



Patten's Neighborhood

**The Center Street Community
and the African-American
Printer Who Preserved It**

**by Jack Lufkin
photography by Chuck Greiner**

Printer Robert E. Patten hoped to open a museum partly devoted to the history of African Americans in Des Moines—the city he called home for almost 60 years. He intended to display some of the many items he had produced for Des Moines's black community, from tickets and posters to party invitations and family portraits. Patten never opened his museum, but his printing legacy survives as the Robert E. Patten Collection at the State Historical Society of Iowa.

The 1,800 items in the collection represent more than Patten's

Above: Entrepreneur Robert E. Patten poses with a confident demeanor, about 1909.

projected museum. They reflect a past in which a largely segregated people developed a rich, varied, and oftentimes distinct neighborhood community within the larger city—a neighborhood where those with money lived near those with none. The heart of this community was affectionately known as Center Street, once located northwest of downtown Des Moines. Between the early 1900s and the 1960s, Center Street thrived within an otherwise segregated and sometimes hostile city. In this neighborhood, Des Moines's black community lived, worked, and played. And they took their printing jobs to Robert Patten.

Patten was born in rural Georgia in 1883 of African-American

and Native American lineage. Literally, a kick in the pants sent Patten in the direction of printing. According to his son, E. Hobart De Patten, Patten as a child was booted in the rump as he picked berries in a southern fruit patch. This act spurred him toward the goal of working for himself. When he learned as a young man that established printers did not want to print his opinions, he determined that he would own his own printing equipment.

Like many a restless young American, Patten traveled the country by rail in search of opportunity. He must have heard about the rare prospects for blacks in the southern Iowa coal-mining town of Buxton and moved there about



1900. He made his living as a job printer, a photographer, and an itinerant seller of books and prints, particularly to black schools and businesses. About 1909 he moved to Des Moines and established his printing business and home along Center Street. In 1910, while selling books at an all-black school in Ohio, he met teacher Margaret Mitchell and married her. Their children would eventually help in Patten's print shop located in the

front of their Des Moines home.

On the eve of World War I, Des Moines's black population was rising from 1,100 (in 1900) to 3,500. When Fort Des Moines was designated as the site for the Colored Officers Training Camp, an influx of officer candidates increased the town's black population. The city's black population rose appreciably after the war as many officers from Fort Des Moines and recruits from Camp Dodge stayed and raised

Patten's versatile career included photography, sales, and printing. With this early-1900s Monroe camera, he produced and sold photographic postcard prints. As director of the Unity Coal Company, Patten advocated buying and selling coal cooperatively to benefit the community. The 1940 calendar represents yet another sales line; Patten ordered colorful picture calendars and then custom printed the advertising block for local businesses, who distributed the calendars as promotional gifts.

families in Des Moines. This population growth reflected the Great Migration, a huge population shift of blacks from the South to the North and Midwest. By 1950, 8,200 blacks lived in Des Moines; by 1960, 10,300.

With scattered exceptions, most African Americans in Des Moines could live in only a few areas, and the area known as Center Street was one of them. Certainly, segregation was not as extreme in Des Moines, Iowa, as it was in the statutory Jim Crow South or in major northern cities, like Chicago or Detroit, with much larger African-American populations. Indeed, determining the extent of segregation in Des Moines is a tricky proposi-

tion. Although there was some racial interaction, the collective memory of longtime Des Moines black residents suggests that African Americans generally could not patronize most Des Moines restaurants, hotels, and stores. Seating in theaters was usually segregated. Job opportunities were limited. Most social organizations and events remained off-limits to blacks.

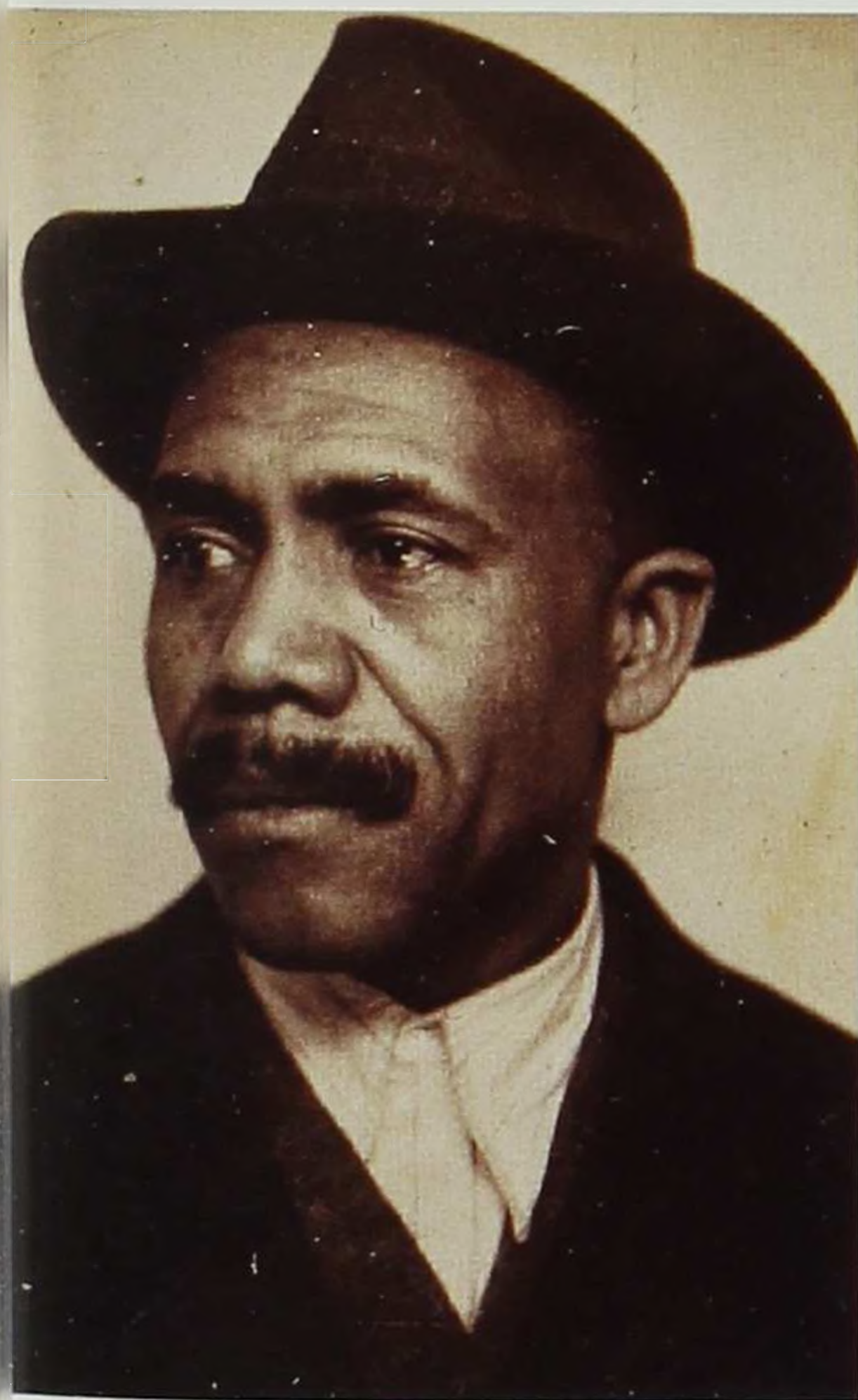
The racial bigotry that hamstrung blacks in their quest for economic and social opportunities understandably left residual resentment of this separate but unequal condition. Nevertheless, most former Center Street residents feel a nostalgia for Center Street and a

lost sense of community, where neighbors had helped neighbors, looked after each other's children, and patronized local businesses.

