (IOWA CITY)

## On the Cover



SHS (IOWA CITY), PAUL C. JUHL COLLECTION

Gleaming watches and fob chains, spoons and ladles adorn the dress of this woman representing "Will S. Pitt, Jeweler." A century ago, women decked themselves out in merchandise to promote local businesses in events called merchants' carnivals. Fortunately for us, this woman "preserved" her costume by having it photographed by "Jacobs" of Oelwein, Iowa. Turn the page for more amazing examples.





In blue conductor's cloth (above), engine epaulets, and a ticket necklace, Nellie Allison represents the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad for the 1890 Decorah Merchants' Carnival. (Photo by C.A. Hill, Decorah.) Above right: Sponsored by F. Messer Meat Market, this young woman wears sausages and butcher's tools. (Photo by M. D. Baxter, Milton.)

## "The Brigade of Beauty in Advertising Costumes"

### Merchants' Carnivals in Iowa

by Paul C. Juhl

They waited anxiously outside Coe's Opera House on a dirt street in Osage, Iowa. Sixty-nine young women nervously adjusted their dresses, anticipating the reaction of the overflowing crowd inside. It was half past eight with the sun just beginning to set. In their minds, they were rehearsing the steps in the drill that would allow them to show off their dresses to the best advantage. Standing behind Minnie Richardson, who was to lead the procession, was

Emily Holmes in a pink dress and cap with a butcher knife suspended from her waist and a cow's horn on each of her shoulders. Further down the line was Mrs. George Cole with a necklace of shaving brushes and a razor fastened in her hair.

Even further down the line was Julia Tressider who was attired in red with three rows of dried apples around the bottom of her skirt, a panel of bananas on one side, and lemons and oranges on the other.





**B**arely visible, glass bottles bedeck the apron and sponges the hem of this costume advertising W. G. Israel, Druggist. (Photo by Birdia E. Warner, Brighton.) Right: Wearing a dress of upholstery fabric and tassels and carrying a banner, this woman promotes an unnamed furniture dealer. (Photo by Cundill, Maquoketa.)

Around her waist was a china tea set, and on her dress, large buttons made of cookies. The floor-length gowns of these 69 Iowa women represented the best that the merchants and service providers of Osage had to offer.

Finally the signal was given by the leader, Mrs. S. B. Roberts. To the music of Mackays' Orchestra, the ladies marched quickly through the crowd. Their dresses were bright splashes of color. But what really attracted the audience's attention were the materials adorning the women—every imaginable item that might in some way represent a business or a service to the farmers and townspeople. Dresses were loaded with everything from shingles to bottles of perfume.

Fathers and mothers, grandparents, and aunts and uncles pointed proudly to the young women, many of them unmarried, who were from their families. Merchants looked with great pleasure at the young women who represented their enterprises. And, of

course, the area's young bachelors looked about for someone to provide some summer romance. The opera house was full of excitement as the 1889 Merchants' Carnival got under way.

Intended to promote individual merchants and the community itself, the Osage Merchants' Carnival was probably similar to those held by other Iowa towns and cities in the late 1880s and 1890s. The photographs on these pages and the front cover are rare evidence of merchants' carnivals in several Iowa communities (though none of these photos appear to match the descriptions in the Osage newspaper). Merchants' carnivals were probably not unique to Iowa. Similar photographs dating to the last decades of the 19th century have been found for communities from Pennsylvania to Montana.

To sponsor young women, merchants would supply them with items from their businesses with which to decorate their gowns. The women, possibly helped





*Birdia E. Warner,* BRIGHTON,  
IOWA.



**Bills and coins adorn this representative of the Brighton Bank. (Photo by Birdia E. Warner, Brighton.) Right: With banner set aside, this woman strikes an artful pose in watches and long chains for Smith the Jeweler. (Photo by Buser, Mt. Vernon.)**

by mothers or local dressmakers, would create the costume. Once the program began, the women would march around the hall, carrying their banners and showing off their creativity.

The remainder of the evening would vary according to the organizers. Women's church groups often used the events as fund raisers. Musical or literary performances or other drills might round out the entertainment. The evening usually concluded with ice cream and cake—and modest profits for the fund-raising group.

Accounts and evidence of merchants' carnivals are rare. Historians and collectors occasionally happen upon intriguing photos of women bedecked in merchandise but seldom find documentation of where or why these costumes were worn. Fortunately, two reporters for Iowa newspapers, the *Mitchell County Press* in Osage and the *Decorah Republican*, wrote lengthy accounts of merchants' carnivals.

In 1890 more than a hundred women participated

in the two-day merchants' carnival in Decorah, Iowa. The two-page article in the *Decorah Republican* (much of it in verse) hints at the purpose, and calls to mind civic pride and the desire to promote one's own town:

What shall we do, our wise ones said,  
To give the town a boom?  
We'll show the world that we're not dead,  
For all we need is room  
And chance to show what we can do  
In setting all its charms on view.

So they called a public meeting,  
You know men always do.  
They had a President and Vice,  
Secretary and Treasurer too,  
Attorney and committees full,  
And worked by parliamentary rule.

Then they had a grand procession,  
With pomp and music loud;





Spoons, keys, and scissors advertise J. S. Nye Hardware. (Photo by McElhose, Primghar.) "How do you like me?" appears on the back. Right: A. Holland Dry Goods provided buttons and handkerchiefs. (Photo by Bolstad & Bakken, Northwood.)

The growlers made concession,  
And all alike were proud  
Of Nature's beauties, man's emprise,  
Combined to charm the travelers eyes.

The business men wished to display  
Their wares and trades and gold,  
So next they asked the ladies  
A carnival to hold,  
To represent each trade and store  
That pays its way, and something more.

The ladies gathered in a bunch,  
They had no rule or order, true,  
With twenty talking all at once,—  
But that's the way they do.  
The scheme was started in a minute  
And pushed along for all that's in it.

The Decorah reporter also gave detailed descriptions of the costumes and then repeated the lengthy

verses that were read as each young woman stepped forward. Imagine, if you will, a few of the participants in the Decorah Merchants' Carnival. Consider, for example, Dora Peterson, representing C. Goltz's furniture store. According to the *Republican*, she wears a "black dress, ornamented with bits of fine mouldings, toy furniture and undertaker's implements" and carries a banner of "blue and white satin, decorated with toy chairs." The narrator reads:

Who started the first furniture store  
And always kept the best of stock?  
Why! Goltz, of course, from days of yore.  
He never has been known to shirk.  
We've known him many years gone past,  
We all must come to him at last.

Then there's Tilda Ambly, for C. Jennish, the blacksmith. Her black dress is adorned "with silver plated horseshoes for trimming and hair ornaments, necklace of small chains" and she carries a "banner of wire net,





**Small sacks of grain and bales of hay bedeck this flour-sack costume, sponsored by a mill. (Photo by Reynolds, Jefferson.)**

decorated with shoe nails, yellow ribbon, and horse shoe on top." From the narrator:

Charley Jennisch is the man  
To set a shoe or tire a wheel.  
Always go to him when you can.  
You'll find him fair in every deal.  
For honest work and quickly done  
He's not excelled by any one.

Josie Brorby, sponsored by J. E. Morton, the carriage painter, models a "dress ornamented with endless variety of paint sample tags." The narrator says:

I want to sell my buggy  
But it is so scratched and shabby  
That it looks as if it wasn't worth a cent.  
Joe Morton is the dandy  
Who can paint it up so handy,  
And surely that's the man to whom I went.

Representing Spurr, the local photographer, Kate Protheroe is in "black lace over velvet, trimmings of photographs and girdle of same, black tam O' Shanter

hat trimmed with photographs" and holds a banner of "pink and black satin pallet, name one side and artist on reverse." As she steps forward, we hear:

The artist, Spurr, is busy each day,  
But though busy has room for you;  
He'll make you look sweet,  
Handsome and neat,  
If your looks will allow you to;  
So fix yourself up all pretty and nice  
And he will take you just in a trice.

Refusing responsibility for fine verse, the poet admits: "Though rhyme and metre both are rough/The sense is here and that's enough." For 95 verses the poem continues. Such detailed descriptions, along with photographs, give us glimpses of the variety of local businesses and services in small towns. In Decorah, for instance, businesses ranged from insurance agents and harness shops, to greenhouses and Chinese laundries. The descriptions also tell us what businesses sold or used (for example, wallpaper, poker chips, and opera glasses at the bookstore; fly nets and sleigh bells at the harness shop; butter tubs and butter tryers at the creamery).

A June 1889 account of the Tipton merchants' carnival in the *Tipton Advertiser* reports that 50 women participated. "The next round of music heralded the advent of the brigade of beauty in advertising costumes," the newspaper noted. "The ladies marched in two ranks, and keeping time to the music, executed some quite difficult and very effective evolutions, which were exceedingly well done, especially considering the small opportunity for practice. There was too much to see; and the effect, though pleasing, was confusing. The ladies, therefore, responded to a unanimous call for a repetition of the march, for which, as before, they were enthusiastically applauded."

Small-town Iowans looked to their own communities for both commerce and entertainment. Iowa historian Dorothy Schwieder writes, "The presence of numerous diverse businesses in Iowa's towns reflected the fact . . . that for the tens of thousands of Iowans who lived there, life was local in character. Though Iowans certainly read newspapers and magazines covering events elsewhere, most interests and activities centered on or took place in one's own community."

"Accordingly," Schwieder continues, "town residents traded locally for groceries, clothing, and other



necessities; the major exception was merchandise ordered through mail-order houses." The popularity of mail-order houses became a serious threat to small-town businesses. First, Montgomery Ward and then, in 1886, Sears, Roebuck and Company courted consumers who had long relied on local merchants. Mail-order houses "selected goods with the rural market in mind, and by purchasing in volume obtained reduced prices from manufacturers," writes historian Lewis Atherton. Attractively displayed in catalogs and delivered by train, mail-order merchandise bypassed local merchants, cutting into their business so much that merchants soon would oppose rural free delivery and especially parcel post laws, arguing that the government was subsidizing mail-order houses while ruining local businesses.

Were merchants' carnivals an effort to fight off consumer changes or economic downswings, by reminding the community of local businesses? Were they simply booster pageants with large casts? Or local entertainment until the next circus or stock company came to town? Perhaps they fulfilled all these roles.

**B**y the turn of the century, interest in these local extravaganzas had begun to wane. "The Merchant's Carnival given at the Opera House last Saturday evening, was not very extensively patronized by our citizens," the *Howard County Times* of Cresco, Iowa, commented on November 30, 1899. "Some thirty or forty business people were represented, making the program too long for particular mention. The ladies of the Congregational Church realized about \$30, and the fellow who worked up the entertainment carried off the lion's share, as usual."

The phenomena of merchants' carnivals may have been lost to time, if not for the fact that after the carnival, the women sometimes took their costumes to the town photographer to "save" them. In 1889, the *Mitchell County Press* reported that "our artists (photographers), Samson & Corning and J. A. Douglas are busy this week photographing the costumes worn at the carnival."

The sepia-toned cabinet cards showcased here could not capture the costumes' bright colors and fabrics—black brilliantine and white surah, rose brocade and garnet plush, Nile green and mauve satin. Nor do they show how the footlights of the opera house must have reflected off the shiny spoons and buckles and pie pans that hung from the dresses. And they lack examples of the perishable and ephemeral items that



**W**earing a necklace of cigars, this woman represents a tobacco enterprise. More cigars and artificial leaves adorn her dress. (Photo by Floral Studio, Columbus Junction.)

some women wore—ruffles of prunes, bonnets of shavings, panels of gingersnaps. But they do explain why one reporter called the costumes "wonderfully ingenious," and why another called a merchants' carnival "a beautiful and bewildering scene." ♦

Paul C. Juhl of Iowa City is a guidance counselor for Center Point/Urbana Schools and collects early Iowa images. His article on the J. P. Doremus stereographs of Mississippi river towns appeared in the Summer 1992 Palimpsest. He invites readers to write him or the editor regarding other photos or accounts of merchants' carnivals.

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

Mary Noble, Shan Thomas, and Jamie Beranek provided useful reference material. Other sources were these Iowa newspapers: *Decorah Republican* (June 12, 1890); *Osage's Mitchell County Press* (May 30, 1889); *Cresco's Howard County Times* (Nov. 30, 1899, p. 5); *Tipton Advertiser* (June 27, 1889, p. 2); and *Vinton Eagle* (Aug. 18, 25, 1899). For more on late 19th-century small-town life, see Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Iowa State University Press, 1996); and Lewis Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border* (Indiana University Press, 1984).





**O**n the cutting edge of hydraulic research, Floyd Nagler also had a passion for earlier forms of Iowa water power. On his field trips throughout the state, he located, photographed, and researched remains of water-powered mills, thus documenting one of Iowa's most important industries in the 19th century. Here, he measures a rusting turbine.

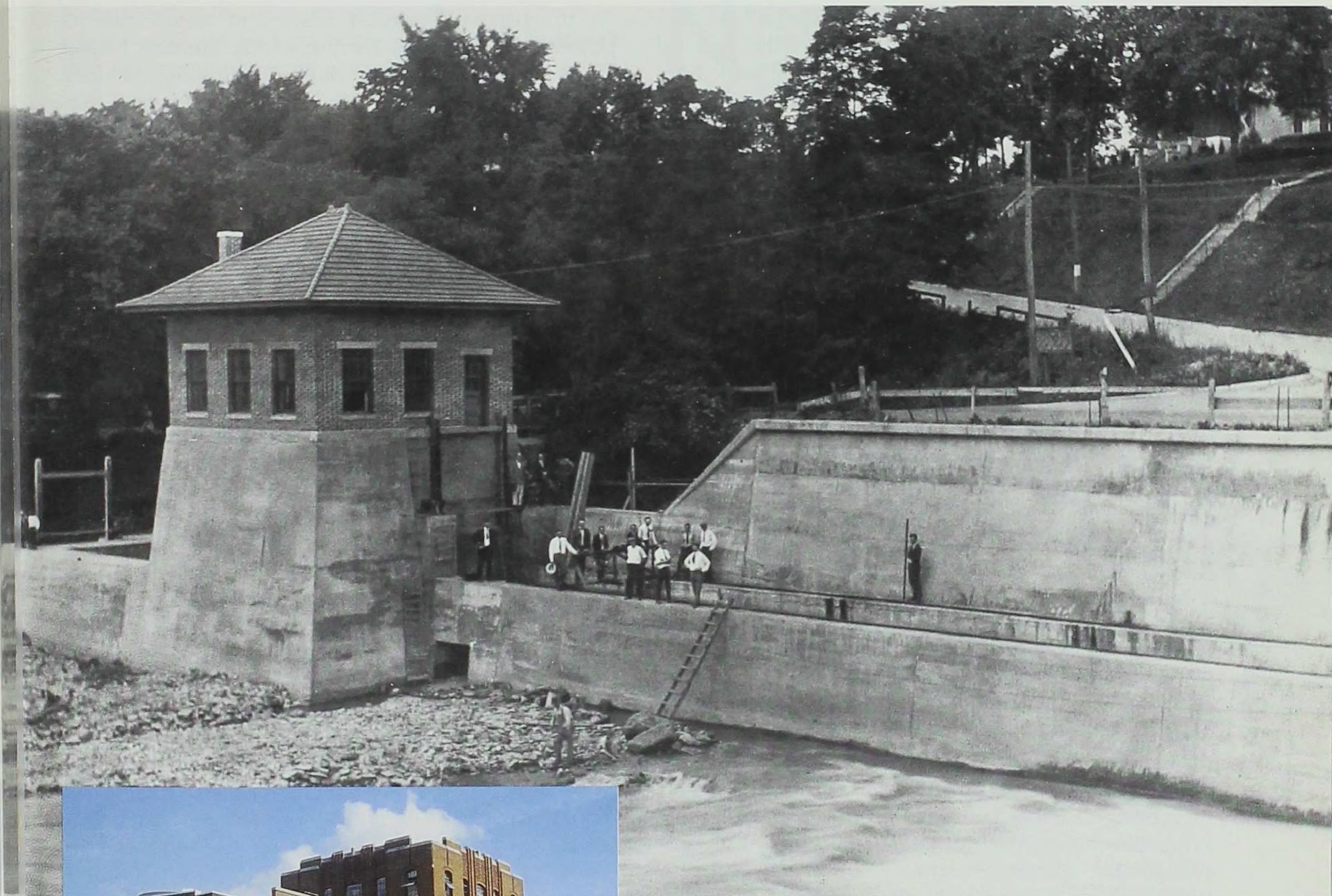
# Floyd Nagler's Passion for Water Power

by Cornelia F. Mutel

**F**loyd Nagler exuded a passion for water and a passion for life. It is said that he was a man of boundless energy and drive, capable of balancing ten activities simultaneously and keeping them all going. That in summer he rose at 4:30 a.m. to tend the family garden at his home in Iowa City, and then walked off to an early start at his work as director of the University of Iowa's Hydraulics Laboratory. That at night he carried his love of water back home with him, damming a small water course to build his children a pond for swimming and fishing. That he approached his prolific efforts at the university with eagerness, efficiency, precision, and thoroughness, inspiring the same in others who then had trouble keeping up with him.

Not the least of his tasks before his premature death at age 41 was the establishment of the Iowa Institute of Hydraulic Research, today one of the University of Iowa's stellar institutes, known around the world for its contributions to the understanding of water flow and fluid mechanics generally. Although he was on the cutting edge of hydraulic research in the 1920s and early 1930s, Nagler was equally fascinated with documenting the use of water to power Iowa's





**I**n little more than a decade, Floyd Nagler expanded the tiny Hydraulics Laboratory from a small cube on a concrete channel on the Iowa River (large photo), to a laboratory with 50 times the floor space (color inset). A man of boundless energy, he filled the new lab with researchers, equipment, and projects. Since his death, the outer facade of this structure in Iowa City has remained virtually unchanged. Today the building forms the administrative core of the renowned Iowa Institute of Hydraulic Research.

settlement-era mills (a technology that had passed into history) and in promoting the use of water power to generate electricity (a technology then at its height in Iowa). This mix of interests created a rare individual capable of simultaneously promoting the value of looking to the future and to the past.

Nagler was brought to the University of Iowa's Engineering College in 1920, to direct activities at its newly established Hydraulics Lab. The laboratory at

that time was a tiny square building, 22 feet on each side, perched atop a concrete experimental channel that fed water from the adjacent Iowa River into laboratory projects. Nagler immediately launched the lab on an energetic research program involving questions of water flowing through culverts and spillways, around river curves, underneath bridges, and over weirs and dams, and the countless other enigmas of water flow that concern hydraulic engineers. Over the



next decade, he solicited funds and directed the construction of an expanded laboratory with over 50 times as much floor space as his original workshop. He also attracted an ever-growing torrent of research funding and projects. Perhaps most notable among these were Nagler's surveys of Iowa's rivers.

Floyd Nagler seemed to have an absorbing love of free-flowing rivers and a fascination for their transformation into a "usable" form through human constructs. Nagler firmly believed that knowledge of our streams was imperative to harnessing the benefits of our waterways and decreasing their damage. "The information obtained from the adequate measurement of the flow of streams is almost indispensable in the economic design of a large variety of projects which directly or indirectly affect the public welfare, such as drainage, river pollution [*sic*] by sewage, flood protection devices, [and] waterways," he wrote to Iowa governor John Hammill in 1925. His own efforts focused on surveys regarding the water resource potential and flow characteristics of the Mississippi, its immediate tributaries, and smaller rivers in Iowa.

Some of these surveys were performed for Iowa's Board of Conservation and for the Fish and Game Commission, which were then preparing the *Twenty-Five Year Conservation Plan for Iowa*. Nagler became Iowa's chief consultant for water-related aspects of their projects, and he tramped the sites of future state parks, assessing their potential for artificial lakes and then designing the dams that would form the lakes. When the *Twenty-Five Year Conservation Plan* was completed, he continued similar consultations with Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps, inspecting and reporting on sites where the CCC was considering constructing or improving an Iowa lake or dam, including the dam that would form Lake Macbride just north of Iowa City. A number of these projects would be under construction at the time of his death.

Nagler provided similar services to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (then the "U.S. Engineer Department"). The Corps, which for decades had attempted to train the Mississippi River's mighty flow, was asked in the 1920s to report to the U.S. Congress on the best method for controlling its floods regionally—and, incidentally, on possibilities for power production, navigation, and irrigation as well. Nagler, as the "Engineer in Charge of Stream Investigations," asserted that the Mississippi could best be understood by learning more about its tributaries, and he immediately initiated comprehensive surveys of Iowa's rivers and streams. Two field parties under his supervision helped him assess stream profiles and features, report

on prospective reservoir sites, and search out all power developments. During winter months, Nagler spent ten- to twelve-hour days spinning out detailed, lengthy reports on the Iowa, Des Moines, Boone, Racoon, Turkey, Wapsipinicon, and nine other Iowa rivers.

