

1899 State Fair • New Year's a Century Ago • 19th-Century Progress • Family Chronicles

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Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED



Front Porch

Dear Readers:

You'll remember that in the last issue, we printed some of the responses gathered at the Iowa State Fair to the question "What one event would you like to have witnessed in the 20th century?" The poll was coordinated by Roger Munns, the State Historical Society's public relations director.

Roger also posed the question to staff of the State Historical Society of Iowa and its sister agency, the Iowa Arts Council. Julie Bailey articulated many staff members' thoughts: "It wasn't hard to think of something, but it was hard to narrow it down to just one thing!" But, if forced to choose, what one moment in the 20th century would she most liked to have witnessed? "To have been on the back of Secretariat as the great horse ran his legendary three Triple Crown races in 1973," she said. Here are some of the other responses:

Deirdre Bach: "When the Wright Brothers achieved flight."

Marv Bergman: "I'd most like to be able to sit in on a Sunday School class at First Presbyterian Church in Iowa City during the 1920s. That was a time when the split between 'fundamentalists' and 'modernists' was tearing the Presbyterian church apart, much as the split between the religious right and liberal Presbyterians is tearing at the fabric of the Presbyterian church today. I'd like to hear how a local congregation talked about the issue—if they did."

Jodi Evans: "My parents' first date."

Dave Hudson: "On December 14, 1941, my father, minister of the Bloomfield Christian Church, read from the pulpit an uncompromising antiwar statement. I did not know about this until after my mother died in 1990, and I found a copy of it among her collection of most prized papers. The effect of that statement in conservative, small-town

Iowa one week after Pearl Harbor must have been a sight to behold. The most amazing thing about it, to my mind, was that he remained as minister of that congregation for five more years, until 1946."

Bruce Krueger: "I would like to have had a ringside seat at the Battle of Midway in June 1942. Unlike any other campaign in World War II, Midway was a classic 'at the right place at the right time' scenario, when American dive-bombers just happened to appear over the Japanese aircraft carriers at their most vulnerable point. Also, I feel that this particular battle showed the courage and determination of Americans at their most desperate hours."

Walter Ladd: "The grand opening of the Empire State Building. The building was officially opened by Herbert Hoover on May 1, 1931, with much fanfare. President Hoover turned the lights on in the building by pressing a button in Washington, D.C. The building's grand opening ceremony was as much about celebrating the opening as about saying that mankind could triumph over anything, even the Depression. I believe it is considered to be the first true skyscraper. It is also considered the pinnacle of Art Deco architecture."

Linda Lee: "The 'Stand in the Gap' men's promise keepers who gathered at the mall in Washington, D.C., in October of 1997. There were more than one million men (my husband was one) who went to the event for the nondenominational day-long (10-hour) prayer/worship gathering. This was a first in U.S. history of this magnitude."

Tom Morain: "I think I would have liked to be present in 1969 with the walk on the moon. I remember watching the TV coverage. Vikki and I were married in June, living for the summer in Jefferson, and the walk occurred sometime that summer. After watching at my folks' house, we walked about a half block to the house we were baby-sitting, and we looked up at the moon about 11:00 at night, knowing somebody was up there. It would have been fun to be

on the moon, looking back. Or I would have liked to have been with [computer inventor John] Atanasoff on his all-night drive, but I would have yakked at him the whole time and he wouldn't have gotten any thinking done."

Jennie Morgan: "In Davenport, Iowa, on VE day—actually almost anywhere in the USA, because of the overwhelming euphoria and celebration, and the sense of unity."

Becki Plunkett: "The New York World's Fair, 1939/40. Coming out of the Depression, fairgoers must have felt renewed optimism witnessing the technological marvels of 'The World of Tomorrow.'"

Matt Schaefer: "Bob Beamon's record-setting long jump at the 1968 Mexico Olympics, and Ernest Shackleton's rendezvous with the men at the whaling station on Elephant Island after being presumed lost or dead in his 1914-1916 effort to walk across Antarctica. Both events show individuals exceeding all expectations of what was thought to be the limits of human performance."

Jerome Thompson: "The opening of King Tut's tomb."

Roger also asked staffers to name whom they would invite to lunch. Responses varied from family members and former museum curators, to Joe DiMaggio, Martin Luther King Jr., Edward Abbey, Adolph Hitler, Queen Victoria, Harry Truman, Billy Graham, Franklin Roosevelt, Dorothy Parker, Thomas Francis Jr. (tester of polio vaccine), and Theodore Roosevelt. Staffers Jodi Henke and KC Hummel had more suggestions: Laura Ingalls Wilder, Sitting Bull, Chief Joseph, Red Eagle, and Crazy Horse. Now that would have been one lively luncheon conversation!