In the 1960s the Center Street neighborhood was bulldozed to make way for urban renewal and construction of Interstate 235 through Des Moines. But prior to this, Patten's granddaughter Barbara Oliver-Hall and his son-in-law W. Lawrence Oliver had taken steps to preserve at least part of the Center Street community. Oliver-Hall had worked in Patten's print shop as a child, and she remembered Patten's dream of opening a museum. She asked her father to store printed materials that Patten had kept for years in his home, and



Patten stands next to his print shop around 1930. The signs advertise his involvement in cooperative ventures geared toward peaceful coexistence, problem solving, and fellowship. Cooperative business enterprises, he felt, held the key to racial uplift in an age of white supremacy and limited civil rights.



By 1930, Robert E. Patten (above) had established himself as a successful job printer for African Americans in Des Moines. The only other known black printer at that time in Des Moines was the Morris family, publishers of the *Iowa Bystander* newspaper.

to save them from destruction in a specially built shed on his property. In 1995, Patten's son, E. Hobart De Patten, donated the collection to the State Historical Society of Iowa, offering the Society a breathtaking opportunity to study and showcase the Center Street neighborhood from 1910 to 1960, then the largest concentration of African Americans in Iowa.

The collection is admittedly a fragment, but a rather large and significant one, of African-American history in Iowa. The images on the following pages are a sampling from the museum exhibit "Patten's Neighborhood: Memories of the Center Street Community" at the Iowa Historical Building, 600 East Locust, Des Moines (Tuesday-Saturday, 9-4:30; Sunday, noon-4:30).

The collection unveils a vibrant neighborhood, bursting with the life of a community—in homes and workplaces, churches and gathering spots. Through Patten's printed posters, tickets and business advertising, one relives the bustle of Center Street, the tantalizing bargains of a local store, the enthusiasm for an upcoming con-

cert, the spiritual uplift of a church event, the pride of new beauty school graduates, the dazzle of a local night club.

One also senses the relentless energy of job printer Robert E. Patten—an entrepreneur of considerable ambition, a printer with versatile skills, and an idealist in quest of sweeping change for African Americans.

Jack Lufkin is a curator at the State Historical Society of Iowa. He curated the museum exhibit "Patten's Neighborhood: Memories of the Center Street Community" in the Iowa Historical Building in Des Moines. He thanks the following for their assistance: E. Hobart De Patten, Barbara Oliver-Hall, Gwendolyn Fowler, Robert V. Morris, and Don Lee. Chuck Greiner is a freelance photographer from Huxley, Iowa, whose photos have often appeared in this magazine.



Patten's children and other family members learned the business of selling as well as the art of printing; they sold a variety of items, including greeting cards, postcards, and magazines. One of his sons, E. Hobart De Patten, shown here in front of his Novelty Nook sales vehicle, also engaged in other business ventures, including real estate, a restaurant, general printing, and a launderette. Most of the items on exhibit were donated by E. Hobart De Patten to the State Historical Society.




As a sales agent in Des Moines, Robert E. Patten sold products during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s for the black-owned Lucky Heart Company of Memphis, Tennessee, which manufactured cosmetics and other products targeted primarily to African Americans. These are some of the surviving product samples and a 1949 sales catalog.

Patten also printed advertisements and marketed items for local black entrepreneur Lawrence J. Chapman and his Uneedor Chemical Company. From his home shop, Chapman prepared a variety of food flavorings, cosmetics, cleaning products, and hair treatments (see jar on far right).

Right: Patten's ads (upper right corner and purple stamp) direct customers to his Des Moines post office address. Although Patten did not print this book, he kept it in his collection. It is the only known surviving copy of *Some Phases of Negro Life in Des Moines*, published in 1903. The book's preamble states its purpose of projecting a more positive image of African Americans, denigrated by society during this nadir in race relations. The box below Patten's stamp features rising young attorney S. Joe Brown, who would become one of Des Moines's leading citizens.

In the late 1920s Patten began work for a book featuring biographies of African Americans and photos of their Des Moines homes. The project was never completed, but the photos that survive reveal the variety of housing in the Center Street neighborhood. Here, in one of the photos, Edna and John Spriggs pose by their house at 1060 14th Street, constructed and stuccoed by Spriggs. An Alabama native, he came to Des Moines in 1913 and became the city's first African-American stucco builder, a skill he had learned in the South.

<p>C. Anderson E. S. Morgan</p> <p>Proprietors of the</p> <p>EQUAL RIGHTS</p> <p>Palisade Barber Shop</p> <p>First-Class Work Guaranteed. Hot and Cold Baths Every Day. Sunday from 8 A. M. to 12 M.</p> <p>230 West Third Street.</p> <p>DES MOINES, IOWA.</p>	<p>BOOKS! BOOKS! BOOKS!</p> <p>WHAT KINDS? ALL KINDS!</p> <p>Name a few that all Colored Men—White as well—Should Read. All Right.</p> <p>"The United Negro," "The Negro Revealed," "20th Century Negro Literature," "The New Negro," "Progress of the Negro," "Negro Soldiers," "Souls of Black Folk," and Works of Dunbar.</p> <p>In addition to the foregoing named books I have other kinds you may want.</p> <p>Write to</p> <p>R. E. PATTEN, Agt. Box 391, Des Moines, Iowa.</p>
<p>R. E. PATTEN, For Subscription Books Agent for Harper & Bros. Periodicals Box 391, Des Moines, Iowa</p>	
	<p>S. JOE BROWN.</p> <p>Superintendent of Sunday School and Clerk of St. Paul's Church. Member of the Greek Scholarship Society of Phi Beta Kappa. Formerly Professor of Ancient Languages in Bishop College, Marshall, Texas. At present a practicing attorney and resident member of the firm of Woodson & Brown, Attorneys at Law and Notaries Public, with offices at Des Moines and Muchakinock, Iowa.</p>
<p>Attorney S. JOE BROWN, A. M., LL. B.</p>	