By the time Nagler's work on the river survey project ended in December 1930, he had compiled a significant portion of the information needed to reshape the Mississippi River into its current state. While working in the Corps' Rock Island office, he had become involved in a number of engineering-related matters, including the planned construction of a nine-foot-deep navigation channel and associated locks and dams on the upper Mississippi. According to one source, Nagler was the first to recommend the channelization program that today characterizes the river. Because of Nagler, the Hydraulics Lab later became a major site for modeling federal river projects in the eastern United States.

**N**agler integrated a passion for the subject of water power into his work on Iowa's rivers. He envisioned Iowa as a land jeweled with lakes and dams, where water was put to service for the betterment of Iowa's people wherever possible. While his stream studies for the Corps firmly stated that he saw little need or desirability in using Iowa's rivers for irrigation or commercial navigation, he thought differently about water-power developments. For the Iowa River, for example, he recommended increasing the outage of the few existing plants and designated sites for 24 new power plants (although he admitted that only four of these really were feasible).

His bias toward the development of water power was revealed in a 1926 paper entitled "Will Water Waste or Work," in which he expressed resource-depletion concerns remarkably similar to those of the present day: "With only 5 percent of the water power of the world developed at the present time while the world's coal supply is being depleted at the rate which will mean its entire exhaustion in 200 years, the question of whether water shall work or waste presents a real challenge to the engineer-economist. In Iowa alone, and Iowa has comparatively little water power, there are 200,000 horse power which can yet be developed."

By the following year, he had increased his prediction to 400,000 horsepower, and wrote that this water power would "play an important part in the industrial development of the state" and save more than two million tons of coal per year. Here and elsewhere he



admitted that the harnessing of such water power in Iowa would not be easy or cheap; yet he maintained that water-power plants would be economical when tied into large electrical systems also fed by other power sources, and he pinpointed specific sites for dam construction and development of power plants.

These dreams of Nagler's never came to fruition. Although several dozen of Iowa's old millsites were converted to hydroelectric power in the early 1900s, and these contributed significantly to the state's total electric budget in the 1920s, they could not keep up with the state's soaring demands for electricity, and thus they were replaced with coal-fired generating stations as they wore out. Today, the few Iowa hydroelectric plants still in operation provide an infinitesimal amount of Iowa's total power needs. The generating potential of the running water of our rather flat state is simply too low and the flow too irregular to justify the expense involved in constructing dams and related power plants.

Nagler's passion for water power did, however, carry him into successful reconstruction of one aspect of the state's past. Floyd Nagler loved to wander the Iowa countryside, picking up an interesting rock here or there and searching out remains of earlier times. These walks cultivated his love of history, especially his fascination with Iowa's early experiments with water power. Old water mills particularly grabbed his fancy. Nagler himself rooted old millstones from the mud and sought out rusting turbines in scrapyards, arranging for these signs of earlier times to be transported back to Iowa City where he proudly displayed them in front of the Hydraulics Lab building and in a small park across the street. He also incorporated a pair of millstones into the construction of the Hydraulics Lab's entrance hall. His river surveys allowed him ample opportunity to exercise his historic passions, and his work with the Corps provided him with two field teams, which he instructed to locate and photograph as many old water-powered

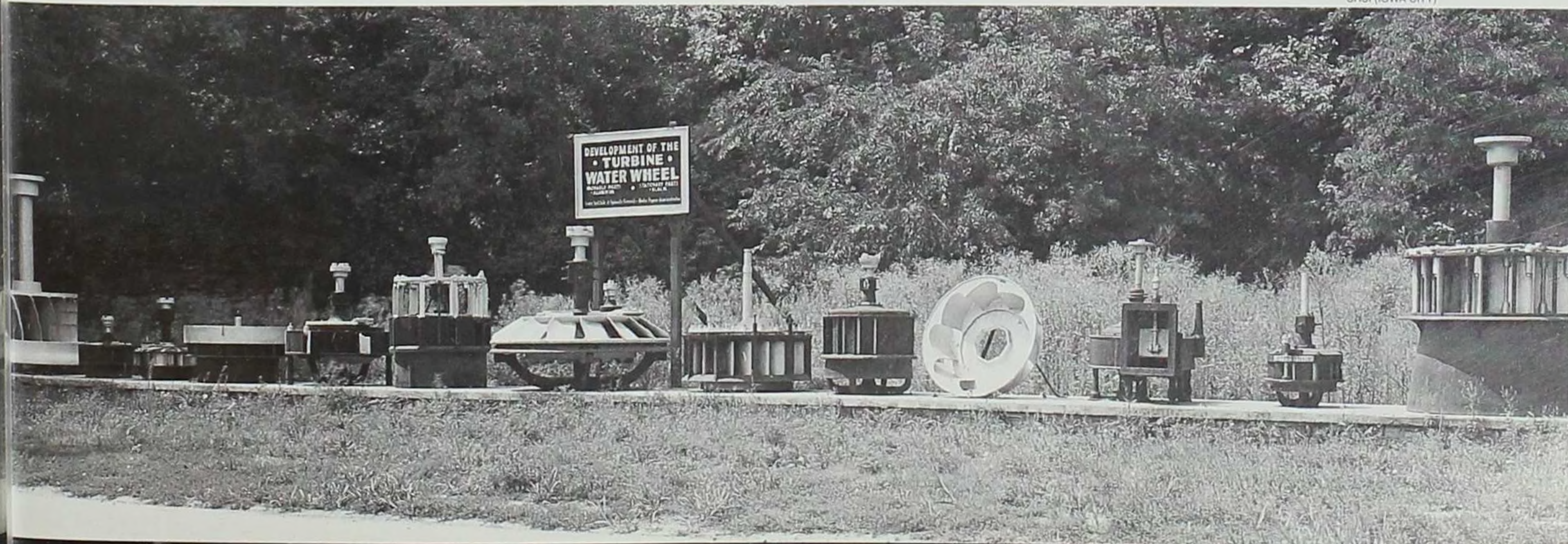
UNIVERSITY OF IOWA LIBRARY, SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, IOWA CITY

Dear Mr. Tegtmeier:

I was recently at the town of Greene, Iowa, and noted that you have discarded three water wheels which are now rusting in the pile of miscellaneous material behind your power plant. I wonder how much persuasion it would take to get you to load these three wheels, complete with their guide cases, onto a Rock Island train and donate them to the hydraulic laboratory at the State University of Iowa. They would certainly be of interest and value to my students, and I have plans for making a collection of old wheels to adorn the front yard of the hydraulic laboratory. When I finished my undergraduate work, I had no conception of what a water wheel looked like, and I am determined that our students will know water wheels from "a to z".

In a letter dated November 3, 1927, Nagler explains his purpose for collecting remains of early mills and solicits the donation of a rusting turbine. The turbines that Nagler collected on his field studies in Iowa were displayed across the street from the Hydraulics Laboratory in Iowa City. He labeled the instructional exhibit, "Development of the Turbine Water Wheel" (below). Depression-era Work Projects Administration employees were directed to paint the movable parts of the turbines silver and the stationary parts black. The collection was later disbanded.

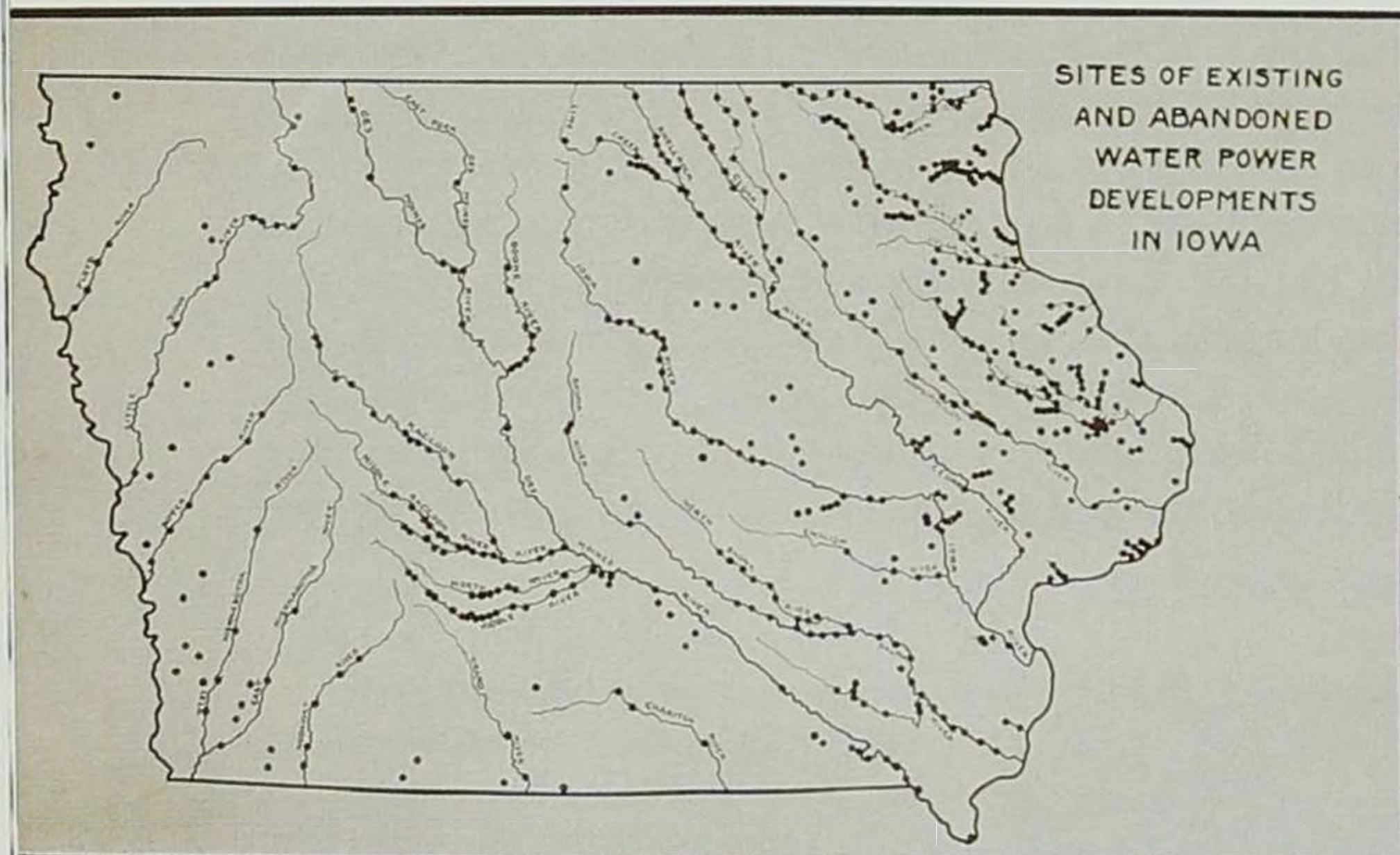
SHSI (IOWA CITY)



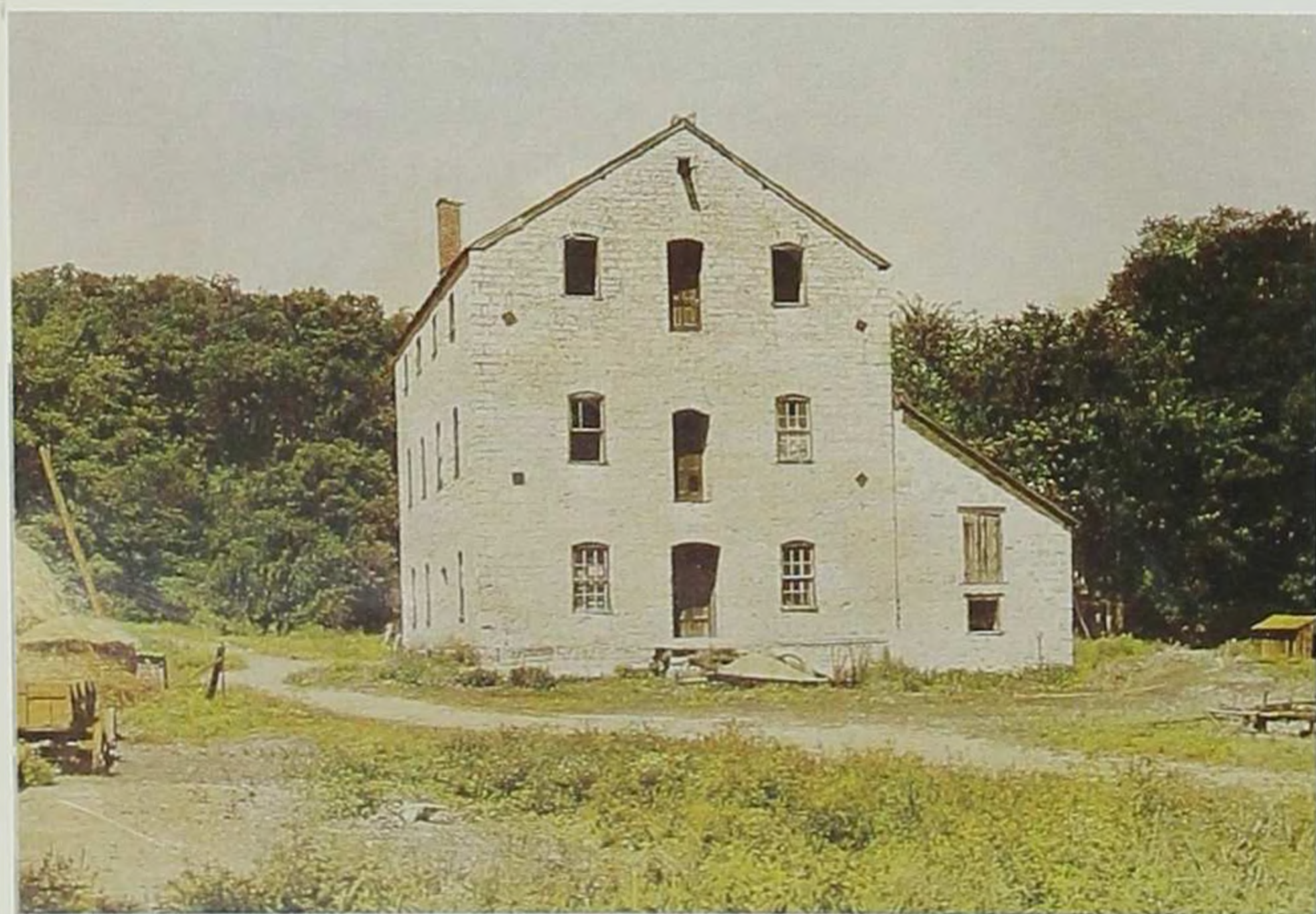


mills as they could. Nagler then put the glass slides of these mills together into a popular lecture that he presented repeatedly to the general public in Iowa City and elsewhere.

Floyd Nagler was a large, powerful man who routinely returned from his rambles in the field loaded down with rocks, which he used to build a rock garden with a fountain, waterfall, and three connected pools just outside his front door. But his unusually



**Nagler** used these glass slides and two dozen more to illustrate his public lectures on Iowa's vanishing water-powered mills. The slide above, showing hundreds of "sites of existing and abandoned water power developments in Iowa," is a tribute to Nagler's efforts to locate all existing sites of former mills, and to 19th-century Iowans' efforts to harness water power. The hand-tinted slide below depicts Kleinlein's Mill.



BOTH SLIDES: SHSI (IOWA CITY)

good health, strength, and vigor could not prevent a normal attack of appendicitis, which at first was diagnosed as the flu. After disregarding his supposedly minor illness for a few days, Nagler checked into the University Hospital a few blocks from his home and underwent surgery at midnight, but by that time his appendix had ruptured and the infection had spread. While his premature death likely could have been prevented with modern antibiotics, these were not available in 1933. He survived a second surgery two weeks later when portions of his liver were removed. Floyd Nagler died a few weeks after that on November 10, 1933.

However, his enthusiasm for the subject of old mills and water power continued to inspire historians. Jacob Swisher, a State Historical Society of Iowa research associate during much of the first half of the century who was recognized throughout Iowa for his prolific historical writings, credited "Floyd A. Nagler, eminent engineer and student of pioneer life" with inspiring Swisher's 1940 book, *Iowa, Land of Many Mills*, which remains the definitive volume on this aspect of Iowa's past.

Many photographs collected by Nagler appeared in Swisher's book, and a selection of them, as well as photos collected by others, illustrate the following article, which explores the milling industry and water-power developments that so raised Nagler's passion. Through Swisher's historical book and Nagler's own cutting-edge research commenced at the Hydraulics Laboratory, Floyd Nagler contributed significantly to historic efforts to understand and control the use of Iowa's water and water power. ♦

*Cornelia F. Mutel is a historian of science at the University of Iowa's Institute of Hydraulic Research, which is discussed in this article. The article is adapted from a book she is writing on the history of the institute, to be published as part of the University of Iowa's 1997 sesquicentennial celebration.*

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

Sources include correspondence, newspaper clippings, published and unpublished reports, and other materials archived at the Iowa Institute of Hydraulic Research and the University of Iowa's Special Collections (University of Iowa Library, Iowa City); thanks to Earl Rogers at Special Collections for his assistance. Thanks also to Floyd Nagler's son, Robert Nagler, for reminiscences of his father. Nagler's glass slides and lecture script are archived at the State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City). A more detailed accounting of Nagler's life and contributions is included in a forthcoming book on the history of the Iowa Institute of Hydraulic Research. Specific annotations to this article are held in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files (SHSI-Iowa City).





SHSI (IOWA CITY)

# Water-Powered Mills in Iowa: A Forsaken Technology

by Cornelia F. Mutel

Settlers entering Iowa in the 1830s had survival on their minds, and survival meant harnessing power to transpose raw materials into products that would shelter and feed them. At that time power—like most everything else—was locally produced and locally consumed. Muscle power was the form most readily available: settlers were known to grind their grains by hand with

coffee mills or a carpenter's jointer, to turn millstones with horses, and to build log cabins with axes and human sweat. But water-powered mills provided a welcome alternative, and although the Iowa territory was relatively flat, its streams and rivers until the late 19th century powered a flurry of gristmills and sawmills that permitted settlers to nourish their children and to construct farmsteads, towns,

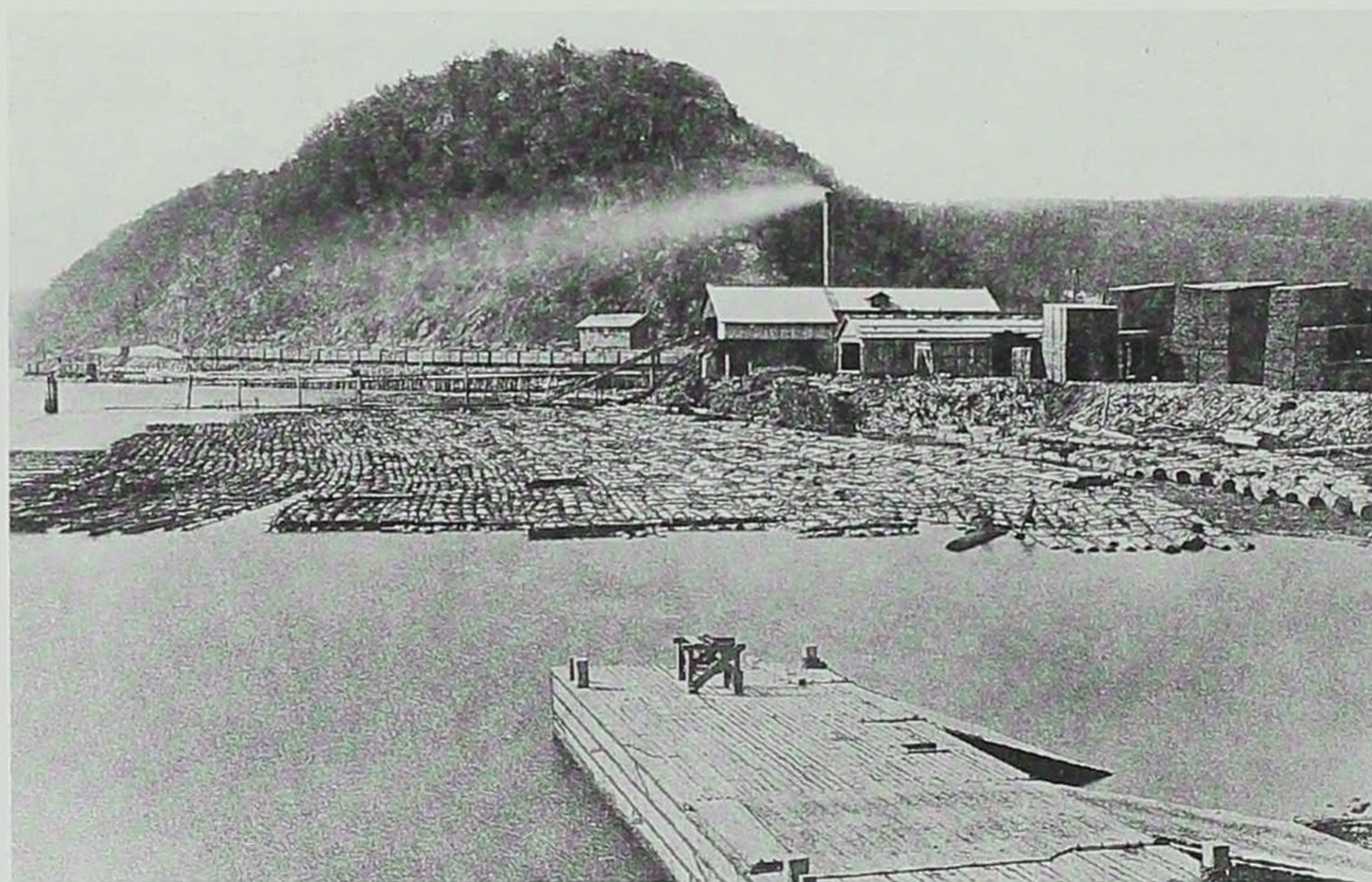
and industries. Water powered Iowa through much of the century, and mills were considered essential to settlement and life.