Come and converse on our front porch! Share your thoughts with our readers here on the Front Porch page. Send letters to Ginalie Swaim, editor, *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240. By e-mail at: gswaim@blue.weeg.uiowa.edu. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

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

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on a voyage to Iowa's past . . .



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tury. More on the end of the 19th century
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Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED

Formerly The Palimpsest

Winter 1999, Vol. 80, No. 4



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Fair amusements



On the Cover

In the swirling darkness of the future, the torch is passed to a determined winged messenger. Published in Harper's Weekly in January 1901, the full illustration is titled "The Legacy of the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century" and symbolizes the pride that 19th-century Americans took in the technological advances of their own century. More on the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th in this issue.

Harboring the history bug?

In January 1900, the satire magazine *Punch* identified the frazzled fellow below as “a calculating gentleman (not at all a bad looking chap) who has solved the problem as to whether we are in the nineteenth or twentieth century.”

Today, a hundred years later, he might be identified as “a weary fellow (having a bad hair day) who has read one too many lists of the ten most significant people or events of this century ... or millennium ... or geological epoch.” Certainly the na-

tional media has saturated the public with historical looks and lists—perhaps to the point of weariness and ennui for many.

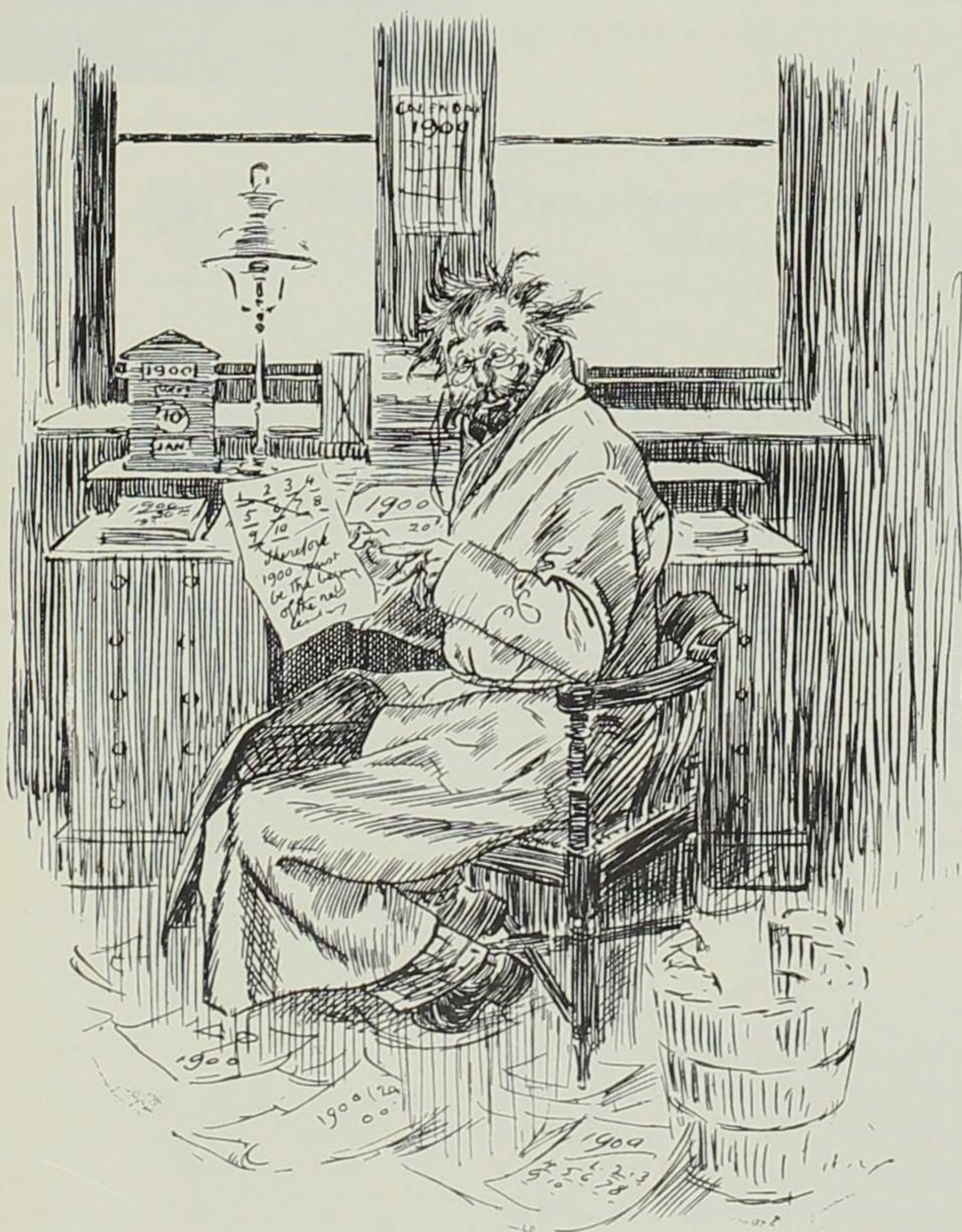
But perhaps not for people like you and me—right? I would suspect that most of you loyal readers of *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* had been contentedly harboring the “history bug” long before the new-century-and-new-millennium hoopla ever began. For people like us, looking back at the past, wondering what it was really like, comparing it to the present—this is just part of how we view the world we live in.