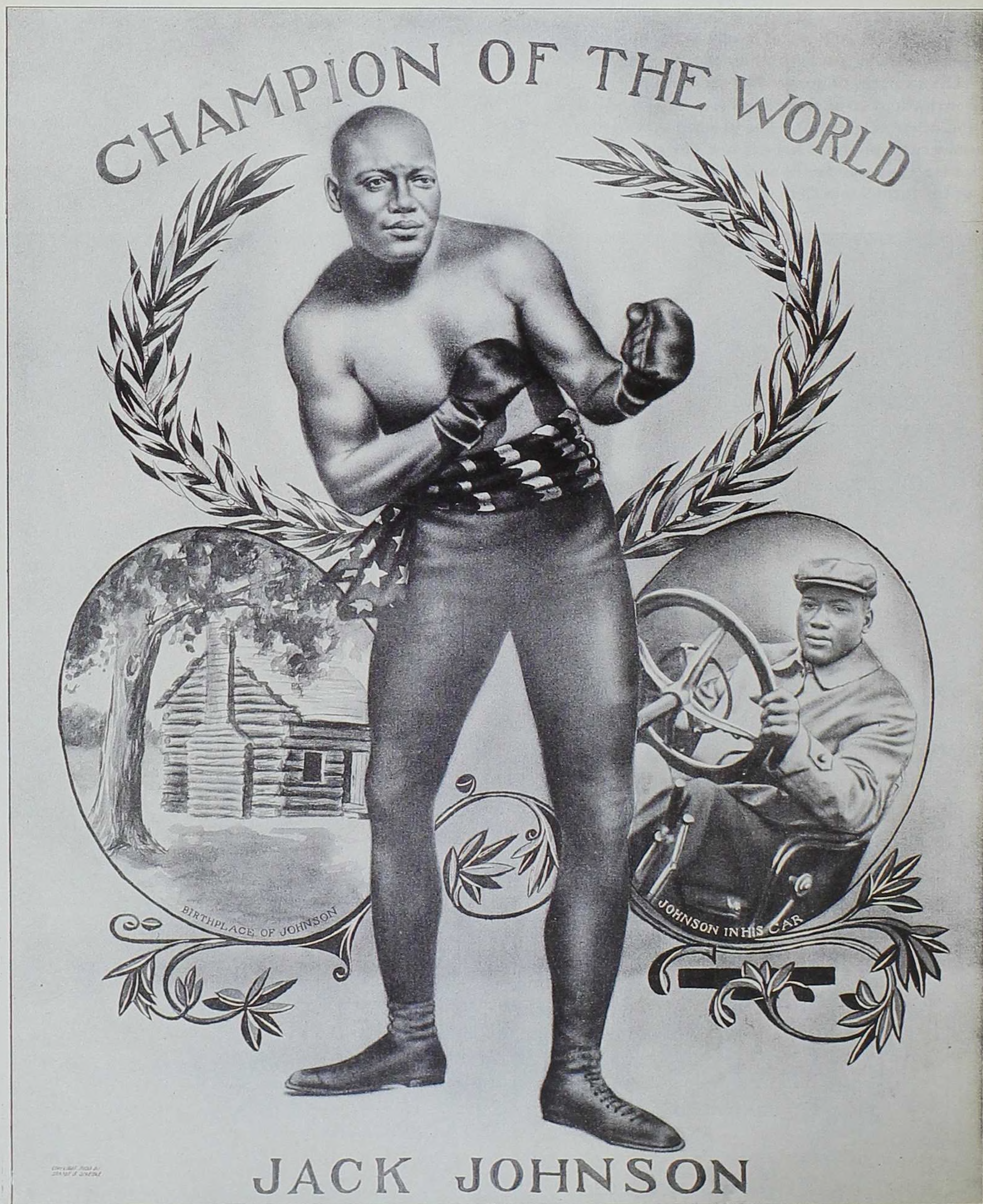
*From the collection of R. E. Patton
E. Hobart De Patton
Photo by R. E. Patton*

This striking image of a young cowboy reveals Patten's versatility as a photographer. The boy was probably from Buxton or Des Moines. His cowboy garb bespeaks a time when African Americans served as cowhands, scouts, and cavalry soldiers.

Family celebrations brought in photography and print jobs like these for Patten. Today, the samples he kept document the importance of family life in the Center Street community. Mass-produced pictures of family milestones appeared on calendars Patten customized for local businesses, which chose from a variety of images like the ones here. He also printed invitations to anniversaries (see the small cards here) and other celebrations. The printed mat framing the 50th anniversary photo of Arbelia and James Gray reminds Americans to buy war bonds and stamps—and to dine and dance at the local Sepia Club.

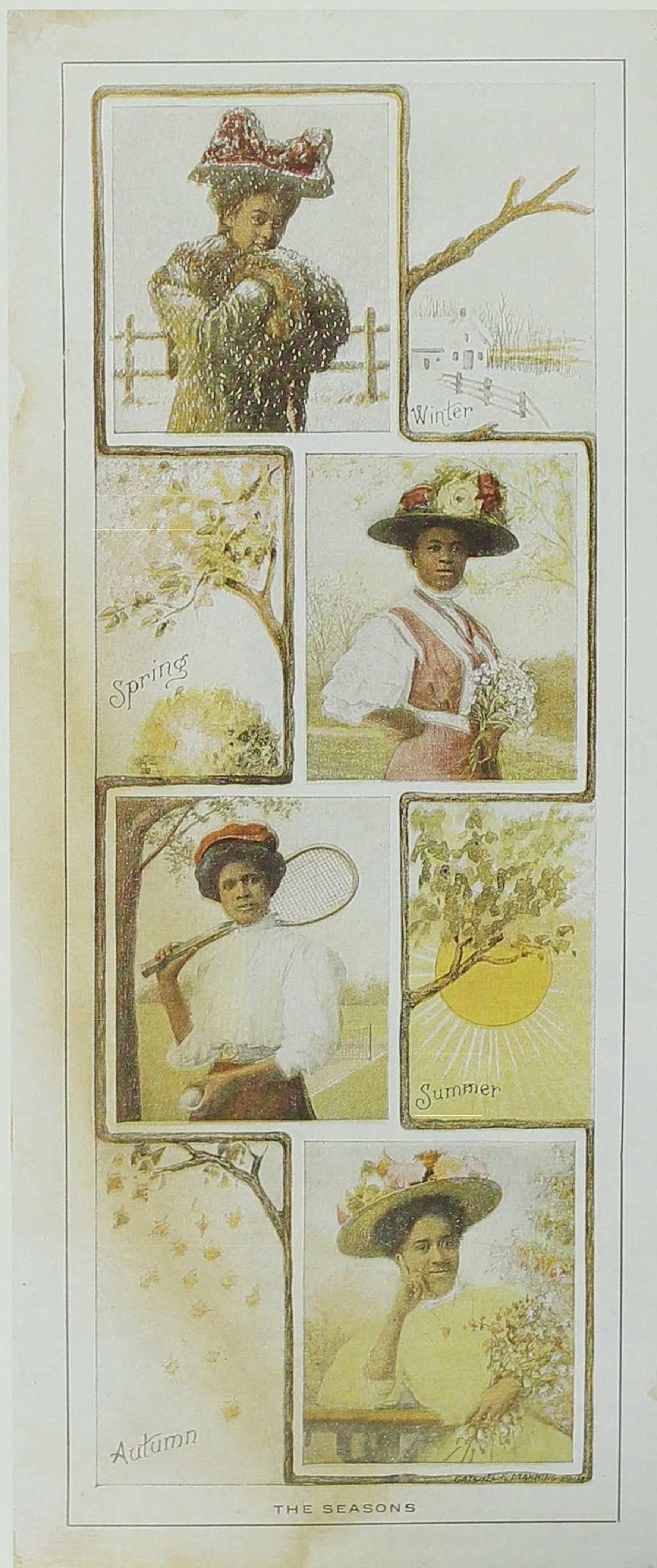
SEPIA CLUB ANNIVERSARY PHOTO COURTESY OF EDYTHE GRAY SPATES







Patten sold a series of inspirational lithographs intended to decorate African-American homes or gathering places. These are two of the series. World heavyweight champion Jack Johnson (left) was a hero to African Americans, but was scorned by white supremacists. His life was the basis of the play *The Great White Hope*, a term referring to his opponents. Above: The religious nature of this lithograph might have lent itself to a church as well as a home. The series also included portraits of Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, Paul Lawrence Dunbar, W.E.B. DuBois, Hightower T. Kealing, and Sissieretta (Black Patti) Jones.



Patten sold (but did not print) this color lithograph "The Seasons," of black women fashionably dressed in early 20th century attire.

Right: Patten printed a variety of materials for Center Street businesses, including these from the Crescent Beauty School. In 1939, Pauline Brown (later Humphrey) founded Crescent, Iowa's first black beauty culture school after attending one of Madam C.J. Walker's beauty schools in Chicago. (Walker's line of hair products made her America's first black woman millionaire.)

Black-owned beauty parlors appeared in nearly every African-American community in the 20th century, as more black women could afford to spend money on commercial hair care. An aspiring beautician could begin her operation in her home with little operating capital.