The first mill in Iowa was built in 1831 by the future president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis

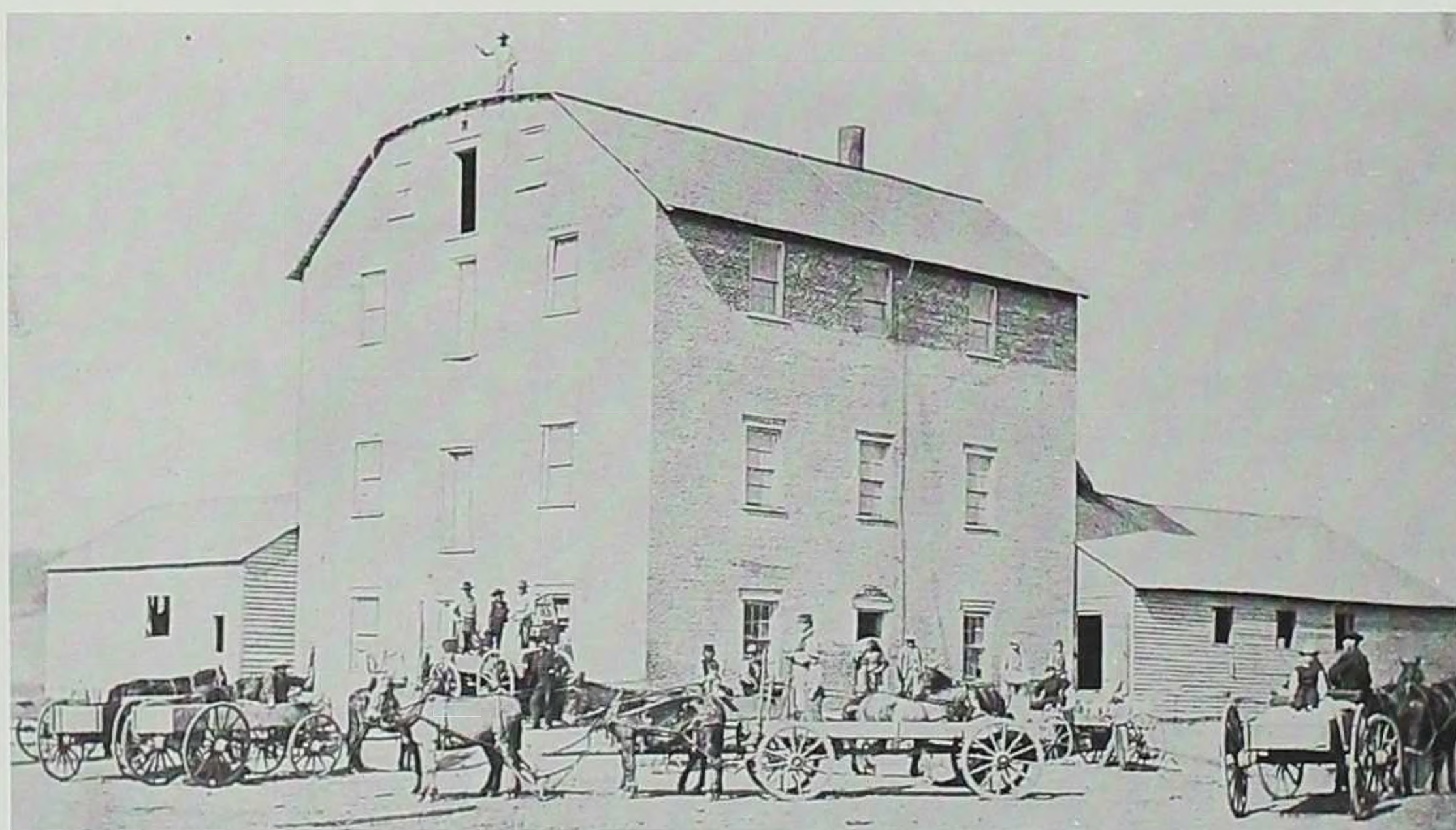
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**Above:** Once centers of thriving local industry, Iowa's water-powered mills, like Florenceville Mill in Howard County, have faded into the past.





**Above:** Iowa's lumber industry helped develop Mississippi river towns, as did Fleming Sawmill at Marquette, Iowa. **Below:** Wagons line up at the J.F. Young Flour Mill at Vinton. Iowa's flour mills ranged from small country mills to large commercial mills on the Mississippi. The small mills served farmers, who brought in grain and took home flour. The larger, commercial mills bought grain from farmers, ground it into flour, and then sold the flour to whatever markets were most profitable at that time.



(then a lieutenant in the U.S. Army). This sawmill, on the Yellow River, provided lumber for the construction of Fort Crawford near Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. But more typically, the earliest mills were fabricated by millers who forged a path into the Iowa wilderness, chose a site, and attracted set-

tlers to follow. The water-powered mills served many functions. There were gristmills, flour mills, hominy mills, sawmills, paper and woolen mills, even calico print mills and oil mills. While Iowa was being settled and transportation remained poor, the abundance of small, local, water-powered mills

allowed Iowans to survive in an era of self-sufficiency.

For nearly five decades, until the late 1870s, the number of mills gradually increased. The vast majority of these were sawmills and flour and gristmills. Already by the 1850s, mills had been established in many parts of Iowa, sawmills numbering 540 and flour and gristmills rising to 333. These early mills produced millions of dollars worth of goods annually; in 1860, their production of flour, meal, and lumber constituted Iowa's leading industries.

While small local sawmills were abundant in the early decades of settlement, the continuing proliferation of mills was most directly linked to the growing and processing of wheat, at first on a subsistence level, then commercially. Wheat, in the mid-1800s, was a mainstay of Iowa's agriculture, and wheat production necessitated flour mills. By 1870, 502 flour and gristmills speckled the state, and with the growth of wheat peaking in 1875, Iowa's flour and gristmills rose to a maximum of 713 by 1880, most of these run by water power.

While Iowa's streams powered the state's early economy, they also fueled Iowa's social life and shaped patterns of development. Early settlers often had to travel great distances to reach the closest mill, sometimes journeying a day or more with considerable difficulty. Once they arrived at a gristmill, they might join a line of dozens of horse-drawn wagons, waiting days in frustration for their turn, for the water to rise, or for machinery to be repaired so that the mill could grind their grain. While waiting, they camped near the mill or lodged nearby and vis-





SHSI (IOWA CITY); D.C. HALE COLLECTION

**Motor Mill, near Elkader, was photographed by D.C. Hale in the 1920s. One of the few water-powered mills still standing in Iowa, it is now on the National Register of Historic Places.**

ited with fellow travelers. Children who came along would roam the woods in search of flowers or fruits, or fish in the pond. Thus coming to the mill could become a significant social event, an uncommon occasion to cease labor and catch up on the local news. Mill ponds also served as social centers, as sites for ice-skating in winter and rowboating, fishing, camping, and picnicking in summer.

These activities, plus the cutting of much-needed ice from the ponds in winter, congregated trav-

elers and settlers around the mills. Mills became a hub of activity, a site doubling as trading post and post office. Mills, often the first constructs in an area, started to attract support industries (such as flour barrel cooperages) and other constructions that formed the nuclei of villages. The millers themselves claimed status as well-to-do leaders in community affairs as well as counselors and authorities on all subjects. It is thus little wonder that the mills, which were coupled with the power, supplies, water, and social and economic activities upon which settlers depended, became a focal point for regional development. Mill sites served as the kernels of many Iowa communities, and even today,

many Iowa cities and highway crossings form lasting tributes to the sites of Iowa's original mills.

A suitable site for a mill was greatly valued. Such a site included a stream with sufficient drop and flow to turn the water wheel, which in turn rotated millstones or other equipment. Sites with a steep gradient and high runoff were excellent, but locating such sites in Iowa's relatively flat terrain was difficult. Quantity of water also was a consideration: streams that were too small or erratic would not provide the necessary power, but bigger rivers meant larger floods and ice jams that threatened the mills.

Sites were often modified to



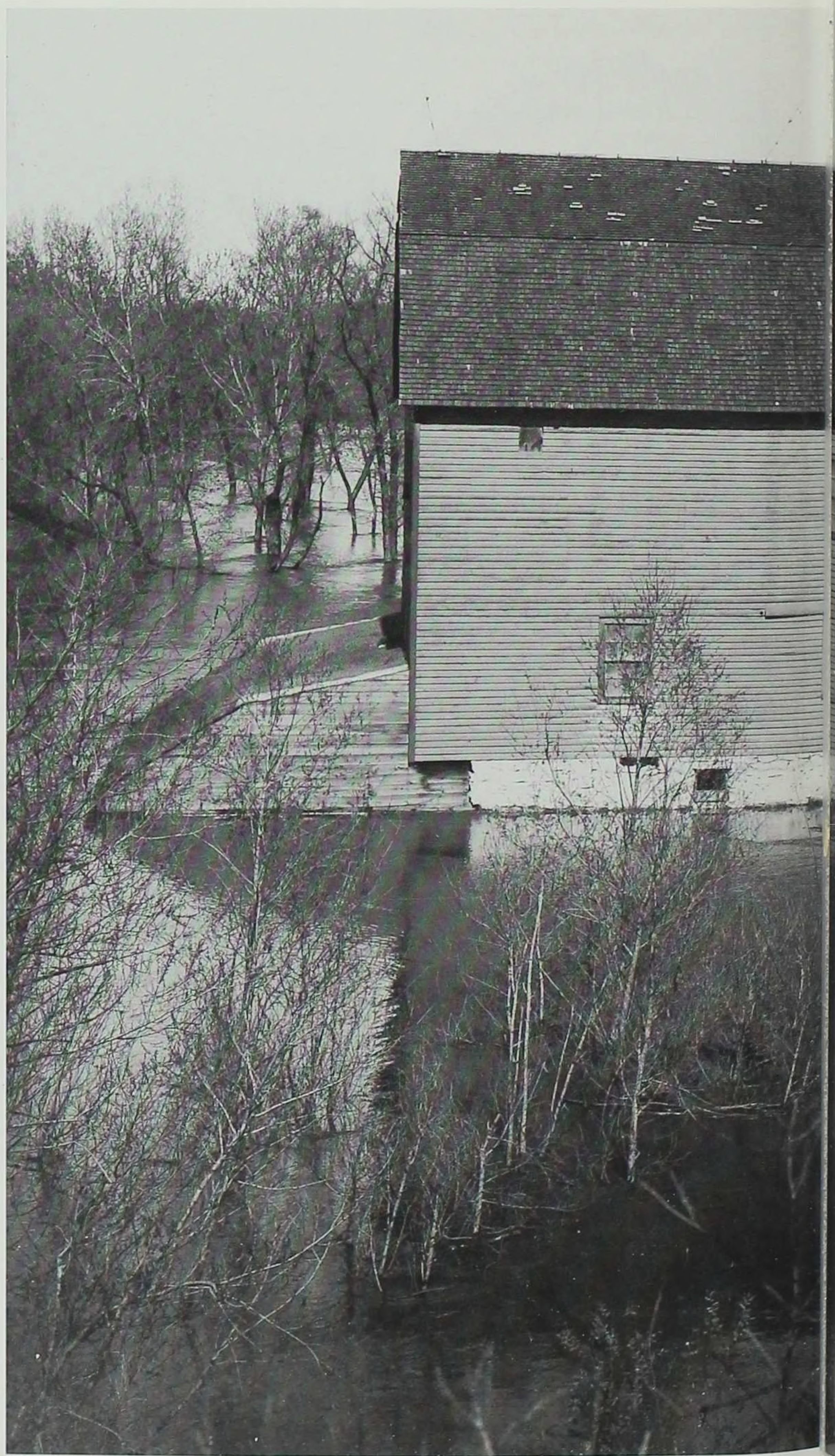
provide the optimal conditions: dams were constructed of brush, logs, or stone, sometimes reinforced with clay, and these dams enhanced the drop and speed of water and thus its force. The higher the dam, the greater the drop and the resulting power. Mill ponds created by dams also provided a more constant source of flowing water (and thus of energy) than Iowa's erratic streams supplied. Today, artificial waterfalls on Iowa's streams frequently mark the location of a former mill.

The construction of a millrace (an artificial channel that conveyed water to the wheel) could save the miller the cost and maintenance headaches of a dam, provided that the natural drop was sufficient. The race might, for example, connect one section of a river with a distant, lower section. However, a millrace also might be a short diversion dependent on a dam for its drop. Longer millraces might allow the mill's equipment to remain distant from a river's destructive forces. The canal dug from the Iowa River through the Amana Colonies was a seven-mile millrace that powered woolen, calico, hominy, and other mills, in addition to a starch factory, machine shops, and threshing machines.

All of these structures were exposed to the elements, which frequently degraded or destroyed them. Water's natural erosive power could eat away at dam and mill foundations, a problem exacerbated by the soil substrata

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**Flood waters catch the attention of men on a riverbank near Red Oak. Floods and ice jams could do great damage to the foundations of structures built along Iowa's rivers and streams. Droughts, on the other hand, could bring mills to a standstill.**



SHSI (IOWA CITY): SCHWINN COLLECTION





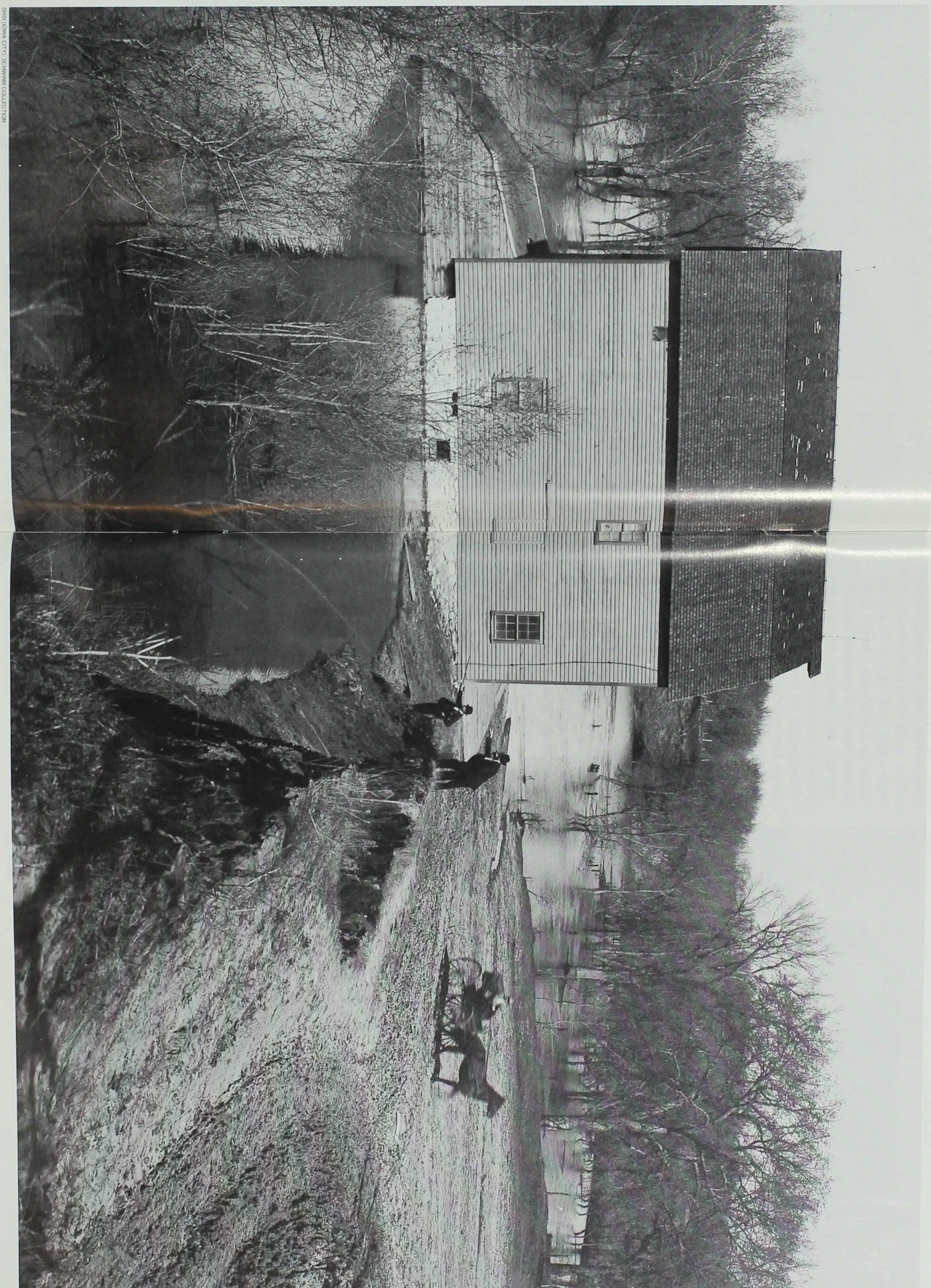


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SHIRLEY IOWA CITY, SCHWANN COLLECTION



SHSI (IOWA CITY): D.C. HALE COLLECTION



**Above:** Churning flood waters tear into Thompson Mill in Elkader, as photographed by D. C. Hale in June 1880. Ice could also be sinister, destroying wooden water wheels. **Below:** Chilly waters and ice floes rush past the Lennon Mill at Panora.



SHSI (DES MOINES)

(rather than solid rock) upon which most Iowa mills were constructed. Floods could wash out dams and millraces, carry away water wheels, or invade the mill itself. Log and ice jams bombarded dams and water wheels, and a wheel might be trapped and rendered inoperable by freezing water. Increased sediment loads from soils washing off the plowed prairies clogged ponds, races, and wheel pits. Mill structures required maintenance, and a failure of any one structure would close the mill. Dam failure and low water were frequent seasonal problems.

Gristmills came in various sizes and degrees of sophistication. The earliest mills were often simple and rough-hewn structures, but soon Iowa's mills were being constructed according to standardized plans that had been developed by Oliver Evans, an American inventor and engineer, and published in his 1795 book *The Young Mill-wright and Miller's Guide*. Evans detailed a mechanized mill that could be managed by a few operators who controlled the flow of grain and water power via a series of levers, gears, and leather pulleys or shafts. Gravity fed the grain to one or a series of millstones (which in later years were combined with or replaced by rollers) that ground the grain, and thence through various dressing, fanning, screening, and sifting machines that sorted, cleaned, and otherwise processed the flour. Ground grain might be cycled through cleaners and reground several times, until the desired particle size and quality were attained. Eventually, the bins, hoppers, and chutes would pour the finished flour into sacks.



Because of their dependence on gravity-fed flow, mills were tall structures, typically four floors high. Wheat might first enter the third floor of a mill where it would be cleaned and then fed into hoppers on the floor below, which in turn would feed the millstones below them. The ground grain would then be hoisted back upstairs by elevators, to be fed through sorters, sifters, and the like as it again flowed from one floor down to the next. The grain might cycle from upper to lower and back to upper floors several times before processing was completed. Power was fed from the stream into the mill on the lowest level and transported directly to the turning millstones. Machinery to run the various auxiliary pro-

cessing equipment was located on the uppermost floor, the power transmitted to these machines through a series of shafts and leather belts whose velocity was regulated through cogs and gears. Mills operated with a rhythmic slurp of water and a creaking and grinding rumble of equipment that endeared them to settlers and were later nostalgically remembered.