So here at *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*, we’re not rushing into this “make a list and move on” mentality. This issue savors the end of the 19th century as Iowa was poised to begin a new one and, like everyone else in the world, was a bit puzzled over when the new century actually began. The issue also looks at our state in 1899 through the lens of that Iowa icon, the State Fair, at a time when Iowans were just as interested in looking back as looking forward.

There’s even more in this issue, of course, and much more lined up for the coming year. We plan to feature some special articles on the 20th century in Iowa, culminating in a special collector’s edition—a companion issue to the State Historical Society’s upcoming museum exhibit about the 20th century. Titled “A Few of Our Favorite Things,” the exhibit is scheduled to open in December 2000.

But first, let me wish you and yours a happy new year. And please join me in looking forward to more of the past—brought to you in every issue of *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*.

—The Editor



Looking Forward and Backward



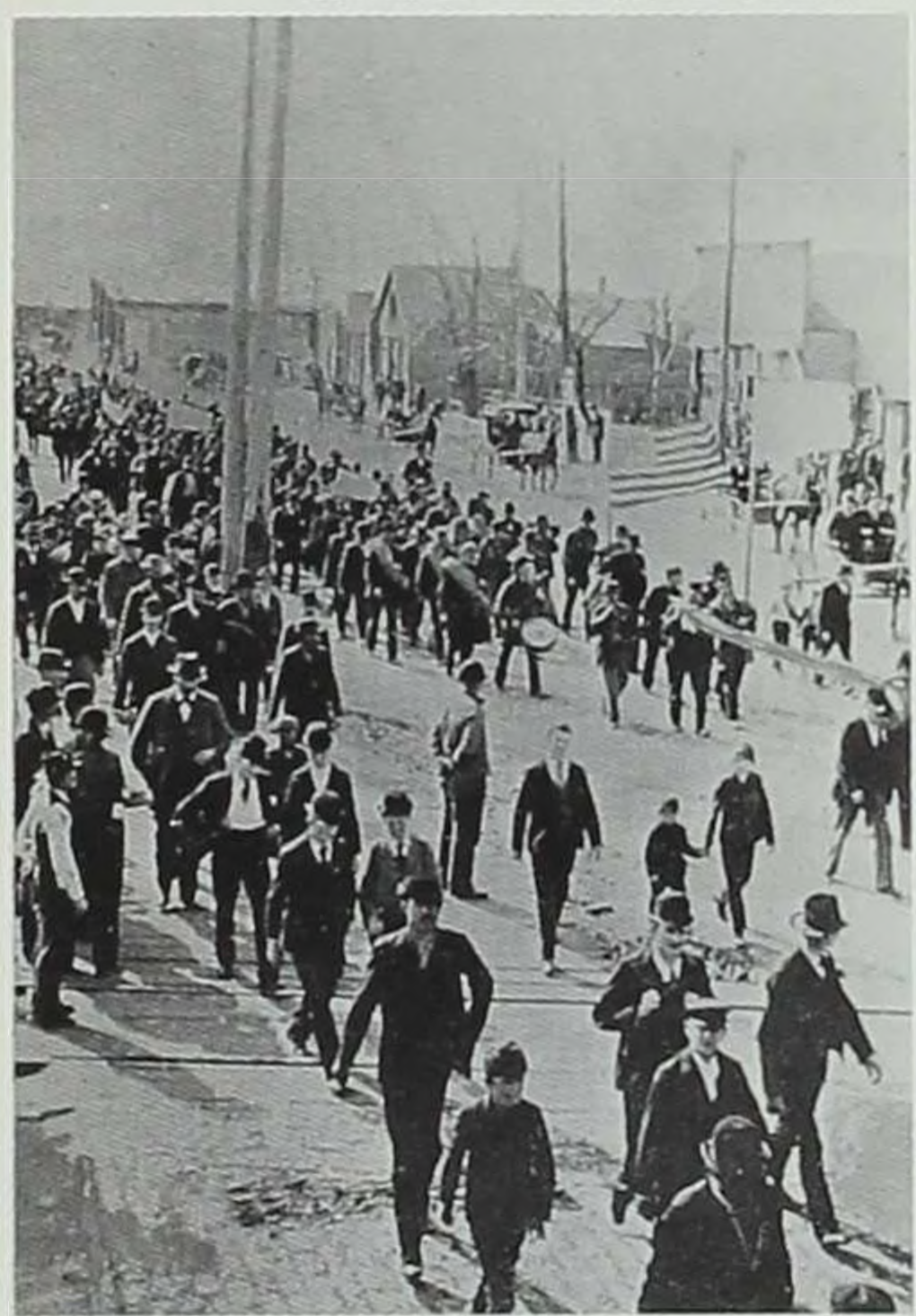
The Iowa State Fair at the Close of the 19th Century