The Jewish Community Center, at 801 Forest, was one of the few white organizations to host events for the Crescent Beauty School and other African-American community groups. The center had originated on Des Moines's east side to serve many of the city's first Jewish immigrants.

GLAMOROUS Copper Colored Review COMES TO TOWN Review of Hair Style

SPONSORS

Crescent Beauty School
and Beauty Shops

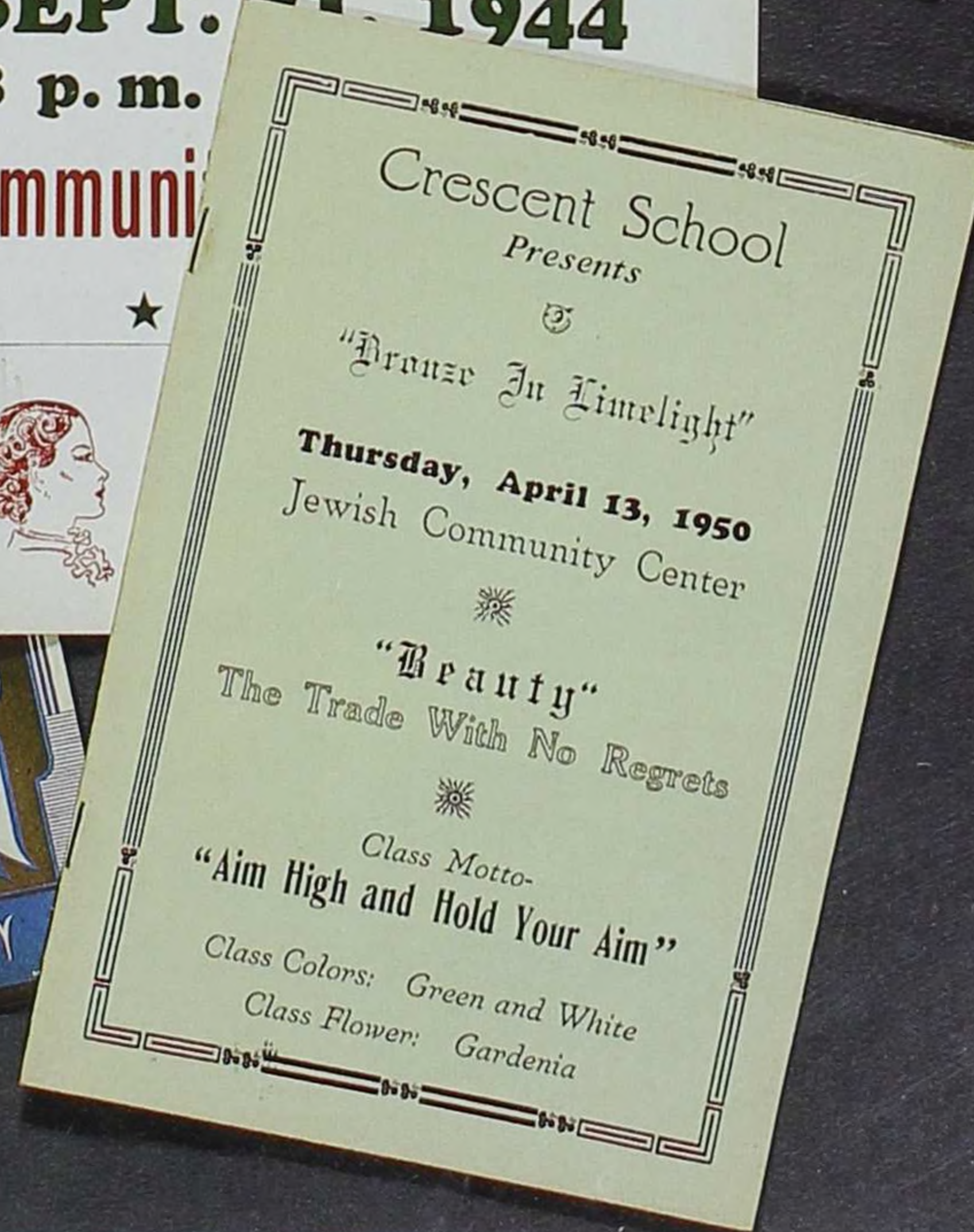
Evalon Murline Ruth's
Vo Pon Polly's Le Joyce
Bernice Berline Miniature

THURS., SEPT. 1, 1944
8 p. m.

Jewish Community

Admission 50c.

★ door





PHONE 4-9878
Lena's Beauty Salon
 1204 CENTER STREET
 FOR THE WOMAN WHO CARES
 Miss Walker System
 Des Moines, Iowa

Community Pharmacy
 Mr. J. W. Mitchell, Prop.
 Special attention given to our Prescription Department
1200 Center Street
 Des Moines, Iowa
 Phone 3-9860



Community Luncheonette
 Mrs. A. P. Trotter, Prop.
 Home Cooked Food
1202 Center Street
 Des Moines, Iowa



Lena's Beauty Salon
 For The Woman Who Cares
 Miss Walker System
1204 Center Street
 Des Moines, Iowa
 Phone 4-9878



Special Sale Prices Week of July 29th

Sanitol Liquid Shampoo	.50--39c
Ayers' Hair Vigor	\$1.10--96c
Mahdeen Dandruff Remover	\$1.00--86c
Cocoonut Oil Shampoo	.35--27c
A.D.S. Shaving Cream	.50--39c
A.D.S. Aspirin	.20--14c
Grandpa's Wonder Soap	.08--06c
Pasteurine Shaving Cream	.35--27c
Mavis Talcum	.25--21c
Hobson's Cascarills	.25--17c
Unguentine	.30--26c
Dr. Hobson's Baby Cough Syrup	.25--17c
Dr. Simmens' Squaw Vine Compound FOR WOMEN	\$1.00--79c
Mentholatum	.25--21c
Unguentine Soap	.25--21c
Dr. Fred Palmer's Skin Whitener	.25--21c
Four Fold Liniment	.60--41c

Dr. Fred Palmer's Face Powder Always in Stock
 We Carry Your Favorite Brand of Cigarettes
Blagburn & Shelton Pharmacy
 1200 CENTER ST. DES MOINES, IOWA

Sampson's Chicken Shack

Prizes to Ten Dressed
 Men
 W. Lawrence Oliver
 Announces the opening of
 his Law Office
 at 416 E. 6th Street
 No problem is too small or too large
 for us to handle
 First Look your right and then proceed
 Office Phone 3-6317
 Residence Phone 3-3558
5 Cash

