

Modern Schools for the Twenties • Iowa and the *Titanic* • Controversy in 1950s Glenwood
SUMMER 1998 • \$6

Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED



Front Porch

Dear Readers: Our "front porch" is delightfully crowded this issue with several letters regarding the Spring '98 issue. Thanks for writing. It's great to hear from you. —The Editor

Congratulations on the Spring '98 *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*. The pictures are marvelous and the captions are great. I guess I'm old enough to remember some of the sights. Keep up the good work! Each issue is a classic.

Norman Erbe
West Des Moines, Iowa

Thank you for the story and pictures of the William H. Felton collection in the Spring issue. It is true that Mr. Felton's nephew, Donald Nielsen, gave the collection to me, and it is true that I indeed did donate the collection to the State Historical Society of Iowa. However, the truth is that the glass plate negatives would still be collecting dust in my basement had it not been for my daughter, Julie Mangold, who lives in Washington, Iowa. It was she who suggested I donate the entire collection to the State Historical Society. It never occurred to me to do so. She deserves the credit. I am happy the collection of negatives will be forever preserved.

Paul A. Rietz
Belmond, Iowa

Please advise us of the cost for seven copies of the spring issue. What a unique and educational Christmas gift! Grandparents take notice!

Ralph W. Adams
Waucoma, Iowa

Editor's tip: For holiday shopping at its easiest, use the tear-out order cards for gift subscriptions, or call 319-335-3916.

The picture on page 30 is very much how I remember my parents' "Soda Grill" in Garner, Iowa, in the early 1920s. They sold expensive candy (in the case under the cash register), but I preferred getting a penny to buy the good kind at the grocery store nearby. My mother could never understand that.

Norma Jean Stebleton Parry
e-mail correspondence

I found your text and Mr. Felton's photographs of special interest. I grew up on a farm near a small Nebraska town during the 1950s and remember business places that were not much different than some of those pictured. In fact, my first job was "printers' devil" in a newspaper office similar to the one on

page 37. Most of the small-town weeklies were family operations so I wouldn't be at all surprised if the people in the photo are editor, wife, and daughter. Many of the small papers used similar equipment well into the 1970s and I think I could still run a linotype and hand-feed a flat-bed press.

Although I no longer work for that newspaper, *The Laurel* [Nebraska] *Advocate*, I continue to write a weekly history column. Arguments against mail-order shopping and shopping in other towns were advanced many times in the more than 1,800 issues I have read thus far (1839-1929). When U.S. Highway 20 was proposed in the mid-1920s, a number of local merchants argued that people would take their business to Sioux City. The editor of *The Advocate*, always a champion of progress, replied that people from Sioux City might just come to Laurel to shop. Of course, it didn't happen and the large shopping mall that opened in the early 1980s just about finished off the local merchants. Main Street is nearly empty now.

I find it sad to compare the small towns of Mr. Felton's day to those of the present. The small businessmen are largely gone, the schools are consolidated or closed, and the hometown newspapers have folded. I think your suggestion to document life in the '90s is a good one, but I wonder how many of our small towns will exist in 75 years.

Ed Tryon
Sioux City, Iowa

My father, Oscar Floy, and my brother, Paul Willis, remember Emil Jacobsen and his harness shop in Thornton (pages 8-9). My dad used to take my brother there to buy shoes. The smell of neetsfoot oil permeated the air. (It was used to keep the leather supple.) Dad recalls the cob-burning furnace and the "town loafers" who gathered there. The building is now Jack Colburn's garage. Meservey's main street looks about the same as on pages 2-3. (By the way, the best noon meal to be found in northern Iowa is at Donna's in Meservey. Weekdays only.)

Annie Costello
e-mail correspondence

Regarding the jewelry store (pages 46-47): The man behind the counter is my uncle, Leo Nelson. Note that "N.P. Nelson" is still visible above the vault. My grandfather, Nels Peter Nelson, founded Nelson Jewelry Store of Forest City in 1885. His son Leo assumed operation after my grandfather's death in 1915. When Leo died in 1939, his brother Paul took over the business.

Donald K. Nelson
Dubuque, Iowa

Come and converse on our front porch!

Share your thoughts with other readers here on the Front Porch page. Send your letters to Editor, *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*, 402 Iowa Ave., Iowa City, IA 52240-1806. E-mail: gswaim@blue.weeg.uiowa.edu. Fax: 319-335-3935. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

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Let your imagination soar
on a voyage to Iowa's past . . .

Heritage Illustrated

RATED

Winter 1998, Vol. 79, No. 2

"The ill-fated ship": Connections to the *Titanic*

On the night in 1912, three dozen *Titanic* survivors, some with roots in Iowa, others with ties to Iowa—confronted the unthinkable.

By Tryon

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50 Survivors

"The ground": Controversy at Glenwood State School

As someone who "needed to stir things up," Alfred Sasser was a controversial figure during his stormy administration of an institution for mental disabilities.

By Don Hawbaker

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School for the 1920s: Merrell Designs Oskaloosa's Lincoln School

Iowa architect teamed up with the state's universities to create a series of education with a colorful celebration of patriotism. The result is one of Iowa's historic places.

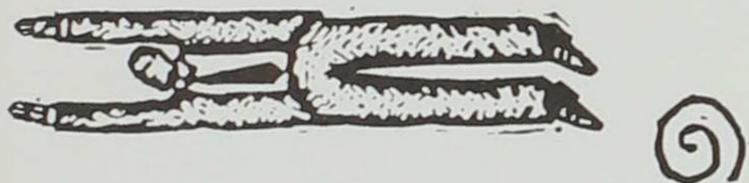
By Dan

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88 Terra cotta tutorial

"The school architecture," Oskaloosa's Lincoln School was dedicated in April 1922. As the Oskaloosa Daily Herald reported, "In a celebration of patriotism, 310 happy pupils in the First ward dedicated the new building that bears the name of the great emancipator as a history lesson, reminding us of what we can do in the 1920s. (Photo by Molly Myers Naumann)"



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Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED

Formerly The Palimpsest

Summer 1998, Vol. 79, No. 2

"Aboard the ill-fated ship": Iowa's connections to the *Titanic*

On an April night in 1912, three dozen *Titanic* passengers—some with roots in Iowa, others with dreams of Iowa—confronted the unthinkable.

by Edward R. Tryon

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50 Survivors

"No middle ground": Change and Controversy at Glenwood State School

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Remembered as someone who "needed to stir things up," Alfred Sasser did just that during his stormy administration of an institution for Iowans with mental disabilities.

by Becky Wilson Hawbaker

A Modern School for the 1920s: Frank Wetherell Designs Oskaloosa's Lincoln School

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In 1922, an Iowa architect teamed up modern theories of education with a colorful terra cotta celebration of patriotism. The story behind one of Iowa's historic places.

by Jean Florman



88 Terra cotta tutorial



62 Hard choices in the Fifties



On the Cover

Trumpeted as "the latest word in school architecture," Oskaloosa's Lincoln School held its opening ceremonies in April 1922. As the Oskaloosa Daily Herald reported, "Pledging life long allegiance to the flag and nation [that] the immortal Abraham Lincoln saved for posterity, 310 happy pupils in the First ward dedicated the new \$75,000 grade school building that bears the name of the great emancipator." Today, Lincoln School still functions as a history lesson, reminding us of what Americans expected of their schools in the 1920s. (Photo by Molly Myers Naumann)

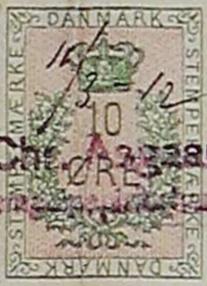
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From Southampton by White Star Line's S: S: *Itania* in Third Class to *New York* and from there

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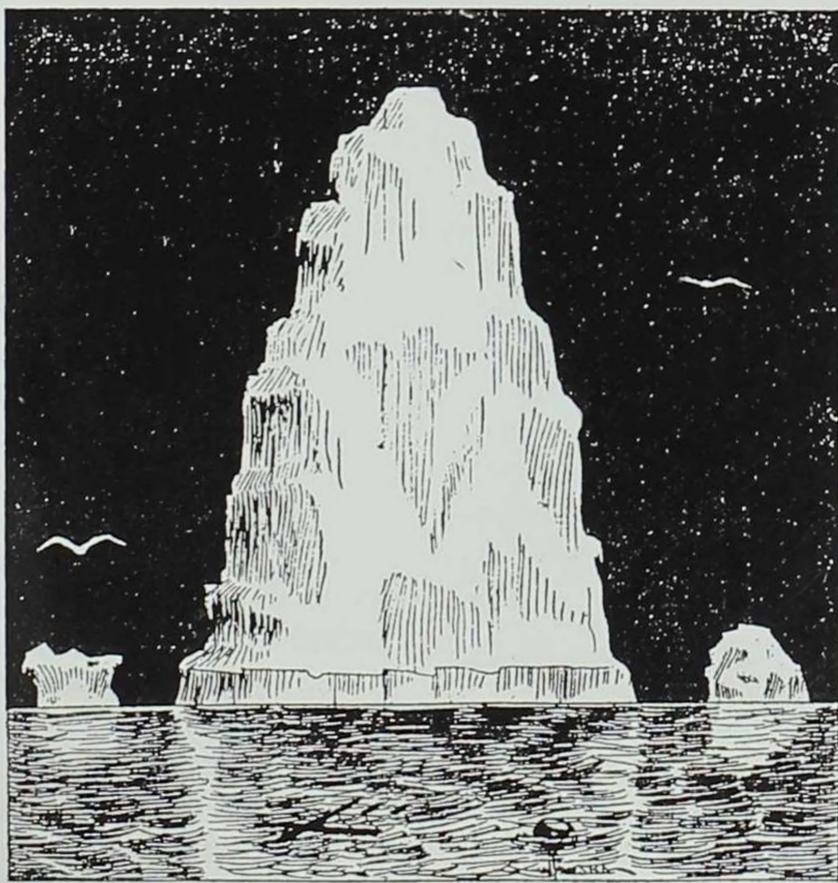
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ill-fated ship'

Iowa's connections to the *Titanic*

by Edward R. Tryon



THE TITANIC MONUMENT.

Grim echoes of a tragedy: the contract for *Titanic* passenger Gunnar Tenglin, headed to Burlington, and an editorial cartoon in the *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, April 17, 1912.

WHEN THE TERRIBLE news of the disaster to the great steamship, the *Titanic*, was read last week," the *Red Oak Express* observed soberly for its readers in Montgomery County, Iowa, "there was little idea that there would be anything of real local interest in the matter. . . . little idea that anyone bound for this county was aboard the ill-fated ship."

Yet in the days following the sinking of the *Titanic* on April 15, 1912, the state's newspapers would report that some three dozen people with Iowa connections had been aboard "the ill-fated ship," the largest and most luxurious ocean liner ever built. Across the nation, the disaster pushed its way into small-town weeklies and big-city dailies.

From the beginning, discrepancies plagued the reporting of

the disaster. As the press picked up the story, eyewitness accounts began to blur, myth-making hijacked facts, and journalism succumbed to story-telling. Now in its 86th year, the story is still riddled with unanswered questions: Who was a hero and who a coward? Who was to blame? Who saved whom? Why did so few steerage passengers survive? And, for whatever it's worth, what was the orchestra's final piece?

The story is also rich in irony. The *Titanic* provided a luxury voyage home for America's nouveau riche, but it also served as basic transportation to the New World for Europe's emigrants. Its wireless telegraphy allowed communication from ship-to-ship or ship-to-shore, but language barriers on board impeded communication between steerage passengers and crew. And the ship that was considered "unsinkable" did, indeed, sink.

Over the decades, social critics have framed the disaster as a cautionary tale, finding in it various morals for 20th-century society—the error of pride; the fallibility of technology; the redemption of the leisure class through heroic self-sacrifice.

Certainly the disaster touched the lives of America's leisure class. Billed as the social event of the season, the *Titanic's* first voyage had attracted many of the brightest and wealthiest stars of the Gilded Age. Among the 337 First Class passengers was a millionaire who had made much of his fortune in Iowa—Walter D. Douglas.

Born in Waterloo, Douglas had amassed substantial wealth in Cedar Rapids—including a one-third interest in Quaker Oats and partnership in Douglas & Co. starchworks—before moving to Minneapolis in 1905 and expanding his fortune there. Now 51 and retired, Douglas and his wife, Mahala (a Cedar Rapids native), had decided to return from a three-month tour of Europe on the *Titanic*, the White Star Line's newest floating palace. "It was the last word in luxury," Mahala Douglas said later, describing the ship's elegant dinner parties. "The women in their beautiful shimmering gowns . . . the men immaculate and well-groomed. The food was superb: caviar, lobster, quail from Egypt, plover's eggs, and hot-house grapes and fresh peaches."

But the *Titanic* disaster also touched the lives of ordinary Iowans: a coal miner in Appanoose County who could finally afford to send for his family in France; three Greek immigrants who had been promised jobs in Mason City. In Burlington, friends and family awaited Gunnar Tenglin's return on the *Titanic*; in Central City, Bertha Lehmann; in Stanton,

Ernest and Sigrid Danbom. Culled from Iowa newspapers of April 1912 and pieced together here, their stories are compelling reminders that the past comprises an immeasurable number of individual experiences and interpretations. And, like all historic events, the *Titanic* disaster had endless levels of impact on ordinary people—even in Iowa, some 2,000 miles from an iceberg off the coast of Newfoundland.

AMID GREAT FANFARE, the *Titanic* had begun its first voyage well prepared. Coal filled the bunkers—some 650 tons a day for the ship's 162 furnaces. Provisions lined the galleys—40 tons of potatoes; 7,000 heads of lettuce; 40,000 eggs. Twenty lifeboats stood ready—enough for 1,176 people

Granted, the lifeboats would hold only half of *Titanic's* 2,223 passengers and crew members, but the number of boats complied with, and actually exceeded, British regulations. And even though the regulation dated from an era of ships only a quarter the size of White Star Line's trio of enormous liners (the *Olympic*, *Titanic*, and the proposed *Gigantic*), it hardly mattered. Hadn't the respected British journal *Shipbuilder* described White Star's trio as "practically unsinkable"?

Now on the *Titanic's* third day out, all was proceeding as planned—the Sunday morning ritual of the captain's inspection, followed by a prayer service, and then an afternoon luncheon. Fair weather continued to grace the voyage. But towards evening, as the *Titanic* entered the iceberg region, the weather turned unseasonably cold. Although several ice warnings had been received throughout the day and into the evening, Captain Edward J. Smith continued to push the ship through the darkness at speeds above 21 knots.

Then, shortly before midnight, one of the lookouts spotted a massive object directly in *Titanic's* path. Instinctively, he sounded the ship's warning bell, then picked up the telephone and informed the bridge: "Iceberg right ahead!"

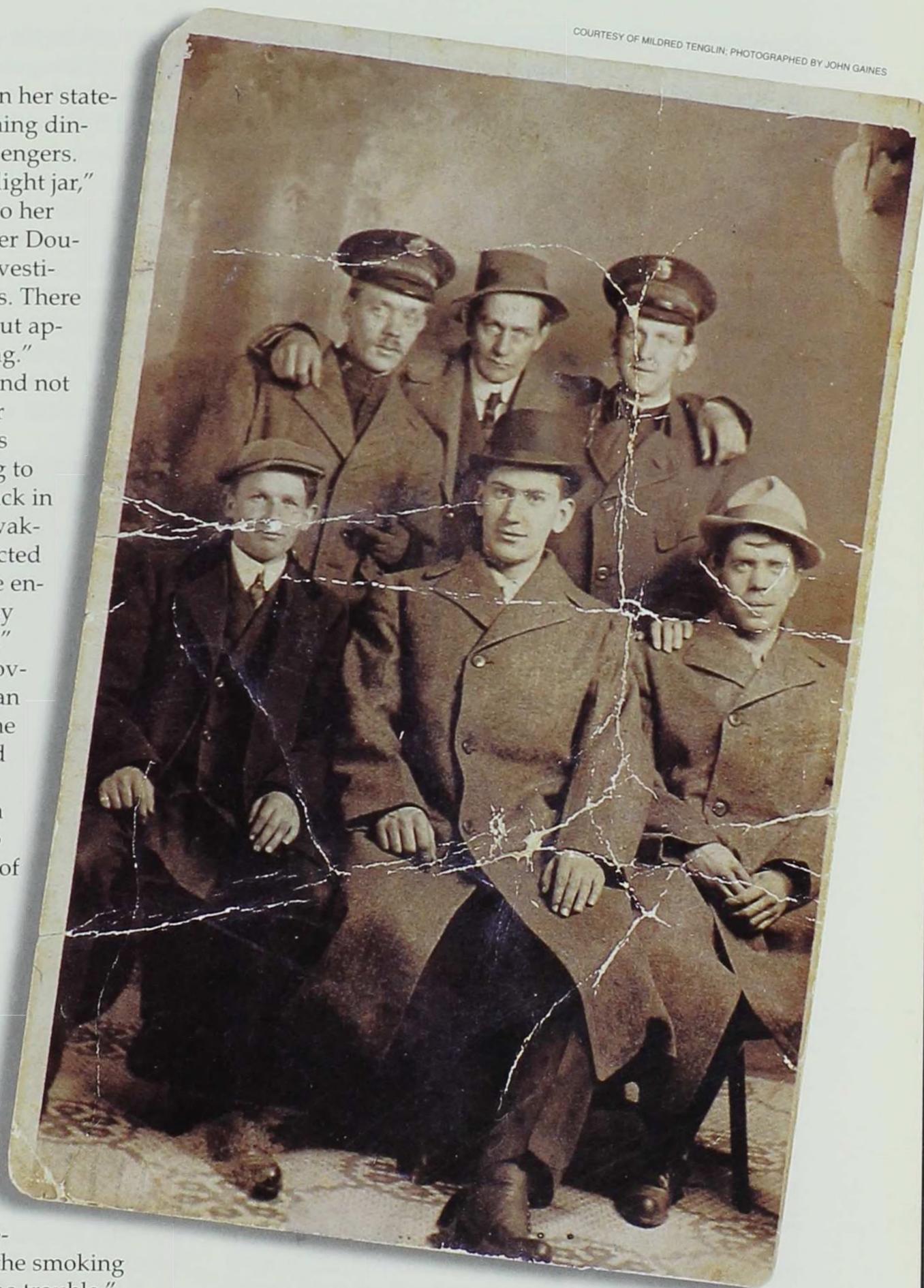
Immediately the quartermaster threw the wheel "hard-a-starboard" as the first officer slammed the lever of the engine-room telegraph into "full-speed astern." But a ship the length of four city blocks and weighing some 90 million pounds could neither turn on a dime nor stop in less than half a mile. Moments later the *Titanic* sideswiped a huge iceberg. The time was 11:46 p.m.

MAHALA DOUGLAS was in her state-room after a particularly lavish evening dinner party with other First Class passengers. Now preparing for bed, she felt a "slight jar," as she later described it, and called to her husband in an adjoining room. Walter Douglas dressed, went out on deck to investigate, and returned in a few moments. There had been a collision, he explained, but apparently it had "amounted to nothing."

On a lower deck, near the bow and not far from the point of impact, Gunnar Tenglin was asleep in his Third Class cabin. The 25-year-old was returning to Burlington, Iowa, after four years back in his homeland of Sweden. He was awakened by the collision, but what attracted his attention was the stoppage of the engines. "I put on all my clothes but my shoes and went to the forward deck," Tenglin recounted. "The deck was covered with particles of ice. We asked an officer if there was any danger and he said, 'No, go back to your berths and go to sleep.'"

Near the stern, Albert and Sylvia Caldwell and their baby were asleep in their Second Class cabin. Months of overseas travel had meant that neither their friends in Cedar Rapids and Burlington, nor their family across the Mississippi in Biggsville, Illinois, had met the couple's ten-month-old son, Alden—but they would soon. The Caldwells slept through the collision but were awakened by the sudden absence of noise. "The silence was ominous," Albert Caldwell remembered. "I slipped my coat over my pajamas and stepped out of the state-room. A steward was sweeping out the smoking room and I asked him the cause of the trouble." "Hit an iceberg," he had replied. Reassured by the steward's apparent lack of concern, Caldwell returned to his family and dozed off.