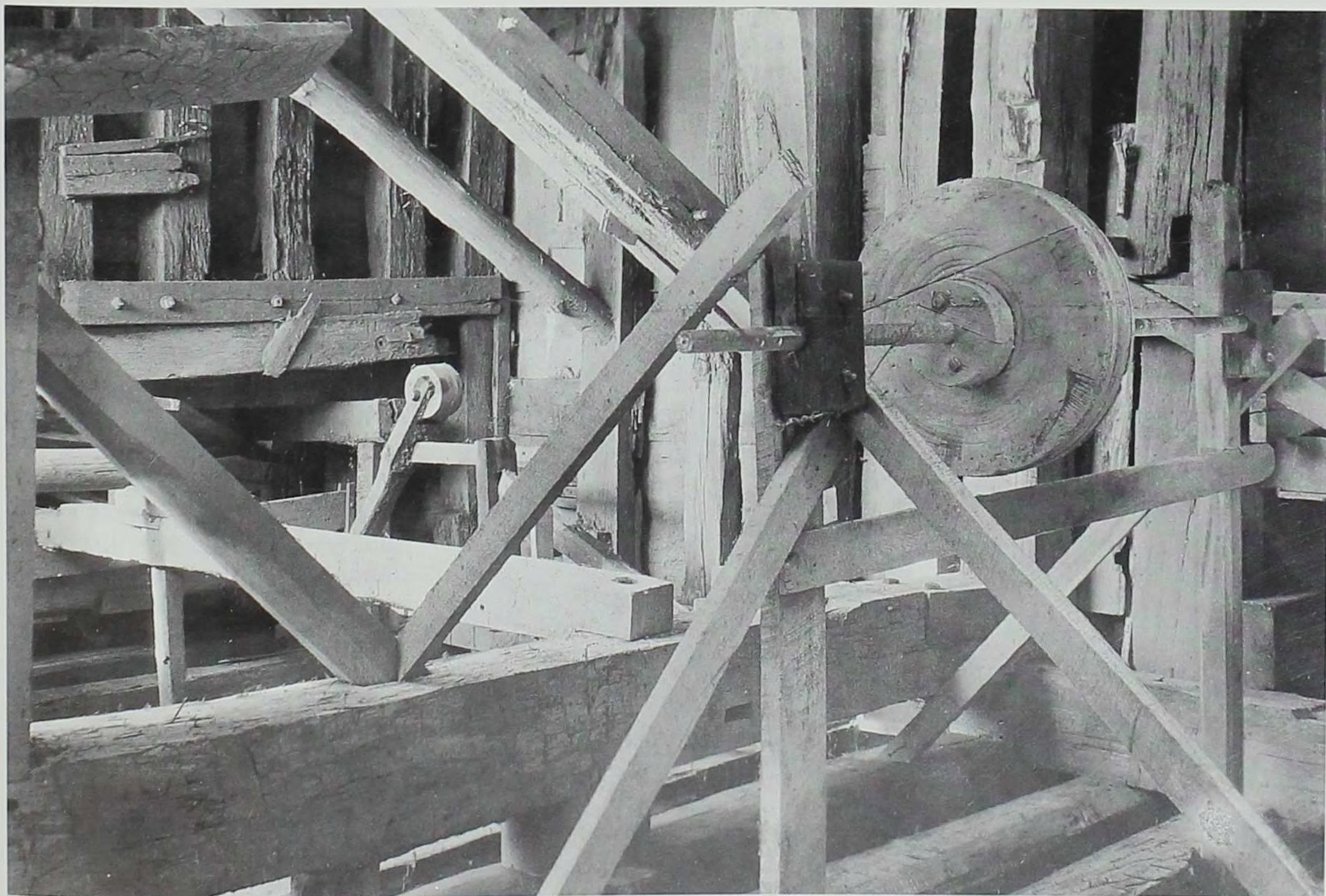
**M**ills ran on direct mechanical power: the force of moving water was captured by water wheels, which pivoted on hefty shafts that spun around with the wheel and transported the power into the mill and its equipment. Water wheels that powered gristmills turned the up-

permost of a pair of millstones, between which grain was ground. Both water wheels and millstones were crucial components of Iowa's early water-powered mills.

Vertical water wheels were broad, massive, wooden devices 18 or even 24 feet in diameter, big enough to rival steamboat paddlewheels in size. Water flowed beneath the undershot wheels, which had a series of paddles around the outside that were pushed forward by the water, thus turning the wheel. Breast wheels and overshot wheels, in contrast, had a series of buckets or grooved pockets. Water

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**A** rare photo of a mill interior reveals the hand-hewn timbers of walnut or oak in Forest Mill near McGregor.



SHSI (IOWA CITY); NAGLER COLLECTION



flowing over the wheel was caught in the buckets, which were pushed downward by the weight, thus turning the wheel. Each wheel type had its advantages. Even a few feet of drop could power an undershot wheel, which dipped directly into a running stream or millrace and then turned in tempo with the speed of the water. Thus dams were not an absolute requirement. Breast wheels and overshot wheels were more efficient, but could only operate if the water had sufficient drop, typically created by a dam. They also required the construction of a trough or race that fed the water onto the wheel. All wheels were prone to broken shafts and, because they extended directly into

the water, were vulnerable to ice damage and to floods, which sometimes washed them away. None operated once the surface water iced over; mills with vertical water wheels were seasonal operations.

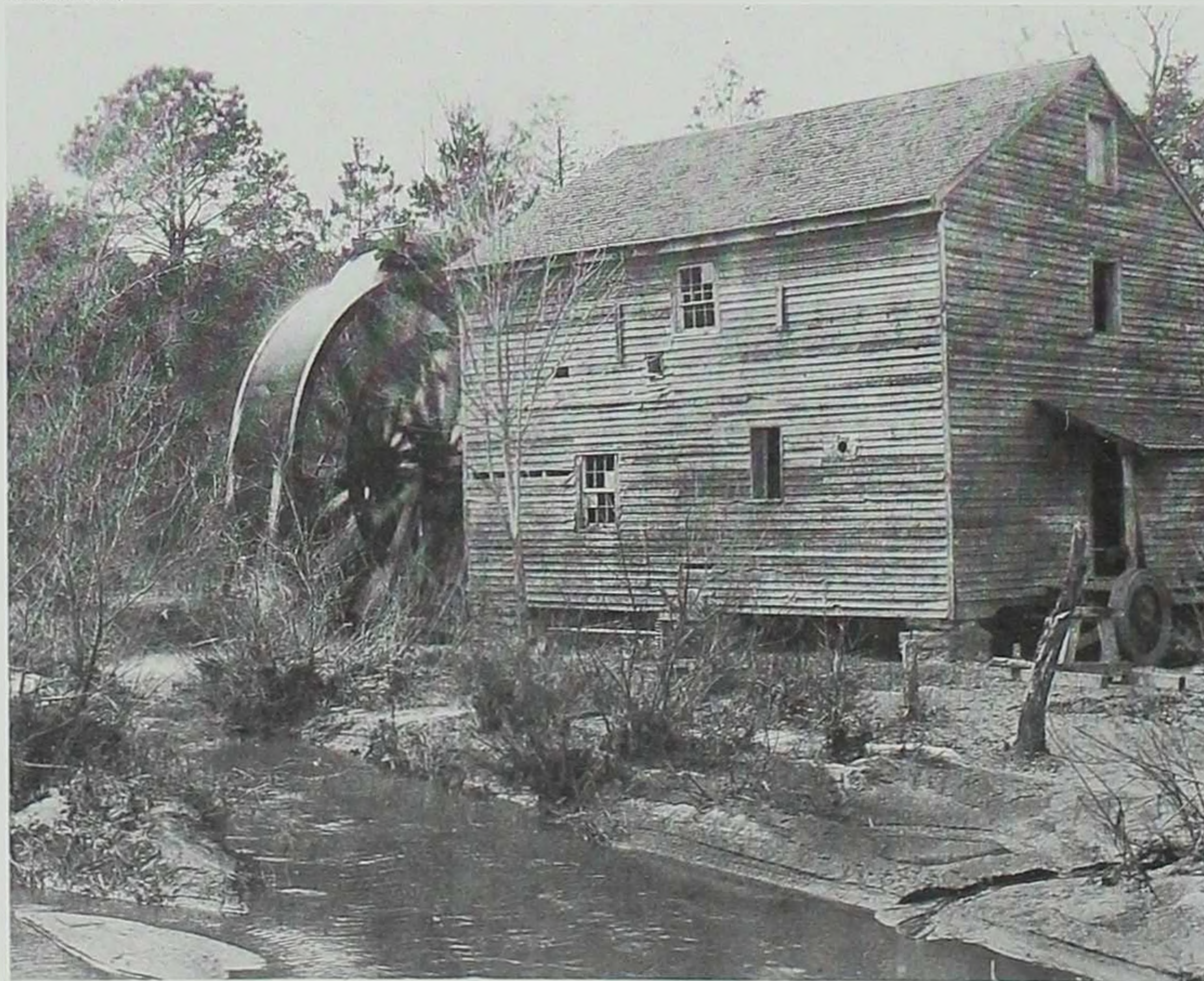
The shaping and sharpening of millstones was an art in itself. Not just any stone was acceptable. The best millstones were made from a very hard silicate found in France's Seine valley, and France became famous for its buhrstones, which were shipped to America in pieces and then cemented and bound together with wide iron hoops. American millstones, in contrast, were usually chiseled from a single stone block. They were manufactured in several eastern states and sometimes carved from Iowa's "prairie boulders," glacial erratics transported here and deposited many thousands of years ago.

Grain was funneled into a hole in the center of the uppermost

millstone, which rotated against a fixed lower millstone, the pulverized grain moving outward along a series of radial grooves and spilling from the stones' outer edges in the process. The setting of the millstones determined the coarseness of the finished product. For flour, millstones were brought close together and run fast, so that the sharp stone edges could grind grain as fine as possible during the first run. The stones wore down in the process. Thus the edges of the grooves or furrows that were carved into the two rotating stone faces had to be sharpened, or "dressed," as often as weekly. The thread-like lines had to be kept distinct and separate, the grooves deepened just a bit, and the stone surface roughened. Dressing a stone was both an art and a tedious, demanding chore.

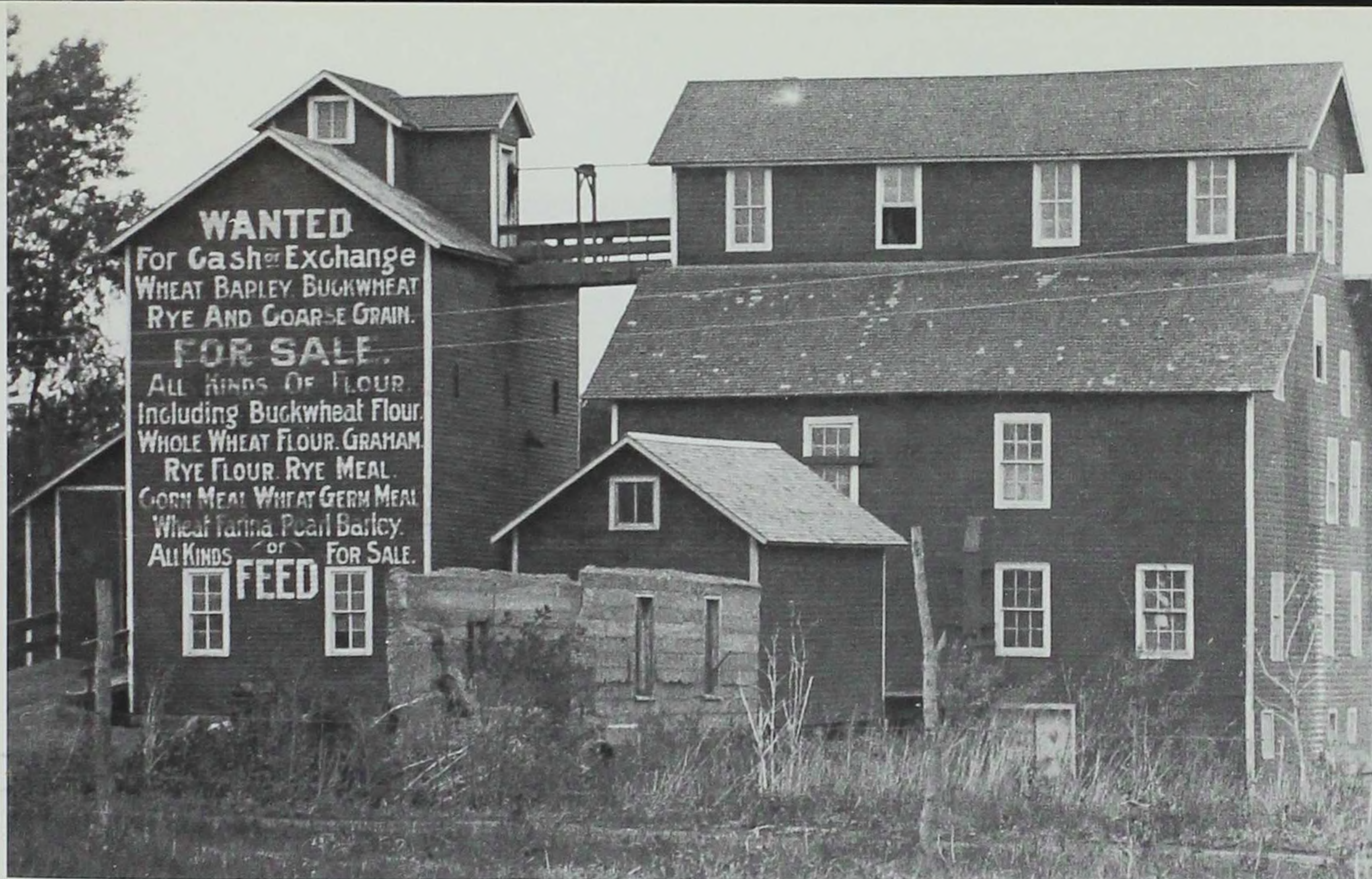
**Water powers an overshot wheel at an unidentified mill. Mills used four kinds of wooden wheels—breast, overshot, tub, and undershot—to harness Iowa's sometimes erratic water flow.**

SHSI (IOWA CITY)



Wooden water wheels and millstones were ancient devices, dating back to antiquity. Both were surpassed, however, by newer technologies during Iowa's brief romance with water-powered mills. The vertical water wheel gave way to the tub wheel and then to the turbine, a metal wheel that was rotated within a fixed case by moving water. Both were horizontally oriented. Although far less picturesque and charming than the vertical wooden wheels, turbines claimed several advantages. They were much smaller and far more efficient than the wooden wheels, powering mills with greater constancy at a fraction of the water power. They operated during low water. They also ran throughout the year because they could be powered by water fed from underneath an icy surface, and thus they did not close down in winter.





SHSI (IOWA CITY)

The modern turbine, which was developed in the mid-1800s, offered such benefits that many pioneer-era mills with wooden wheels were rebuilt to accommodate turbines in the 1860s and 1870s. Advancing technologies of many sorts swept westward like a wave across the state, even as the land was being settled and development intensified. Mills built later in Iowa's development or in the western part of the state incorporated turbines from the start, entirely bypassing use of vertical wooden wheels.

Grain-grinding technologies were also in transition. While some early mills had bolting (sifting) equipment to separate and refine the flour, many mills had none. Thus they ground the entire wheat kernel into an indiscriminate mass that included the bran and oily germ. This produced a flour that might be discolored by the heat generated from friction of the millstones' speed and pressure and was not uniform in texture or quality. The flour, bran, and intermedi-

ate "middlings" were eaten as a unit, often as a coarse "stone-ground whole wheat" flour. In the 1870s, a new milling process using a middlings purifier was adopted. Grain was run between the stones, which had been adjusted to break apart the bran but not grind the wheat kernels. Then the grain was run through the purifier, which employed a blast of wind to blow out the bran, and the millstones ground the kernel a second time, producing premium-quality bran-less flour. Shortly thereafter, in the 1870s and 1880s, adjustable rollers replaced millstones completely. Rollers produced a flour of more uniform texture, white color, and supposedly higher quality, devoid of germ and bran. Rollers also required less space, were more energy efficient, and did not require the careful, frequent dressing of millstones.

Mills were rapidly refurbished to incorporate these latest improvements. However, although the turbines and roller mills replaced the early mills' wooden wa-

**A mill on the Floyd River in Plymouth County in the 1890s solicits for "wheat, barley, buckwheat, rye and coarse grain." As grain-grinding technologies optimized the milling of gluten-rich spring wheat, and wheat production moved north and west, Minneapolis replaced St. Louis as the center of the premium-quality flour industry.**

ter wheels and hefty millstones, the mills incorporating these new technologies remained local, numerous, and water-powered.

And then, just as the turbines and roller mills were revolutionizing Iowa's mills, the grain that had mandated Iowa's many flour and gristmills took its leave. Locally grown wheat had fed first Iowa's pioneer children and then Iowa's economy and had nurtured both into robust adulthood. Wheat had been easy to plant and to sow, its production readily bringing in good profits. The amount of wheat produced in Iowa climbed steadily from the time of settlement until it peaked





**W**orkers line up outside Pearl Mill in Coralville in Johnson County. By 1892, the date of this photo, the number of local mills was diminishing as milling became more centralized and commercialized.

in 1875. Early Iowa was a land of wheat, with large expanses being repeatedly planted in this crop.

Now the land recoiled. Monocultures of wheat were depleting the soil of nutrients. Periods of dry weather stifled crops, and years of extreme heat and drought resulted in massive wheat crop failures. And insects increasingly staged attacks on wheat. Some years grasshoppers came in so rapidly and thickly that they were likened to blizzards, and young, succulent wheat seemed to be their favored

food. Chinch bugs also proved devastating, ravaging entire wheat crops.

In the midst of wheat failures, corn was providing a viable alternative to troublesome wheat production. Corn, associated with a more diversified agriculture, tended to provide greater financial security and to retain higher soil fertility. It found its most profitable use as feed for cattle and hogs, which could be readily marketed, and livestock numbers increased with the swelling corn acreage. In

1870, Iowa ranked second in the nation in production of both corn and wheat. But by 1890, wheat production had declined dramatically and corn dominated Iowa's agriculture: that year more corn was raised here than in any other state, and Iowa had fallen to 19th place as a wheat state.

**M**eanwhile, the wheat industry had moved on to the Dakotas and Minnesota, the farmers tempted there by the lure of cheap government land



and the ability to ship processed flour with ease back to users farther east. This ability was fed by the development of roller mills, which were capable of processing the gluten-rich spring wheat grown in those regions, and separating the bran and oily germ from the kernel, which was then ground into flour that could be sacked and sold in stores without spoilage. Rollers also could efficiently produce larger quantities of flour. And the growing web of railroads provided easy and economical transport of wheat to mills and of flour to stores. Improved equipment was allowing the harvesting of larger wheat fields and thus increasing wheat production. These factors collectively encouraged the concentration of the milling industry in metropolitan commercial centers to the north and west of Iowa. Flour now could be bought at the market more economically than it could be grown and ground locally.

With railroads carrying processed flour from large centralized mills into Iowa, there was no

longer a call for local mills to grind Iowa's wheat into flour. Wheat production and Iowa's milling industry declined together. In the 1880s, Iowa's flour and gristmills decreased from 713 to 441, commencing a steady and continuing decline in number. By 1930, only 63 mills of any type still ground grain in Iowa. Most of these were centralized commercial mills, far different in size, type, and operation from the small water-powered mills that had characterized Iowa in the middle-1800s. As one miller stated, "The big mills had swallowed up the little ones."

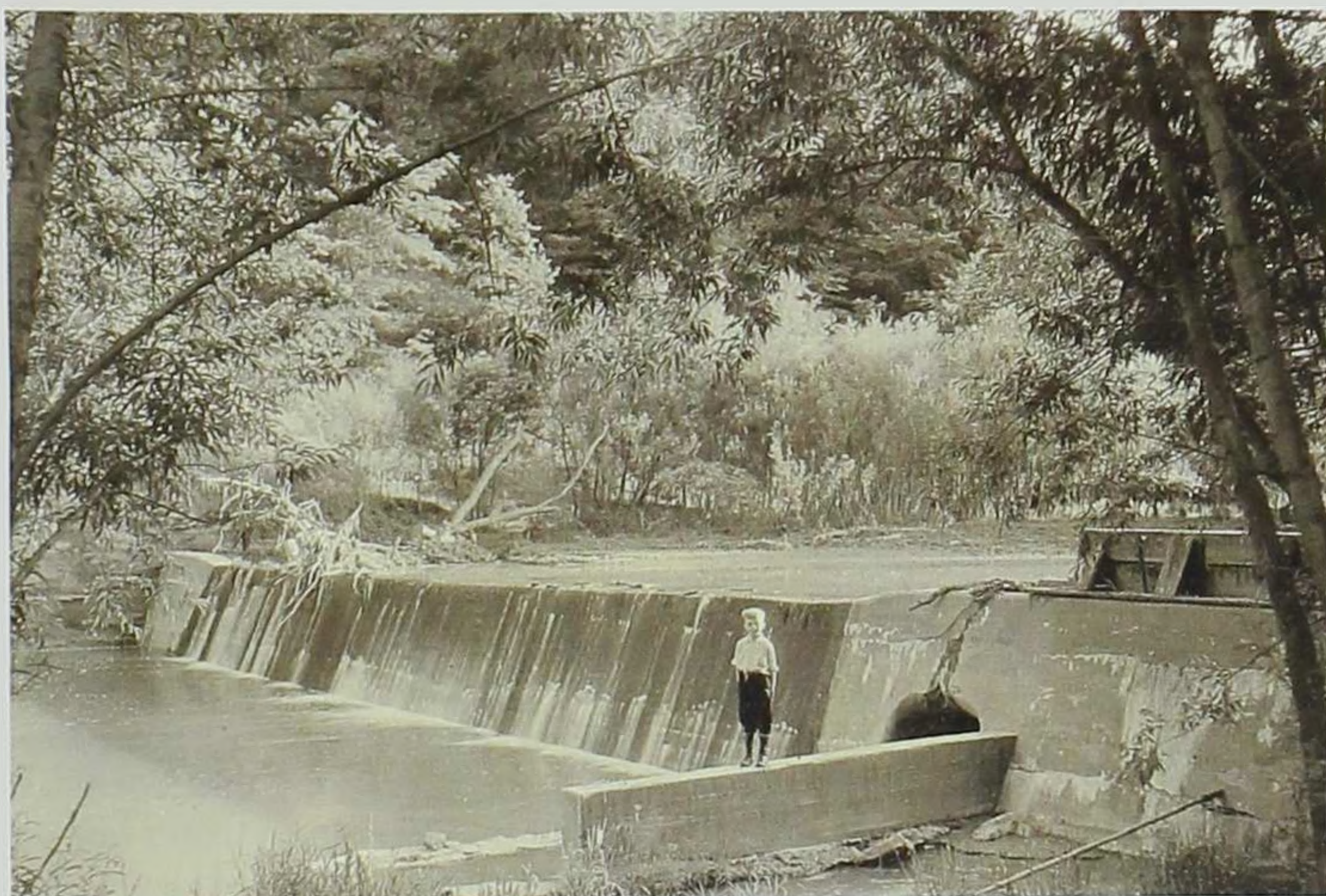
Small, local, water-powered sawmills, fed by Iowa's meager quantities of local timber, had already passed through a similar transformation. At the time of settlement they had provided vital rough lumber for constructing farmsteads, but within a few decades Iowa's choice trees had been cut and local forests could no longer keep up with the increasing demand for wood. Settlement of timber-thin prairie lands throughout the Midwest became depen-

dent on the import of millions of white pine logs from the north woods of Wisconsin. These were rafted down the Mississippi to massive, centralized, riverside urban sawmills in Iowa and elsewhere, where the logs were converted to lumber or wooden constructs, which were distributed via the growing web of railroads. Iowa's widely scattered smaller sawmills declined in relative importance and most disappeared, with those surviving converting from water to other power sources. Toward the end of the 19th century, as the north woods of the upper Midwest became logged out, the larger mills also closed their doors due to lack of raw materials. A greatly reduced number of scattered small mills remain to this day, but these long since have been converted from water power first to steam, then to electricity.