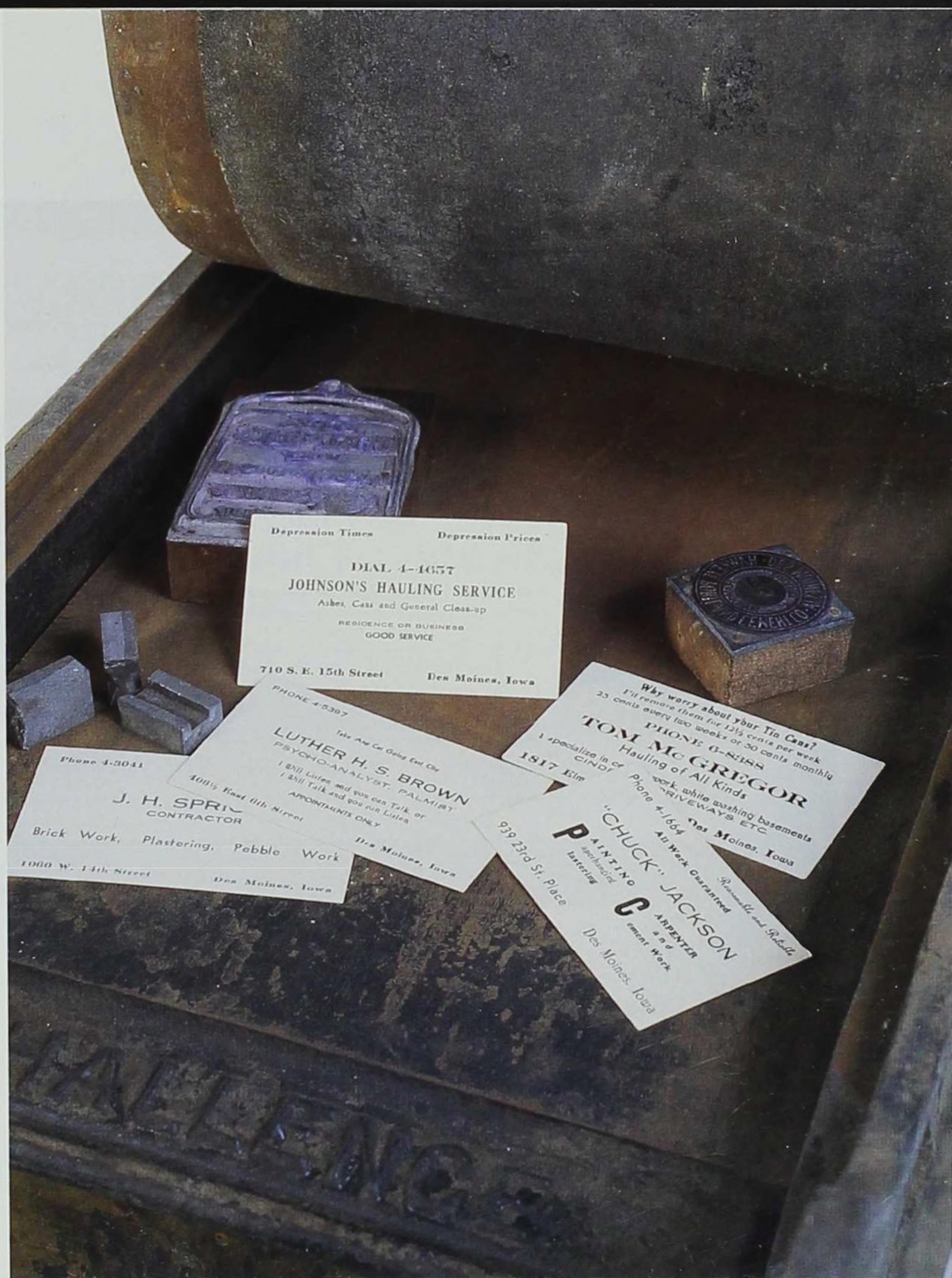


Woman's Auxiliary

Left: Patten printed numerous items for African Americans who opened and managed their own businesses in response to the discrimination they found in many Des Moines businesses. Black-owned businesses ranged from pharmacies and law offices to barber shops and luncheonettes. Patten printed posters, broadsides, business cards, blotters, and customized promotional calendars for local businesses.

Although most public discrimination in Iowa had been outlawed by 1892, many white business owners continued to discriminate against blacks, including white-owned restaurants that refused to serve African Americans well into the 1940s and beyond. Within the Center Street community, this gave aspiring restaurant owners a built-in business base.

The businesses represented here were community fixtures for decades. Sampson's Chicken Shack was located on the east side, a short trolley ride away from Center Street. Patten's son-in-law, attorney W. Lawrence Oliver, whose portrait appears here, was instrumental in saving the Patten collection with his daughter, Barbara Oliver-Hall.



Over the decades, Patten printed thousands of business cards for Center Street residents. A large percentage of the African-American work force in Des Moines consisted of general laborers who performed hauling, painting, and repair services. A few of their business cards rest on Patten's proof press.

A GREAT MUSICAL PROGRAM

OCTOBER 1 & 2, 1942; 8 P.M.



Miss Griffin

Corinthian Baptist Church

9th and School Streets Des Moines, Iowa
Rev. G. B. Robinson, Pastor

Voices of 50 Young People in Mass Chorus

Singing and Program under the direction of Mme.
Johnnie L. Howard Franklin, National Gospel Singer
of Saint Louis, Mo.

This Program will mark the Debut of
Mildred H. Griffin, Gospel Singer of Des Moines, Iowa

Also appearing will be the Corresponding Secretary of the National
Baptist Home Mission Board, Rev. F. Theo. Lovelace of Chicago



Mrs. Franklin



Each Patron kindly bring Gift or Silver Offering



LOOK! LOOK!



Rev. H. A. Simmons, Evangelist

**The
WAY
TO
Peace**



Rev. L. R. Kinard, Pastor in Charge

REVIVAL

Is now in progress, July 6, 1942, and
will continue until further notice at

Kyles A.M.E. Zion Church
709 So. East 15th Street

The meetings are conducted by Rev. H. A. Simmons, the Gos-
pel Evangelist; Elder A. N. Fox, the Spirit filled Evangelist Singer
and Rev. L. R. Kinard, Pastor in charge

Pastors and members of all denominations
are invited to come and take part in God's Services