Seventeen-year-old Bertha Lehmann did not awaken until she heard excited voices and footsteps in the hall outside her Second Class cabin. Traveling from Berne, Switzerland, to relatives living near



COURTESY OF MILDRED TENGLIN; PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOHN GAINES

Gunnar Tenglin (extreme right) and five other *Titanic* passengers, photographed in New York City.

Central City, Iowa, Lehmann thought the *Titanic* must have already reached New York. She got out of bed, dressed, and waited for the ship to dock.

THE COLLISION had been only a glancing blow. There was no great gash in the starboard side—only some bent plates, split seams, and popped rivets in an area about 12 square feet, according to later estimates. Nevertheless, water began pouring into the forward holds, rising seven feet in seven minutes.

Captain Smith ordered the wireless operator to send out a distress call and the crew to prepare the lifeboats, but to avoid panic he decided not to sound a general alarm. Instead, stewards began knocking on doors, advising passengers to put on life jackets and to assemble on the upper decks. The time was just after midnight—12:05 on Monday, April 15.

In her stateroom, Mahala Douglas slipped a heavy coat over her kimono and accompanied her husband to the upper deck. "There was not the least commotion," she recalled, "and even when the lifeboats began to be lowered most of the passengers took it lightly." She heard a shipboard acquaintance turn to his wife and say: "You go out there in the water and play around a little while, you will be back here in a few minutes."

Publicity about the "unsinkable" *Titanic* had bred great confidence in its ability to remain afloat. Now despite the collision, there seemed to be little urgency or need to board the 16 wooden lifeboats or 4 canvas-sided collapsible boats. Many passengers were reluctant to leave the warmth and safety of an "unsinkable" ship for a lifeboat that wasn't.

To compound this reluctance, some passengers were still in their cabins, gathering a few belongings (a partly read novel perhaps, or a muff or a compass);

others refused to part with spouses, or were uncertain of procedures and exits. Certain crew members were slow to mobilize; others feared that a fully loaded lifeboat would buckle and break, or planned to add more passengers as the boat passed by lower decks or reached the water. Later, when distress rockets lit up the sky and the pitch of the deck increased, passengers would mob the lifeboats. But now, some of the first boats were lowered only half full.

Lifeboat 8 had room for 65 people but only 28 boarded it. One was Mimi [Stauffer] Kenyon, a Connecticut woman whose roots lay in Fremont County, Iowa. (Her father had been a newspaper editor in Sidney, and her widowed mother lived in Hamburg.)

Now it was Mimi's turn to board. Her husband, Fred, helped her into the boat, kissed her, and stepped back.

COURTESY OF BRUCEMORE (CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA)



Walter Douglas, about 1912.

RESPONDING to a rap on their door, Albert and Sylvia Caldwell woke again. "I was not a particle uneasy," Albert remembered. "In fact, [I] was somewhat annoyed as I fully believed the boat would float for days or weeks before it sank." Nevertheless, they dressed warmly, wrapped baby Alden in a steamer rug, and proceeded to the top deck. Rerouted first to one deck and then another, they arrived at Boat 13 just as someone shouted, "Lower away." The baby

was handed to a woman in the stern, Sylvia took a seat near the center, and Albert and several crew members scrambled in.

Tilting first to one end, and then to the other, Boat 13 jerked its way down the 70 feet to the sea. It landed just short of a torrent of water spewing from boiler room pumps. As the lifeboat crew struggled to release the lines, the force of the discharge was pushing the boat directly under Boat 15, now being lowered. Boat 15's five and a half tons were about to drop squarely onto Boat 13. "We shouted to the men above

to stop lowering the boat," Albert Caldwell reported later. "They comprehended our warning, but not until the boat was so low that we could reach up and touch the bottom with our hands." With seconds to spare, the lines were cut and Boat 13 moved out of the way.

Amidst the 70 passengers on Boat 15 was a trio of professional gamblers who had jumped in at the last moment. Identified as Harry Homer, Harry Romaine, and "Boy" Bradley, the men specialized in separating wealthy passengers from their cash on fast transatlantic liners. Bradley, in fact, was wanted for questioning about a swindling operation in Council Bluffs. Now crowded into Boat 15, the three gamblers were taking, as the newspapers put it, their "last turn of the cards of fate."

The shouts of passengers and crew would have meant little to Bertha Lehmann, who spoke French but not English and was traveling alone. But earlier on the voyage, she had struck up an acquaintance with a musician from the ship's orchestra. They had shared an occasional dance and once he had escorted her back to her cabin. Now the French musician arrived to escort her to one of the remaining lifeboats.

As Lehmann's boat was being lowered, up on the top deck, port side, Mahala Douglas climbed into Boat 2. She pleaded with her husband to join her, but Walter replied: "You had better get into the boat. It would be safer. We can't tell what may happen." She begged again. He answered: "I can't do it. I would not be a man or a gentleman if I left the Titanic while there was a woman or child on board. It's all right. I'll probably be with you again in a few minutes."

Chivalry and self-sacrifice aside, Walter Douglas probably would not have been allowed in Boat 2 anyway. To Charles Lightoller, the officer in charge of lifeboats on the *Titanic's* port side, "women and children first" meant "women and children *only*." More

rigid than his counterpart on the starboard side, Lightoller not only refused John Jacob Astor's request to join his pregnant 19-year-old wife in Boat 4 but also tried to prevent a 13-year-old boy from joining his mother.

STILL BELIEVING there was no immediate danger, Gunnar Tenglin walked the length of the ship to the Third Class smoking room at the rear. "We tried to get something to drink but the bar was closed," recounted Tenglin's cabinmate, August Wennerstrom.

"Nothing else to do, we got someone to play the piano and started to dance."

"The English, Swedish, Irish and German passengers were the most composed, but the Italians were greatly excited," Tenglin later told reporters. "They were swarming up on the deck in all stages of undress, carrying baggage of every description, crying, praying and wringing their hands. As we were perfectly sure the boat would not sink, their antics seemed amusing to us. In fact we stood around about an hour or more watching them, enjoying what we considered their unnecessary fright." Wennerstrom remarked: "They acted like they were crazy—jumping and calling on their Madonna. We made a circle around them and started a ring dance."

More than one American news story of the disaster would reflect a rising xenophobia toward immigrants from southern and central Europe. In fact, Italians on the *Titanic* were accused (wrongly) of so many cowardly acts that the ambassador of Italy later lodged a protest. Actually, the majority of Italians on the *Titanic* were waiters, not passengers, and very few survived.

There were, however, a number of Bulgarians (an ethnic group perhaps mistaken as Italian by some)



Mahala Douglas, some years before 1912.

COURTESY OF BRUCEMORE (CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA)

who were traveling in Third Class. Most were young, single men, and at least four—Ivan Mineff, Lazar Minkoff, Christo Nenkoff, and Stanko Lyntakoff—were bound for Coon Rapids, Iowa. Three unidentified Greeks were headed for jobs in Mason City, and one Norwegian, Johannes Kalvig, was ticketed to Roland. All went down with the ship.

Third Class passengers would have found access to lifeboats very difficult, as Seaman Joseph Scarrott later testified. Because of the ship's design, the route to the upper decks and the lifeboats was indirect and complicated. And in full compliance with American immigration laws, the steerage exits were guarded or barricaded, a regulation intended to isolate Third Class passengers until they were examined at Ellis Island. Originally designed to stop the spread of disease, the barriers were now stopping steerage passengers from escaping a sinking ship.

FOR MORE THAN AN HOUR after the collision, the *Titanic's* bow settled in the water at an almost imperceptible rate. But now the ship was taking on water at an increasing rate and the slant of the decks was growing steeper. Gunnar Tenglin and cabinmate Wennerstrom could feel the ship sinking beneath their feet.

By 2 a.m., only a few lifeboats remained. Officer Lightoller was attempting to fill Collapsible D with women and children. To prevent men from rushing the lifeboat, he enlisted crew members and a few passengers to link arms around it. Shortly before Collapsible D was lowered at 2:05, a man passed two children through the circle of arms and into the boat.

About ten minutes later, the bow of the *Titanic* lurched downward, lifting the stern out of the water. Those still onboard stampeded up the steep incline. From her lifeboat Bertha Lehmann watched people jump from the stern. "It was a nightmare," she said, "the screaming, the calling. . . . the ones that were left behind." Crew members were making a last-ditch effort to launch Collapsible A when it was swept off the deck with Tenglin clinging to the side.

As the ship split apart between the third and fourth funnels, the bow slipped beneath the surface and the stern settled briefly to a near-even keel. Then, as water filled the front of the stern, the aft section raised out of the water.

From Boat 13 a half-mile away, Albert Caldwell watched the drama unfolding before his eyes: "One

by one the rows of lights from the portholes disappeared as the boat sank lower and lower in the water. About five minutes after all the lights went out, there was a muffled explosion. . . . The stern of the boat reared high in the air into an almost perpendicular position and then dove from sight forever."

The time was 2:20 a.m. Ten-month-old Alden Caldwell had slept through the whole thing.

NOW, AS THE *TITANIC* PLUNGED two miles to the ocean's bottom, some 1,500 people struggled for their lives in the bone-chilling waters. Gunnar Tenglin and two dozen others hauled themselves aboard Collapsible A. "When the ship went down there was a tremendous shrieking and groaning," he said. "It was awful and continued for some time, but we were having our own troubles and did not pay much attention.

"There must have been fully 150 people swimming around or clinging to the boat," he continued. "It meant the death of us all should they have swamped our raft by overloading it. There was no way to sit down in the boat and we stood knee deep in ice-cold water while those on the edges pushed the frantic people in the water back to their fates, it being feared they would doom us all."

The water temperature that night was 28 degrees, and the victims' cries were soon stilled. Bodies floated on the waves as if, said Tenglin, "the ocean were carpeted with the dead."

Adrift in 20 small boats, the 705 *Titanic* survivors were a thousand miles from land with no food, no water, and no knowledge if help was on the way. In Boat 2, Mahala Douglas lay on her back holding a long pole topped by a signal lantern. When the oil was gone, she stood at the tiller as Officer Joseph Boxhall fired off green flares, one by one.

Meanwhile, the Cunard liner *Carpathia* had picked up the *Titanic's* distress call and was steaming to the rescue. Fifty-eight miles separated the rescuers from the survivors, and the *Carpathia* was a 13-knot ship. But by cutting off cabin heat and forcing every ounce of steam through the engines, Captain Arthur H. Rostron pushed the ship to 17 knots and covered the distance in three and a half hours. A flare was sighted and Captain Rostron steered directly for it. At 4:10 a.m., the *Carpathia* pulled alongside Boat 2. Mahala Douglas and the others struggled aboard.

As dawn broke on that Monday morning and the

lifeboats were emptied one by one, survivors held out hope for missing family members. Carrie Toogood Chaffee (a native of Manchester, Iowa) had not yet found her husband, Herbert, but prayed that "he is somewhere, alive," certain that "there are some prayers that will be answered."

Meanwhile, Mahala Douglas was searching desperately for Walter. Some survivors reported that they had seen him helping load lifeboats; her maid was certain she had seen him in one of the collapsibles. But by 9 a.m., all lifeboats had been picked up and all survivors accounted for.

Mahala Douglas stood at the rail and stared at the ocean, realizing for the first time that she was a widow. Indeed, the *Carpathia* was a ship of widows. "Such an outburst of grief," Albert Caldwell later remarked, "I hope it may never again be our lot to witness."

AS THE *CARPATHIA* STEAMED towards New York that Monday, incomplete survivor lists and conflicting reports spread across the nation and into Iowa communities. "The news of Titanic's disaster came at noon while we were at luncheon," Irene Douglas (wife of Walter's brother George) wrote in her journal in their elegant Bruce more mansion in Cedar Rapids. "Did not seem serious until evening about

7:30—spent the evening at the Republican office."

A morning paper, the *Cedar Rapids Republican* would not appear on the streets for hours, but conflicting press dispatches had already filled the front page of Monday's *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*. A dispatch from Montreal reported: "All passengers are safe and Titanic taken in tow." From Halifax: "Titanic reported sinking." From the White Star Line: "The boat is absolutely unsinkable. . . . We are extremely sorry for the annoyance and inconvenience of our passengers."

But any remaining hopes were blasted by the *Republican's* Tuesday morning headline: "1234 PROBABLY DROWNED AS TITANIC SANK." Irene Douglas spent the morning "frantically answering telephones and telegrams."

Also awaiting news of her "Uncle Walter and Aunt Mahala" was 15-year-old Margaret Douglas. "At noon Mother & Daddy decided to go to N.Y.," she wrote in her diary that day, and on Thursday: "Got up early and read the news about Titanic. Everybody telephoned if we had gotten any news yet."

When the *Carpathia* docked that night in New York, among the 40,000 waiting in the cold rain were Mahala's sister and George and Irene Douglas. Mahala told them simply: "Walter did not come with me."

In the privacy of a New York hotel room, Mahala would recount the disaster to her family; later, before a U.S. Senate investigating committee, she would pillory White Star Line and its managing director J.

[Twenty years after witnessing the sinking from Lifeboat 2, Mahala Douglas published a collection of her stories and poems. This poem appears on the final page of her book.]

Titanic

The sea velvet-smooth, blue-black,
The sky set thick with stars unbelievably brilliant.
The horizon a clean-cut circle.
The air motionless, cold—cold as death.
Boundless space.
A small boat waiting, waiting in this vast stillness,
 Waiting heart-breakingly.
In the offing a vast ship, light streaming from her portholes.
Her prow on an incline.
Darkness comes to her suddenly.
The huge black bulk stands out in silhouette against the star-lit sky.

Silently the prow sinks deeper,
As if some Titan's hand,
Inexorable as Fate,
Were drawing the great ship down to her death.

Slowly, slowly, with hardly a ripple
Of that velvet sea,
She sinks out of sight.

Then that vast emptiness
Was suddenly rent
With a terrifying sound.

It rose like a column of heavy smoke.

It was so strong, so imploring, so insistent
One thought it would even reach
The throne of grace on high.

Slowly it lost its force,
Thinned to a tiny wisp of sound,
Then to a pitiful whisper. . . .
Silence.

Bruce Ismay. But there on the dock, George and Irene Douglas had already heard what they had most dreaded.

COAL MINER Francois ("Frank") Lefebre was in disbelief. Working in Mystic, Iowa, Lefebre had slowly hoarded his miner's wages until at last he had saved enough to bring his wife and four young children from France. He learned of the disaster from friends. "It is not so, what you tell me," he insisted. "In the letter my wife says they come to me on the *Titanic*."

Then Lefebre learned of two unidentified French children who had arrived on the *Carpathia*. These were the two boys who had been thrust into Collapsible D at the last moment. Dubbed the "Titanic Waifs," they had become an international news story. Certain they were his, Lefebre set out for New York.

Meanwhile, a woman in France saw the waifs' picture in the newspaper. She alerted authorities that her husband, Michel Navratil, had kidnapped their two boys pending a divorce. (Aboard the *Titanic*, Navratil had used the alias "Hoffman," and had told Bertha Lehmann, who had babysat on the ship for his sons, that he was a widower.)

Frank Lefebre had gotten as far as Chicago when he found out that the boys' real parent was on her way to New York. Steamship officials convinced the

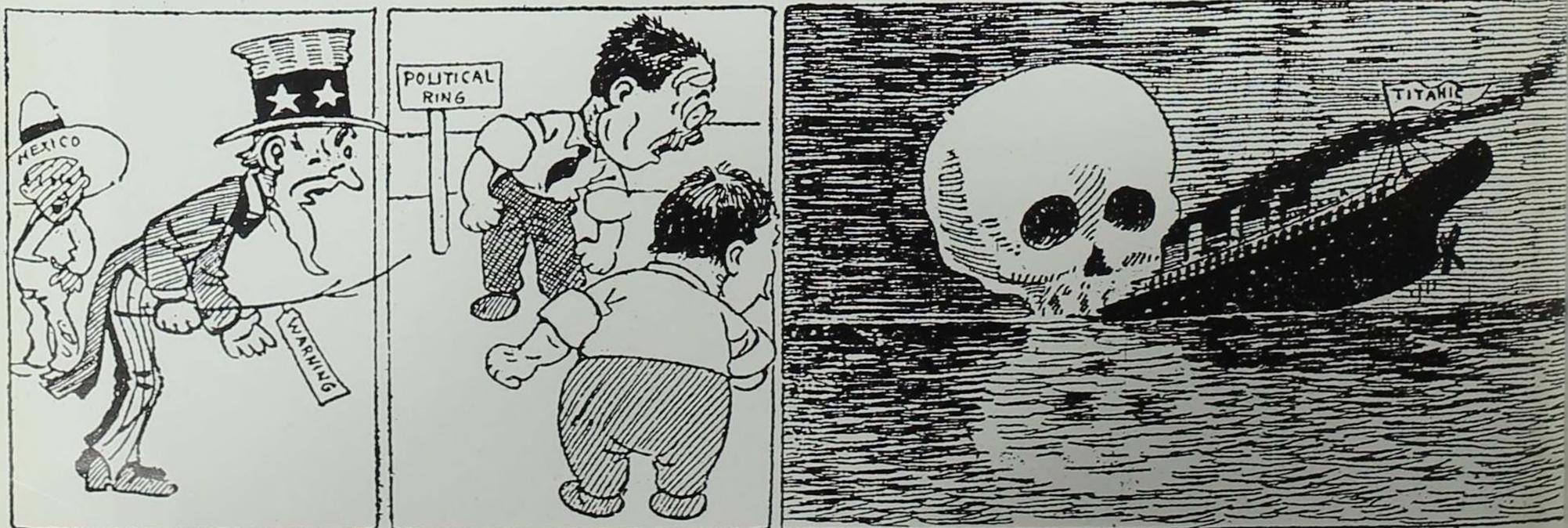
Mystic coal miner that his entire family had been lost. In grief, he returned to Iowa.

Other Iowans also were desperate for confirmation of survivors. In Des Moines, friends of Ernest Tomlin had just received a letter from the 22-year-old British student, who had been caring for his ailing father. He was returning on the *Titanic*, Tomlin wrote, and would resume his theology studies at Drake University. The letter arrived the day after the disaster. In shock, his friends wired White Star's New York office for information but received no answer. Five days later a telegram finally arrived in Des Moines: Tomlin, too, had gone down with the ship.

In Red Oak, Emily Peters awaited news of her niece and nephew, Dagmar and Kurt Bryhl. Against her parents' wishes, Dagmar and her fiancé, Ingvar Hagstrom, had left Sweden to start a new life in the United States. Her brother Kurt had also decided to emigrate, as had Konrad Hagstrom. All had tickets on the *Titanic*. Now the details filtered into Red Oak: only Dagmar had survived.

A DAY OR SO AFTER THE SINKING, August Schmalenberg stood on the deck of the German liner *Bremen* and saw before him a sea strewn with bodies. The shoe manufacturer had not anticipated such a gruesome sight on his trip to visit his brother in Hawkeye, Iowa. *Bremen* passengers

THE GAZETTE CARTOONIST REVIEWS THE LEADING EVENTS



counted more than a hundred bodies, some in chilling tableaux: a man in evening dress lying on a door, several clinging to steamer chairs, two locked in a death embrace, a woman floating on the surface, her nightgown billowing in the breeze. Later in Cedar Rapids, Schmalenberg would tell a German translator how there hadn't been "a dry eye on the ship," how some passengers had become hysterical as the *Bremen* passed through the *Titanic's* debris field.

Perhaps those aboard the *Mackay-Bennett* were more prepared for the sight. With a volunteer crew and 40 funeral directors aboard, the cable-ship was on its way from Halifax, Nova Scotia, towards what newspapers were calling "the graveyard of the Atlantic." Picking up the *Bremen's* message that bodies and wreckage had been sighted some 30 miles northeast of the *Titanic's* last known position, the ship charted its course accordingly and arrived Saturday night, April 20.

Recovery work began the next morning. As each body was pulled from the sea, it was examined, assigned a number, and identified if possible. Personal effects were inventoried and numbered. Over the next five days, 306 bodies were recovered—a fifth of the total number of victims.