by Chris Rasmussen

In 1899, the state of Iowa was scarcely more than half a century old. The state's most eagerly watched institution, the Iowa State Fair, was even younger, having originated in 1854. Nonetheless, the fin de siècle almost inevitably led Iowans to take stock of the progress their state had made since white settlement began in the 1830s.

When they looked to the past, they marveled at the changes that had occurred in only a few decades; nonetheless, when they tried to glimpse the future, their outlook was not altogether optimistic.

The 1890s, curiously referred to as the "Gay Nineties," were among the most tumultuous eras in American history. A



Images of the 1890s speak of unemployment, disparities in income, labor struggles. From left: "Kelly's Industrial Army"—some 1,500 unemployed workers from San Francisco, victims of the 1893 depression—march through Council Bluffs on their way across Iowa en route to Washington, D.C., in 1894. Barefoot children on a farm near Independence, Iowa, contrast with the

wrenching financial depression, waves of strife between labor and capital, a vast influx of immigrants, and the Populist insurgency of disgruntled farmers convinced many Americans that their society was changing rapidly—and not necessarily for the better. The closing of the western frontier prompted hand-wringing that the wellspring of American distinctiveness and democracy had dried up; a few years later, the United States opened a new frontier of sorts by embarking on a war for imperial conquest against Spain. At century's end, many Americans' faith in unbounded progress was sorely tested, if not altogether broken.

The turbulent political and economic currents of the 1890s powerfully affected Iowa's annual state fair. The Populist movement, which garnered strength in the 1880s and 1890s as it organized farmers in Iowa and the rest of the nation, ran counter to many of the tenets of economic development espoused by the state fair's organizers, who generally favored railroads and sought to diversify Iowa's economy by encouraging the growth of manufacturing. Most of the society's officers were anxious about the growing clout of the populist movement and its People's Party, whose advocacy of stringent regulation of business corporations ran counter to their booster ethos. As early as the 1880s, John R. Shaffer, the secretary of the Iowa State Agricultural Society, the private corporation that oversaw the fair, warned ominously that Populism threatened to "rupture" American politics. While the Farm-

ers' Alliance was not as potent in Iowa as in portions of the South and Great Plains, it was influential enough that the state fair's managers permitted it to host meetings on the grounds during fair week throughout the 1880s and 1890s.

Furthermore, as a result of the economic turmoil of the period, the Iowa State Agricultural Society became mired deep in debt in 1893 and never regained solid financial footing. Hard times often made it impossible for the fair to meet its expenses, or even to pay premiums to its prize-winners. Economic difficulties in the 1890s also brought long-standing debates about the fair's proper role to a head. Disagreements over whether the fair should emphasize educational exhibits or offer more amusements divided both the fair's organizers and Iowans generally. The fair was suffering from a growing sense that agricultural fairs were fast becoming yet another relic of the pioneer era.

Ironically, from its inception, the Iowa State Fair had been devoted to progress, and had displayed Iowans' finest achievements and the most up-to-date agricultural knowledge and technology. The inaugural Iowa State Fair was held in Fairfield in October 1854. In his oration, lawyer George C. Dixon of Keokuk declared that the fair's opening marked the beginning of "an era in our state," and established a benchmark from which subsequent progress would be measured. The fair not only afforded farmers an opportunity to learn about new farming techniques and



elegant boaters on an artificial lake on the J. C. Hubinger estate in Keokuk, as does the lavish Hubinger home with the cramped housing of a coal miner's family in Brazil, Iowa. In the cartoon, a burly, robust "Labor" bids farewell to "XIX Century," burdened with "serfdom, hopeless toil, slavery, and pauper wages."

implements, but broadly chronicled the advances that a state or locale had made since white settlement began. "Improvement," Dixon reminded the throng gathered on the grounds, was the watchword of the age, and agriculture could ill afford to stand still while other industries sped ahead.