For **VICTORY** Let us Seek **CHRIST**

The Poison Pool



**A Dramatic Picture
IN 5 REELS**

Played by Colored Actors

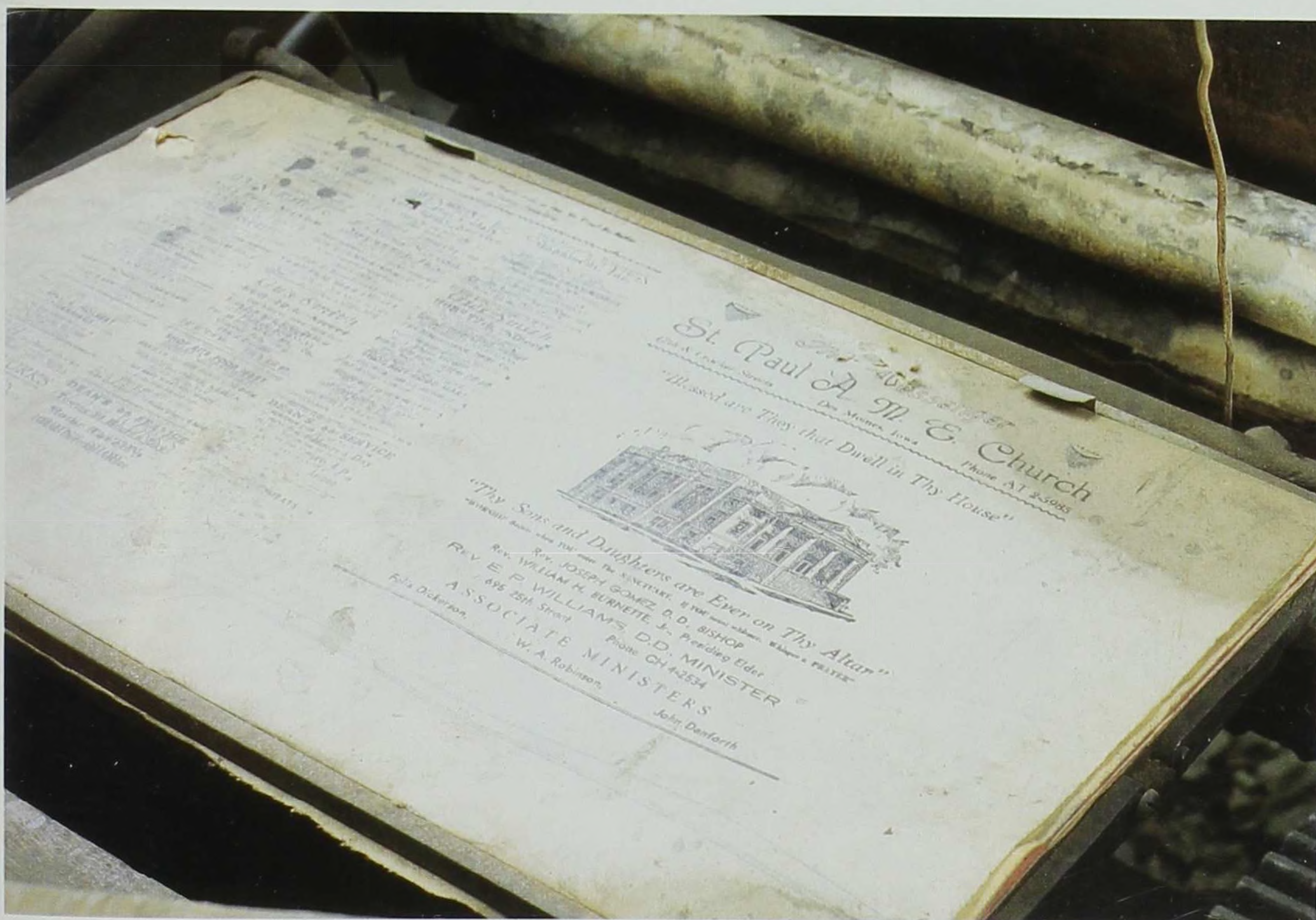
At St. Paul A.M.E. Church

Tues., July 25th, 1922 8:15 P.M.

Auspices of Bell Club

*You can't afford to miss this picture; come see
the good that may come out of this Poison
Pool of the mixture of the races.*

ADMISSION 25 cts.



Patten's print jobs for local black churches help document the special events and the everyday activities of African-American communities. Above: A bulletin from St. Paul's A.M.E. Church in Des Moines is still on one of Patten's presses. As is typical for black communities across the nation, churches were the largest, most influential organizations in black Des Moines, and black clergy and lay leaders assumed strong leadership roles in the community.

Opposite: In 1942, Corinthian Baptist Church brought together national gospel singer Johnnie L. Howard Franklin and local singer Mildred Griffin; and Kyles A.M.E. Zion, which served the African-American neighborhood on Des Moines's east side, sponsored a peace revival. In 1922, St. Paul A.M.E. Church showed *The Poison Pool*, one of the earliest films featuring an African-American cast. St. Paul A.M.E. and Corinthian Baptist churches are still located near the site of the old Center Street neighborhood.



1943

1949

6th Annual Meeting 1st District of the Iowa Association of Colored Women **VILKIE HOUSE**

907 15th Street
 Des Moines, Iowa

November 11, 1949

George Jackson, Chairman
 Alberta Frazier, Secretary

NOON SESSION

Delegates

..... Mrs. Emma Evans
 .. State Officers and Clubs

Committees

Mrs. Inez Willis,
 nt of I. A. of C. W.
 f Officers

15 P.M.

siding

Emma Evans

Boulware,
 ctivity Director
 Des Moines Y.W.C.A.

..... Miss Vera Douglas
 ate and National Officers
 Adjournment

To a Friend, Your **Photograph** has more personal significance than any gift you can make. ☞ The family, too, will welcome a New Portrait. ☞ Make an **Appointment today** ☞ ☞

CLAUDE FRYE, Photographer, 1413 Park Street

For latest Styles in
 Hair Dressing Call

**Polly's
 Beauty Shop**

1108 E. 16th St. Ph. 6-1986

ALWAYS A BARGAIN At

**16th Street
 Grocery**

1601 School Street
 Phone 4-7026
 WE DELIVER

COMPLIMENTS OF

Dr. C. R. Bradford

404 E. 5th St. Ph. 4-3627

Drugs of all Kinds

Higgins Pharmacy

122 Locust St. Ph. 3-9854
 1000 Center St. Ph. 3-9807

**Square Deal
 Tailors & Cleaners**

Mr. Simmons, Prop.
 Work GUARANTEED
 1002 Center St. Ph. 3-9731

For Dressmaking and
 Alterations See or Call

Mrs. John Wilson

1020 16th St. Ph. 4-5893

Wright's Grocery

1001 17th St. Ph. 3-5531

Free Delivery

Dr. W. J. Ritchey

DENTIST

Office Hours
 9-12; 1-5; P. M.
 517 Mulberry Street
 Phone 3-8411

**Phi Chapter
 Delta Sigma Theta Sorority**



PRESENTS THE

SECOND ANNUAL

"JABBERWOCK"

At

Jewish

Community Center

8th and Forest

Left: Black women's organizations enjoyed a long tradition of public service, and those in Des Moines frequented Patten's print shop. This photograph of the Flower Committee for a July 1938 meeting of the Central Association of Colored Women appeared in the *Chicago Defender*, a prominent African-American newspaper. Margaret Patten is in the upper left. In 1935, the Des Moines chapter of Delta Sigma Theta sorority initiated the "Jabberwock," a vaudeville entertainment fund raiser for college scholarships. The sorority remains quite active today.

Right: Patten also secured printing jobs from men's social and service clubs in Center Street, including the Monarchs, to which he belonged and which still functions today. Groups like the Monarchs flourished because discrimination and segregation necessitated the formation of clubs for black members. A few were branches of national organizations, but many had local origins. Functions varied from recreational events to charitable fund raising to calls for community action. The Monarchs' annual minstrel event, advertised here, had begun in 1924. Proceeds benefited a black Boy Scout troop and the black YMCA and YWCA.

Below: Dance programs from Center Street social events rest on Patten's platform stapler.