On the third day, the body of First Class passenger Walter Douglas was recovered and a telegram dispatched: "DOUGLAS HAS BEEN EMBALMED." The *Mackay-Bennett* had left Halifax with only enough embalming fluid for 70 bodies and 100 coffins. These were allotted not by "first come, first served," but



COURTESY OF STANTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY (STANTON, IOWA)

Ernest and Sigrid Danbom, and their son, Gilbert.

rather "First Class, first served." Although many bodies were packed in ice, and a hundred or more weighted and buried at sea, "no prominent man was recommitted to the deep," Captain F. H. Lardner would explain, because "it seemed best to bring back the dead where the death might give rise to questions of large inheritance." Thus the class distinctions that had existed in life were maintained in death.

Among the Third Class passengers identified was Ernest Danbom of Stanton, Iowa. After an 18-month wedding trip to Sweden, Ernest and Sigrid Danbom had been returning to Iowa with five-month-old

News of the *Titanic* dominated Iowa's newspapers in mid-April 1912. An editorial cartoon from the *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette* on April 20 conveys how a nation in shock turned its attention away from these major events:

- The previous week, the Taft administration had vowed to protect American lives and property amidst the Mexican Revolution and had sent stern warnings to the Mexican government and rebel leaders.
- Theodore Roosevelt's challenge of Taft for the Republican nomination was gaining momentum, but that news also took a back seat to the *Titanic* story.
- The U.S. Congress now shifted its focus from legislation to investigation of the tragedy.
- Cedar Rapids was caught up in the glory of hosting the upcoming state Republican Party convention. Now a full-page story about local preparations for the event was bumped to page 11, as *Titanic* news washed over the pages.

EVENTS OF THE WEEK



Gilbert and six Swedish relatives—Alfrida and Anders Andersson and their children. All nine perished.

Of the nine, only the body of Ernest Danbom was hauled from the sea and identified. The inventory of his personal effects included a gold watch, an opal and ruby ring, a bracelet, a woman's watch, a diamond ring, a substantial amount of cash, gold coin, and a check for \$1,315.79 drawn on the Security National Bank of Sioux City, Iowa. Seventy-five years later that inventory prompted speculation: "Was E. Gilbert Danbom a real name?" asked author Michael Davie in *Titanic: The Death and Life of a Legend* (1987). Davie thought Danbom was carrying too much money for someone in Third Class, and conjectured that he might have been either a jewel thief or a professional gambler. He was neither.

A better question might have been why only 25 percent of Third Class passengers survived—compared to 43 percent of Second Class, and 60 percent of First Class. (Of the crew, 23 percent survived.) Two investigations found no discrimination in loading the boats and attributed the disproportionate loss of life to the fact that most Third Class passengers could not speak English and presumably could not understand directions. The theory does not hold for the Danboms. Ernest Danbom had been born and raised in Iowa, and both he and his wife understood English.

BY THE CLOSE of the American and British investigations in mid-summer, *Titanic's* victims had been laid to rest and the survivors had left New York.

The body of Walter Douglas was interred in the family mausoleum in a Cedar Rapids cemetery; Mahala waited three years before returning to their palatial Minnesota house on Lake Minnetonka.

Gunnar Tenglin posed with other survivors for a picture postcard that he later sent to his mother in Sweden, assuring her of his safety. The Salvation Army and other New York relief agencies provided assistance—\$40, a suit of clothes, and a railroad ticket to Burlington, Iowa, where he said he intended to remain.

Albert and Sylvia Caldwell boarded a train for Biggsville, Illinois, where they were welcomed home by friends and family, and interviewed extensively by the *Burlington Gazette*. Baby Alden met his grandparents for the first time.

Bertha Lehmann continued on to her sister's home near Central City, Iowa. Months later she became a bride, and, in 1918, a war widow.

Coal miner Frank Lefebre was left near penniless. Having spent his savings on *Titanic* tickets for his family, he applied for Red Cross aid. Immigration officials subsequently discovered that he had entered the country illegally, and he was deported.

En route to North Dakota, and dressed in the same clothes she had worn when she climbed into a lifeboat, Carrie Toogood Chaffee stopped in Minnesota to see her new grandchild. Unwilling to accept her husband's death, she told reporters: "I simply cannot lose hope." Chaffee still had ties to Manchester, Iowa, her childhood home, and there the local newspaper soon announced: "She alone survives."

Grief-stricken over the loss of her fiancé and brother, Dagmar Bryhl decided against proceeding to

NOTE ON SOURCES

Iowa newspaper accounts from April and May 1912 form the basis of this article; the author searched newspapers from these towns: Boone, Burlington, Cedar Rapids, Centerville, Charles City, Coon Rapids, Davenport, Des Moines, Manchester, Mason City, Ottumwa, Red Oak, Roland, Sioux City, and Stanton. Follow-up stories on Gunnar Tenglin appeared in the *Keokuk Daily Gate City* (April 13, 1962) and the *Burlington Hawk Eye* (January 2, 1998); and on Bertha Lehmann in the *Brainerd (Minn.) Daily Dispatch* (Dec. 2, 1937) and the *Fort Wayne (Ind.) News Sentinel* (Feb. 14/15, 1998). Internet sources: "An Unforgettable Voyage" by Lehmann's son, Elmer Zimmerman (newsletter home page, 1996); and Tom Fruehling, "Lost, not forgotten," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, *GazetteOnline.com* (posted April 14, 1996). Accounts published in 1912 and thereafter vary considerably on some points; the author weighted the earlier accounts more heavily. The names of those traveling to Red Oak differed slightly in various sources: Bryhl/Bryll; Ingvald/Ingvar; Kirt/Kurt; and Hagland/Hagström.

The author thanks Donald Peterson (Stanton Historical Society) for information on the Danboms; and Tracy Schoenle (SHSI intern) for research on the Douglas story. Douglas diary excerpts and Mahala Douglas's poem appeared in the March 1998 newsletter from Bruce More, a National Trust historic site in Cedar Rapids. For the U.S. investigation, see U.S. 62nd Cong., 2d sess., Senate Report No. 806, May 28, 1912 (also in National Archives Microfile M580, Roll 200). Britain's investigation was reported in the *London Times*, May 4, 1912.

Numerous books have been published on the *Titanic*; one of the first was Jay Henry Mowbray's *The Sinking of the Titanic, Memorial Edition* (Harrisburg, PA, 1912), and one of the most famous, Walter Lord's *A Night to Remember* (New York, 1955). For general background and occasional mention of Iowans, both were consulted, as well as: Rick Archbold and Dana McCauley, *Last Dinner on the Titanic* (NY, 1997); Steve Biel, *Down with the Old Canoe: A Cultural History of the Titanic Disaster* (New York, 1996); Daniel Allen Butler, "Unsinkable": *The Full Story of RMS Titanic* (Mechanicsburg, PA, 1998); Michael Davie, *Titanic: The Death and Life of a Legend* (New York, 1987); John P. Eaton and Charles A. Hass, *Titanic, Triumph and Tragedy: A Chronicle in Words and Pictures* (New York, 1986); Robin Gardiner and Dan Van Der Vat, *The Titanic Conspiracy: Cover-ups and Mysteries of the World's Most Famous Sea Disaster* (New York, 1996); Col. Archibald Gracie, *Titanic: A Survivor's Story* (Chicago, 1996; first pub. 1913); Donald Lynch and Ken Marschall, *Titanic: An Illustrated History* (Toronto, 1995); Wyn Craig Wade, *The Titanic: End of a Dream* (New York, 1979); and Jack Winocour, ed., *The Story of the Titanic, as Told by its Survivors* (New York, 1960).

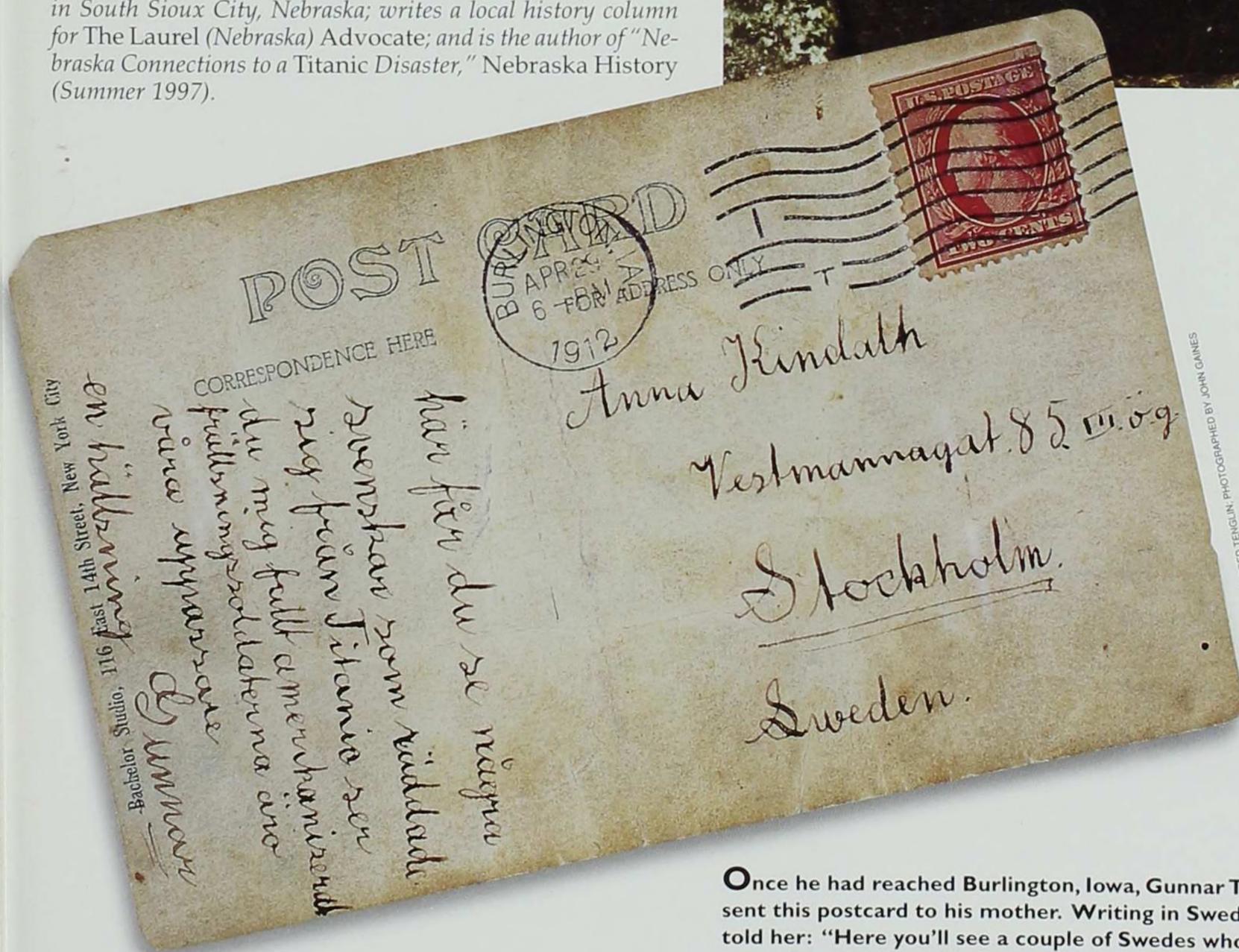
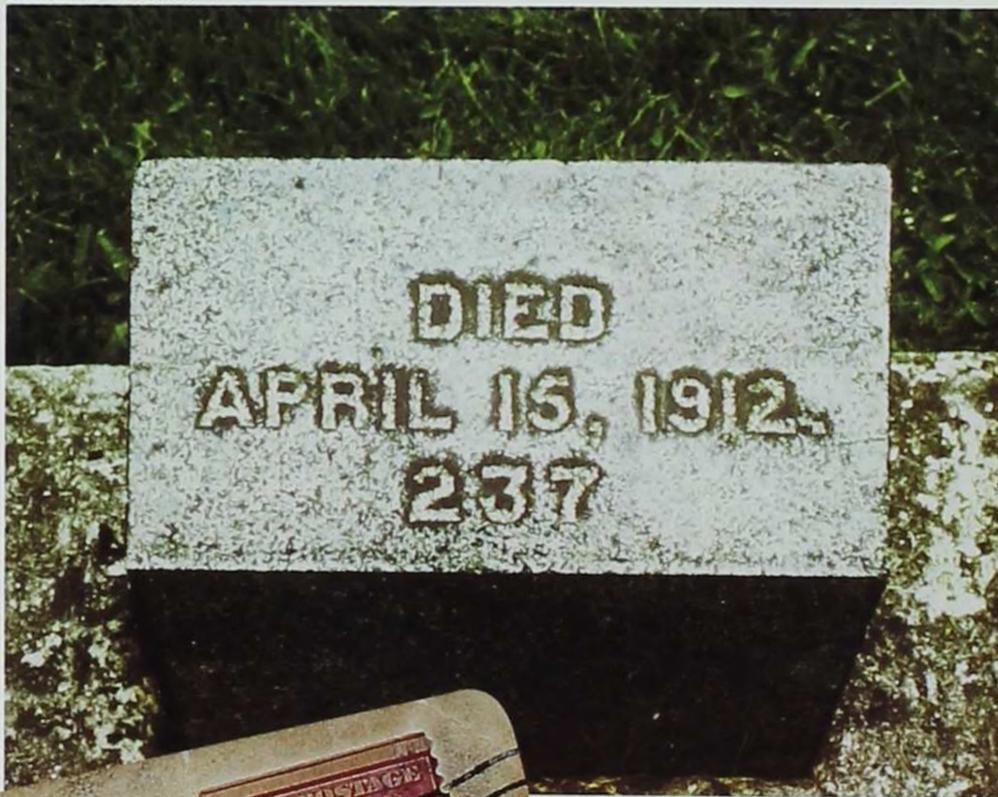
Manuscript annotations are held in Iowa Heritage Illustrated production files (SHSI-Iowa City).

Red Oak for the wedding of her cousin Ebba Peters. Instead, she boarded the White Star liner *Baltic* and returned to Sweden on May 9—the same day the body of Ernest G. Danbom was laid to rest in a Stanton, Iowa, cemetery.

What about Sigrid Danbom, her baby Gilbert, and the other Iowa-bound *Titanic* passengers? Perhaps they are among the thousand or so victims whose bodies were never recovered. Or perhaps, like their stories that lie buried in Iowa newspapers of 1912, they lie unidentified in one of the scores of numbered graves in Halifax, Nova Scotia—far from North Atlantic icebergs, but even farther from Iowa prairies. ❖

The author lives in Sioux City, Iowa. He teaches mathematics in South Sioux City, Nebraska; writes a local history column for The Laurel (Nebraska) Advocate; and is the author of "Nebraska Connections to a Titanic Disaster," Nebraska History (Summer 1997).

COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR



COURTESY OF MILDRED TENGLIN; PHOTOGRAPHED BY JOHN GAINES

Once he had reached Burlington, Iowa, Gunnar Tenglin sent this postcard to his mother. Writing in Swedish, he told her: "Here you'll see a couple of Swedes who were saved from the *Titanic*. Can you see me totally Americanized. The Salvation Army our servants. A greeting from Gunnar." (His photo was on the reverse side; see page 53.) Above: In a cemetery in Halifax, Nova Scotia, scores of simple stones dated "April 15, 1912" mark the graves of unidentified victims of the *Titanic*.





Looking back to the 1950s, how should we picture Iowa's institutions for those with mental and physical disabilities? Photographs show solid buildings amidst tidy grounds, uniformed staff helping contented residents. Others—like this view of peeling paint and torn curtains at Independence Mental Health Institute in 1959—reveal a darker side. From today's vantage point, we see both truths: how far we had advanced as a compassionate, informed, and just society, and how much farther we still had to go. Though often billed as a decade of complacency, the 1950s witnessed the birth of sweeping changes in understanding and caring for those with mental retardation, changes that have brought us to where we are today. Here's part of that story.

—The Editor

'No middle ground'

Change and Controversy at Glenwood State School

by **Becky Wilson Hawbaker**

Eighty years old, Dr. V. J. Meyer was ready to retire. More than a year ago he had agreed to wait until a suitable replacement could be found. Now, in the spring of 1957, he was still the superintendent of Glenwood State School, a state institution for people with mental retardation, located in Glenwood, Iowa. And despite new construction and recent remodeling, Meyer himself acknowledged that Glenwood was still "woefully overcrowded and understaffed."

That May, Meyer's successor arrived: 33-year-old Alfred Sasser Jr. The changes Sasser would make at Glenwood State School would soon catapult the institution into the national spotlight and add momentum to a



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HSI (IOWA CITY); JOAN LIFFRING ZUG COLLECTION

reform movement already sweeping the United States. Across the country, parents of children with disabilities were joined by progressive professionals in psychology and special education and by investigative journalists, all calling for reform of America's institutions for people with disabilities.

Although many worked quietly behind the scenes—organizing grassroots groups, conducting research, and educating the public—Alfred Sasser was one of the more visible and vocal crusaders, and his showboating style would generate conflict as well as reform. But Sasser was only one agent of change, and the events at Glenwood only one chapter, in a movement steering the nation towards a new understanding of the needs, capabilities, and rights of people with disabilities.

Reform had never come easily. In the early 19th century, care for those with mental retardation varied enormously. Those with wealth sometimes cared for family members with disabilities within their own homes, as did some families with less means. But the public solution was for local governments to "bid out" or contract with individuals to care for those with mental retardation (especially severe retardation), or to operate local almshouses, poor farms, and county homes.

By mid-century, however, reformer Samuel Howe argued that those with mental retardation could be "trained for industry, order, and self-respect," and crusader Dorothea Dix exposed the horrific conditions of poor houses and demanded that states shoulder their share of the responsibility by building specialized institutions. By the 1870s and 1880s, according to psychologist R. C. Scheerenberger, these reforms had ironically translated into much larger residential facilities that "were located in isolated rural areas, and [had] established admission policies of accepting mildly retarded and normal epileptic persons."

Meanwhile, the medical world was broadly implicating heredity as the cause for much mental retardation. Again, Scheerenberger writes, "Mentally retarded persons were no longer viewed as 'unfortunate' or 'innocents' . . . [but] as undesirable, . . . the social parasite, criminal, prostitute, pauper. Anyone remotely connected with the possibility of transmitting mental retardation was viciously attacked, including the immigrant."

By the early 20th century, this stereotype of the "feeble-minded" as amoral and dangerous menaces to society had profound consequences. It fueled immi-

gration restrictions and quotas targeting the "defective" and the "less desirable" nationalities—meaning, southern and eastern European immigrants. And it justified eugenic measures such as institutional sterilizations and marriage restrictions—especially for women of childbearing age.

By World War I, Scheerenberger says, "large isolated facilities offering minimum programming . . . were consistent with society's decision to remove the retarded and epileptic from within their midst; place them in a remote area beyond sight, thought and conscience; and treat them as indentured servants in order to reduce operational costs."

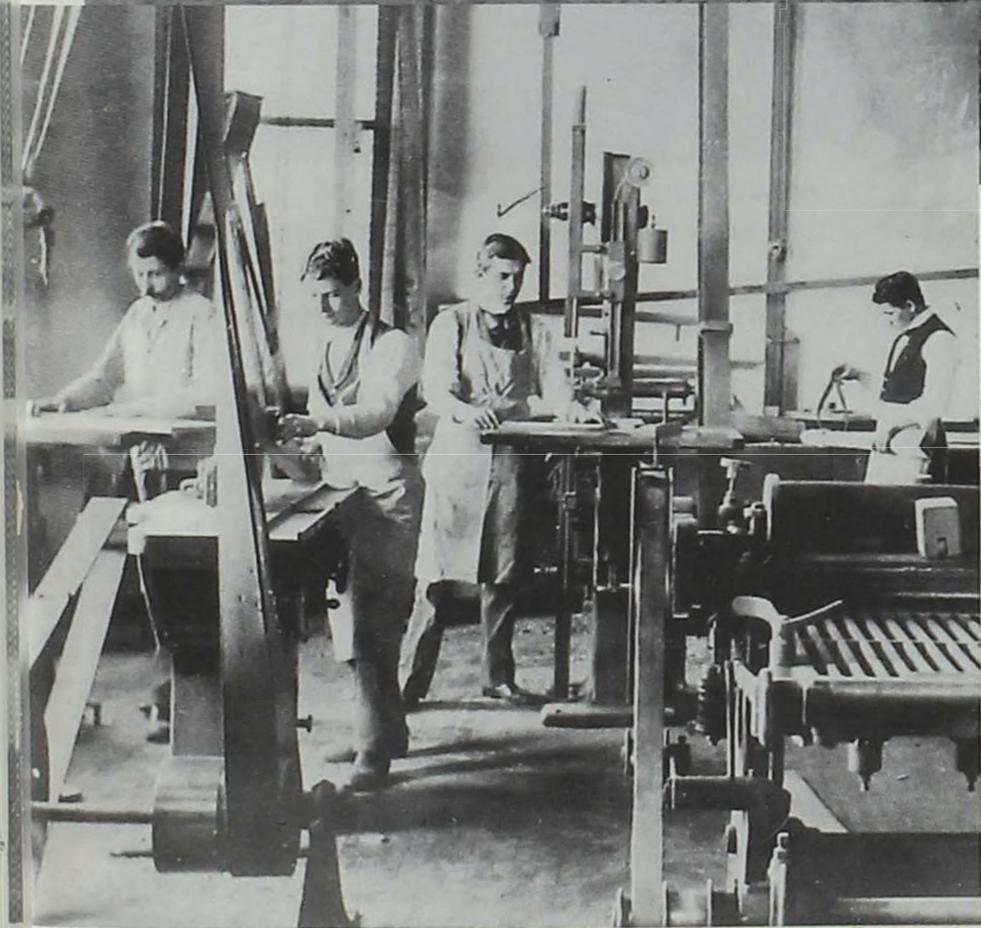
Simply put, "protecting the deviant from society" had shifted to "protecting society from the deviant." With this emphasis on protecting society and the gene pool, coupled with a pervasive belief in the psychology community that mental retardation was incurable and unchangeable, the prevailing approach became one of storing or warehousing people, rather than rehabilitating or educating them.