Meanwhile, the small local gristmills that remained followed their predecessors down the road to annihilation. The millers' original heavy investments of time, effort, and money had produced highly vulnerable mill structures, and through the years many an Iowa water wheel, dam, or entire mill succumbed to flood, fire, ice, or old age. A decade after the 1933 death of Floyd Nagler (hydraulics expert and Iowa's chronicler of old mill sites), the few old mills remaining were nearing their end, and most of these were no longer functioning as originally intended. Some shel-

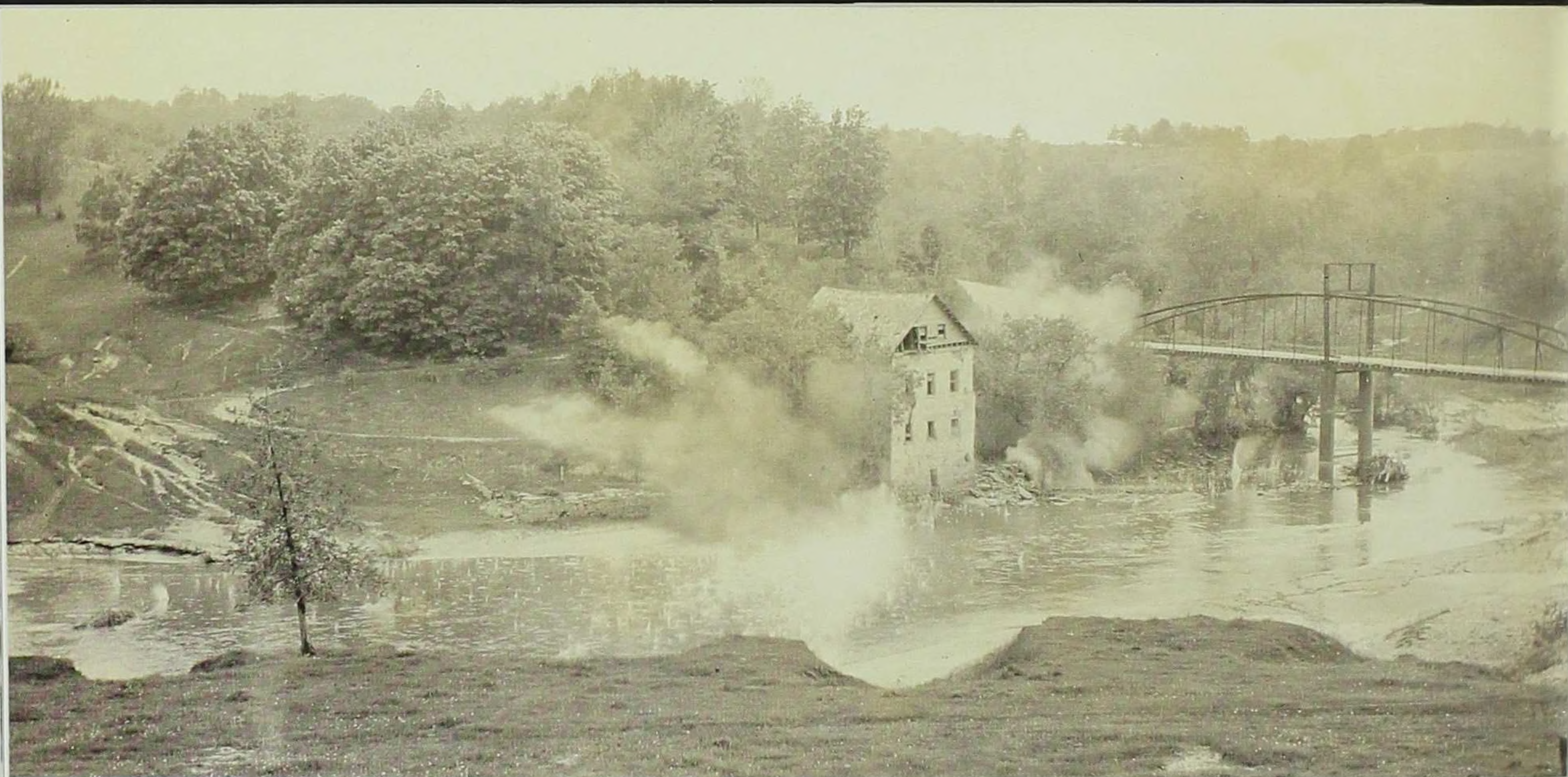
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**B**ear Creek Dam near Quandahl was the site of two mill-dams built by Norwegian settlers. Hydraulics expert Floyd Nagler reported that Bear Creek was the smallest Iowa stream still driving a water mill in the late 1920s.



SHSI (IOWA CITY): NAGLER COLLECTION





BOTH PHOTOS: SHSI (IOWA CITY); NAGLER COLLECTION

tered livestock. Others had become residences or taverns, and one was a cheese factory. Nagler in the late 1920s had counted 40 that had been converted into hydro-electric generating stations, "with mute wires of copper radiating to the many small urban communities of the state—a marked contrast to the visible and noisy activity of the pioneer mills." But most lay abandoned and decaying, their millstones and turbines buried in the mud of the adjacent creek.

Today a mere handful of these picturesque relics still function as mills or stand transformed into modern shops or businesses, residences or museums. The vast majority remain only in memory, as Nagler nostalgically recounted in his paper, "The Passing of the Old Water Mills In Iowa": "Childhood memories bring back with a dusty haze and a musty odor, that tingling sensation of awe and delight which always accompanied a visit to the old water mill. What a slapping and swishing of belts, a grinding and roaring of gears, and an ominous swish and gurgle beneath! The smell, the slippery chaff



**H**artwick Mill, one of Iowa's earliest, was built on the Maquoketa River in 1836 and dynamited nearly a century later when the Delhi dam was built. Floyd Nagler described the scene: "The inertia of the heavy stone walls was so great that they remained erect for the camera a fraction of a second after their foundations had been ruptured by the blast." In the bottom image, the mill lies in ruins.

on the floor, the powdery smoothness of each board and handle, and most of all, the hatted and overalled dusty miller, stamped 'the mill' as an unforgettable impression."

Nagler continued, "Slowly but

surely, since 1880, these old water mills have been disappearing, eventually leaving only scant traces of their former existence in a few logs held firmly underneath a pile of boulders in a stream bed or an abandoned stone wall on the



river bank. . . . These old mills have taken with them in their decline some of the poetry and romance of the pioneer life in Iowa."

Even had Iowa maintained its hold over wheat agriculture and the milling industry, the days of water-powered mills were limited. The settlement-era mills were aging, and repairing or rebuilding a mill was impractical, especially in a state where water power had always posed serious limitations: the flat terrain limited the potential for water power, and the flow of water was too erratic; mills were subject to closure when water was either too high or low. Thus deteriorating mills were usually abandoned.

Those mills that had withstood the passage of time were gradually converted to other power sources. This trend actually had commenced with Iowa's first settlements: some of Iowa's earliest millers had supplemented water power with steam so that the whims of Iowa's streams did not interrupt their service, and the use of steam power became more common through the 19th century. Toward the end of the century, both water and steam power were being replaced by electricity in Iowa's continually declining numbers of mills.

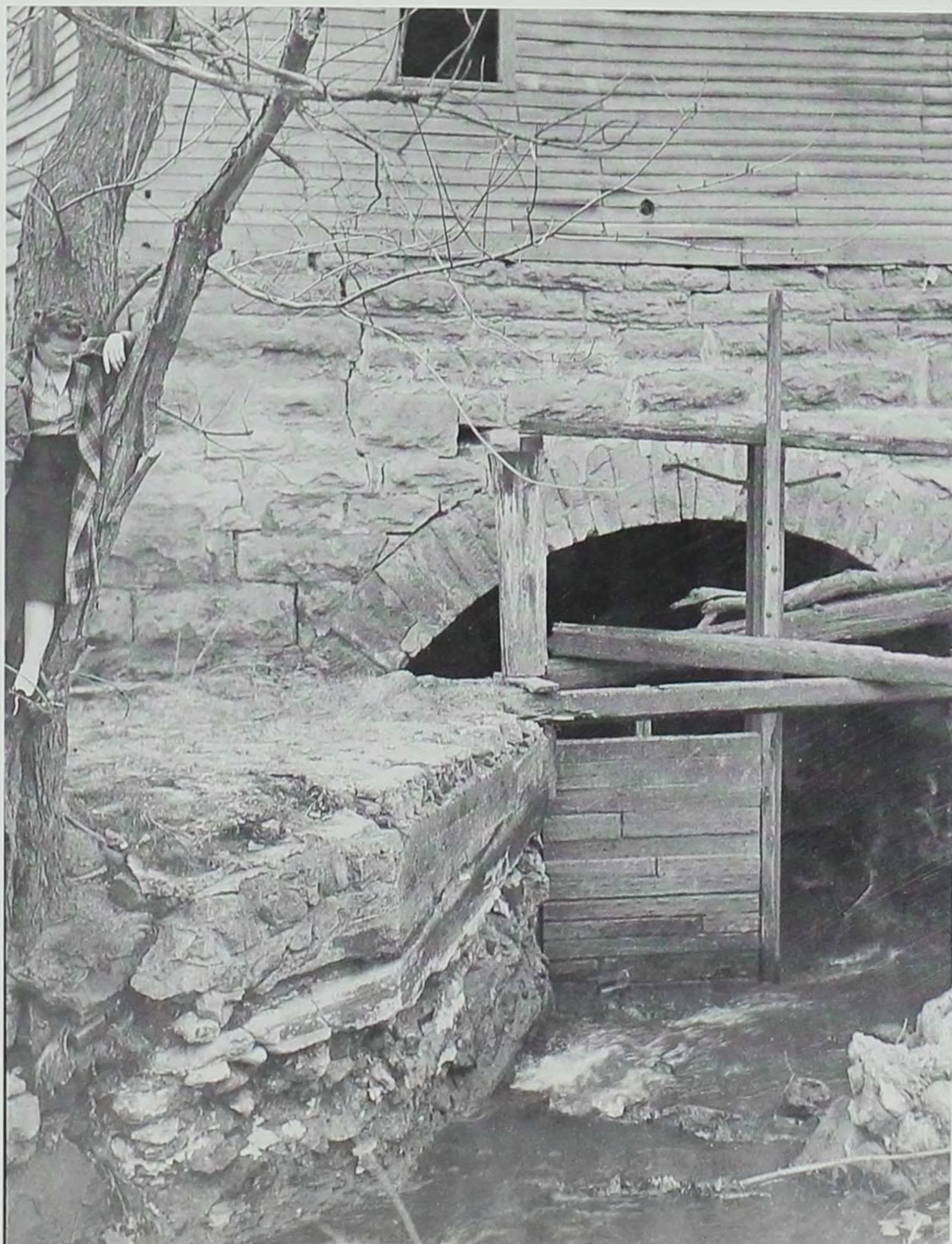
The importance of water as a power source made a brief comeback in Iowa in the early 20th century—not as a means of powering mills, but rather through powering hydroelectric plants. Not until the 1890s did electricity commonly present itself as a replacement for locally produced water or steam power. However, once this new power was available, the lust for electricity to light cities and move electric street cars grew rapidly. The nation's first successful hydro-



SHSI (IOWA CITY)

**Above:** Union Mill in Hardin County stands in ruins. **Below:** A woman climbs a tree for a close look at the sluiceway, where waters from the English River flowed through the Wassonville Mill near Wellman. The mill was slated to be torn down for a jog in a state highway in 1939.

SHSI (DES MOINES)



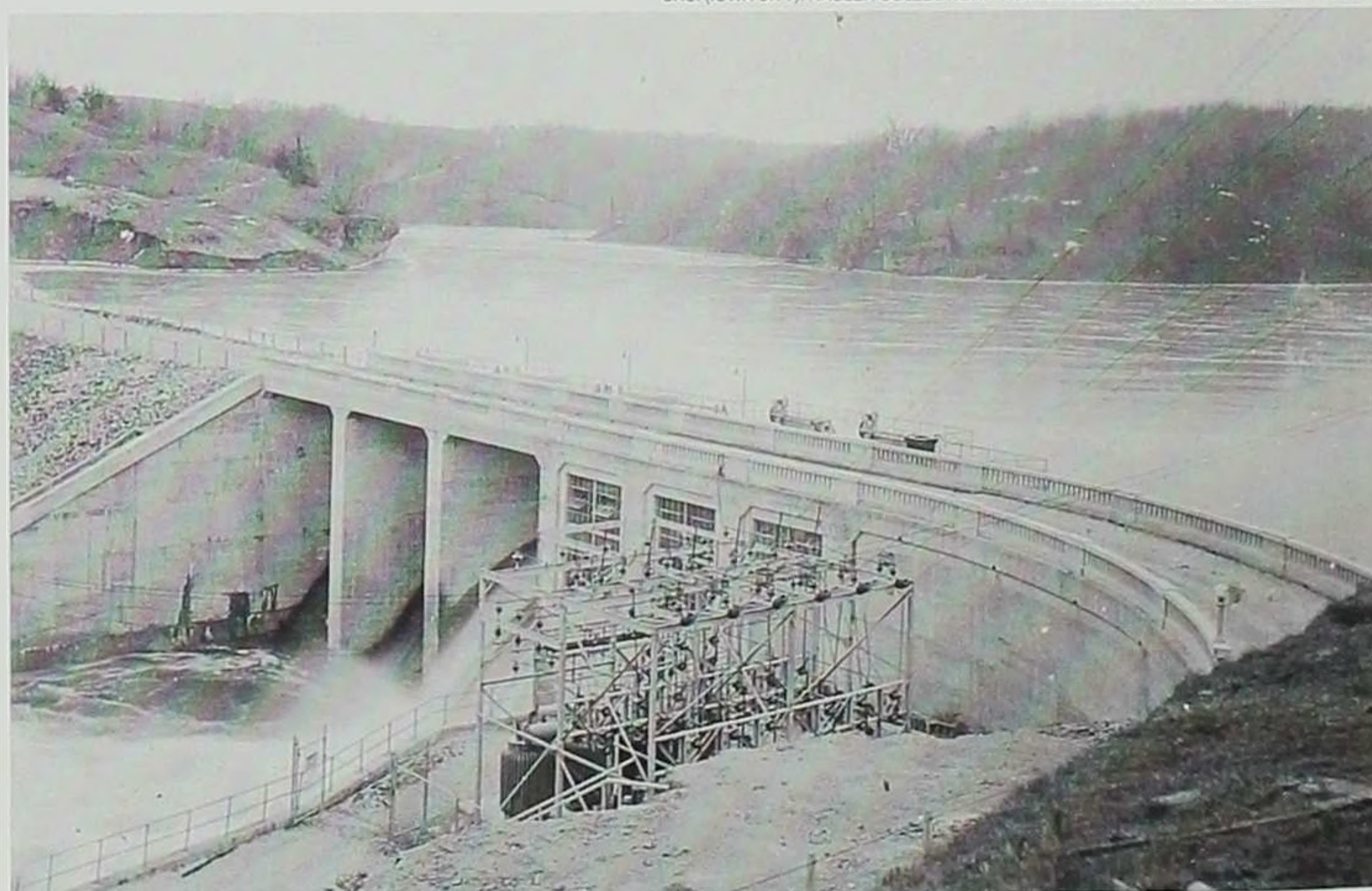




**T**he hydroelectric plant at Independence was built across the stream from the flour mill and produced twice the horsepower, according to Floyd Nagler in the late 1920s. Right: Two old mill sites were submerged when the Maquoketa River was dammed at Delhi in 1927, producing ten times their power and a recreational lake.

electric plant was constructed at Niagara Falls in 1895, and soon hydroelectric plants were being constructed throughout the Midwest.

Many of Iowa's old mill sites were converted to small hydroelectric plants in the early 1900s; these were run by local companies, which channeled the power primarily to local industries. By 1910, Iowa boasted 28 hydroelectric sites, and in 1920, two-thirds of the state's electric power flowed from hydroelectric plants. The number of such plants increased to 48 in 1927, and to 49 in 1950. However, these sites had peaked in their contribution to the state's electricity budget in the 1920s, when Floyd



Nagler was so avidly promoting hydroelectric power. The state's streams were not capable of being tapped for any more power, and the amount they were already producing simply could not keep up with the climbing demands for electricity. In contrast, large coal-fired steam electric plants were

soaring in their relative power production. They were rivaled only by the Keokuk power plant on the Mississippi River, which, when built in 1913, was the largest single water-power development in the world; most of its power, however, was exported to other states.

Mimicking the trend in mill-



ing, the newer plants were large and centrally located, reflecting an economy of scale. Thus the smaller, locally operated hydroelectric plants shut down as their equipment wore out; the amount of power they produced did not justify the cost of maintaining their structures. Today, only six hydroelectric plants remain in Iowa: Union Electric Plant at Keokuk and five small plants on inland streams. Water power has thus followed water-powered mills in the lineup of Iowa's forsaken technologies. ♦

Cornelia F. Mutel, also author of the preceding article, is a historian of science at the Iowa Institute of Hydraulic Research at the University of Iowa. She has written several articles and books on Iowa's environment and natural features, including *Fragile Giants: A Natural History of the Loess Hills*.

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

Major sources on the milling industry in Iowa include Jacob A. Swisher's *Iowa, Land of Many Mills* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1940) and an unpublished manuscript written in the late 1920s or early 1930s by Floyd Nagler, "The Passing of the Old Water Mills in Iowa," on file at both the Iowa Institute of Hydraulic Research and the State Historical Society, Iowa City. Carl A. Merry's 1988 technical report, *Phase II Investigations at 13WH228, The Kendallville Mill, Winneshiek County, Iowa: Iowa Department of Transportation Project Completion Report, Vol. 11, No. 120* (Iowa City: Office of the State Archaeologist, 1988) provided helpful information. Archives at the State Historical Society (Iowa City) and the Iowa Institute of Hydraulic Research were also consulted. Copies of Oliver Evans's 1795 book, *The Young Mill-wright and Miller's Guide*, are at the University of Iowa Main Library (microfiche) and the State Historical Society in Iowa City (reprint). Cornelia F. Mutel's "The Historic Role of Iowa's Trees," in *Famous and Historical Trees of Iowa* (Des Moines: Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 1966) presents a synthesis of the lumbering industry and the history of sawmills in Iowa. Additional references are cited therein, while statistics on the importance of that industry are in Floyd B. Haworth's "The Economic Development of the Woodworking Industry in Iowa," *Iowa Studies in Business* XIII (1933), pp. 35-36. The Iowa Conservation Commission's and Iowa State University's 1979 publication, *Iowa's Low-Head Dams, Their Past, Present, and Future Roles* (ISU-ERI-AMES 79225, ISWRRI #96 Special Report, published by the Iowa Conservation Commission in Des Moines), gives an excellent summary of the history of hydroelectric power in the state. Leslie C. Swanson's booklet *Old Mills in the Mid-West* (1963, rev. 1985; published by Leslie Swanson, Box 334-M, Moline, IL, 61265) is recommended as a guide to mills remaining in Iowa and nearby; however, the booklet was not used as a source for this paper. Annotations to the original manuscript of this article are held in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files (SHSI-Iowa City).