RETURN PERFORMANCE:-

by Popular Demand

MONARCHS' MINSTRELS

Wed. Nite, November 29, 1939

Curtain 8:30 O'clock

Jewish Community Center

8th Street and Forest Avenue



Adults - 25c



Admission

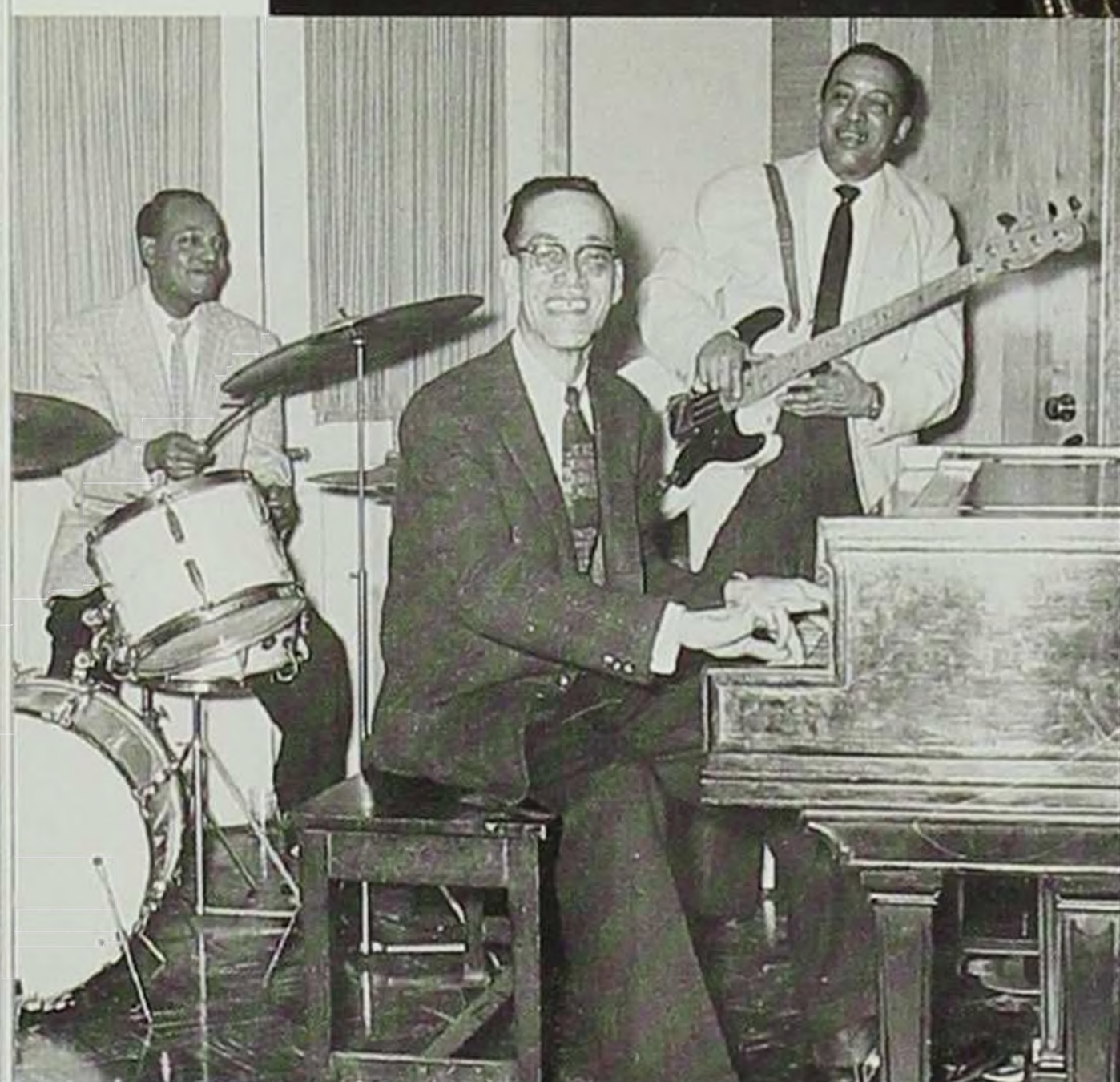


Children - 15c

If you didn't see "The Show" - - Ask Your Neighbor!!

NOTE: People holding Tickets for First Performance will be Admitted upon Presentation of Ticket.





ARMISTICE DANCE

THE HAWKEYE ELKS

Present

Real! Solid! Jive!

Tickets On Sale
Community Pharmacy
and ELKS CLUB

Admission 75c



BILLIEN FALL

2, 1944

MAY Day JUMP ANOTHER BIG JAM SESSION

BILLIKEN

Wednesday, May 1, 1946
Nine O'Clock P. M.

MUSIC BY
★ Spate's 6 Bits of Rhythm
With IRENE

THE LINE-UP

Spate - Irene - Sweet Pea

Gater - Johnson - George

That's the **BAND** you gotta **WATCH!**

Admission - 60 Cents Including Tax

SAXOPHONE LOANED BY EDYTHE GRAY SPATES

Left: Des Moines residents could hear some of the country's finest jazz, be-bop, and blues. Oftentimes nationally famous black musicians performed for a separate white audience first, then put on a late-night performance for black audiences at Center Street spots such as the Billiken Nite Club or the Sepia Supper Club.

Local musicians also filled the bill at the Billiken and the Sepia. Opposite, inset: Ernest "Speck" Redd, the freckled jazz pianist, was a renowned teacher, performer, and radio host. After Redd opted to forgo a national musical career and stay in Des Moines to raise his family, his band played often at the Billiken. Patten printed several posters that advertised his performances. Redd's most famous pupil was young Louis Wertz, who later became Roger Williams.

Rufus M. Spates played this gleaming tenor saxophone with his friends the Gray Brothers and Irene Miles (now spelled Myles).

MIDNITE SHOW

Sat. Sept. 30, 1939 **Billiken** 1200 Center Street
Advance Sale 41c

TICKETS ON SALE
COMMUNITY PHARMACY BILLIKEN NITE CLUB

George Kraska presents

JOSEPHINE BAKER



THE REAL
RAGE
OF
PARIS!

The World's
Greatest Entertainer
in

PRINCESS TAM TAM

A SENSATIONAL MUSICAL FILM!

MIDNIGHT SHOW
JOSEPHINE BAKER IN
"PRINCESS TAM TAM"
BILLIKEN
 1200 CENTER STREET
 Saturday, September 30, 1939
 Also Short Subjects
 Advance Sale 41c

MUSIC - LAUGHTER - THRILLS - HOT SENSUOUS RHYTHM
THAT'S

"PRINCESS TAM TAM"

WITH
JOSEPHINE BAKER



"Josephine Baker is magnificent as 'Princess Tam Tam'."
—LE JOURNAL, Paris
"Josephine Baker is magnificent as 'Princess Tam Tam'."
—LE JOURNAL, Paris
"Josephine Baker is magnificent as 'Princess Tam Tam'."
—LE JOURNAL, Paris
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—LE JOURNAL, Paris
"Josephine Baker is magnificent as 'Princess Tam Tam'."
—LE JOURNAL, Paris