This long slide into neglect and "custodialism" reached its low point by mid-century. Between 1934 and 1943—while American resources were prioritized for ending the depression and winning the war—the number of people with mental retardation in institutions rose by 40 percent, compared to only a 20 percent increase in the U.S. population. Scheerenberger paints a grim picture: "Rows of beds, end to end, in colorless, drab wards typified most institutions."

Thus, by the 1950s, Glenwood State School was no different than most American institutions. Unfortunately, being "woefully overcrowded" was nothing new for the Iowa institution; already in 1877 its first biennial report had complained of crowded conditions.

Located on a rise just beyond the small town of Glenwood in southwest Iowa, the "Asylum [later, "Institution"] for Feeble-minded Children" had been founded in 1876 to provide care, support, training, and instruction for children with epilepsy and "feeble-mindedness." Occupying the earlier site of the Western Branch of the Iowa Soldier's Orphans Home, it admitted both children and adults who were labeled as "feeble-minded" and thus considered (often without any formal assessment) unable to function in society.

Renamed "Glenwood State School" in 1941, the institution typified U.S. institutions in other ways as well. Like many institutions, Glenwood was embarking on several positive reforms; it unlocked a ward of



Large institutions such as Glenwood (shown here, circa 1905) relied heavily on the productivity of their trained residents in farming, gardening, woodworking, and other work at the institution. In 1903/05, the total value of agricultural and manufactured goods produced at Glenwood was equal to one-seventh of its total expenditures.



Institution, Glenwood, Iowa.

"custodial patients" in Mogridge Hall in 1957, following the lead of Iowa's mental health institutions earlier that year. And, as at many institutions, the custodial approach prevailed at Glenwood, thus meeting the essentials of survival—food, shelter, clothing—and functioning to warehouse people with disabilities for most of their lives.

Carrie Merritt, an employee of Glenwood State School from 1945 to 1988, believes the custodial label was fair for Glenwood during the 1940s and 1950s because of the high ratio of residents to employees. In 1954, for example, Glenwood had a total residential population of 1,797, and total personnel of 342 (counting employees such as clerical staff who did not work directly with the residents). And of the 342 personnel, only 37 were professional staff (psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and therapists).

Liz Stimmel, who was a resident at Glenwood from 1953 to 1959, recalls that overcrowding made sleeping difficult and allowed "no privacy whatsoever." "Their beds were so close together," Carrie Merritt remembers about the residents. "They [the staff] had to put the residents to bed one after the other, they had them all lined against the wall, and they'd pull one bed out to make it, then put it back, then pull another one out into the aisle and make it, put it back. . . . There just was no room and the odor was terrible. . . . With that many people living in one room, the odor just—you just can't get rid of it."

Again, the problem was not unique to Glenwood State School. Scheerenberger reminds us that pervasive overcrowding and understaffing meant that those with more severe disabilities in U.S. institutions often "were not dressed beyond diapers (at best, in some facilities) and simply lay in bed all day."

Photographs survive of Glenwood residents wearing only diapers and in bed restraints, and a 1966 *Psychiatric Reporter* article states: "When the Glenwood State Hospital School in Iowa began its conversion eight years ago from a custodial institution for the mentally retarded to a training center, chains and restraints were still in use there."

James Purkhiser, who worked at Glenwood from 1957 to 1965, remembers that when he first arrived, "they had all kinds of restraints. . . . They tied them in beds and tied them to places. Lord, God, yes . . . big long rags, they would tie and make loops in them and tie their hands to the bed where they couldn't get up. But at that time, understand . . . they knew nothing else, I guess, except 'we'll hold them or we'll restrain them' instead of trying to educate or train or do something with them."

Another mark of custodialism is an absence of educational opportunities and treatment for all residents—often the consequence of inadequate funding, a lack of trained teachers, a need for residents' labor, and the assumption that most residents couldn't learn. Although the Glenwood institution had built a modern school building in 1954, Superintendent Meyer reported to the Board of Control in 1956 that "the educational program is based on the philosophy that many of our children will never master the elementary school fundamentals sufficiently well to be of practical value." Instead, he explained, they were taught, mostly through their work assignments, "basic behavior patterns," including "1. Obedience. 2. Ability to follow directions. 3. Acceptable social conduct. 4. Good work habits. 5. Personal cleanliness. 6. Fundamentals as ability permits." Actually, this was a big step forward, for it at least acknowledged that the goal was to teach the six patterns to all residents, in order to prepare them, as Meyer explained in the school newsletter, for "contented and happy lives . . . at home, at self-supporting work, or in our institution."

In general, there were just too few teachers, and too much work required to maintain the institution, for any but a small percentage of residents to receive much schooling. Although Liz Stimmel had been taught to read and write at the Iowa Annie Wittenmyer Home, she says her formal education was suspended when she was transferred from the Davenport orphanage to Glenwood at the age of nine. "I learnt one skill at Glenwood," Stimmel says. "I had to work in the laundry, and they taught me how to run a great big old mangle. . . . It's like, well, it's a machine, it's just like a pressing cycle. You put sheets [in] and then they would go all the way through the machines and down the other end and you got to grab and fold them. . . . I picked it up real good."

Art Mencl was among the small percentage of residents who did attend classes. Mencl had been court-committed to Glenwood in 1934 after his father was killed and his mother was no longer able to care for him. The staff felt that his disability was mild enough that he would benefit from an education. He went to school half-days and was sent back to the ward for the other half.

Mencl explains that not everyone at the institution got to attend school because "it was too hard for them." He recalls one day when school seemed particularly difficult for him and his friends on the ward: "We all gathered around on our beds and we talked about that and said, 'Now all of you that wants to go



PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE DES MOINES REGISTER

Ward G in the girls custodial building at Glenwood was so crowded in 1938 that the girls got in and out of bed by climbing over the end. That year, the state institution housed 1,828 residents (178 beyond capacity), with 274 more on the waiting list.

through with this, well, you stay here, but all of you that don't want to go through with it, if you figure you don't want to make it, then drop out.' We stuck together and then as the years went on, we took and we just went right on through school and that, and then after our schooling was done, that was when they put us to work outside."

Because labor and funds were invariably scarce, many U.S. institutions relied on their residents with milder disabilities as workers. Again, Glenwood was no exception. As Carrie Merritt put it, "The only way you could have 2,000 residents and . . . [far fewer] employees is that the residents did *a lot* of the work." Certainly, the labor required to run Glenwood's 1,185-acre farm, including an 85-acre garden and 65-acre orchard, a dairy and a cannery, taught residents valuable work skills, and also provided the institution with food. But unfortunately, this also meant that the residents most likely to adapt successfully to life outside of the institution seldom received that chance. Because they made good workers inside the institution and because their labor was close to free, institutions had a strong incentive to keep them as "patients" rather than helping them find work and living arrangements outside the institution.

Art Mencl worked a variety of jobs at Glenwood after he completed his schooling there. (He estimates

that he was schooled for three or four years, from age seven to ten or eleven.) He washed tables and cooked in the kitchen. He clerked in the canteen, where residents bought candy and gum with the nickels and dimes they earned in their jobs. He loaded laundry onto a truck and then rode in the back even on the coldest of Iowa's winter days. (One day he passed out from the cold and had to be hospitalized for several days; thereafter, he rode in the cab.) His last job was as an aide at State School, caring for some of the children with most severe retardation. Although Mencl enjoyed most of his jobs, he still bristles when he remembers that he received little or no pay for much of his work: "That was the punishment, working for nothing. So, there was a lot of them up there that didn't like that, but well, I guess there wasn't nothing that they could do about it."

Because most State School residents needed 24-hour supervision, the institution required a large staff of ward attendants, despite its small budget. The fact that ward attendants were paid low wages and worked in overcrowded conditions, often with very little training, sometimes led to frustration and abuse. Mencl remembers instances when a rule was broken and the ward attendants would "wait 'til

you got back to the ward, and then they'd punish you. . . . They'd take you out in the middle of the floor and they'd beat you up. . . . They would kick you, and knock you down on the floor, or either shout [at] you until you was blue in the face. And that was the rules. It wouldn't do no good to tell anybody about it because they wouldn't do anything about it, and if you told somebody, you'd get a worsen punishment . . . when you got back to the ward." Nevertheless, Mencl insists, "I couldn't hate the people that raised and educated me because if it wasn't for them cracking down on us . . . we would have never learned how to do anything."

Of course, not all attendants were abusive. Liz Stimmel remembers one particular attendant very favorably: "She would do extra things for you that she wasn't supposed to but she did. . . . She just felt like you need[ed] the love and care. She'd bring us in, like, candy and maybe some pop we wasn't supposed to have. . . . She'd go out of her way to help us."

Yet Stimmel also remembers that "when you got punished . . . they stuck you in, like, a room, no lights and . . . they made you take the mattress off your bed and your sheets to cover it up with. And then they gave you, like, a tin can to use as a bathroom. . . . I got in trouble all the time . . . and I got stuck in that room."

The long tradition of custodial care in institutions was a reflection of society's attitudes towards people with disabilities, as William Campbell, Glenwood's current administrator, explains. "Institutions have an evil reputation, as though they were orchestrating all that was happening, when really they are only the responder to what society wants. In the early days, everybody was committed to these places. . . . It wasn't these institutions saying, . . . 'We sure wish you'd come here.' We had to deal with what we had. [The

state gives] you so much money and we take all comers, and . . . these places swelled to unreasonable proportions and size."

"Institutions," Campbell emphasizes, "are a product of society."

That "product" would begin to change, as would American society in the 1950s, prodded by research on the learning capacity of people with disabilities, the organization of parent advocacy groups, and the impact of media exposés. In Iowa, these forces soon converged at Glenwood State School.

For most parents in the 1940s and early 1950s, finding out that one's child had a disability like Down syndrome was tantamount to learning that the child was dead. Parents were told by their doctors that there was no hope for the child to ever

lead a normal life, and that the kindest thing to do was to send such children (even infants) to institutions to be with "others of their own kind."

Although public and private institutions were the only options for many families, parents were not always happy with what they found. Helen Henderson recalls that she decided to send her daughter to Woodward

State Hospital and School, in Woodward, Iowa, because there was "no place else. . . . I wasn't happy with them, but where were we to go?"

In many institutions, parents found abuse and neglect. And in almost every institution, for a variety of reasons including underfunding and overcrowding, they found a philosophy of custodialism. John and Erma Cheyney (whose child was a Glenwood State School resident in the 1950s), described the agony and hard choices that parents faced: "For too many years we have put our children in the State institution for one reason or another—and they are good reasons, re-



COURTESY UNIVERSITY AFFILIATED PROGRAM, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

An early view of Mogridge Hall at Glenwood State School. Parents of a child with mental disabilities had few choices but to send the child to a large institution, often far from home, family, and community.

ardless of what outsiders might think—and have spent sleepless nights and long days wondering and worrying about the care, happiness and contentment of our youngsters. But because of our bewilderment, ignorance, and lack of strength, we didn't know what to do about the things that distressed us."

Finally, for some parents, having a child with mental retardation was a source of shame and bewilderment. Should it be kept secret? Were they somehow to blame? What was best for the entire family?

Then, in the early 1950s, a new genre of books and articles, which historian James Trent calls "parent confessionals," began to change those perceptions of shame. Author Pearl Buck wrote one of the earliest parent confessionals—first as an article in *Ladies' Home Journal* and then as a book, *The Child Who Never Grew*. Both were published in 1950. Describing her 25-year struggle to raise her daughter, Buck recommended that children with disabilities should be allowed to live at home as long as possible. In 1952, John P. Frank, a prominent professor of constitutional law and the parent of a son with a mental disability, wrote *My Son's Story*; excerpts appeared in *Reader's Digest*.

In 1953, Dale Evans Rogers, wife and show business partner of Roy Rogers, wrote *Angel Unaware*, the story of the short life of their daughter Robin. Evans, writing in the voice of Robin, declared that all "special children" should be raised at home, and that Evans and Rogers "weren't ashamed of their little 'borderline Mongoloid' [although] a lot of parents are, you know." *Angel Unaware* was the third best-seller for the year, behind the Bible and *The Power of Positive Thinking*.

As these parent confessionals reached mainstream audiences, the concept took hold that mental retardation occurred among both the wealthy and the poor, in obscure and prominent families alike. It was neither a mark of shame nor a result of social class.

Bolstered by the growing acceptability of admitting to disabilities in one's family, parents began to form networks and organizations, first to support each other, and later to advocate for more choices for their children. One such group was NARC, the National Association for Retarded Children. Formed in Minneapolis in 1950, it joined together 88 local ARC groups.

Comprising mainly middle- and upper-class parents, local ARC chapters sprang up across the United States. In Cedar Falls, Iowa, parent advocate Helen Henderson devoted years to speaking to the public

and organizing local ARCs in 94 of Iowa's 99 counties; she eventually served as president of the Iowa Association for Retarded Children.

Many professionals, such as William Campbell, who worked at the Cherokee Mental Health Institute in the 1950s and would later become superintendent at Glenwood State School in 1969, also joined local ARCs (Campbell was a charter member of the Cherokee ARC) and supported their advocacy efforts.

NARC would become one of the most powerful parent groups in the country, forcing changes in the law by lobbying legislators and filing lawsuits, and providing local services like special education classes when school districts would not. Although NARC's motto—"Retarded Children Can Be Helped!"—now seems so obvious as to sound condescending, it was a truly revolutionary concept in its time, even to the professional community. For years, psychologists and educators had believed that children with mental retardation could not learn, that IQ was unchangeable, and that mental retardation (by its 1941 definition) was "incurable."

In the 1930s and increasingly in the 1950s, however, psychological and educational research was starting to show something different, and by 1959 the thinking had shifted enough that the American Association on Mental Deficiency redefined "mental retardation," dropping the earlier reference to incurability.

One of the earliest studies to find evidence that mental stimulation could increase IQ was actually conducted at the Glenwood institution in 1939. Harold Dye, its superintendent from 1935 to 1939, was involved with the research of psychologist Harold Skeels of the State University of Iowa's Child Welfare Research Station.

The two-year study, coauthored by Skeels and Dye, found that a group of young orphans with mental retardation who received individual love and attention from adults on a Glenwood ward increased their IQs into the normal range, whereas a control group of orphans with normal IQs who remained in a deprived environment with limited adult contact declined significantly in IQ scores.

The findings regarding IQ sparked a major debate in the professional community, and although most of Skeels and Dye's contemporaries did not accept their findings, the study is now considered a landmark. And despite seemingly clear implications for treatment for all Glenwood residents, there is no evidence that Dye or Skeels used the study's findings to argue

for increased state appropriations for teaching staff, rehabilitative programming, or any other meaningful reform at Glenwood.

While researchers pondered IQ, the nation was seeing another side of the disabilities issue. During World War II, Americans with disabilities had contributed mightily to the war effort. "Tens of thousands" served in the military, Scheerenberger notes. "A mental age of 8 was found adequate for the Army, 10 for the Navy."

Others worked in defense plants and factories, helped with salvage drives, harvested crops, and canned foodstuffs. According to historian Joan Gittens, advocates for those with disabilities "lost no opportunity to contrast the democracies' emphasis on individual rights and protection of the vulnerable with the fascists countries' ruthless state dominance and determination to create a master race by . . . [exterminating] those they deemed unfit."

For thousands of veterans after the war, reentry into the work force and community life was complicated by disabilities acquired during the war. Public demands spurred federal and state governments to create vocational rehabilitation programs and to fund training and research. Professional associations raised inspection standards for institutions for those with physical and mental disabilities.

Thus, "by the 1950s, the need for institutional reform was righteously proclaimed from both within and without," Scheerenberger chronicles. "Administrators, practitioners, and parents were uniformly decrying current conditions."

Reformers were aided by journalists who found that exposing deplorable conditions in institutions produced dramatic human-interest stories. As historian James Trent points out, "Some of America's leading reporters (Peter Lisagor of the *Chicago Daily News*, Mike Gorman then of the *Tulsa Daily Oklahoman*, and Al Ostrow of the *San Francisco News*, for example) gained recognition by exposing conditions in institutions around the nation."

This rising tide of reform swept into Iowa in the late 1950s, leading to many changes in its institutions, especially at Glenwood State School. Searching for a new Glenwood superintendent to replace retiring V. J. Meyer, the Iowa Board of Control of State Institutions apparently wanted an individual uniquely qualified to provide rehabilitation services

and to carry through with changes that had just begun to remedy the overcrowding.

The Board of Control had found that individual—Alfred Sasser, superintendent of Muscatatuck State School in Indiana—but an exception would have to be made. By tradition and by state law, the superintendent of a state institution was supposed to be a medical doctor. Sasser told the Board of Control that although he held master's degrees in hospital administration and psychology and a Ph.D. in education, he was not a medical doctor.

Sasser's credentials did include the 1955 American Psychiatric Association Mental Hospital Achievement Award, and because of his reforms at Muscatatuck State School, he had been featured in a chapter titled "How to Reform an Institution" in *Retarded Children Can Be Helped*, a book authored by *Life* magazine staffers. During his first two years at Muscatatuck, according to the book, Sasser had discharged 500 adults (a quarter of the institution's population), and out of 700 school-aged children he had increased the number attending school from 100 to 400. He had expanded the professional staff from 15 to 105, brought in \$25,000 in private donations, and launched a successful volunteer recruiting and training program.

Sasser clearly had a reputation as a reformer, and if that's what the Board of Control wanted—someone who could earn Glenwood a national reputation for quality—they had found their candidate. So, the Iowa General Assembly repealed the requirement that the superintendent be a medical doctor.

What the Board of Control may or may not have known is that Sasser's reforms at Muscatatuck—or his methods for making reforms—had caused vehement controversy. Perhaps the changes had been too big, too fast. Perhaps Sasser's hiring policies, which did not coincide with longtime county patronage traditions, were what incited a very vocal opposition, as James Purkhiser (Sasser's colleague at Muscatatuck) believes. Sasser called it "character assassination." "I was the victim of a political frame," he would comment later. "Indiana politicians were out to get me because I wouldn't play ball with them."

Purkhiser recounts how the opposition had "drummed up a thing against one of our staff members" and demanded an investigation. A grand jury was called to hear charges of sodomy against the assistant superintendent and a speech therapist, and claims of communistic leanings among the staff. The grand jury returned indictments against the two employees.

The experience proved to be the last straw for

Sasser, who had been considering the Glenwood job. Sasser had said, "The heck with it. I'm not going to put up with this. I'm going to Iowa," Purkhiser remembers, "and he asked me if I would come."

Alfred Sasser arrived in Glenwood in May 1957. The *Glenwood Opinion-Tribune* published several upbeat stories about him that spring, citing his credentials and awards, his book proposals, his speaking engagements for the University of Nebraska Medical College, the Iowa ARC convention in Marshalltown, and the National ARC in Chicago. Reporting that the Board of Control had given Sasser free rein and full cooperation "in a program to speed the correction and release of patients," the newspaper commented, "Mr. Sasser is vitally interested in a rehabilitation therapeutic service."