**The site of Fredericka Mill in Bremer County on the Wapsipinicon became an idyllic spot popular for fishing. Such picturesque photos of abandoned mill sites belie the dusty, noisy activity of the mills decades earlier, when they were essential to settlers' survival and local economics.**



SHSI (IOWA CITY): NAGLER COLLECTION



# Emilie Blackmore Stapp

and her

## Go-Hawks Happy Tribe



### A World War I Children's Crusade

by Louise Rosenfield Noun

**D**uring an era in which welfare reformers struggled for child labor laws, muckraking journalists blasted private and corporate greed, and an American president urged neutrality as Europeans slaughtered each other, an Iowa journalist with the nickname "Happy" inspired and organized a national movement of children helping other children. Reflecting the optimistic side of the Progressive era, she created a niche in war-relief work that would win her national recognition and give comfort to thousands of children.

Emilie Blackmore Stapp, the fourth of five children of Carrie Blackmore and David Wilbur Stapp, was born in Indiana in 1872. The family moved to Des Moines in 1883. From her school days, Stapp's ambition was to become a writer, and by her mid-twenties, the *Des Moines Capital* reported, she was already known in local circles as "the well known authoress whose works of fiction have attracted great attention."

Her first book, *Bread and 'Lasses: Sketches of Child Life*, published in 1902, consisted of short pieces in which she featured children's cute sayings, many of which had been previously published in various midwestern newspapers. This book was so successful, the *Des Moines Register* later reported, that Stapp's friends "were compelled to take her as she takes herself, seriously."

In 1904 Stapp became associate editor of the *Mail and Times*, a weekly Des Moines paper that featured club and social news, literature, and the arts. Among her numerous contributions to this paper were book reviews, club notes, dramatic criticism, fashion stories, and a weekly household column published under the pseudonym "Polly Pinkerton." Stapp also edited special editions of the paper, including a Thanksgiving book edition that led the *Register* to call the *Mail and Times* the "most creditable literary and social weekly Des Moines has ever had." The *Mail and Times*



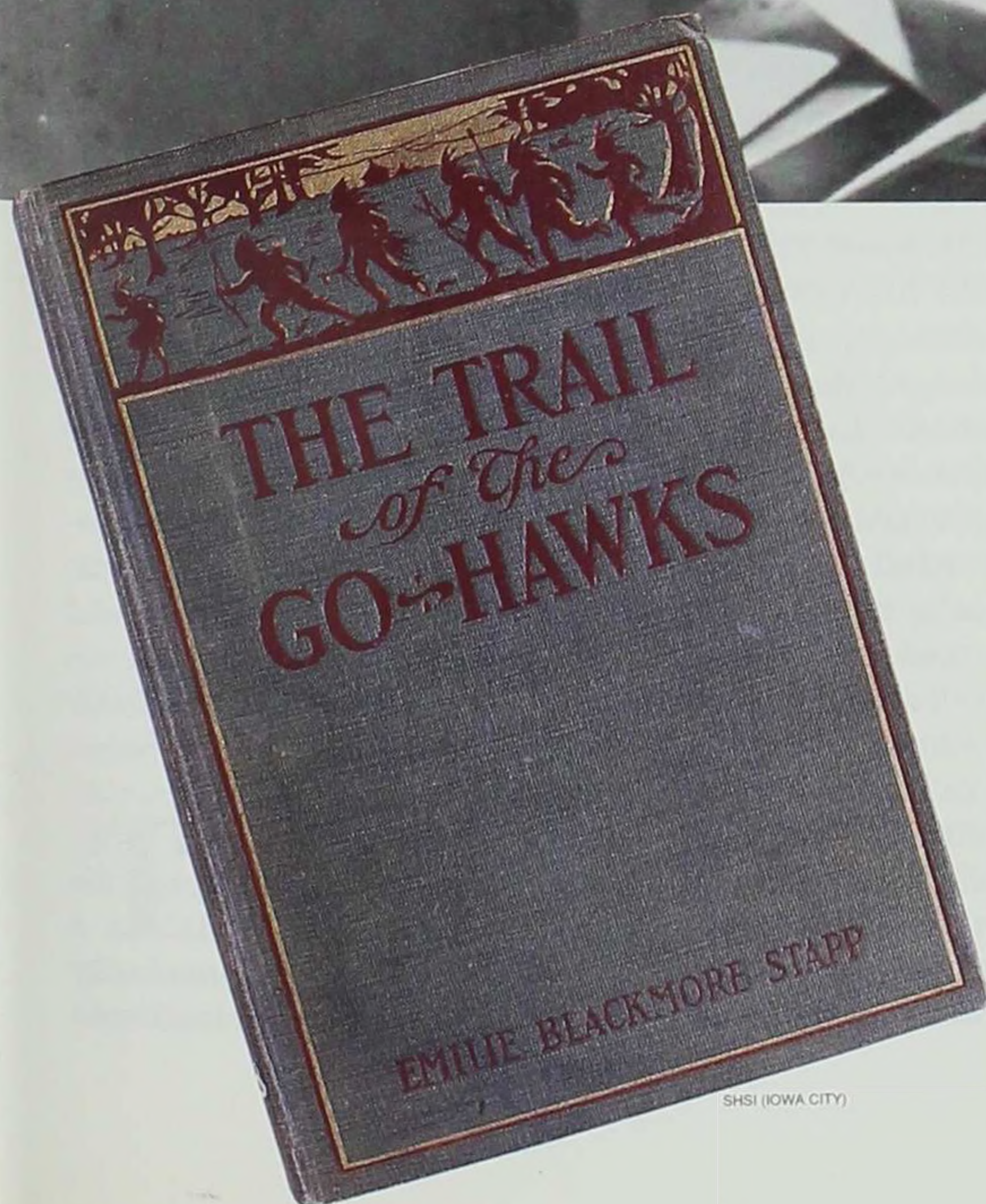


DE GRUMMOND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE COLLECTION, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

**N**icknamed "Happy," Emilie Blackmore Stapp sits amidst Go-Hawks mail. To the left, her 1908 novel that began the Go-Hawks movement, and (far left) a membership button.

was on a shaky financial basis, however, and it folded early in 1908. Soon after this Stapp became literary editor of the *Des Moines Capital*, where she would truly win acclaim.

Meanwhile, Stapp was also busy writing children's books. *The Trail of the Go-Hawks* was published in 1908; *Uncle Peter Heathen* would follow in 1912. The first book relates the misadventures of ten boys and two girls who form a club called the "Go-Hawks Tribe" and "play Indian." In the second book, the two girls, Patience and Prudence, give up the company of boys and devote themselves to missionary activities. Yet it would be *The Trail of the Go-Hawks* that would



SHSI (IOWA CITY)





**F**ashioned from crepe paper, feathers, and tassels, these headdresses were part of the Happy Tribe costumes. Boys and girls wore Go-Hawk shoulder sashes (below) over fringed tunics adorned with embroidery, beadwork, and cast-off rhinestone jewelry.



ALL PHOTOS AND ARTIFACTS FROM SHS (DES MOINES) UNLESS NOTED. ARTIFACT AND COPY PHOTOS BY CHUCK GREINER

launch a far greater movement of benevolence than Stapp's characters "Patience" and "Prudence" could ever have envisioned.

The movement began, according to Stapp's own account, with a fan letter from an ardent reader named Jimmie. Stapp visited the ten-year-old New York boy, who was disabled and terminally ill and who longed to run around and "play Indian," as Stapp's characters did in *The Trail of the Go-Hawks*. She suggested that the two of them form a tribe of their own. It would be called the "Happy Tribe" because, Stapp explained, "Everybody wants to be happy." Those who belonged would earn arrows for performing good deeds that made others happy; they would wear membership buttons; and they would select a famous person to be "Big Chief." At Jimmie's request, Stapp contacted James Whitcomb Riley, whose idyllic, sentimental poems of childhood, small towns, and the simple life had endeared him to mainstream America. Riley accepted this honor in February 1914, and he worked with Stapp to promote the Happy Tribe until his death two years later.

Stapp never explains in *The Trail of the Go-Hawks* why she chose the name Go-Hawks. But using the motif of an Indian tribe for a children's club was certainly capitalizing on the intense enthusiasm for popularized notions of Native American customs and culture. Much of this enthusiasm could be traced to the work of Ernest Thompson Seton. An artist and naturalist, Seton "was heavily influenced by the standard romantic conventions as set forth by Rousseau, Longfellow and Thoreau" and his own passion for the environment, the outdoor life, and the "noble Red-man," writes H. Allen Anderson in *The Journal of American Culture*. In 1902 Seton organized camp-outs on his Connecticut farm for local boys and taught them nature lore and moral lessons.

At the same time Seton began a "boys' department" for *Ladies Home Journal*, from which developed his *Birch Bark Roll of the Woodcraft Indians*, an activities manual for "tribes" and "councils" of boys. Seton promoted the idea through his Chautauqua lectures, even adapting it for the urban poor. The idea spread quickly. President Theodore Roosevelt—himself an outdoorsman—gave it his approval. By 1910, 200,000 American boys belonged to Seton's tribes, and Seton included his woodcraft emphasis when he wrote America's first Boy Scout manual that year.

In Iowa, Emilie Blackmore Stapp also co-opted the popular motif of "Indian tribes" and "chiefs" as a structure for her Go-Hawks Happy Tribes. Some lucky members would even wear costumes of feathered





**Although not all Go-Hawks had costumes, Howard Petrie and Hus (?) Shaney posed proudly in their elaborate outfits.**

headdresses and beaded tunics. But Stapp's goals were not to teach woodcraft or nature lore, or to champion romanticized versions of Native Americans. Her similarity with Ernest Thompson Seton was that she intended membership in her "Happy Tribe" to be a character-building experience. Members, she said, "would rather make other folks happy than themselves."

**T**here is no record of the early months of the Happy Tribe, but it was soon evident that the idea appealed to children. By May 1914 over a thousand girls and boys in Des Moines were wearing the Go-Hawks Happy Tribe buttons, and the move-

ment was spreading over Iowa and even into other states.

The *Capital*, where Stapp worked and which up to this time had regarded Stapp's project as a mere pastime for her, was so impressed with the response that it established a Happy Tribe Department. On May 10 the paper ran a front-page story asking youngsters to send two cents to cover postage for a Happy Tribe button and instructions on how to start a tribe in their communities. Members were sent a certificate that read, "I promise to do at least one act of kindness every day. I will do all in my power to protect birds and all wild animals." The Tribe's motto was "to make the world a happier place." When Go-Hawk membership in any community reached a hundred, the reward was a large photo of "Big Chief" James Whitcomb Riley.

Stapp encouraged her young readers to recruit other members, and membership soared, with as many as 56 letters received in a single morning's mail. Youngsters looked forward to seeing their names in print, and Stapp's columns brimmed with earnest do-goodism. "I will try very much to be a good girl and do many kind acts every day," wrote Mildred Gates of Cross Timbers, Missouri, in a typical response.

An idealist, Stapp even described herself as one "who still down deep in her heart believes in fairies." But she was also a savvy reporter, and she knew how to market an idea. Consider the contest she launched in May 1914, in which she offered a prize for the longest list of cousins submitted by a Go-Hawk. Her young readers saw it as a way of winning the first prize of \$200. Stapp saw it as a way of identifying and reaching potential members. "We not only want you to belong to the tribe but we want your cousins no matter where they live," she wrote. "Send us a list today giving their names and addresses."

Would second and third cousins count, her readers wondered. "Yes," she answered, "all cousins count if you know them well enough to have their correct addresses." On June 16, when she announced that Mabel Shideler of Van Meter was the winner with her list of 282 cousins, she gently explained that although Henry Frye of Garrison had sent in a promisingly long list, she could not count those names he had marked as "not living." "It is true 'live' cousins were not specified as a condition for the contest," Stapp admitted, "for it was thought it was understood that they must be located where happy trails could reach them."

Stapp was obviously establishing a lot of trails. Entire classes and Sunday schools were now joining. Members were bringing in more members. Young Ardelia Gladstone promised, "I expect to get my sister



to join and my cousin and my neighbor's little girl." Stapp replied, "This is as we hoped it would be." And Stapp was enlisting the support of influential adults; in June she announced that the popular children's author Rudyard Kipling would be the "Chief of The Happy Tribe of England."

The *Capital* was pleased with her success. Children—like adults—loved to see their names in print, and surely this sold more papers. Yet her sincerity convinced many that profit wasn't the goal. Colonel Henry Mann, described as a "soldier under Custer, author, [and] editor," soon endorsed the Happy Tribe, explaining, "The tribe originated under the wigwam of the clever *Capital* in Des Moines and has become as popular in the west as the Boy Scouts. Although a chief for New York has been selected only a few weeks, hundreds of children, women and men [there] are already wearing the Go-Hawk button. This, I am glad to say is not an advertising scheme nor an organization to make money, but an exposition of pure benevolence."

The Go-Hawks' first public philanthropy, Stapp reported, was initiated by Jake, a small, bare-footed boy in a faded blue shirt who came to Stapp's office one day in June 1914 and asked, "How much does it take to save a baby?" Stapp replied that it would take ten cents a day to buy milk, ice to refrigerate it, and some nursing care. Jake gave Stapp six cents and asked her to find a baby who needed help. She soon located Mabel, a sickly infant whose family lived near the Roadside Settlement house in Des Moines. Promising to supply her with milk and other needs for the rest of the summer, Stapp established a "Good Deeds Fund for Needy Children" and asked Happy Tribe youngsters to start sending pennies.

In mid-July Jake donated more pennies himself: "Dear Happy Editor, I did errands for a man—I wiped the dishes Picked some berries and wheeled our naybors baby and here is the money to save her." Stapp published the letter and reminded her readers that surely loyal Go-Hawks wouldn't leave the entire burden for Mabel on Jake and his friend Sam. Pennies rolled in.

A few weeks later Jake suggested that the Tribe adopt a baby boy, and so he and Stapp, accompanied by a staff photographer, went to the baby clinic where they found Wesley, "the sickest, thinnest baby you ever did see." In a few weeks Wesley had gained weight and was no longer crying constantly. Four other infants were helped by the Happy Tribe during that year.

Such children's projects dovetailed nicely with



**Hazel and Thelma Petrie model Go-Hawks costumes.**

what the *Capital* called its "annual charity work among the poor." In May, the same month the Go-Hawks column was launched, the *Capital* reported almost daily on its "Save the Babies" campaign to raise funds for milk and fresh-air clinics for poor children in Des Moines during the hot Iowa summer. Such reform projects were typical early in the century, as American social workers worked through settlement houses such as the Roadside Settlement in Des Moines.

That May the *Capital* also gave front-page coverage to Chimmie McFadden, New York's "king of the newsboys," whose series of speaking engagements in Des Moines helped fund the *Capital's* annual outing for its newsies and the "Save the Babies" campaign. In his colorful speeches, he described his childhood as a Bowery newsboy and "admonished the newsies to strive for better things, and to 'cut' the 'gangs,'" the



*Capital* reported. This, too, fit into new views of welfare. Social reformers concerned with child labor on the street as well as in the factory were now refuting the Horatio Alger image of the American newsboy as "plucky" and "enterprising," writes historian Robert H. Bremner, and warning instead that children's street work—such as selling papers—led to adult pimping, thieving, and gambling. Stapp herself would befriend many a newsie who sold papers for the *Capital*. Yet her columns did not portray them as needing charity but rather as prime movers in Go-Hawk campaigns to help other needy children.

**N**ews of tensions and hostilities in Europe began to fill the *Capital's* pages as the summer of 1914 continued. "Austrians Bombard Belgrade," the *Capital* blared across the front page on one day; on another, "Trenches At Liege Filled With Dead." The war invaded the *Capital's* inside pages, too, with short stories on Isadora Duncan becoming a French army nurse, photos of "Servian Women Being Trained to Fight the Austrians," and editorial cartoons of grim reapers climbing over skulls and peasant gleaners harvesting death.

Two weeks after Germany declared war on Russia, the first hint of the war appeared in the Happy Tribe column. "Jake Fears that War May Interfere with Happy Tribe," the August 14 column announced. Stapp explained that the boy who had started the milk fund was now worried about the war's effect on the Go-Hawks. But after reading that morning's mail from loyal Go-Hawks, Stapp reported that Jake had said, "I guess if the whole world gets to fightin' the Happy Tribe will stick together." Indeed it would.

Because of Germany's ruthless invasion of Belgium in violation of treaties and its subsequent invasion of France, there was great concern about the plight of children made destitute by the fighting. Stapp, whose entire focus was children, was surely distraught. In September, she announced that the *Capital's* Happy Tribe was joining 14 other American newspapers in a relief effort sponsored by the *Chicago Herald*. They would solicit gifts and raise funds to purchase clothing for refugee children. The materials would be sent on a chartered "Christmas Ship." "Six thousand children are members of *The Capital's* Happy Tribe," Stapp reported, and "are now called upon to play their part in one of the great world movements of the day." In her front-page story next to a map showing "How the Armies Are Lined Up Near Paris," Stapp minced no words, begging readers to remember

European children whose Santa Claus "fell dead on the battlefield when father dropped with a bullet in his heart."

In her "Happy Tribe" column that day, she spoke more gently to her younger readers, urging them to donate money or make gifts, to send "toys of which you are tired, clothes you have outgrown." She offered encouraging, comforting images: "You can help load the sleigh and you can shut your eyes and feel the reins in your fingers and drive the reindeer up and down the lanes of England, lined with the thatched cottages, through the vineyards of France and the stubble fields of Belgium, over the hills of Austria and along the frozen Danube to the Servian peasants' huts."

Young readers responded enthusiastically. In her journal Stapp recounted, "A vacant room had been given to us for all donations and Sammy [a newboy and ardent Go-Hawk] has chalked off every country—giving large space to Russia." By October 23, Stapp and other *Capital* staff, with the help of Sammy and other newsies, had packed and shipped 4,000 gifts in large boxes, each box marked with the name of the country for which it was destined.

Helping war orphans appealed to Stapp's young followers, and individual acts of charity filled her column. "I am sending ten cents that I hope some day will help some poor little starving girl or boy whose father has gone away never to return," wrote Harriet Chamberlain from Panora, Iowa. "I read about the Happy Tribe every night in *The Capital* and am much interested in it."

In another column, Stapp recounted, "It was about time to start home when suddenly from behind the desk stepped a little boy, so thin he looked as though he might blow away."

"I knew this was the Happy Tribe corner because the fellers said there were kids all over the walls and there are," he told her. "I brought you a cent."

"Brought me a cent," said Stapp. "What do you want me to do with it?"

"It is to buy a roll for a kid like me in Belgium," he responded. "I'd give more but that is all I've got. Can I get into the Tribe?" Stapp gave him a warm welcome.

In looking for a means of distributing the funds being raised by the Happy Tribe, Stapp contacted the Reverend S. Stuart Starritt of London, head of the Presbyterian Churches in England and a member of the Belgian Relief Committee of London. He suggested sending funds for Belgian children temporarily housed in the Alexandria Palace in London. Members of the Go-Hawks Happy Tribe contributed enough





**B**elgian orphans find shelter and food in London in 1914 (above and right). Stapp forwarded Go-Hawks funds to the Belgian Relief Committee there. (War orphans were defined as children who had lost one or both parents.)