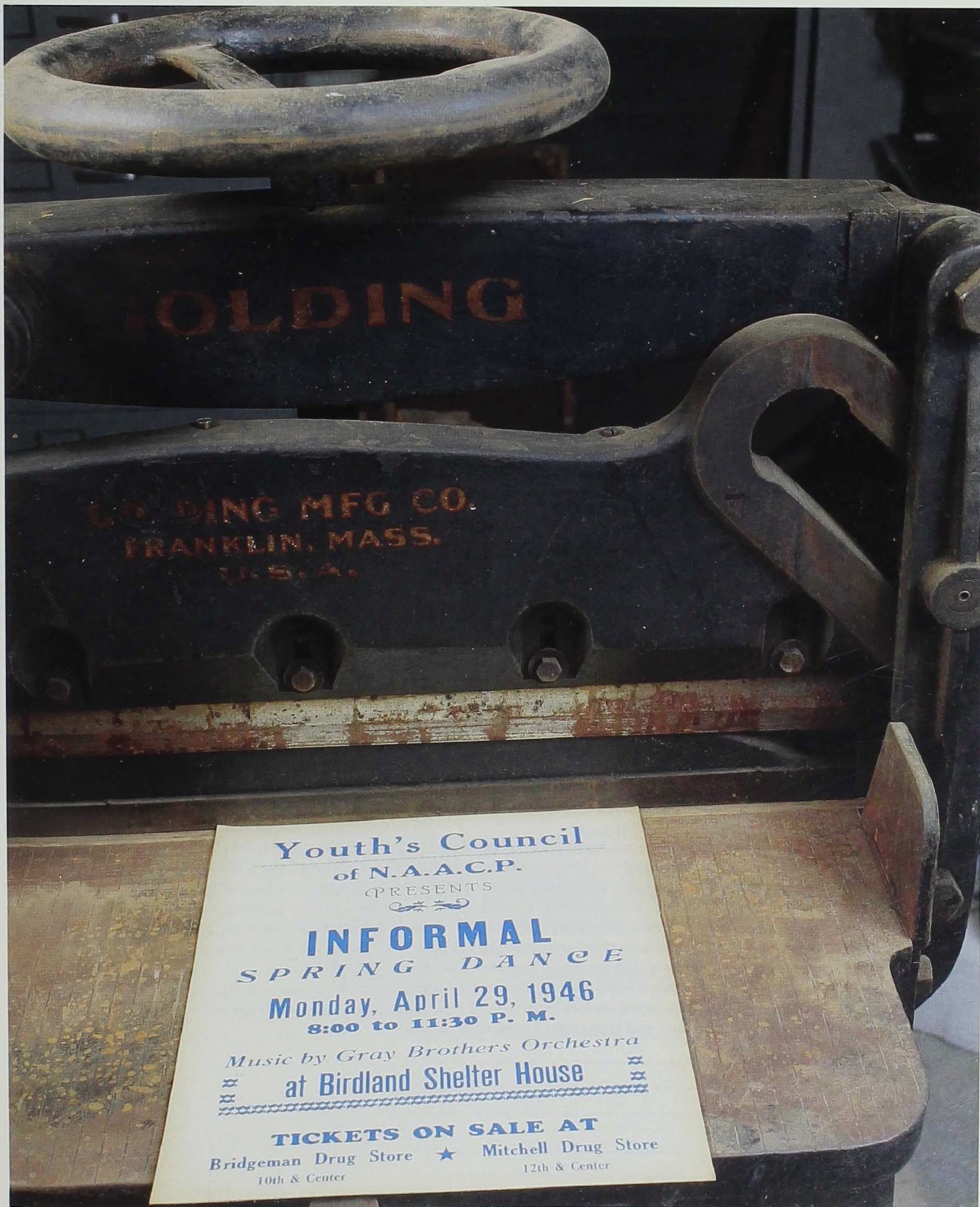
When international blues singer and dancer Josephine Baker appeared in Des Moines for a 1939 showing of her movie *Princess Tam Tam*, Patten printed tickets and local appearance dates on these mass-produced advertisements. Born in St. Louis and later centered in Paris, Baker's colorful life also involved spying against the Nazis in occupied France, adopting 12 international orphans, and becoming a civil rights activist. But she is most remembered for her sensational, albeit controversial, dance performances.

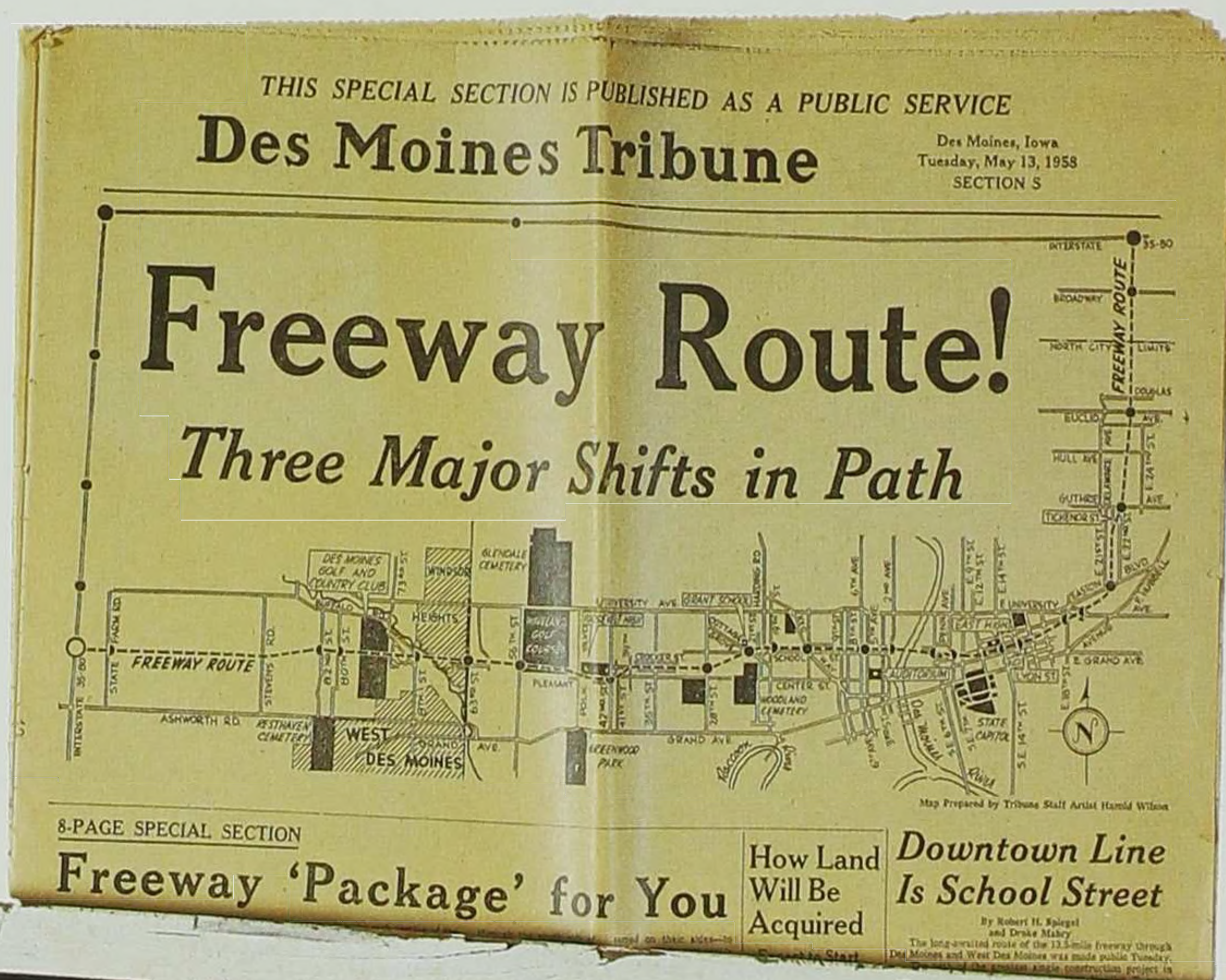


PHOTO COURTESY OF EDYTHE GRAY SPATES

The Gray Brothers Band blazes away at the Sepia Club in the 1940s. Front row, from left: Howard Gray, Wesley Bettis, Rufus Spates, and an unidentified trumpet player. Charles Gaiter plays the bass, and Harold Maupin is on the drums.

Right: Just as the music of local and national musicians filled Center Street night spots, the rhythmic sounds of job presses filled Patten's print shop, as he produced poster after poster for local engagements. Here, a poster from a 1946 performance of the Gray Brothers rests on Patten's printing shop guillotine, used to cut press jobs. The Gray Brothers played at numerous local engagements, including this 1946 spring dance sponsored by the Youth's Council of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The Des Moines chapter of the NAACP, begun in 1915, was one of the first local chapters launched in cities beyond the East Coast.





CENTER ST

SIGN DONATED BY AL "HINKY" BREWER

This street sign once marked the intersection at 12th and Center Streets in Des Moines. Sections of the Center Street neighborhood stood in the path of 1960s urban renewal and the construction of Interstate 235, as forewarned in this 1958 *Des Moines Tribune*. Many Center Street residents and businesses were displaced, and a community that had thrived for decades eroded. The night before the area was closed for demolition, Al "Hinky" Brewer took down this sign as a remembrance of his longtime residence in the neighborhood.

Robert E. Patten, whose Center Street printing presses had churned out thousands of ephemeral announcements of new businesses and hot bargains, family celebrations and late-night blues, died in 1968. ♦