Basically, Sasser believed that an institution existed to serve the individual needs of its clients. He was explicit that his approach was not "custodial" but rather "rehabilitational," and focused on teaching skills, encouraging normalcy, and working towards independent living outside of the school. Most institutions were still custodial, Sasser had explained in "How to Reform an Institution," and this meant "the kiss of death—all they did with the children was keep 'em, feed 'em, and when they died, put 'em six feet in the ground." Instead, Sasser envisioned an institution that "is not a hospital, not a school, but a rehabilitation center. Any movement forward is rehabilitation. We try to find out what the needs are, then provide [for] them." He was passionate and committed: "I don't believe there are human 'vegetables' and I don't think anyone on the face of the earth knows what the ceiling of a child is."

The public would soon hear more details of Sasser's philosophy, because he spoke to nearly every group that would host him. Sasser was an effective and charismatic speaker, remembers James Purkhiser. "He would give a talk to a group of parents or a group of sorority. He was like a banty rooster. He would come to me and say, 'Purk, I'll have people crying here within ten minutes.' And he would. Now don't get me wrong. What he did was to give examples of . . . what was going on and why the retarded was being de-



PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE DES MOINES REGISTER

Passionate and persuasive, Alfred Sasser fought for change at Glenwood State School. "That the mentally retarded cannot be helped but must remain dredges of our society," he declared, "is an outmoded and obsolete philosophy, with which Glenwood does not concur."

prived of this and that, what was needed and how they could do things and then give some human interest story. . . . It was always, why, why don't we have more facilities . . . more money and more equipment and materials and supplies when these children need this, this, and this. . . . He would even have the person that voted against giving anything, he would have them handing their hand out ready to give." Purkhiser adds, "He didn't care who he stepped on . . . [if] it was for the benefit of the kids."

Carrie Merritt recalls that Sasser "could convince you that black was white . . . and convince you that he was right. Not [by using] especially big words, but it was just the way he said things." But she also described her former employer at State School as an abrasive person who didn't care what other people

thought. "He was going to do what was right for these residents."

What Sasser thought was right, the townspeople of Glenwood soon discovered, was for State School residents to visit local stores and restaurants. Merritt says, "The people downtown didn't feel that the residents should go downtown at all." She remembers their reaction—"Into MY store?!"—and Sasser's response—"They WILL go down."

"He didn't care whether anybody liked him," Merritt says. "He needed to stir things up. I didn't personally like him, but he did a lot of good things in getting these residents out so they could look after themselves and have a place in the community."

Sasser also believed that reform required a larger and professionally trained staff of psychologists, teachers, social workers, and occupational therapists. Along with Purkhiser, whom he appointed as Glenwood's director of special education, Sasser brought with him a vocational rehabilitation counselor, a social worker, and several other professionals whom he had first hired at Muscatatuck. Eventually six more professional staff members were hired with money from a special legislative appropriation for professional staff. Understanding that he would never have sufficient funds to hire all of the professionals he needed, Sasser also launched a new training initiative for attendants and nurses already on staff, expanding the required classes from 10 hours of general orientation to 55 hours in rehabilitation, mental retardation, and practical nursing.

The expansion of the professional staff coincided with a 4 percent reduction in State School's appropriation from the Iowa legislature. Sasser chose where to cut 4 percent based on his philosophy of "putting the patient first," but these first few decisions would spark resentment and set off the opening skirmish of a two-year war, chronicled in the local newspaper.

What's going on at the hill?" asked the *Glenwood Opinion-Tribune* in a front-page story about State School on June 20, 1957. "That's what a lot of Mills County residents have been wondering since Dr. Alfred Sasser, Jr., took over . . . at Glenwood a few weeks ago, and in an interview this week he attempted to give some of the answers."

The article detailed several of Sasser's changes and plans: staff training to improve screening and evaluation of the residents; a community-wide Fourth of July celebration on the grounds; and activities to build school spirit (reviving the school newspaper,

launching resident-staff softball games, showing movies weekly rather than monthly). But a few changes had "caused some controversy in the community." Sasser had discontinued the school's daily whistle—by which townspeople had set their watches for years. Sasser said the loud whistle disturbed the residents, cost \$100 a year, and should be reserved to signal emergencies.

The *Opinion-Tribune* reported that "another controversial change" involved State School's sewing department, which made uniforms for all employees and dresses for the female residents. Carrie Merritt remembers the dresses as "just a sack dress with a belt around it" and "very unattractive." Because Sasser believed that residents should dress like the community members that they were, because he believed that he could buy ready-made clothing more cheaply, and because he didn't care whether employees wore uniforms or not, he closed the sewing department and laid off the four women who had worked in it for many years.

Sasser also laid off more employees, mainly attendants, because of the 4 percent budget cuts. This, coupled with the simultaneous hiring of several professionals, stirred up more resentment. In an open letter distributed to all staff, Sasser tried to allay the "gossip" and "feelings of consternation on the part of some personnel." He clarified the budget situation and the separate special appropriation for hiring professionals, and promised to "diligently and consistently fight for restoration of our cut funds as well as additional funds." But discontent continued to simmer.

In early September, Sasser tried to win people over and generate positive publicity by declaring "State School Day." He invited local officials from the Lions and Rotary clubs, the Chamber of Commerce, the fire department, the school board, the State Board of Control, and the general public to a dinner and special program at the institution's new school building. Completed in 1954, the school was now officially dedicated as "Meyer School" after the locally popular previous superintendent, V. J. Meyer, under whose tenure it had been built.

Three hundred people attended, and an *Opinion-Tribune* columnist commented, "In the future, the event will be held annually, and will serve the purpose of acquainting the public with more of the fascinating things that go on at the State School. Strange as it may seem with the State School right here at home, most of us know very little about it." The townspeople were about to find out more than they may have wanted to know.

What really blew the lid off this simmering pot of local discontent was national publicity about a State School resident who had never belonged there. Although staff and the Board of Control had been aware of several such cases for years, these "patients" had remained at Glenwood and the public had remained in the dark—until *Des Moines Register* reporter George Mills came to town.

Mills, who was also an "antique bug," according to Purkhiser, had come to Glenwood State School to cover a November auction of outdated furnishings and other items from the institution's attics for the *Register*.

In a 1997 interview, Mills recalled his conversation with Sasser: "I had read an article . . . about a woman

who had given about twenty people with mental retardation very intense training . . . and it boosted their IQs. . . . So I said to him, . . . 'Do you have any folks up there who could use that?' and he said, 'We already have people who have normal IQs,' and I said, 'What the hell, what are you talking about?'"

Mills then asked to meet one of them and was introduced to 67-year-old Mayo Buckner. Sasser told Mills that although Buckner had an IQ of 120 (which would be 20 points above average), he had been institutionalized for the past 59 years, and that he wasn't the only one wrongly placed at Glenwood.

"Well, don't ever think that I didn't go to town on that. We put that story all over the paper," Mills relates. "I was so shocked, so angry, that human beings

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE DES MOINES REGISTER



Mayo Buckner was about 12 when he posed (far left, second row from bottom) with the institution's band, about 1902. The institution was aware of his talents: in 1915 a teacher had noted, "Music—perfect rhythm; excellent ear; plays trombone, baritone, violin, cornet, clarinet and cello with equal facility." By age 67, Buckner had scored music for a 25-member orchestra, taught clarinet to a staff member, and was still living at Glenwood State School.



OMAHA WORLD-HERALD

As Sasser looks on, Mayo Buckner (in cap) talks with Herschel and Amelia Loveless, on the governor's surprise visit in April 1958. Governor Loveless had been deluged with mail when Buckner became state and national news in November 1957.

had been incarcerated for no reason at all when they could have had a wife, a family. . . . I [became] emotionally involved."

On November 17, the *Des Moines Sunday Register* headline blasted: "IN HOSPITAL 59 YRS. BY ERROR." George Mills's story detailed Buckner's life: how he was brought to Glenwood in 1898 at the age of eight by his mother, who believed that Buckner needed "special management." She had reported that Buckner had a birthmark and rolled his eyes "and makes a peculiar noise in exact imitation of Blind Boone." Boone was a piano player she had seen perform while she was pregnant with Buckner, and this was surmised as the cause of Buckner's disability classification of "medium-grade imbecile."

Although the admitting official did not administer any sort of formal assessment, Buckner's mother did have to answer questions posed to her on the admissions papers, such as, "Is it good-tempered?" and "Is it inclined to run away?" The *Register* story also quoted from Glenwood's records of Buckner's classwork at the institution ("reads well and understands. . . . Doing long division and fractions") and noted his extraordinary musical abilities—which should have triggered someone to ask: Why is this child here?

Sasser knew part of the answer. For most of Glenwood's history, admissions requirements had been idiosyncratic, to say the least. And because Glenwood had never had the staff to systematically

test its residents, there were a number of "patients," in fact, who did not have mental retardation.

Sasser had already initiated testing of all residents, but he understood the obstacles faced by administrators. "The institutions have had to struggle along with little staff and low appropriations," he told Mills. Glenwood "has a lot of patients who do not belong here," and "a lot of these people can be restored to society."

Sasser was not claiming that there were hundreds of State School residents with above average IQs who were unjustly placed there (although he was correct that Buckner was not alone in this distinction), but rather that hundreds of residents with mild to moderate levels of disabilities could hold jobs and live in their own communities—if prepared for the transition by the necessary psychologists, teachers, social workers, and vocational rehabilitation and occupational therapists. Of course, this approach cost far more than the traditional custodial "warehousing" approach.

The Mayo Buckner story in the *Register* created an instant sensation, and George Mills followed up with profiles on more Glenwood residents with normal IQs. Governor Herschel Loveless, who received thousands of letters about the story, called the situation "a shame on humanity" and ordered an investigation. A *Register* editorial linked "wasted

lives" to "Iowa's backwardness" in mental health care service. "Mentally retarded children who get into the state schools are not brought up to their full potential because of overcrowding and short staffing . . . [and] are not properly diagnosed." Local television and radio stations in Iowa repeated George Mills's story on Mayo Buckner, and it was soon picked up by *Time* magazine.

The *Glenwood Opinion-Tribune* took little note of the flurry of national publicity. A brief story appeared on page four on November 21 ("State School Story Making Headlines"), and a few other articles reported gifts sent to Buckner as a result of the national publicity. Townspeople were talking, however, and many were unhappy that the publicity had cast a bad light on State School before Sasser's administration, and on their town itself—especially since the Chamber of Commerce was in the middle of a big campaign to lure new businesses and industry to town. Just three months earlier, an *Opinion-Tribune* columnist had warned readers, "Do a little less complaining about our shortcomings and a little more bragging about our good points. You can never tell when the stranger at the coffee counter may be an industrial surveyor."

The columnist apparently applied the principle of playing up the good points in commenting on the Buckner story: "It's almost unbelievably tragic for those whole lives to be wasted. But, even so, we don't think that's the most important part of the story, even though it does produce the biggest headlines. . . . The way we see it, . . . the most important part of the story [is] a new testing program . . . [so] future patients will not be admitted if they do not belong there."

Sasser took advantage of the school's new visibility to launch a holiday campaign. Through statewide publicity, he alerted Iowans to the many "forgotten children" at State School who never received letters or visitors and who would benefit immensely from knowing that someone in the world cared about them and their progress. He solicited presents, letters, and

cards, and the public responded with some 10,000 pieces of mail for State School's 1,800 residents.

The *Glenwood Opinion-Tribune* apparently didn't join the "forgotten children" campaign or cover it until December 26, choosing to emphasize the considerable efforts of State School staff and volunteers "from all over the area" to sort gifts and choose recipients. Comparing the scant local coverage to the

broadcast and print coverage in Des Moines, Council Bluffs, and Omaha, one senses that the locals were not happy.

Indeed, on January 9 of the new year, the banner headline of the *Opinion-Tribune* admitted: "City Group Seeks Harmony with Sasser." "Criticism of the school has simmered in Glenwood and [the] surrounding area almost from the day Mr. Sasser took over," the paper acknowledged in a detailed report of a meeting of Sasser, the mayor, two Chamber of Commerce representatives, and the president of the local Rotary.

The front-page story began: "Dr. Alfred Sasser, Jr., said Monday he is not a publicity-seeker, does not feel he has had 'outright resistance' from the people of Glenwood, would not dismiss any employee for criticizing his policies, and had no intention of resigning as superintendent of the Glenwood State School."

The issues were now surfacing. One persistent concern was that Sasser was an overactive publicity hound. The paper reported, "Mayor Harper said people had told him they do not mind the adverse publicity if it is a means of helping the patients and not just Mr. Sasser personally."

"I am not out to make a name for myself. I feel I already have," Sasser had replied. "I don't try to sell myself. I do try to sell mental retardation work."

"Publicity about the school is not his design," the story continued, "but comes about because reporters ask him questions and he answers them." (This certainly jibes with the recollection of George Mills, whose *Register* exposé of the Mayo Buckner story had

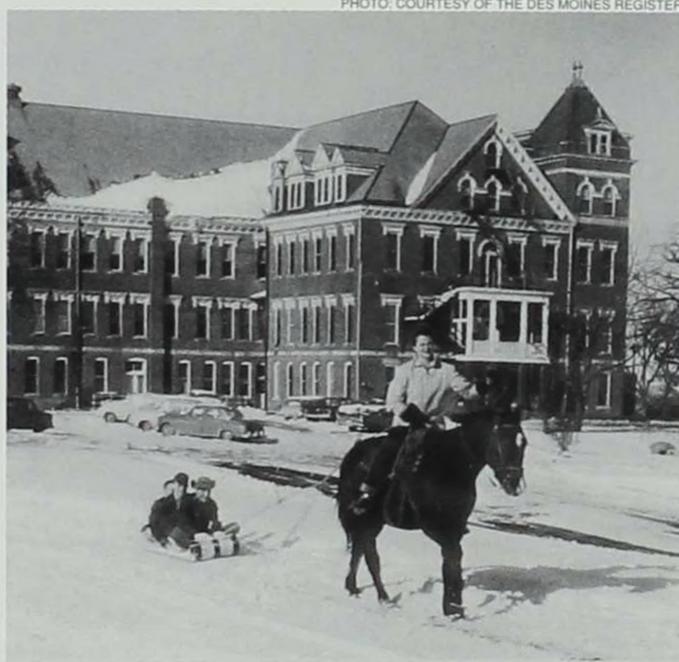


PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE DES MOINES REGISTER

Astride a horse loaned by a Glenwood citizen, State School recreation director Mara Jean Davis takes three residents on a toboggan ride in November 1957. State School appeared often in Iowa newspapers during the 1957 holiday season. Building on its high profile after the Buckner story, Sasser launched a statewide "forgotten children" campaign for Christmas gifts and cards.

launched national publicity. Interviewed in 1997, Mills was emphatic that Sasser had not come to him with the Buckner story seeking publicity, but that instead Mills himself had found the story, was personally upset about it, recognized its human-interest appeal, and ran with it.)

Item by item at the January meeting, Sasser responded to criticism and rumor: No, he did not think he was "moving too fast" in making "sweeping changes," although he saw that tendency in himself. No, he did not feel the community was hostile. No, he did not discharge "regular employees" so professional staff could be hired, nor did he discharge those who disagreed with him as long as they did their work properly.

On the same day, the local columnist commented on the "simmering State School feud" and encouraged compromise to restore "the old spirit of co-operation and understanding" between State School and southwestern Iowa. Sasser was young and energetic but should slow down, the columnist advised, "because the public is not willing to accept everything he does all at once." In turn, the public should "withhold our too-quick criticism of things we do not understand."

The gist of the front-page story and the column seems to be that the publicity—which had been good for Sasser and his plans for more education and rehabilitation—had in effect indicted all previous administrations and reform efforts as insignificant or non-existent. "Everything done at the school during the nearly 100 years before Dr. Alfred Sasser took over . . . could not have been all wrong," the columnist wrote. "All good things at the school did not originate within the past six months. . . . Many [people in this area] have the impression they are being told that everything they ever did was wrong."

Given human nature, it's not hard to fathom how one might have felt slighted or maligned. For example, hadn't the former superintendent, V. J. Meyer, overseen construction of the new school building, extended classes to more residents, and unlocked at least one ward? And weren't current staff helping implement the new rehabilitation programs? What about the ward attendants, who were coping with personnel cuts, low wages, changes in the work culture, higher job expectations, and evening training sessions after a full workday? Or the local merchants and other townspeople, who were struggling to broaden their understanding of mental retardation and State School's new approach? Many thought that the news coverage only reported "outright resistance" to Sasser

and thus implied that the town was backward, negative, and petty.

Coeducational activities also came up at the January 9 meeting. As part of Sasser's campaign to provide "normalcy" to the lives of State School residents, he had loosened the strict sex segregation rules and provided opportunities for monitored coeducational activities. As he had explained in his training materials for ward attendants, "the separation (and police-like methods for maintaining this separation) can only be conducive to . . . bad sexual behavioral actions. What can you expect when you try to contain basic drives in this manner—a behavioral explosion to be sure. . . . Dances, parties, classes, and other activities with both boys and girls present encourage [them] to find their own identity and discourage homosexual behavior."

His stance was a controversial one, treading on the volatile and historically complex issues of sexuality, reproduction, restricted marriage, and institutional sterilization. The *Opinion-Tribune* didn't dodge the issue. "Instituting more activities at night where boy and girl patients can intermingle so they can learn and grow socially," the paper reported, "has not resulted in pregnancies."

Sasser also dispelled rumors that he planned to send some State School residents to the local public schools. Glenwood was certainly not Iowa's only public school district that did not provide public education classes for students with mental retardation (especially moderate to severe retardation). No wonder: The disability classification then in use nationally—"educable, trainable, and custodial"—essentially reinforced the notion that there were some children with disabilities who could not learn and could not benefit from a public school education.

Granted, some of Iowa's larger and more progressive school districts did provide special education classes by this time. The Des Moines school district had since 1914, and by 1957 was offering special classes and work study to 900 students with mild disabilities—although the local ARC had to offer its own classes for students with moderate to severe disabilities. The much smaller school district of Audubon also provided special education classes. This was after intense lobbying by the local ARC in the mid-1950s, according to Mary Barton, a parent and social worker who later moved to Glenwood. But in most Iowa schools, special education classes would not become a reality until passage of the federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, which guaranteed



Bernice Chaffin teaches a class at State School, January 1959. Eight students from nearby Malvern and Hastings traveled daily by bus to special education classes at State School. Set up by Alfred Sasser and the Malvern Board of Education, the arrangement was the first such venture in the state, and was seen as a stop-gap measure until Malvern could provide its own special education classes for local students.

a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment for all children regardless of disability.

Sasser's point-by-point defense on January 9 did not keep State School off the front page. Positive and negative publicity continued. In March, the *Opinion-Tribune* reported that the Iowa Jaycees would fund a late-spring trip to Disneyland for 24 Glenwood residents. Purkhiser, as director of special education, remembers the trip as "a tremendous educational tool" for reinforcing functional reading and writing skills, hygiene, and daily living skills.

But on the same page, the paper reported: "Two Physicians Blast New Policies At State School." The two doctors (one had just been dismissed), were "publicly stating some of the allegations . . . that have been circulating locally for months"—including the "mingling of male and female patients [that] . . . may result in serious repercussions"; a reduction in attendants to allow for more administrative staff; the unnecessary relocation of the hospital; "wasted" Christmas presents given to patients "who couldn't appreciate them"; and a disproportionate focus of resources on residents with milder disabilities.

There was probably some truth behind the last



OMAHA WORLD-HERALD

Sasser points out critical needs at State School to (from left) Monsignor Timothy Gannon (head of psychology at Loras College in Dubuque), Helen Henderson (president of the Iowa ARC), and Mrs. Russell Skelton (of Dickens, Iowa) in February 1958. All three were part of a larger committee, appointed by Governor Loveless in December 1957, to inspect institutions and report their findings to a professional advisory group. Pleading for more funds, Sasser told his visitors: "It's ridiculous to ask someone to work for 120 dollars a month. But that's the starting salary for attendants."

charge. Sasser and his staff had publicly pledged to release residents who didn't belong at State School—"to quit using institutions as dumping grounds," as Purkhiser puts it. But this required intense training and rehabilitation, far more costly than simply feeding and clothing them. The staff understood the demands. They had given up free evenings to teach classes in social skills besides the daytime job training. Purkhiser remembers the effort required: "We found homes and farms and some factories or places that these kids could [work]. . . and then we kind of doubled our hours to make sure we could check on them . . . make sure they were not being taken advantage of."