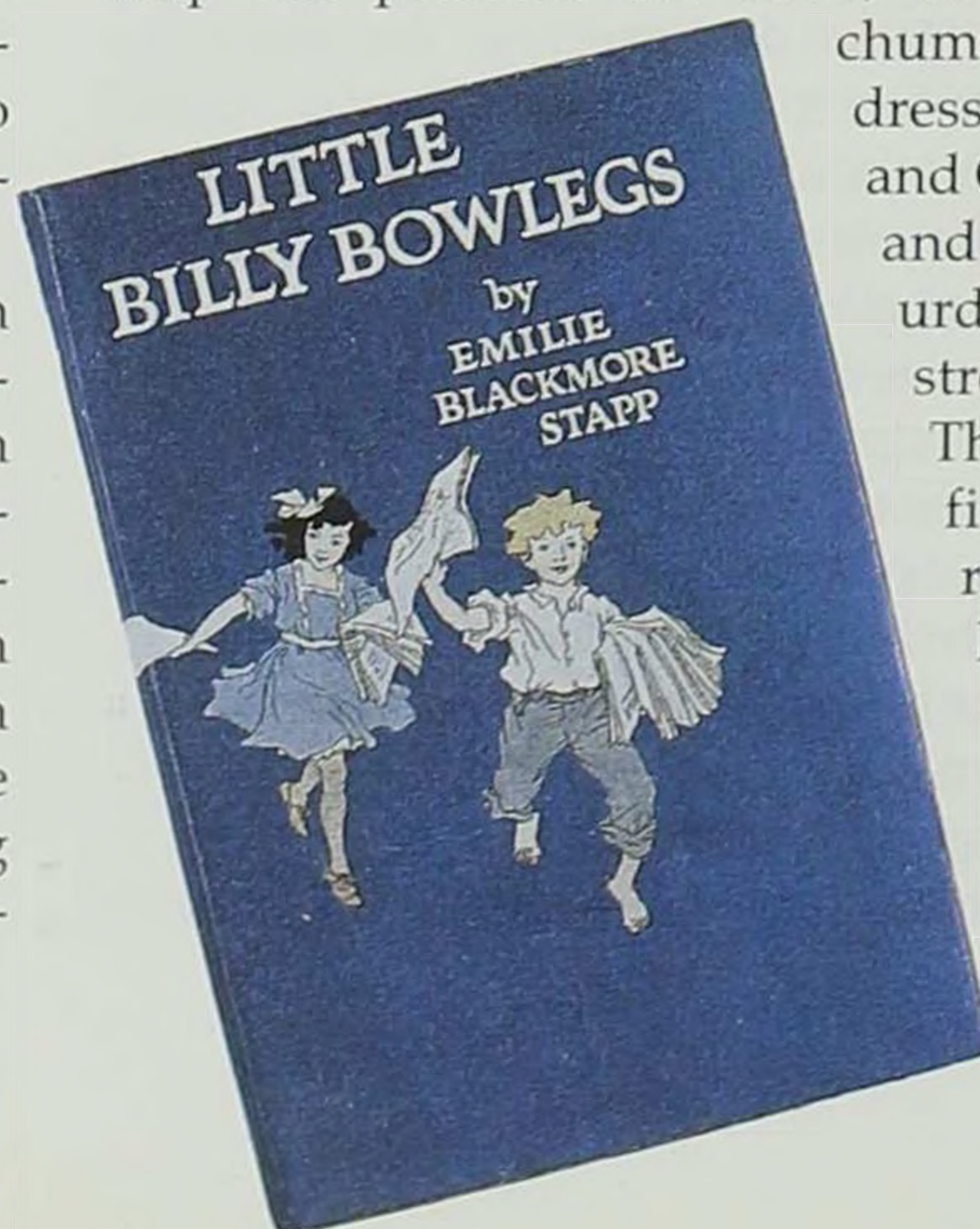
pennies to buy shoes and stockings for 200 of these children.

Stapp's Happy Tribe was soon receiving national recognition through publications such as *The Christian World*, *National Magazine*, and *Today's Magazine*. Memberships were now increasing by over a thousand a month. From New York came a hundred pennies from author and drama critic Stephen Fiske, who also bought 50 memberships for local newsboys. In Montana, a thousand boys from Helena joined, thanks to YMCA secretary Earl Roberts (formerly from Oskaloosa, Iowa).

The relief fund grew at a steady but slow pace, on some days only a few pennies at a time. Never discouraged, Stapp began another fund drive in March 1915. "More food must be provided at once for Belgium—hundreds of tons of it—or thousands of children will die before summer comes. This is the reason that our Happy Tribe has pledged itself to fill with [canned] milk a generous sized corner of the children's relief ship," she wrote. She asked her young contributors to send short messages to Princess Marie-

José, the nine-year-old daughter of Belgium's King Albert, who was to meet the ship in person. Almost \$500 worth of milk was contributed for this project.

In 1916 Stapp continued recruiting new Go-Hawks, encouraging donations for both war orphans in Europe and needy children in Des Moines. Her book *Little Billy Bowlegs* was published that year. To help her promote the book, two of her newsboy chums, Sammy and Mike dressed up as Uncle Sam and George Washington and spent an entire Saturday parading the streets of Des Moines. The book comprises five sentimental stories based on the lives of newsies who belonged to the Go-Hawk Happy Tribe and their friendships









with newspaper reporters. Go-Hawk themes run throughout. In one chapter, reporter Betty Wadsworth worries, "Snowing in Belgium! Women and children freezing and starving! I wish I could make people want to give a million dollars." Stapp dedicated the book's royalties to war orphans.

**T**he entry of the United States into the war in April 1917 heightened Stapp's efforts and the public's interest in the Happy Tribe. Stapp noted in her journal that month: "Kind Deeds Fund was merged into Little Patriots Fund and works expanded for Europe." Later she would write in the journal (characteristically in third person): "Idea for the Happy Tribe Million Penny War Fund was born to Happy June 18, 1917."

She launched the million-penny drive three days later, despite skeptical friends who thought Stapp's goal of raising \$10,000 was unrealistic. They may have underestimated Stapp's ability to reach children—and influential adults. Proclaiming July 4th as the official starting day for the Million Penny campaign, Iowa governor William L. Harding said, "The big folks of Iowa have shown a splendid patriotism and self-denial in their recent Red Cross contribution. You boys and girls of the State can do better according to your means than they." Governors of Alabama and Texas issued similar proclamations and announced state donation centers and state coordinators titled "Miss Happy." By August 1917 the *Birmingham News* had forwarded Stapp a check for \$650; by the next February, the *Houston Chronicle* sent \$1,737.91.

Stapp's office was packed every day with local children bringing in their pennies—many earned by giving "shows" for the benefit of the cause. Her journal is replete with names of children who participated, and her scrapbooks are particularly rich in photographs of events involving Des Moines Go-Hawks. (Apparently she took a photographer everywhere.) Many of the events in Des Moines bear the stamp of the early-20th-century love for pageants, dramatic skits, and festivals. Educators saw these as effective vehicles for teaching citizenship and history, patriotism and community values. Although her goals were building character and helping war orphans, "Happy" probably also approved of the pure fun children and adults had at many of these events.

The chance for proud parents to see their costumed children perform in plays and pageants also attracted adults to Go-Hawk events. An astounding 2,000 guests attended the Go-Hawks' Mother Goose Festival in September 1917 on the lawn of Alice and Frederick Weitz's home on 42nd Street south of Grand Avenue in Des Moines. A goose donated by an East Side family appeared in a chariot and entertained the guests with her continuous squawking. Presumably the goose was silenced in the evening when the First Iowa Infantry Band played.

The goose festival was followed a week later with a goose dinner at Younker's Tea Room. Lots were drawn for ownership of the goose and the winner presented it to the Happy Tribe. "Mr. Joe Schwartz then rose and offered to give 5,000 pennies," Stapp noted, "if Mr. James Davis would invite the goose to be his guest for one week at his home on Grand Avenue and

ROSABEL STOCK COMPANY  
Capital Stock 50,000 Pennies--2000 Shares 25 Cents each

NO. 1894



This picture does not do Rosabel justice. She is much more handsome, and an orderly housekeeper.

INCORPORATED in the Land of Kind Hearts among Big Folks who wish to help the Go-Hawks' Happy Tribe build its Penny War Fund for the fatherless children of France and Belgium.

The owner of this certificate is the willing possessor of one share in the "Rosabel Stock Co." Every share sold of this handsome patriotic pig, at twenty-five cents each, means two and one-half days' food for a hungry child "over there."

Rosabel will become the property of the stockholder whose number corresponds with the one which will be chosen by chance and attached to Rosabel's tail when the designated number of shares are sold. The date of the big event announced later.

(signed)

Happy

**A**nother Go-Hawks project was the formation of the Rosabel Stock Company to sell "shares" in a pig named Rosabel, donated by four-year-old Dean Murray of St. Marys, Iowa. Numbered stock certificates were issued, with photos of Rosabel. The winner of the drawing gave Rosabel to the Des Moines Children's Home, where she no doubt provided a meal for the young residents.



feed Isabel every afternoon at 4:00 o'clock on his front lawn. Mr. Davis accepted the challenge and Isabel rode home with him." During the next week numerous friends gathered each afternoon to watch these "goose teas." Eventually the goose was returned to her original owners, where she soon flew over her fenced enclosure and disappeared.

As the fall and winter of 1917 set in, Go-Hawks in Des Moines staged more fund raisers to help reach the goal of a million pennies. A Happy Tribe orchestra and a Happy Tribe Stock Company performed at the Orpheum Theater. Thanksgiving, which was promoted as "Penny Day," brought in a harvest of pennies. Newsies Mike and Sammy, along with two boys from more prosperous families, worked all day collecting, counting, and wrapping pennies to be delivered to the safekeeping of Iowa National Bank. In mid-December Stapp wrote in her journal: "Office full of soldiers and wide-eyed children bursting with patriotism." Go-Hawks also prepared to sell hundreds of Christmas candles, packed carefully in thread boxes donated by a department store. To every candle they had attached a white and green paper cross that read across, "MY LIGHT WILL SHINE," and down, "LIGHT ACROSS THE SEA."

The million-penny campaign continued. In January 1918, the Camp Dodge regimental band gave two fund-raising concerts at Plymouth Congregational Church. In February a lecture by John Masefield netted \$50. By early May, the million-penny goal was clearly in sight and excitement was riding high. "May 2, 1918—Dorothy Holdoegel, a little Rockwell City girl, has captured 7,300 pennies for Fund," Stapp wrote. "With such work it looks as if we might go 'over the top' next week and reach our goal of One Million Pennies." Undoubtedly alert to publicity angles and thinking of the new national holiday established just five years earlier, she noted, "Wish we might make the goal by Mother's Day."

"May 9—Interest deepening and children in wild state of excitement bring in their pennies," she wrote. "Grown-ups are offering little old banks containing pennies belonging to beloved children of days long



**Identified only as "Betty Cole, with her sack of pennies," this little girl does her part for the Happy Tribe.**

ago whom they had lost but never before could bear to give up their little banks. They now felt the healing touch of the world's great need for suffering innocent children."

She arranged that when the goal was met, the word must reach Go-Hawks immediately. A telegram would notify "any city or village" where children were participating, and factory whistles would be blown. Church and school bells were to be rung immediately after the noon recess, and the children would rise and sing "America."

On May 10—two days short of Mother's Day—the millionth penny arrived. Claire Newport, a farm boy who donated 1,150 pennies earned from the sale of an old buggy that his father had given him, won the honor of sending the drive over the top. On hearing the news, excitement was so intense that in many communities school was dismissed for the rest of the day. In Des Moines, all the pupils from Irving Elementary School, which Stapp had attended, headed downtown. In true Go-Hawk spirit, the older boys carried a disabled student all the way from their

school, at Tenth and Pleasant, to the street below her office, where they all serenaded her with "America."

Even after Stapp's goal was reached, pennies continued to pour into her office, and the children's interest remained at high pitch. On May 13, Stapp chimed, "More pennies—the building full of soldiers and sailors and—my face—children! Children! Children!"

**S**tapp personalized relief efforts by getting the names, addresses, and photos of French and Belgian orphans, and assigning them to schools or individuals for adoption. The sponsors could now identify more closely with the children they were helping. For instance, that spring Elizabeth Werblowsky's dance classes gave a recital at the Orpheum Theater for the benefit of Maria Robert, the Belgian orphan whom they were supporting. Although Stapp never talked about her personal generosity, she adopted several war orphans herself, to whom she regularly sent contributions.

Despite Stapp's success, there were pressures to merge her work with that of the Junior Red Cross,





**P**lays and pageants (like this one at Westchester Gardens in Des Moines) meant donations for war orphans and good times for Go-Hawks. Below: Stapp poses with Go-Hawk Dorothy Holdoegel of Rockwell City at the "Glory to France" day.



which in 1918 was launching a liberty bond and thrift stamp drive. Newspapers that had helped with the million-penny drive now announced that they intended to switch their support to the bond drive, and Stapp was urged to do the same. She did make an effort to interest her young followers but, as she expressed it, "They politely but firmly refused. They agreed to do what they could to help," she said, "but insisted they be permitted to continue supporting their own

plans." Stapp determined that even if she had to work alone, she would continue with Go-Hawks projects: "I must in no way close this wonderful channel opened through the love of little children." She carried on, her "office crowded all day with children all quietly working out plans."

It is easy to understand the enthusiasm of Stapp's young followers. Their correspondence with individual orphans gave them a personal relationship with children in the war-devastated areas, and Stapp's projects stimulated their imaginations and creativity. In comparison, saving money to buy a war bond or thrift stamp held few attractions.

In the summer of 1918, as huge infusions of American troops strengthened the Allied front against Germany, Stapp wrote in her journal: "Have a brand new idea." This was to celebrate French Independence Day on July 14 with a "Glory to France" fête. Izanna Chamberlain agreed to the use of Westchester Gardens, the grounds of her home on Grand Avenue in Des Moines (now the location of Wesley Acres, a retirement community). The event turned out to be a



brilliant success, with 3,000 people paying a ten-cent admission. The grounds were colorful with French and American flags, and soldiers in uniform attended. A military band from Camp Dodge and the Veterans' Drum Corps of Des Moines played, and girls in French peasant costumes roamed the grounds selling ice cream cones. The main event of the day was a "Joan of Arc" pageant, in which Katherine Van Evera in a suit of mail made a grand entrance, riding a white horse and waving a French flag.

Successful pageants and social fêtes aside, Stapp never lost sight of destitute children across the sea. A few days after the "Glory to France" event, she noted in her journal: "Little stories written by Belgian children are now drifting in. Most pathetic." Stapp's ability to maintain the interest of Happy Tribe members was due in large measure to the inventive ways she found to dramatize even the projects in which the youngsters were engaged. For example, when it became patriotic to save tinfoil to help the war effort, Stapp designated two "Happy Tribe" orphans—Joseph from Belgium and Jeanne from France—as "tin-



In colonial costumes, Margaret Jean Verran and Jane Jarnigan sell "Martha Washington Cherry Tarts" on Washington's Birthday. Lydia Bayliss, who ran Younker's Tea Room in Des Moines, donated a thousand tarts. When sales reached 995, a young assistant, Heinie Weitz, bought and consumed the remaining five tarts "for the sake of the war orphans."

## Memories of a Former Go-Hawk

I was one of thousands of children who joined Emilie Blackmore Stapp's Go-Hawks Happy Tribe during World War I. Fond memories of Stapp (known to us as "Happy") led me to look for information about her activities during this period. I was rewarded by finding in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa in Des Moines her handwritten journal, six scrapbooks, many photographs of Go-Hawks and war orphans, and other memorabilia. These materials indicate that Stapp wanted the story of her war work preserved. It seems fortuitous that I would find them some 80 years later, long after she had been forgotten except by those of us old enough to have been her devoted followers when we were young.

The Stapp family seemed to have a special place in their hearts for children. I remember David Stapp, Happy's father, as a dignified old gentleman with a white beard who walked to Greenwood School with neighborhood children, bought them treats, and took them to Saturday matinees. When he died, Greenwood pupils planted a tree on the school grounds in his memory.

While researching this article, I enjoyed looking at the photos and reading the names of my Des Moines childhood companions who also were Go-Hawks. Occasionally I ran across my own name or was reminded of my role in the various events. At the Glory to France fête in July 1918, for example, I sold ten-cent boutonnieres to help the war orphans. I don't remember being in the cast of 80-some children for the Mother Goose pageant in October, but I am listed as playing the part of a maid. (Perhaps if I had been given a more glamorous part, I would have some memory of this occasion.) And according to Happy's journal, I was also one of the youngsters who helped put strings into the tags in preparation for the tag day sale in June 1919.

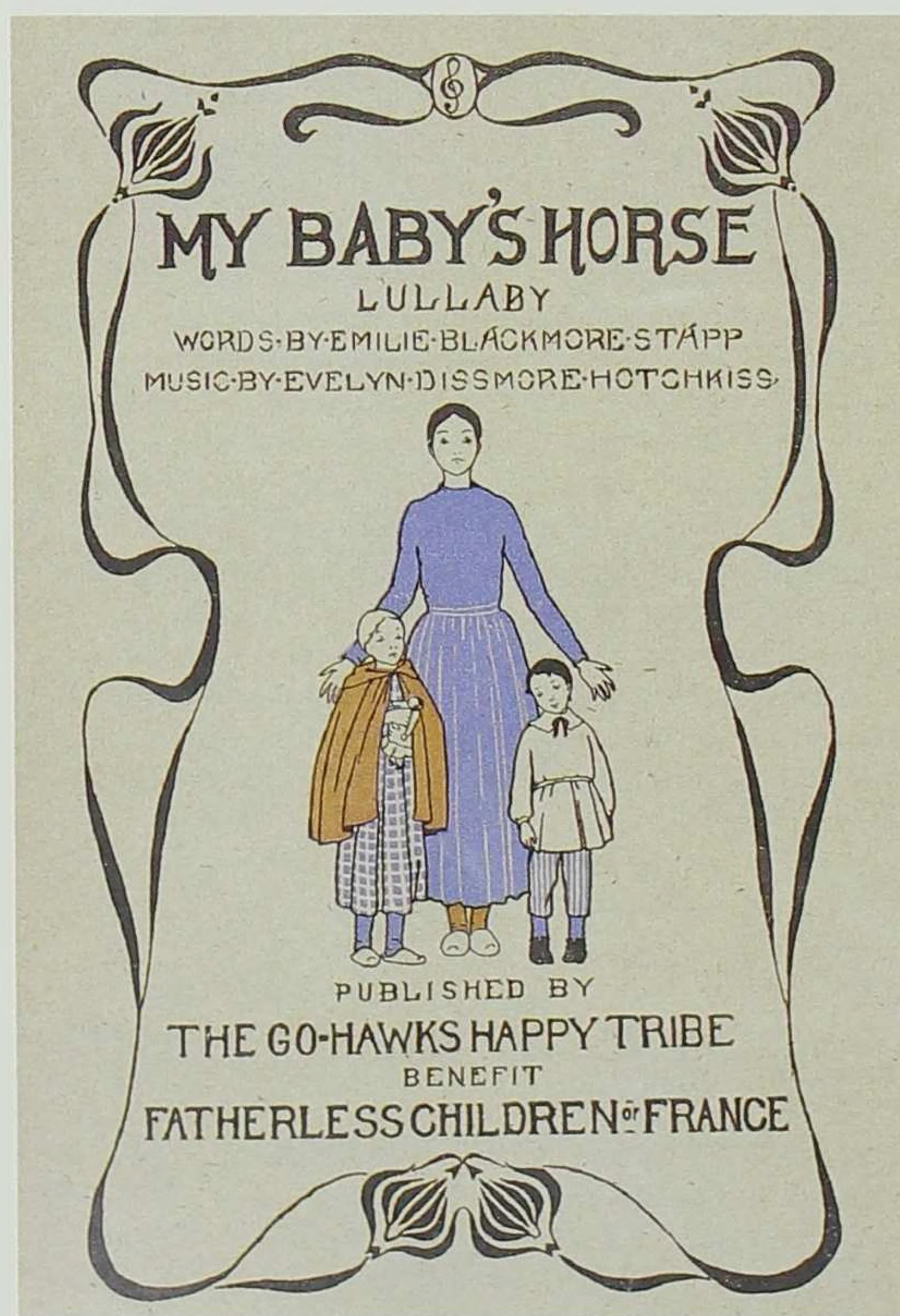
A few weeks later Happy noted in her journal, "Found a basket of apples on my desk from Louise Rosenfield 'to help poor children' who wander in." This kind of "lady bountiful" charity makes me very uncomfortable today, and it is with reluctance that I report this good deed. However, it was certainly the accepted method of charity during my Happy Tribe days. A more generous bit of charity was my giving the Go-Hawks the money I had received as a birthday present. I remember Happy praising me for this gift, but, alas, I can't find the column in which I was mentioned.

—Louise Rosenfield Noun



foil babies." They were to be supported from the sale of tinfoil that youngsters brought in. The "tinfoil" man who purchased the foil from Stapp was dramatized as a skinflint who resisted paying a penny more than he had to. Newsies Mike and Sammy were on hand to defend her against this "Shylocks." Sufficient funds were raised to feed and clothe the tinfoil babies for three years.

Not long after influenza had hit the Western Front, the epidemic reached Des Moines. Stapp noted in late October, "Children flocking to office for schools are closed on account of flu. Trying to keep them all busy." By early November, Go-Hawks in Des Moines had a place of their own—the Wig-Wam, a room on the third floor of the *Capital* building where a stage had been constructed for plays, story hours, concerts, Happy Tribe orchestra rehearsals, and benefit shows produced by the children themselves.



Stapp wrote the words for this lullaby, published in October 1918 for the benefit of the "fatherless children of France."

On November 11, the day the Armistice was signed, Stapp noted in her journal, "Wild excitement in town." But the end of hostilities did not dampen her determination. "No matter what others think," she wrote in early December, "I feel the children in the war zones will still need help for some time." She reported that a constant stream of youngsters came to her office begging to go on with helping the children overseas. Letters from American soldiers stationed in rural France told of visits to Happy Tribe orphans in the area. They sent word that these children still needed help.

She was not alone in understanding that the work was far from over. In January she noted, "Was given the opportunity of speaking on behalf of the French orphans before Jewish women of the city today. Am not much of a speaker but when one has a great cause at heart it speaks for you." And in May, she "met the Belgian consul by request and had a fine interview." "He is very eager that I broaden greatly the scope of my work to make it national." She was soon appointed "organizing president" of American school children for the Belgian Orphans Fund. Through the *Capital* pages, she kept the fund in the public's eye. A full page in the March 1920 rotogravure section was devoted to photos of Stapp, Go-Hawks, and war orphans, and explained that Stapp's responsibility was "to organize the school children of America into a definite working force for the children of Belgium." This meant more than funneling donations to Belgium: "To build an enduring friendship between the children of the two nations, to establish an unbreakable bond of understanding and sympathy thru the interchange of letters and other courtesies, this is to be the great underlying principle of the movement."