The community placement of State School residents was complicated by the relative dearth of com-

munity-based resources; it would take President John F. Kennedy's focus on mental retardation, and considerable funding, before communities responded with local social service agencies, job training, group homes, and other local services. However, one resource already in place was the State Vocational Rehabilitation Program in Des Moines.

When they were ready to be placed out, Glenwood residents were sent to Des Moines for an intense evaluation by Vocational Rehabilitation staff, who would then help them find jobs in the Des Moines area. A number of Glenwood residents featured in George Mills's exposés were sent to Des Moines in this way, and Mills maintained a relationship with them for years. "Mr. George Mills takes me out nearly every

Sunday afternoon," one wrote to Sasser from Des Moines. "Mr. Mills is planning to take us Glenwood boys out for a Sunday ride over to the airport."

Considering the time, money, and human resources available to Sasser, his placement efforts were fairly successful: between March 1, 1958, and March 1, 1959, a total of 41 State School residents were placed out of the institution and into jobs ranging from nursing home attendant to auto body technician. More compelling than numbers are the comments sent to the school's director of vocational rehabilitation by former residents. One wrote, "I never thought outside life could be so wonderful. I want to be free. May God Bless You Always." And another: "I like living in Des Moines very much as it gives me a chance to be independent to myself."

But was "a chance to be independent"—secured by only a small percentage of State School residents, and requiring significant resources—paid for by neglecting residents with more severe disabilities? Some evidence suggests yes. It was, in fact, true that there were fewer ward attendants than in previous years and that more were needed to care for the residents. A nurse would later charge that there was a "marked increase in the number of ward patients referred to the hospital with fecal compactions, impetigo and even body lice." It is also true, however, that Glenwood attendants were better prepared than before, with training in positive discipline, practical nursing, and understanding of mental retardation, and with ongoing job evaluations and feedback.

Certainly Sasser had no intention of slighting residents with moderate or severe retardation. His rehabilitation program included every resident of State School, not just those with mild disabilities. "Helping the individual with . . . [a] disability to attain his fullest potential is the prime motive of the Glenwood program," Sasser wrote in his 1958 biennial report. "Primary consideration is given to: 1. Equipping the individual to live a life that is as nearly normal as possible in the community; 2. Equipping the individual who cannot reach the capacity of normal living in society to live more fully within the environs of the institution."

Purkhiser recalls the perspective: "Maybe they [the children] can only learn to zip their zipper or maybe they can just turn over to smile. And we used to look at these kids . . . and say, 'hey, this is what they're going to be if we don't provide an education for them.' And from that, regardless of what their progress [was] . . . whatever they could do, whatever

they were capable [of], whatever they could achieve . . . we felt was important. And that is the way we taught our staff. . . . If they progress farther, that was great." The whole idea, says Purkhiser, was "to let those kids have an opportunity, to educate them, to have programs for them. But then also to take these people who have been misplaced in the institution and move them out."

A letter from a ward attendant also attested to expanded opportunities for residents with severe disabilities. Her letter appeared in the September 1959 State School newsletter. She wrote: "A little more than two years ago the 'Rehabilitation Program' was introduced to the Glenwood State School. By this we mean teaching every child to his or her highest capability. The Glenwood State School was formerly under a custodial administration . . . three fourths of these children [on my ward] were in restraints, not allowed to run and play as they desired." But since "the rehabilitation program came into effect . . . our children can walk to their meals. . . . [go] to entertainments, a playground has been set up . . . and sandboxes which every one of them enjoy. . . . Also included in our building is a school room taught by Mrs. Ralph Mayberry. It is a happy moment for our children when they see Mrs. Mayberry arrive. . . . There is a birthday party held once a month so every child has a birthday party. It is my pleasure to see these little girls made happy with doing the things they are capable of doing."

Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Collins of Danbury saw things differently. Every three weeks they visited their 12-year-old at State School, the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* reported, and each time "conditions seem to be getting worse." The Collinses said, "It is like putting a bunch of rat terriers and bloodhounds together to fight it out as there are 35 to 40 girls in the ward, from 8 to 16 years of age. The doors are locked and they are left alone much of the time without supervision. It is no wonder that we sometimes find our girl with a black eye or cut lips. . . . It seems like the severely retarded children are being neglected the most at this school."

State School again became the center of national attention. *Life* magazine published a long story on Mayo Buckner and Sasser's reforms in its March 24, 1958 issue. Most of the information had appeared earlier in the *Des Moines Register* and *Time*, but new material in *Life* was particularly damning to previous administrations.

"A standard punishment for those who did try to escape before Sasser's time was confinement to one of



SHSI (DES MOINES)

the 'side rooms,' makeshift cells in the dormitories," the article described. "The side rooms were small . . . and had one strong door and one heavily screened window. Overhead a powerful light bulb glowed 24 hours a day. In addition to the bulb the only object in the room was a bucket. Men were confined to these rooms, naked, three at a time, for periods of days or weeks. They would scratch at the plaster walls with their fingernails until they worked through to the lath. Sometimes, finding a metal nail in the lath, they would write on the walls. Over many years the walls and even the ceilings became covered with inscriptions. In one side room, for example, there are more than 500 inscriptions, only two of which are obscene. In contrast the word 'love' appears dozens of times as does the Christian cross, together with many phrases such as 'Mom and Dad' and 'I love my God very much.'"

Life's article also added new details to Mayo Buckner's story, including excerpts of letters from George Mogridge (an earlier Glenwood superintendent) to Buckner's family, asking that Buckner's visits home be kept short because he was needed in the print shop.

Life charged: "The opposition to Mayo's release on the part of the Glenwood officials was not merely passive. It was active. In state institutions such as Glenwood a paradoxical situation arises when an in-

A crude calendar and words carved in the woodwork give voice to State School residents in this late-1950s photo. A *Life* magazine article on Mayo Buckner explored the obstacles faced by institutions: "Many who worked in Glenwood during Mayo's time were sensitive and informed human beings. Unhappily many others were not, but there were reasons. The pay of attendants and teachers . . . is low and the work is hard."

mate shows signs of ability. . . . The institutions are always in desperate need of money. When the officials discover that an inmate has talent . . . they tighten their grasp on him. The inmate may be made to work within the institution for nothing or, in Mayo's case, for a token payment of \$1 a month." Again, the pre-Sasser administrators and employees were cast in a negative light, and again Alfred Sasser was portrayed as the hero.

Controversy continued. Local physician Ward DeYoung, who had been dismissed from State School by medical director Dr. Frank Jacobson, claimed he was fired because he had publicly opposed Sasser's policies. He clamored for an impartial investigation. J. O. Cromwell, the state mental health director, traveled to Glenwood to hear DeYoung and anyone else who had complaints. Governor Loveless directed that DeYoung's allegations be investigated by a Professional Committee on Mental Health (comprising representatives of the Iowa Psychological Association, Iowa State Bar Association, Iowa State Medical Society, Iowa Neuropsychiatric Society, and State School workers). At the committee's hearing, Jacobson resigned and DeYoung was reinstated.

Local critics were not appeased. They began to organize an official group—the Glenwood Citizens' Committee—to publicly oppose Sasser and "to combat adverse publicity they feel the city of Glenwood has received as a result of the State School situation," the *Opinion-Tribune* reported. Out of the committee's first meeting in April, attended by about 20 people, came a request for an open meeting with Sasser and a statement to the press: "The Citizen's Committee wishes to go on record that it does not care to pass judgment on technical and mechanical aspects of any publicity released from the State School, but requests that the Superintendent shall stick to factual and full information, avoiding such misrepresentations and misleading statements as have appeared heretofore."

Throughout April, conversations once confined to dinner tables or downtown lunch counters began to occur in public sources, most notably as letters to the editor of the *Glenwood Opinion-Tribune*. In one, a Mt. Pleasant parent of a State School resident asked, "What does the average citizen of Glenwood know about running an institution for the mentally handicapped? Dr. Sasser came to Glenwood with years of training, . . . experience, and high recommendations from professional authority." Having observed the kindness of Glenwood merchants and

clerks, the writer ended: "I can't help but feel this dispute is just a misunderstanding and can and will be worked out." Enclosed was a clipping about a Parsons, Kansas, institution and that community's strong support of new reforms.

John and Erma Cheyney were also parents of a State School resident and no strangers to the institution; they participated in the annual fall horse show and other State School activities. Their letter began: "We are certainly aware of the stories, rumors, gossip, and talk coming from and about the School and have been quite awhile—long before Dr. Sasser even came to Glenwood."

The Cheyneys had "listened to complaints from workers at the School, who asked to be nameless for fear of losing their jobs; and have worried about the stories of abuse and neglect of the children by the attendants who didn't care . . . long before Dr. Sasser was hired. But the public didn't know about it. Our complaints and investigations were carefully kept quiet. Glenwood didn't know about these things and went along in its nice little rut, knowing the School was on the Hill and knowing the kids were up there in their own little world and content to keep them there."

Applauding Sasser's "the patient comes first" approach, the Cheyneys also voiced their support of the addition of professional staff (though noting the need for more ward attendants); and even the publicity, which "has awakened the public to the fact that mentally retarded people are still human beings entitled to everything a Democracy can offer and an opportunity to develop in life to their highest capacity. . . . [and has] revealed the fact that many things in the Institution needed to be changed."

Scolding those citizens who had objected to the formation of 4-H and Scouting clubs at State School and who never volunteered, they concluded: "Please, please remember this is 1958, and changes everywhere are many and great, and it is time for a change in the status of the mentally retarded, too. Growing pains can hurt, but don't be too quick to jump to the conclusion that everything is all bad and nothing good is being done."

An anonymous letter began: "I'm sure we're all a little tired of hearing so much talk about the Hill." The letter reasoned that Glenwood citizens had always been aware of positive and negative happenings at State School, including the use and abuse of restraints and other "dire, dark happenings on the Hill," and that with "true compassion" they had learned "to accept the inmates as they are." The letter continued: "Are we losing our sense of balance? . . . Why must we

*meeting at Glenwood Armory
June 25, 1958*

RESOLUTION

It is the considered judgment of the Glenwood Citizens' Committee that:

1. The Board of Control did not make an adequate investigation before naming a successor to Dr. Meyer.
2. The Board of Control has not conducted a proper inquiry since that time as to the administration of the Glenwood State School.
3. The Board of Control has taken no affirmative steps toward correcting and ending the misstatements, misrepresentations and inaccuracies which characterize the publicity emanating from the Glenwood State School.

It is, therefore, recommended by the Glenwood Citizens' Committee that the Board of Control assume some responsibility in controlling the administration at the Glenwood State School. It is further recommended that the Board of Control discharge its duty to the citizens of Iowa by seeking the employment of an administrator for the Glenwood State School whose record and actions permit no question as to his personal integrity.

Glenwood Citizens' Committee
Glenwood, Iowa
June 26, 1958

LETTER: COUNCIL BLUFFS NONPAREIL; PHOTO: OMAHA WORLD-HERALD



One of several community leaders invited to meet with Sasser over the firing of Ward DeYoung, William C. Rathke (left) talks here with Glenwood Citizens' Committee members Mildred Wamberg (secretary) and Dennis Collins (co-chair) in late April 1958. By late June, as the above resolution attests, the Citizens' Committee called for the Board of Control to hire a new administrator "whose record and actions permit no question as to his personal integrity."

hear so much about past neglect, antiquated buildings, etc., with complete disregard and gross ingratitude for all the good things that have been done by many fine people for many years past? Why must the kids of the Hill be completely alienated by animosity never known before, from the community that has done its best to make them as happy as possible?"

The opinion of the anonymous letter-writer was shared by the Glenwood Citizens' Committee, but that group, too, was somewhat anonymous. Who exactly were the members of the Citizens' Committee and what exactly were their concerns? The answers are unclear and depend on the source.

A 1958 *Iowan* magazine article charged the committee with "vile and vindictiveness" and "witch hunting tactics." "One member is supposedly bitter because the board cancelled a repair contract he had with the school," the *Iowan* article continued. "The group ranges from some old ladies who are 'just sure there is something evil out there' to well-known businessmen, to some pretty malicious individuals."

James Purkhiser remembers that the Citizens' Committee's main complaints were that they didn't like the "patients" leaving the institution and going out into the public, and that they felt the publicity placed the community of Glenwood in an unfairly negative spotlight.

Only three members of the Citizens' Committee were ever named in the *Opinion-Tribune*. Of the two who could be located in 1995, neither was willing to discuss individual roles or committee missions, except to say that they were legitimately concerned about important issues.

The committee's slant on the issues might be gleaned from an April 1958 *Opinion-Tribune* article that listed several questions the committee planned to forward to the Board of Control: Did Sasser have unlimited control over state allocations, or were the funds earmarked? Did other institutions "discourage inmates or patients" from "productive work such as canning, gardening, and sewing" for the institution? Should socialization classes be "conducted primarily to teach the girls smoking"? How should the committee take unresolved grievances against Sasser to a

higher authority? Did Sasser's duties require frequent out-of-state travel? Was there a policy on "excessive drinking of hard liquors on institutional premises"?

But perhaps what most aggrieved the Citizens' Committee were Sasser's "misrepresentations" in the media, and his failure to share the credit and limelight with others. These sentiments run like an undercurrent through *Opinion-Tribune* articles, with Sasser claiming that the media sometimes misquoted him and ignored his requests for corrections, and with the Citizens' Committee churning out letters to the media to correct "false information" and to prevent future "misrepresentations" in upcoming stories by *Reader's Digest* and *Armstrong Circle Theatre*. Retired superintendent Meyer explained that the committee "has no objection to Dr. Sasser's program—only to the manner in which it is carried on and to the unfavorable publicity the community has received. It is strange so many things were bad, and so many corrected so rapidly."

Tragically, the conflict may have been less about a community not ready to change its philosophy about people with disabilities, and more about hurt feelings.

The Glenwood Citizens' Committee continued as a self-appointed watchdog. While the Professional Committee on Mental Health released its report, backing Sasser's program and criticizing De-Young for "taking his problems to the press and his legislators rather than to his superiors," the *Opinion-Tribune* sent a staff member to North Vernon, Indiana, to inquire about Sasser's performance at Muscatatuck State School.

The *Opinion-Tribune's* report appeared on May 29, headlined as "North Vernon, Ind., State School Story Same As Here." It cited several complaints at Muscatatuck: "too much freedom allowed between the male and female patients, refusal to allow sterilizations to prevent pregnancies, exaggerated publicity regarding the success of the rehabilitation program, and improper conduct on the part of professional members."

"It was the roughest period of my newspaper career," the North Vernon editor had told the Glenwood reporter, who observed that "in the end there was no middle ground—you either were for Mr. Sasser or against him."

Meetings multiplied. The Southwest Iowa Association for Retarded Children convened special meetings "to discuss possible means of promoting positive support of the program set up by Mr. Sasser." ARC sponsored a public meeting in June, and the Citizens' Committee invited the Board of Control and Iowa

mental health director J. O. Cromwell. Some 250 people showed up. With tight control over the format, Southwest Iowa ARC was joined by parents and school employees voicing strong support for the rehabilitation programs. When the three-hour presentation ended, no one asked any questions. As the *Opinion-Tribune* commented, "Those who went expecting 'fireworks' were disappointed."

Several weeks later, the Citizens' Committee called another public meeting with the Board of Control, this one more contentious. Some 300 people packed the armory basement. The format of this meeting was question-answer. The *Opinion-Tribune* summarized the concerns raised: "Mr. Sasser is a 'troublemaker,' having previously been involved in a similar situation in Indiana; he unduly criticizes past administrations and greatly exaggerates his own accomplishments, which creates unfavorable publicity for the town; and tax money is being used unwisely."

The paper reported that after three hours of heated debate, George Callenius of the Board of Control asked bluntly: "How many of you want us to dismiss Mr. Sasser tomorrow?" and then, "How many want us to keep him?"

The show of hands was two to one, to keep Sasser. "That's enough for me," Callenius said. "I'm going home."

While summer drifted into fall, the feud seemed to quiet down. State School Day was celebrated again in September, and the school entered a float in the town's Homecoming Parade in October. Then on December 10, the national spotlight returned, on network television. In an *Armstrong Circle Theatre* docudrama titled "The Invisible Mark," actors played the roles of Sasser, Purkhiser, vocational rehabilitation director Warren Anthers, and social worker Wilma Bock. *TV Guide* described the plot: "Glenwood State School, Glenwood, Ia., is an institution for mentally retarded people of all ages. . . . [When] Alfred Sasser, Jr., came to the school as its new supervisor, he found conditions deplorable. Tonight's dramatization tells how Sasser and his associates faced this situation and how they dealt with three individual cases: Arthur Marion, 43 [possibly based on Arthur Mencl, who was 43 in 1957], who didn't belong there; Ruth, 21, whose future is uncertain; and Billy Joe . . . , 5, who might never be able to leave. Dr. Sasser speaks at the close of the program."

The show was billed as "the exciting story of one man's discovery that gave a bold new outlook to

people imprisoned in this hospital." Purkhiser recalls that the docudrama, broadcast from New York, "had a lot of things that were very, very real in it."

Back in Iowa, the real Glenwood drama was nearing its climax. Months earlier, the Citizens' Committee had unearthed one particular fact that would prove useful to them: "Dr." Alfred Sasser had not earned a Ph.D.

Sasser did have master's degrees (one in hospital administration and one in educational psychology) and he had started but not completed a Ph.D. from Indiana University while working at Muscatatuck State School. During the interview process, however, he had told the Iowa Board of Control that he had completed the doctorate.

Under other circumstances, this might have been resolved. Iowa law, after all, did not require that its institution superintendents have a Ph.D. But in the supercharged atmosphere of Glenwood, and with Sasser sticking with his claim of a doctorate, it proved to be the last straw.

Purkhiser remembers going to Des Moines with Sasser in early 1959 to meet with John Hansen of the Board of Control. By Purkhiser's recollections, the exchange went something like this:

Hansen: You don't need a doctor's degree. You don't need anything. All you need is just to be Al Sasser. The hell with these people. Do you have this doctor's degree?

Sasser: Yes.

Hansen: Are you sure?

Sasser: Yes.

Purkhiser was frustrated. He knew that what Sasser was saying wasn't true and that Hansen seemed to

be offering him a way out. "I said, 'For God's sakes, the man is trying to tell you something.' He [Sasser] was honked off about this citizen committee and them doing things like this. But why he was telling about this doctor degree, I don't know," Purkhiser recounted. "I've often asked him why. . . . A few things he and I did not agree upon, I'll tell you. . . . We had some big battles from time to time but . . . I would do anything for him and he for me. But this is one area [where] I couldn't touch him. . . . He had this deep-rooted thing. . . . He told them they just lost the records, and that's all there was to it."

Purkhiser recalls that the matter ended with Hansen telling Sasser that he knew Sasser didn't have the degree, and that Sasser had lied to him.

"He fired him on the spot," Purkhiser says. Officially, Sasser resigned.

The *Glenwood Opinion-Tribune* and the *Des Moines Register* gave prominent coverage to Sasser's resignation in mid-March 1959. Both papers reported the Ph.D. controversy as the reason for the resignation, and both reported that Sasser had accepted another job in New Jersey to be closer to his ailing father.

The *Opinion-Tribune* story had a more victorious tone. It cited all the major community complaints in the past and printed a Citizens' Committee statement that the action of the Board of Control "appears to vindicate the position taken by this committee the past year and a half. The numerous unfavorable comparisons to which the Glenwood community and former school administrations have been subjected have been, in the main, apparently ill-advised."

The *Register* story highlighted Sasser's national prominence and the merit of his rehabilitation program, along with diplomatically worded comments

NOTE ON SOURCES

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Complete annotations are held in *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files (SHSI-Iowa City).

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

Seven oral history interviews conducted by the author in 1995 further document the history of institutions for those with mental retardation. Archived in Special Collections at the State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City center), the interviews are available to researchers. Those interviewed and topics discussed are:

Helen Henderson is a parent of a daughter with

from the Board of Control. The article also quoted Helen Henderson, as past president of Iowa ARC, who expressed deep regret at "the loss of Mr. Sasser," questioned the relevance of having a Ph.D., and remarked, "He has a true feeling for retarded children."

As for the *Daily Reporter* (a Davenport news sheet), the editorialist spared few words: "The legislature should make sure the reason that Dr. Alfred Sasser is leaving the Glenwood State School is not that he is so progressive that he has incurred the wrath and jealousy of the 'do nothing' bureaucrats who would rather see that all the T's are crossed and the I's dotted than make progress."

The editorial asserted that the false Ph.D. claim was not important: "That sounds to us like they had to dig real deep for an excuse to let him go. . . . The whole thing stinks. The people of Iowa have a right to know if the man who has done such an outstanding job as to attract national attention has turned out to be a 'stinker' or whether there is another 'stinker' who decided to bust him because he dared to show up some of the lousy things that have been going on under their jurisdiction for the past 40 years."

All in all, the resignation was probably not about a "stinker" embarrassed about "lousy things" Sasser had drawn attention to in the institution's past. More likely, it was about a board's weariness over the constant conflict with the Citizens' Committee, and disappointment that such a charismatic candidate would lie to them and create such controversy.

The Board of Control probably realized that the national publicity Sasser had generated would now help attract a competent, progressive replacement, and that in the meantime J. O. Cromwell, a progressive reformer in his own right, could attempt to put out any local fires that remained.

Although Sasser's tenure had brought conflict to Glenwood, the new philosophy of rehabilitation and

education continued at State School under the following superintendents and with Purkhiser and other Sasser supporters who remained on staff. As Governor Loveless remarked after Sasser had resigned, "The program is greater than any individual. We are determined that it shall move ahead without interruption."

Alfred Sasser had helped to spark major reform at State School, but far greater dynamics were also at work. Across the nation, parents' organizations like the ARC continued to gain strength. More trained professionals entered the fields of special education, social work, vocational rehabilitation, and psychology. Community-based alternatives were created to serve people with disabilities in their hometowns. Federal mandates, such as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, were passed. Most of all, there were changes in American hearts and minds about the worth and potential of people with disabilities.

Reform in Iowa involved far more than one committed, though arrogant, individual, and far more than his two productive, albeit stormy, years at Glenwood. Reform depended on parents and social services advocates like Helen Henderson who worked relentlessly to change Iowa's laws and funding mechanisms and to push for statewide institutional reforms. Reform relied on leadership from subsequent State School superintendents like Peter Peffer and William Campbell. Most importantly, reform relied on Iowans to accept and serve people with disabilities in their home communities.

Such changes meant that many people who had grown up in Glenwood State School now live independently. Liz Stimmel lives in Iowa City and recently was honored at the Iowa City Rehabilitation and Health Care Center, where she has worked the late

a disability, and a crusader for services for people with disabilities. She discusses her feelings about her daughter's years at Woodward, Independence, Glenwood, and in community-based programs. She describes her role in local and state ARCs (as a field representative and state president); involvement on state boards and committees; and lobbying efforts. (Transcribed)

Carrie Merritt worked in Glenwood State School's Business Office, 1945-1988. She talks about administrations she worked under and changes in work culture and programming. (Transcribed)

James Purkhiser worked with Alfred Sasser at Muscatatuck State School and followed him to Glenwood to become Director of Special Education and later Director of Staff Development, staying eight years. He describes his start in special education; Sasser's rehabilitation approach; and curriculum. (Transcribed)

Bob Wallace worked at Glenwood (1960-1990)

in special education teaching and as an Area Administrator. He discusses curriculum; therapeutic teams; Manpower Development Training Act; Foster Grandparents Program; behavior management; etc. (Transcribed)

Mary Barton is the parent of a son with a disability and was a social worker and administrator for Mills County (1960-1978). She describes her son; experiences at Glenwood; Hope Haven School in Rock Valley; Mills County ARC; Lake View Manor class-action suit; and more. (Abstract; partially transcribed)

William Campbell has been Superintendent at Glenwood State Hospital School since 1969. He discusses his work at Cherokee Mental Health Institute; Alfred Sasser; Helen Henderson, and J.O. Cromwell; his Glenwood reforms (building home-like residences, funding changes with Title 19 and Medicaid, outside advocacy groups, changes in office of superintendent); etc. (Abstract; partially transcribed)

Paul Brodigan was Director of Recreational Services at Glenwood for many years and one of the organizers of the first Special Olympics in Iowa. (No transcript or abstract)

Another valuable set of oral history interviews provides additional perspective to the history of Iowa's institutions. In 1992, with funding from the Iowa Humanities Board, the Iowa University Affiliated Program at the University of Iowa conducted interviews with 12 people who had spent all or part of their childhood in one of Iowa's institutions. **Art Mencl** and **Liz Stimmel** were part of this project, and they offered insights and observations available nowhere else. For more information on this second collection, contact: David Leshtz or Barbara Smith, Iowa University Affiliated Program, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa 52242 (319-353-6523).



OMAHA WORLD-HERALD

Leaving the institution—whether for a visit home, for job training and placement, or for an independent life—was Alfred Sasser's vision for many State School residents. Here, a youngster packs her suitcase for a two-week Christmas vacation in December 1957. Before Sasser, the school's own Christmas programs had been considered sufficient holiday observance, and few residents had traveled home at Christmas. "The fact that about eight hundred patients have lost contact with families makes vacations a problem," State School's director of social services said. "They are simply forgotten. Nobody wants them." In 1957 under Sasser's new policy, 350 residents went home for the holidays—five times more than the previous year.

shift in the laundry for 25 years. Calling her "a gem of an employee," the local newspaper commented: "What makes Stimmel so special? She's an ordinary, hard-working person who enjoys her job." Art Mencl lives in Iowa City, too, and has been a guest speaker for university classes, seminars, and the Governor's Commission on Aging.

Such changes meant that many children with disabilities now attend the same schools as their neighbors and live in their own homes with their families.

Finally, the changes meant that people with disabilities who are served by the Glenwood State Hospital School today are fewer in number (about 400 compared to 1,739 in 1956), have individual program plans written in consultation with a multidisciplinary team considering a full range of treatment options, and live as normal lives as are possible, in small houses rather than large institutional wards.

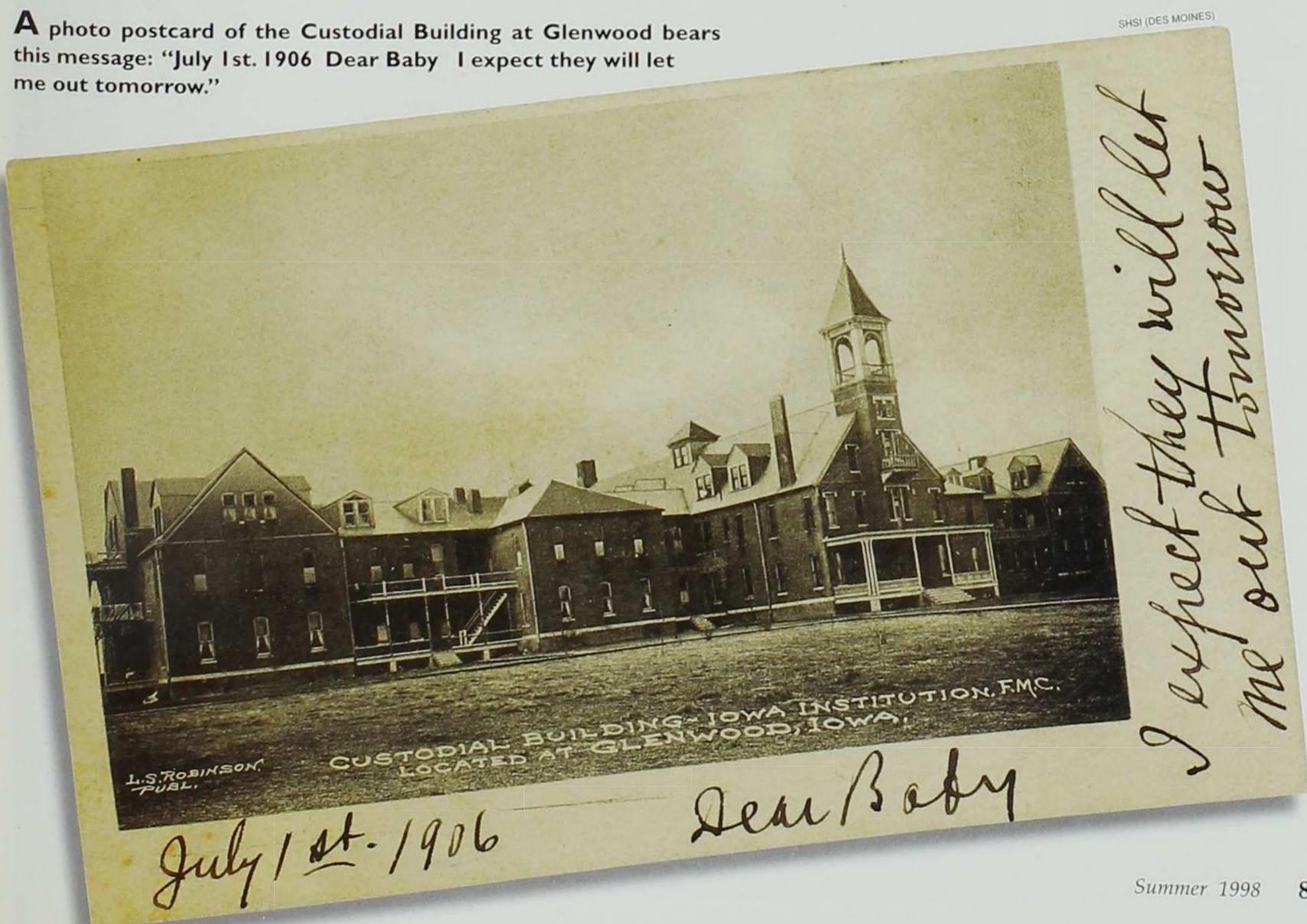
Just as the nationwide struggle for civil rights and racial equality gathered momentum in the 1950s, so did another, less visible struggle—a struggle for the rights of every citizen with a disability to receive hu-

mane and appropriate treatment and education, to participate fully in society in the least restrictive environment possible, and to lead a normal life, like any other American citizen.

And just as the struggle for civil rights and racial equality is not yet over, neither is the struggle for disability rights. The complex issues involved continue to play themselves out in Iowa and across the nation today, as American society now wrestles with full inclusion in public education and critical shortages of certified special education teachers. As in the 1950s, it will take the commitment of parents, professionals, and the public to make a difference. ❖

The author is a middle school special education/at risk teacher at Malcolm Price Lab School in Cedar Falls. She received a B.A. in history from the University of Northern Iowa and an M.A. in special education from the University of Iowa. She has written about George Gallup, dime novelists, and early children's television for this magazine.

A photo postcard of the Custodial Building at Glenwood bears this message: "July 1st. 1906 Dear Baby I expect they will let me out tomorrow."



SHSI (DES MOINES)



PHOTO BY MOLLY MYERS NAUMANN

A Modern School for the 1920s

Frank Wetherell Designs Oskaloosa's Lincoln School



by Jean Florman

Each fall across Iowa, school doors swing open to welcome thousands of returning students. In Oskaloosa, the doors of Lincoln Elementary School extend an especially exuberant "welcome back." Colorful strings of alphabet letters and numbers outline two doorways, and tucked under the arch, a pair of creamy white

owls peer down from their perch, promising wisdom to youngsters who cross the threshold (*left*). Rising dramatically above the roof line, profiles of Abraham Lincoln (*see cover*), a girl, and a boy scout the horizon for any stragglers. These charming terra cotta features temper the serious business of education.

Designed by Iowa architect Frank E. Wetherell in 1921-1922, Lincoln School reflected the latest theories of education and school architecture, and was among the first "modern" single-story schools in Iowa. Its modern trappings included electric lights, a telephone system connecting all rooms, and an electric bell. (Traditional school bells were losing favor, and already in 1911 a respected educator had ridiculed schoolhouse belfries as "useless, impertinent, and expensive" architectural features.)

The furnishings also were modern. "Each youngster has a separate combination seat and desk," the *Oskaloosa Daily Herald* noted in April 1922 when the school opened. Adjustable and movable, one-piece desks meant that every student, regardless of size, could have a desk that fit, and that teachers could arrange their classrooms with ease and flexibility.

Most important, the floor plan addressed modern concerns of safety, ventilation, and lighting. Frank Wetherell designed Lincoln School with wide corridors, several exits, and tall, arched windows. "All class rooms open directly out

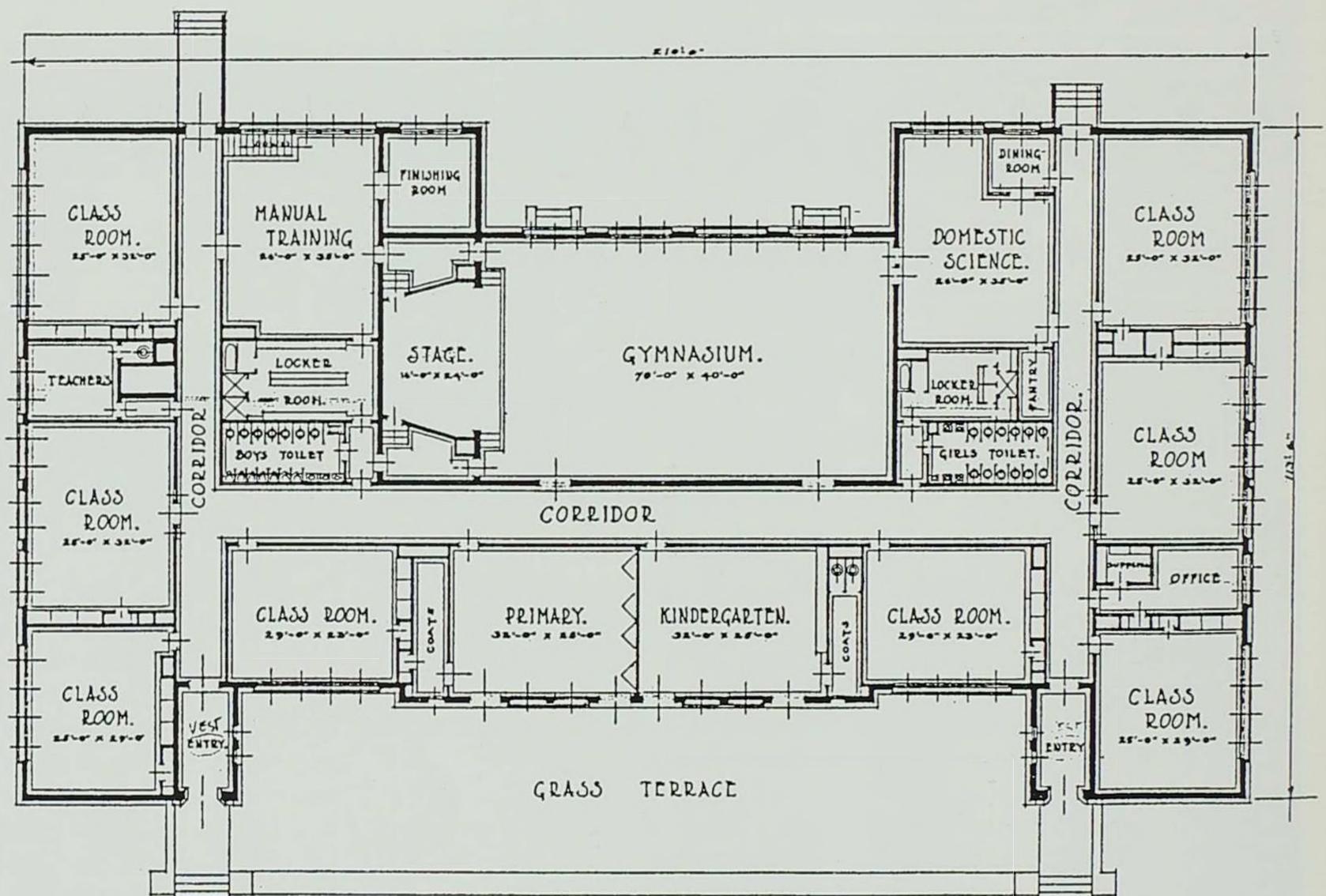
The Stories Behind the Sites

Historic places are often reluctant to reveal their pasts. The historical facts must be gleaned from architectural drawings and property records, pried out of rotting doorsills and weak flooring, coaxed out of people's memories and photo albums, sifted out of local lore and legend. Then they must be dovetailed back into the sense of time and place to derive their real meaning, dimension, and significance.

Yet for those of us who long to understand the past, to inhabit it in our imaginations, preserving historic places and resurrecting their stories offer a wonderful bonus: we can amble around the buildings, pace off the sites, climb the steps, breathe the atmosphere. Through historic places, we can get that much closer to the everyday drama of the past because we can walk onto the stage.

In this issue, *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* continues its occasional series showcasing Iowa's historic structures and places. Iowa has roughly 5,000 structures on the National Register of Historic Places and many more that are judged eligible. Behind every one of those places is a story of why that site is significant to our local, state, or national history.

—The Editor



WETHERELL & HARRISON - ARCHITECTS
DES MOINES - IOWA.

MAIN FLOOR PLAN.
SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0" 1/16" = 1'-0"

LINCOLN SCHOOL BUILDING
OSKALOOSA IOWA

Wetherell's floor plan reflected modern concerns in the 1920s: classrooms open to natural light, multiple exits in case of fire, and a combination gymnasium-auditorium, intended for both school programs and community events.

upon fire proof halls and a half dozen exits are easily accessible," the *Daily Herald* commented. "The rooms all face the street and avenues surrounding the school grounds, and are well lighted."

School architects were discarding the traditional square or rectangular block of contiguous classrooms in favor of more linear layouts (often in the form of an H, T, or L). One benefit was the ease of building later additions, which could branch off as wings and bring in more natural light. Many educators also were calling for kindergarten classrooms to connect directly with the outdoors,

and Wetherell achieved this with large French doors opening onto a grass terrace.

Wetherell's floor plan also embodied the spirit of 1920s progressive education. The manual training room and domestic science room reflected the latest notions of training children in the social and practical arts as well as intellectual skills. The gymnasium, flanked by locker rooms with showers, underscored the emphasis on the body as well as the mind. The gymnasium also doubled as an auditorium, with a stage on one end and a capacity of 500. Auditoriums were another

feature of modern schools, envisioned, as one educator explained, as "the integrating center of the school" and "the center of training in self-expression, self-control, appreciation, and social relations."

Lincoln School's combination gymnasium-auditorium and the entire floor plan addressed another concern of American educators—the role of a school in a community and in a democratic society. "One of the great problems

of a democracy is to develop that community of spirit which binds the entire population into a genuine social body," wrote Charles L. Robbins, education professor at the State University of Iowa and author of *The School as a Social Institution* (1918). Robbins argued for school buildings to be used as a "harmonizing or socializing force," bridging differences in religion, class, and politics, and encouraging interdependence over individualism.

Like other educators, Robbins advocated the use of urban school buildings for adult education, recreation, and social and cultural

events during non-school hours. It made good economic sense and good civic sense. The *Daily Herald* agreed: "The new building will count for the better training of boys and girls and the making of better citizens and a better town."

Between 1919/20 and 1923/24, use of U.S. schools as social, recreational, and community centers jumped 55 percent, and architects designed schools accordingly. "The 'socialized schoolhouse,' as it is frequently called," wrote architect Wilbur T. Mills in 1918, "is so arranged that its auditorium, library, toilets, and gymnasiums can be cut off from the rest of the

building and opened to the public without allowing access to classrooms or offices."

Oskaloosa and architect Frank Wetherell clearly had a "socialized schoolhouse" in mind. When Lincoln School opened in April 1922, the *Daily Herald* described it as a "splendid new building and the new 'community center,' for such the building will be."