Enthusiasm about the Happy Tribe remained high during 1919 and 1920. Easter "Penny Day" brought in \$500. In June, a tag sale (where children solicited donations and gave small tags in return) yielded \$3,285. Individuals and schools donated smaller amounts, but all were diligently noted. As funds accumulated, she forwarded them to Europe—\$1,000 as an "Easter gift to be used for the maintenance of 20 orphans for another year"; \$3,500 to the Belgian Consul General in December.

Meanwhile, Stapp was aware of needs closer to home. For the third consecutive holiday season, Stapp distributed a hundred dolls to Iowa girls who then dressed them as gifts for poor children at Christmas. On the same day that she wrote, "Sent off more quilts to Belgium & France," she noted, "Altho working with all my heart to relieve conditions among children





**From Stapp's scrapbook: "Belgian refugee children being fitted with shoes bought with money sent by Iowa Go-Hawks."**

abroad, I feel we must not forget those at home. Have arranged a special Christmas party for Little Blind Paul." In April 1920 the Go-Hawks sent Easter baskets to every child in Des Moines's hospitals and institutions. The activities and events seem endless.

**S**tapp's journal for 1921 ends after only a few entries. On March 16, the *Capital* announced: "Miss Emilie Blackmore Stapp, children's editor of the *Capital* and known to thousands of children all over the country as 'Happy,' has accepted a position with





Coverlet or banner bearing the words "Iowa" and "Happy Tribe" and signed "Francis Hol" forms the backdrop for names, addresses, and photos of war orphans. Iowa girls knitted squares that were then sewn together and made into coverlets. Fifty were sent to war orphans. By acquiring names and photos of orphans, Stapp helped Go-Hawks identify with the children they were helping. Page after page of addresses fill one scrapbook, and there are hundreds of photos of European children.

Houghton-Mifflin publishing company, of Boston. Miss Stapp will . . . become children's editor of the Houghton-Mifflin syndicate sometime next month. Miss Stapp and her Happy Tribe department in *The Capital* have won national recognition and it was due to the success of this department that the publishing

company selected her out of all of the children's editors throughout the country."

In a farewell editorial the *Capital* admitted that "here in the *Capital* office we were too close to recognize fully [Stapp's] ability. She knew her field better than most of us and cultivated it more thoroughly."



And she knew her audience. At the time of Stapp's resignation the Happy Tribe had a membership of over 40,000. Some sources say that during the war, membership was twice that.

**M**y last day of work in Des Moines," Stapp noted on April 3. "My little brown office crowded all day with children saying goodbye. Have gone over the top with the Million Penny War Fund four times and fund closes today with 4,300,892 pennies, supporting 800 children. The Happy Tribe Trail now leads to Boston."

In her new position Stapp edited a full-page weekly feature named "Happyland," which appeared in the *Boston Sunday Herald* and other newspapers, with a total readership of over a million. The page contained a variety of materials appealing to children. In addition to promoting the Go-Hawks Happy Tribe, she featured recipes for girls, workshop instructions



"Still the pennies come for the war orphans," Stapp titled this 1919 photo of a Des Moines newsboy monitoring donations.



Margaret Cummins, Marion Watrous, Virginia Fitzhugh, and Doris Hunnel staff a Happy Tribe shop in Des Moines that sold knitting bags made out of paper shopping bags decorated with cutouts from magazines.





for boys, her own plays written in verse for children, and reprints of children's literature, including *The Trail of the Go-Hawks* and other books in this series. A column called "Little Friends Across the Sea" presented correspondence from youngsters in foreign countries being helped by the Happy Tribe. By early November 1921, the *Herald* reported that the Happyland page was "the talk of the children of New England. . . . Pretty soon from all indications every child in the North East will be a Go-Hawk."

In response to an appeal by the American Red Cross for books for European countries where children were learning English, Stapp assembled collections of carefully selected children's books and sent these "Happyland" and "Go-Hawk" libraries to France, Belgium, Poland, Albania, Italy, Yugoslavia, and Hungary. In one thank-you letter, a grateful teacher signed off with "a big Whoop, PROFTE SHKO-SQYFTERA! Albanian, for Hurrah for the Go-Hawks."

The trail of Stapp's Go-Hawks is harder to follow after the early 1920s. Did the growing economic depression have some effect on even "Happy" and her vision of helping one another? Did the idea lose appeal among American children? Or are there scrapbooks from this period, too—in which Stapp proudly pasted her columns and correspondence—that have yet to surface? In 1938, Stapp, in her mid-60s, resigned from Houghton-Mifflin in order to do free-lance writing. Two years later she published *Isabella, the Wise*

*Goose*, the first of a six-part series of "Isabella" books for children. Stapp used her first "Isabella" book as the focus of a mailing campaign for the sale of war bonds during World War II.

Stapp and her younger sister, Marie (who had moved with her from Des Moines to Boston), now relocated to a farm near Wiggins, Mississippi, where they built a Cape Cod-style house on a farm developed by their brother, Fred. Their home was called the "Doll House" because of some 400 dolls they had collected over two decades. They opened their home for two hours every Friday afternoon to the many visitors who wanted to see the doll collection. The Stapps were also instrumental in establishing a clubhouse for women's organizations in Wiggins, as well as a public library, one of the first in the vicinity. Emilie and Marie were well known for their generosity to the community. Marie Stapp died in 1960, and Emilie two years later.

**E**milie Blackmore Stapp's war-relief efforts pale when compared to those of another Iowan, Herbert Hoover, who coordinated millions of dollars of relief for Europe. Yet Stapp, in her own way, worked tirelessly to reach those she seemed to know best—children. And she inspired and implemented one of the more unusual war-relief efforts—mobilizing children to help other children. At a time when a





loaf of bread cost a dime, and a dozen diapers a dollar, she raised thousands and thousands of dollars for children whose wage-earning fathers had been killed in World War I. She focused on the needs of both war orphans and Iowa's own children—perhaps not in ways that would help them end their poverty and solve their problems (then the new goal of social work), but in ways that did bring momentary comfort.

In terms of the billions of dollars needed for war relief, her goals were small. But so were her donors. Much of the money raised came in the unit children understood well—pennies. "It probably plays a big part in the everyday life of most children to go without some desired penny treasure, especially when the penny is an available asset," wrote a Texas reporter about Stapp's work.

To those children who sacrificed their pennies and their time, she gave something in exchange. She gave working-class newsboys positions of esteem (a September 1919 journal entry reads: "Sammy is now the leader of a group of Four Minute speakers for the Belgian orphans"). She gave a little fame to children from all parts of Iowa, indeed, the nation, who sent in their pennies and letters to her office in Des Moines, and who then read their names in her column.

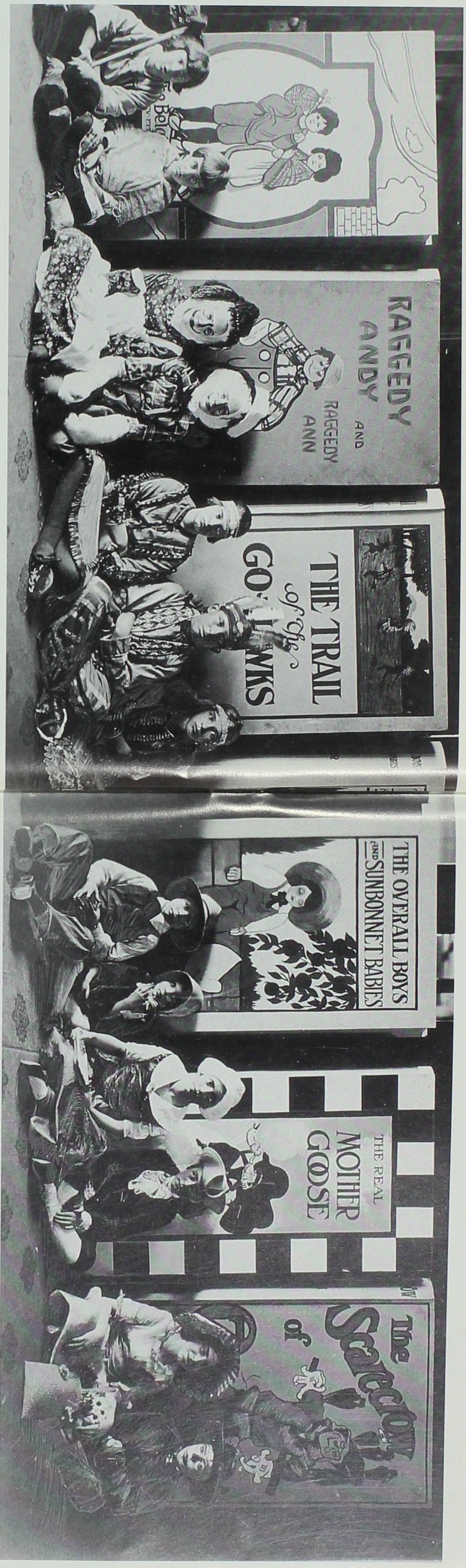
And at a time when American reformers pointed to the chasm between America's poor and America's wealthy, she gave children of privilege the benefit of the doubt. Soon after the Go-Hawks were launched,

**Dressed as favorite characters, children stepped out of giant books at the "Children's Book Shelf" tableau at the 1920 Harris Emery Department Store book fair in Des Moines. Youngsters packed the auditorium to watch the tableau and honor Stapp on "Emilie Blackmore Stapp Day." Below: Anita and John Packwood sent Stapp paper dolls with pennies tucked in tiny sacks. (Another Packwood doll is on page 145.)**

she commented in her column: "It has long been a popular bit of fiction that little children who live in certain aristocratic sections of the city must all be selfish because of their environment. If so, then how are we to account in this instance for the [children's] thought of the birds' comfort all summer, the daily act of cheering a woman who they quaintly fancy needs them and how about the good deed each remembers to do every day. These







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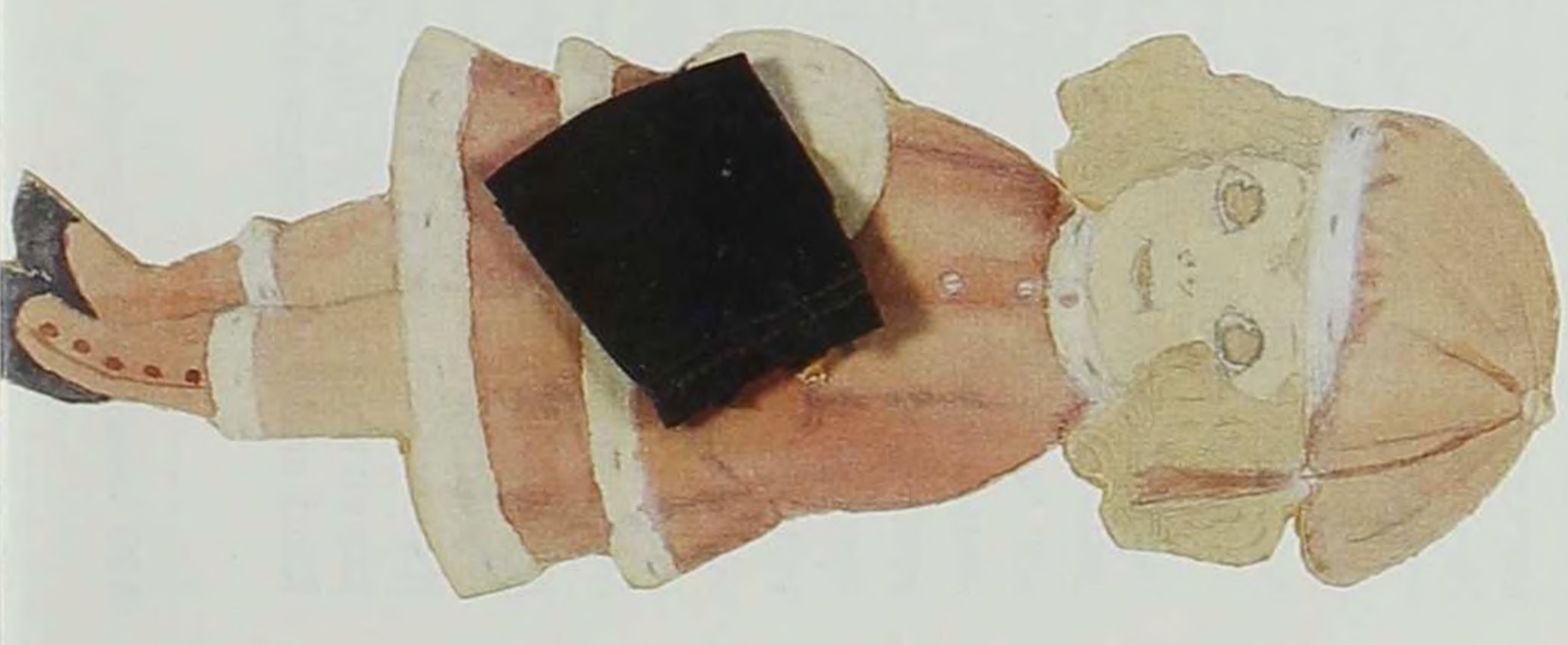
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**Stapp distributed dolls to Iowa girls and asked them to dress them and then donate them to the poor. This photo, from Stapp's scrapbook, is captioned: "We each dressed a doll for a little poor child at home."**

facts prove that Happy Tribes flourish in one part of a city as well as another."

Stapp's success lay in her understanding of children. "Everywhere children love organization, and the feeling that they are a part of something of enough importance to be of interest to other people," wrote a New England reporter in 1921 about the Go-Hawks. "The rest is left to the children, who are never at a loss, with the help of Happy's suggestions, to form plans and activities for themselves."

Responsible for earning her own living and making her own way in a largely male occupation, Stapp instinctively knew how to write a heart-wrenching sob story and how to parlay a good situation for her cause. Although she and her writings may be considered saccharine and sentimental by today's standards, she nevertheless cajoled thousands of Americans to witness a war across the ocean in personal terms. Despite the anti-German hysteria that swept through Iowa, she never wrote with rancor about the enemy, but only with compassion for the victim. Working in journalism a decade after Theodore Roosevelt had chastised journalists for going too far in muckraking the evils of society, she used another approach to improve the world—giving people the opportunity to be kind and to feel happy about it. ❖

*Louise Rosenfield Noun is the author of Strong-Minded Women; More Strong-Minded Women; and Journey to Autonomy. She has written about Carrie Chapman Catt, Nellie Verne Walker, and Harriet Ketcham for this magazine. She invites readers with memories of or materials from the Go-Hawks to contact Iowa Heritage Illustrated.*

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

In 1932, at the suggestion of J. B. Weaver, a Des Moines lawyer and former neighbor, Emilie Blackmore Stapp gave the records and memorabilia of her work during World War I to the Iowa Department of History (now State Historical Society of Iowa) as a memorial to the thousands of children who helped care for the war orphans. These materials are housed in the SHSI archives and museum in Des Moines. Her other papers, and those of her sister, Marie, and their doll collection, are in the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection, University Libraries and McCain Library and Archives, at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg. Although Stapp's birth year is usually given as 1876, the 1885 Iowa census lists her as age 13, which would make her birth year 1872.

Besides Stapp's novels, materials from the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection, the *Des Moines Capital*, *Des Moines Register*, and *Mail and Times*, other sources are *Christian World* (Jan. 28, 1915); *National Magazine* (Jan. 1915); Frank Moorhead, "Here's the Happy Tribe," *Today's Magazine* (Aug. 1915); and Marjorie Ash's story in the *Boston Herald* (Nov. 6, 1921). Other sources include H. Allen Anderson, "Ernest Thompson Seton and the Woodcraft Indians," *Journal of American Culture*, 8:1 (Spring 1985), 43-50; and Robert H. Bremner, *From the Depths: The Discovery of Poverty in the United States* (New York University Press, 1956). Annotations to an earlier version of this article are in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* files. Jodi Evans, SHSI registrar, assisted Chuck Greiner in photographing Stapp artifacts.



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compiled by Jenny Welter

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# Iowa Heritage Illustrated



# One in a Million

**A**mong the millions of items in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa is this Wedgewood-Holly gas stove. It represents top-end kitchen appliances of the mid-1950s, an era of stove manufacture before built-in units became popular, and when the stove was the centerpiece of the kitchen.

It had almost as much chrome as the Buick in the garage and nearly as many gadgets. This stove features a griddle, oven, warming oven, broiler, pull-out grease pans, built-in timer, and ceramic salt and pepper shakers flanking the clock. The distinctive style and use of opulent materials for stoves like this one were difficult to continue as competition increased, and in the 1970s production ended.

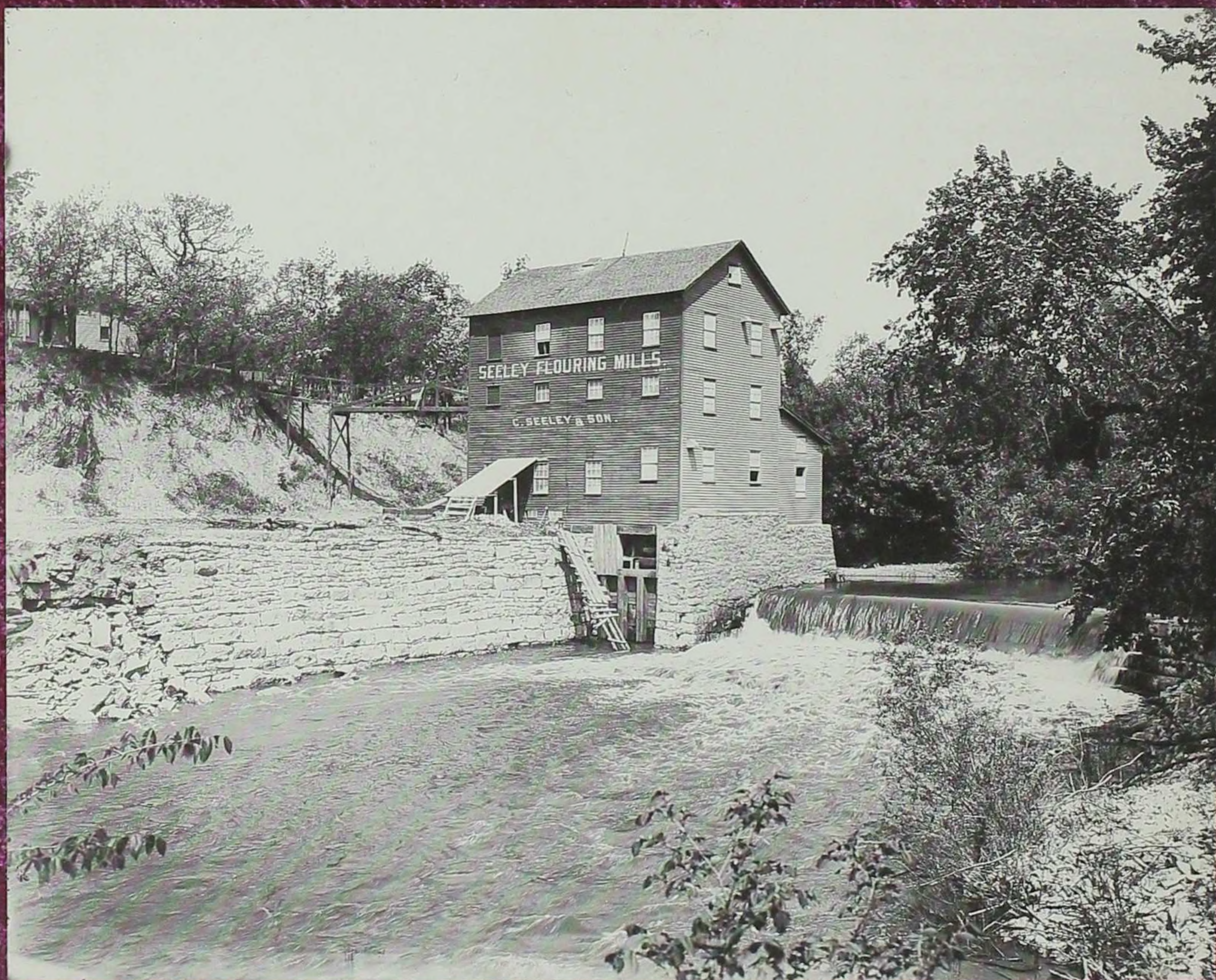
This stove and other 1950s appliances will be on exhibit at the Iowa Historical Building in Des Moines in February 1997.

—Michael O. Smith  
Chief Curator  
State Historical Society of Iowa

PHOTO BY CHUCK GREINER







**A constant rush of water to turn water wheels and millstones was the wish of grain farmers and mill operators in the era of water-powered mills. Mills—such as Red Oak's Seeley Flour Mill, pictured here—were one of Iowa's leading industries in the 19th century. This issue explores the rise and fall of milling in Iowa, and features Floyd Nagler, a dynamic hydraulics expert who helped document Iowa's numerous mill sites. (Photo from the Schwinn Collection, State Historical Society of Iowa.)**