The newspaper continued: "The auditorium-gymnasium fills the center portion of the building, and will be the First ward's community center. Here the kiddies will indulge in their indoor sports, the youngsters stage their plays and

PHOTO BY MOLLY MYERS NAUMANN



Built to replace a school described by Oskaloosa's townspeople as "dingy, unsafe, and unsanitary," Lincoln School, at 911 B Avenue West, opened on April 3, 1922. Some 300 students assembled in the auditorium for opening ceremonies, the *Daily Herald* reported. "They gave the flag salute with much feeling and devotion. Then followed the singing of 'The Star Spangled Banner' as only school children know how to sing it, and they gave three lusty cheers for the new school building."



Terra cotta profiles of two students (above and right) punctuate the roof line of Lincoln School. Social thinkers believed that the architectural character of a modern school should express “the spirit of education,” as one educator put it, and create “an atmosphere of invitation to participate in the learning process.”

entertainments, the old folks hold their public rallies.” The gymnasium connected “with the domestic science rooms on the east, an ideal arrangement to permit the serving of banquets, luncheons and dinners with little extra effort.”

Frank Wetherell designed Lincoln School with an eye to form as well as function. His use of lavish terra cotta ornamentation added a healthy dash of style and wit to the brick building.

“Wetherell’s terra cotta designs incorporated delightful motifs and happy colors,” says architectural historian Molly Myers Naumann. “Green, rose, blue—they remind me of a bouquet of flowers fresh-picked from a spring garden.”

Once glazed and fired, Naumann explains, terra cotta elements can maintain their rich colors and architectural integrity for decades—as they have on Lincoln School for the last 76 years.

Although use of the ancient material dates back to antiquity, terra cotta became particularly popular in the 1870s among Chi-

cago architects. They used it for ornamentation because of its diverse design possibilities, and for cladding multistoried buildings because of its fireproof qualities. Architect Louis Sullivan and his followers in the Prairie School movement especially favored terra cotta. Some of Iowa’s finest examples include the Poweshiek National Bank (1913-1915) and the Masonic Temple (1917), both in Grinnell; the Woodbury County Courthouse in Sioux City (1915-1918); and certainly Lincoln School in Oskaloosa.

Terra cotta (Latin for “burnt earth”) can be molded or carved into almost any shape and glazed in a rainbow of colors. Although it can mimic stone, terra cotta weighs half as much, and individual motifs are easily and inexpensively replicated from the original casts. Terra cotta also lends itself to the demands of various architectural styles. Its highly decorative possibilities satisfied the aesthetic needs of Neoclassical devotees, whereas its naturalistic texture and colors complemented the organic sensibilities of Prairie School proponents. Architects and builders could order standard terra cotta elements from manufacturers’ catalogs or oversee the creation of custom-designed pieces.

“A real surge in the manufacture of terra cotta occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries,” says Ralph Christian, architectural historian at the State Historical Society of Iowa. “The development of terra cotta and tile technology—especially in Ohio—parallels the rise of the petroleum



A Lincoln Fervor

In Oskaloosa's Lincoln School, modern education and school architecture also dovetailed with the national push early in the century to "Americanize" millions of new immigrants by reinforcing and celebrating traditional American values and patriotism. The upheaval and uncertainty of World War I and the Red Scare fueled the fires of patriotism even more. Looking for national symbols of stalwart saviors during crisis, Americans turned to historic figures like Abraham Lincoln.

The 1909 centennial of Lincoln's birth had already sparked a "Lincoln fervor" that would last well into the century. "The first Lincoln penny was minted that year," architectural historian Ralph Christian says, "and Americans fanned a renaissance of interest in the president's life and

contributions. He was seen as a good role model for children, and the stories of Lincoln reading by candlelight and walking to school barefoot were told again and again in homes and classrooms."

In the eleven years (1911-1922) between the planning and completion of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., Americans bestowed the name "Lincoln" on countless endeavors. While the transcontinental Lincoln Highway proved to be the most far-reaching project to honor the Great Emancipator, hundreds of others also proudly bore his name—from "Lincoln Logs" (invented by architect Frank Lloyd Wright's son), to Oskaloosa's Lincoln School and its terra cotta profile of the president (see cover).

—Jean Florman



PHOTO BY MOLLY MYERS NAUMANN

and natural gas industries in this country. Before the use of natural gas could provide a steady high heat, terra cotta tended to be too soft to be widely used on commercial and other public architecture."

Abundant in clay, petroleum, and natural gas, Ohio soon became a major producer of high-quality pottery and terra cotta. Ohio was also the birthplace of Lincoln School architect Frank Wetherell. Frank was born in Malta in 1869, where his father, Henry, was a contractor and builder. It is possible, Christian says, that when Henry Wetherell moved his family to Iowa in 1875, he brought with him knowledge of the beauty and benefits of terra cotta as a building material.

The terra cotta medallions that Frank Wetherell incorporated into the Lincoln School design are particularly impressive and creative examples: profiles of Abraham Lincoln and two students rise above groupings of cipher books, globes, and other educational motifs. At once "elegant and whimsical," Naumann remarks, "terra cotta provided Wetherell the vehicle to add richness to a functional structure."

Wetherell always considered himself a native son of Oskaloosa. He studied civil engineering at the State University of Iowa, in Iowa City, but his interest in design soon lured him to architecture, and after completing his studies, he returned to Oskaloosa to launch his architectural career.

Like beads on a ribbon, alphabet letters and numbers ornament an entrance to Lincoln School.

COURTESY OF JOHN WETHERELL

Two years later, he and his wife, Amy, moved to Peoria, Illinois; he practiced there for four years and then returned to Oskaloosa. Today the south-central Iowa community still boasts 44 structures attributed to him—one of the best collections of Wetherell designs in the state.

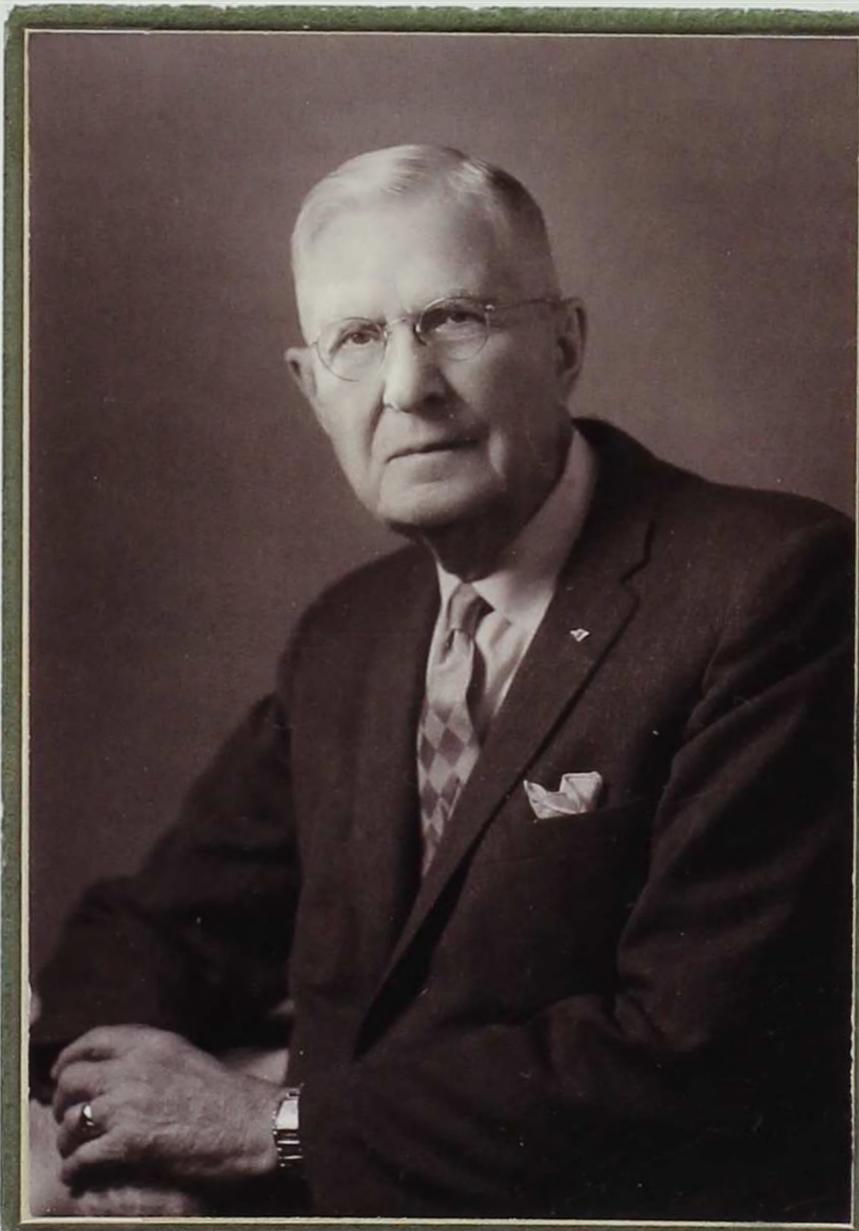
Wetherell's first commissions were residential. Many of his early house designs were a simplified Queen Anne style, with multiple hip roofs, gable wings, and wrap-around porches. By the turn of the century, he was experimenting with the simplified facades, broad gable roof lines, and gambrel roofs of the popular Shingle style.

Soon, the successful young architect was tackling public and commercial work in Oskaloosa, designing storefronts, the St. James Episcopal Church, and the town's Carnegie Library. Then in 1905, Wetherell moved to Des Moines, where he quickly joined forces with the well-established architectural firm of Oliver O. Smith.

"Wetherell had had many residential commissions in Oskaloosa," Naumann says, "but he must have been looking for a larger audience for his talents."

Naumann, who researched Wetherell and nominated Lincoln School to the National Register of Historic Places, lists just a few Des Moines structures designed by his firm: St. Joseph's Academy, the Merchant's Transfer Building (now Younkers), and a handful of buildings on the State Fairgrounds. As a member of the Des Moines Boulevard Commission, he also helped plan civic improvements like Keosauqua Way as part of the national City Beautiful Movement.

Elsewhere in Iowa, Wetherell's credits included a number of



Iowa architect Frank Wetherell, several years after he designed Lincoln School in Oskaloosa.

Where to find a Wetherell

Frank Wetherell's architectural legacy lives on throughout Iowa today, perhaps in your own community. Here's a brief list of where you'll find some of his work.

- * Masonic Temple in Grinnell
- * Decatur County Courthouse in Leon
- * Keokuk County Courthouse in Sigourney
- * Public libraries in Bedford, Bloomfield, Boone, Cherokee, Eldon, and Osceola
- * St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Des Moines
- * Masonic Home Lodge in Des Moines

schools, libraries, fraternal lodges, and YMCAs. He also provided designs for houses, churches, and a camp store for Buxton, Iowa, a coal-mining community established by Consolidation Coal Company in 1900. And he continued to design projects for his hometown, including Oskaloosa's fire station and city hall, the City Park bandstand, the stone gateway to Forest Cemetery, and Lincoln Elementary School.

Through the years, Smith & Wetherell underwent several permutations, and today the architectural firm is known as Wetherell, Ericsson, Leusink. Frank Wetherell ended his active practice in 1931, although he still went to the office each day for another decade. On October 6, 1931, he died in Des Moines.

One of the shining lights of early 20th-century Iowa architecture" is how historian Ralph Christian describes Frank Wetherell. Des Moines architect John Wetherell has a more personal view. He recalls his grandfather as a dignified Renaissance man who built his own retirement home in the Ozarks, tended a formidable vegetable garden, and nurtured home-grown grapes into wine.

"My grandfather's buildings

came right from his creative mind," says Wetherell, who, like his grandfather and father before him, is a partner in the Wetherell firm. "Although he used bits and pieces of elements from various classical architectural orders, his work was never cookie-cutter. His architecture is a unique and enduring presence in Iowa."

Like Wetherell's other architectural gems that dot the Iowa landscape, Lincoln School in Oskaloosa memorializes his eye for both form and function. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1991, the school is recognized today as a representa-

tive example of Wetherell's larger body of work, of exceptionally rich architectural detailing, and of American notions of the "modern school" in the early 20th century. ❖

Writer Jean Florman is the author of "Moments in Iowa History" (broadcast daily on KUNI Public Radio during Iowa's sesquicentennial and now in book form) and KUNI's current series, "From Moldboards to Motherboards: Technology in 20th-Century Iowa." This article developed from the work of Molly Myers Naumann, who researched Lincoln School and Frank Wetherell in 1991 for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places.



Wetherell's signature on Lincoln School, in terra cotta.

NOTE ON SOURCES

This article is based on the National Register of Historic Places site inventory for Lincoln School, and the Multiple Property Documentation Form "Architectural and Historical Resources of Oskaloosa, Iowa: The Works of Frank E. Wetherell." Both were prepared by Molly Myers Naumann in 1991. The author interviewed Naumann, Ralph Christian, and John Wetherell. The *Oskaloosa Daily Herald* covered Lincoln School's opening on April 3 and 20, and July 8, 1922.

Floor plans and photographs of three Des Moines schools (Hubbell, Brooks, and Byrne Rice) designed by Wetherell & Gage appear in William C. Bruce, *Grade School Buildings*, vol. 1 (Milwaukee, 1914). On modern schools, see the following: Ernest J. Ashbaugh, "Survey of the School Buildings of Muscatine," *State University of Iowa Extension Division Bulletin*, No. 41 (Sept. 1918); May Ayres, Jesse F. Williams, Thomas D. Wood, *Healthful Schools: How to Build, Equip, and Maintain Them* (New York, 1918); Fletcher B. Dresslar, *American Schoolhouses*, US Bureau of Education (Washington, DC, 1911); Harry A. Greene, "A School Building Program for Indianola, Iowa," *University of Iowa Extension Bulletin*, No. 101 (March 1, 1924); Wilbur T. Mills, *American School Building Standards* (Columbus, OH, 1915); Charles L. Robbins, *The School as a Social Institution* (Boston, 1918); Charles Lyle Spain, Arthur B. Moehlman, and Fred Watson Frostic, *The Public Elementary School Plant* (New York, 1930); George D. Strayer and N. L. Engelhardt, *Standards for Elementary School Buildings* (New York, 1933), and *idem*, *School Building Problems* (New York, 1927). Several examples of schools as community centers appear in the periodical *The Nation's Schools* during 1928.

On Louis Sullivan and terra cotta, see Larry Millett, *The Curve of the Arch: The Story of Louis Sullivan's Owatonna Bank* (St. Paul, 1985); and Ronald E. Schmitt, "Sullivan-esque Architecture and Terra Cotta," in John S. Garner, ed., *The Midwest in American Architecture* (Chicago, 1991).

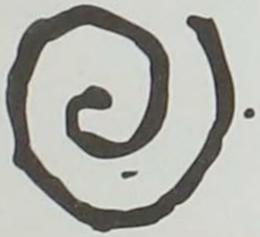
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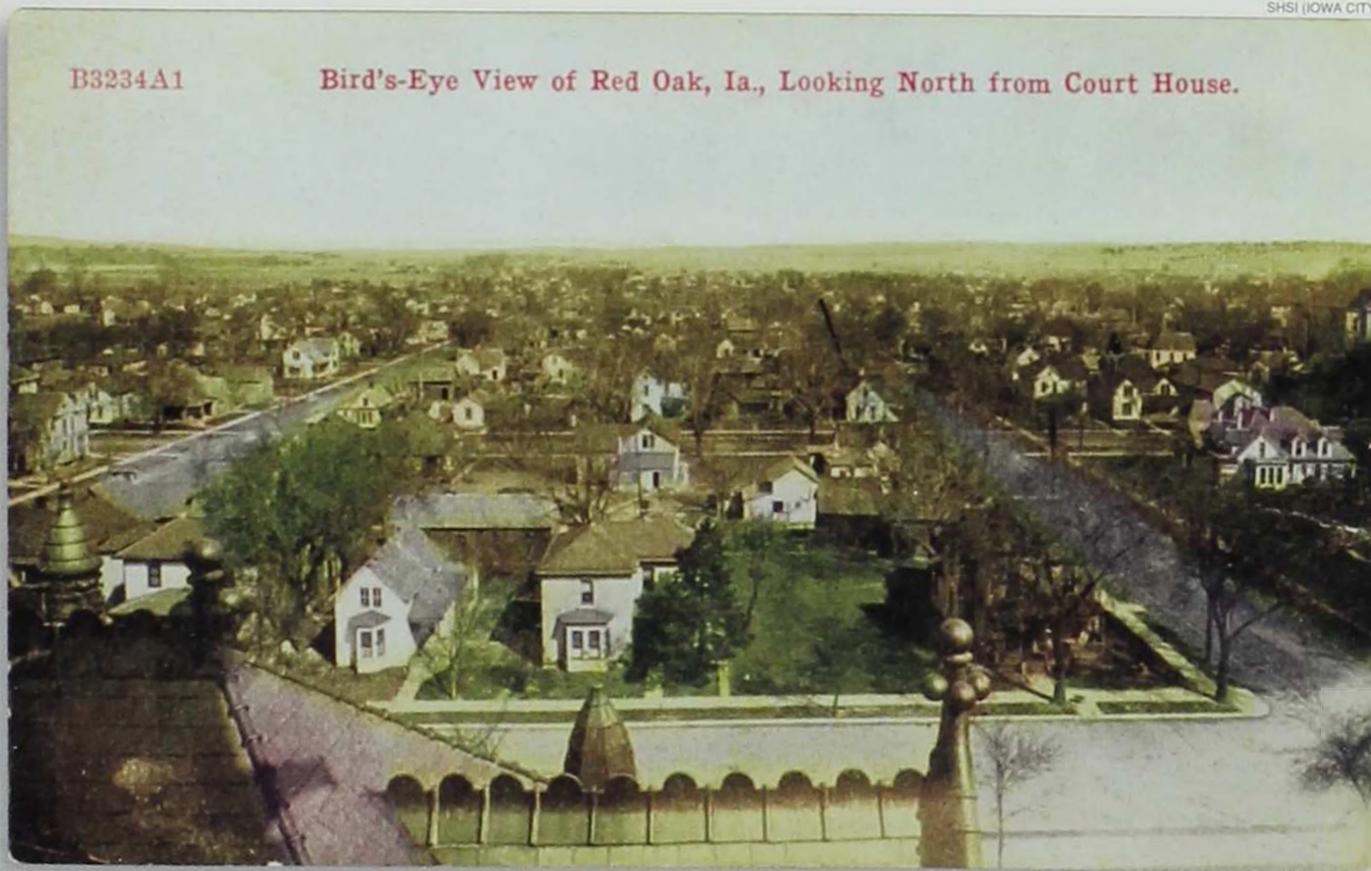
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One in a Million



Among the millions of items in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa is this postcard of Red Oak, Iowa, dating to the early 20th century.

Sending and collecting postcards was all the craze in the first decades of this century. Postcards worked well to convey brief, handwritten messages, of course. Consider, for example, the postcards on pages 61 and 87 in this issue. But the actual picture on a postcard also tells more than we might expect at first glance.

The photographer who climbed out on the roof of the Montgomery County Courthouse, then aimed the camera to the north and shot this fine image, gave Red Oak townspeople something they seldom enjoyed—a bird's eye view of their community. Before aviation and photography joined forces, photographers needing this kind of vantage point logically sought out the tallest structure in the community.

In this case, the courthouse was probably the most imposing structure in the community, too. Intentionally or not, the photographer also gave townspeople a close-up look at the scallops, finials, and

other rooftop ornamentation on the courthouse.

Picture postcards also conveyed community identity and pride by showcasing symbols of a town's technological progress (dams, electric plants, and bridges), its bustling economy (factories and Main Street businesses), and its sense of civic responsibility (schools, hospitals, and courthouses). Residential scenes like this one portrayed a stable community of solidly built homes and well-kept neighborhoods.

Armed with a magnifying glass, we could compare this postcard with Red Oak today, to see what houses are still standing and whether they have been altered over the years—roof lines and gables, porches and windows, for instance. But it's doubtful that the postcard would accurately convey the color of house paint. The original black-and-white image was probably color-tinted in Germany, then the center of fine color printing and the postcard industry. Color-tinting added believability—the trees are green, the sky is blue—but not necessarily accuracy.

—The Editor

Cast in terra cotta, a profile of President Abraham Lincoln (front cover) rises above Lincoln Elementary School in Oskaloosa, Iowa. Built in 1922 and now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Lincoln School stands today as an example of striking terra cotta ornamentation, of modern educational notions in the 1920s, and of the architecture of Iowan Frank E. Wetherell.

(Photo by Molly Myers Naumann)