As the annual measure of Iowans' attainments, the fair grew along with the young state. During its first 25 years, the fair was moved to a new location every other year, in order to afford more Iowans at least an occasional opportunity to attend. As settlers filled the state's western counties, many Iowans began to urge that a permanent, centrally located fairgrounds be created. Des Moines, the state's capital city, was both centrally located and well served by railroads. The fair was moved to Brown's Park in Des Moines in 1879, and to its permanent grounds on the city's east side in 1886. The acquisition of a permanent fairgrounds led the fair's organizers, and many Iowans, to anticipate a much more impressive fair in the future, and the Iowa State Agricultural Society and private exhibitors immediately began constructing buildings on the impressive new fairgrounds, which grew like a small city. Expectations for the fair ran high in the late 1880s and early 1890s.

Americans, it has been remarked, like to talk about decades (the Thirties, or the Fifties, or the Sixties) as though culture changes deci-

sively every ten years, precisely on January 1. History, of course, is seldom so tidy. The gloomy tenor of the 1890s, for example, seems to have been established in 1893, as Americans suffered a wrenching financial depression at the very moment that they were taking stock of the nation's progress and future.

In 1893, the most stupendous of all world's fairs, the World's Columbian Exposition, was held in Chicago to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's "discovery" of the New World (the exposition was originally slated to open in 1892, but arranging and constructing the mammoth fair proved more time-consuming than its organizers had anticipated). Within days of the fair's opening in 1893, the nation's economy dove into its deepest depression to date. Factory workers and farmers, already dissatisfied at not sharing fully in America's booming industrial economy in the late 19th century, now found themselves confronted with rampant unemployment and plunging crop prices.

The 1893 World's Fair was also the site of the American Historical Association's convention. At the convention, Frederick Jackson Turner, a 33-year-old historian, delivered "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," perhaps the single most influential paper in the annals of American historical scholarship. A longing for a bygone era suffused Turner's famous "frontier thesis." The 1890 U.S. Census had revealed that, for the first time in American history, no uninhabited lands remained for pioneers to settle. Be-



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cause Turner, like many Americans, believed that the experience of westward expansion and the encounter between pioneers and raw wilderness was the source of American distinctiveness and democracy, he fretted that the absence of land would worsen inequality and give rise to class antagonisms. Amid the political and economic turmoil of the 1890s, the "closing" of the frontier exacerbated many Americans' sense of foreboding as the century drew to a close.

Nevertheless, the World's Fair in Chicago dazzled some 27 million visitors (in a nation with a population of 67 million!) with its celebrated "Midway Plaisance" chock full of entertainments, and its exhibits of the most advanced products of American industry. The fair's exhibits afforded visitors a glimpse of a future filled with technological wonders.

Competition from the 1893 World's Fair, which especially attracted visitors from Iowa's eastern counties, coupled with the onset of the depression and hard times for farmers, plunged the Iowa State Fair deep into debt in 1893. The enormous World's Fair not only siphoned away receipts from the Iowa State Fair, but made state and county fairs seem tiny and humdrum by comparison. Well into the 20th century, the Columbian Exposition's fabled White City and Midway would cast their shadow over midwestern state and county fairs. Smaller fairs would even whitewash their buildings, touting their wooden exhibition halls and barns as a miniature "White City," and they soon advertised their own "Midways" in order to lure fairgoers in search of entertainment. The organizers of the Iowa State Fair complained that "it will be an uphill business for state and county fairs for some time to come," at least until the memory of the World's Columbian Exposition was forgotten.

Despite efforts to book attractions that would lure patrons to the fair, the state fair remained mired in debt in 1894 as well; the Iowa State Agricultural Society, the private organization long responsible for organizing and operating the state fair, was forced to borrow money to meet its expenses. After the 1894 fair closed, the *Iowa State Register* suggested that "it is possible that we have come to the end of the road, as far as old-fashioned fairs are concerned. The demand of the present is for something new." Despite an impressive bill of entertainers and lavish advertising, hard times for farmers resulted in more hard times for the fair, which remained unprofitable in 1895 and 1896.

After four years of financially unsuccessful fairs,

the State Agricultural Society's 1897 convention was decidedly somber, and some of the society's members wondered aloud whether the fair would endure. One member of the fair's board of directors, John Cownie of South Amana, delivered an address on the question, "What Are the Causes of the Lack of Interest in the State Fair?" in which he likened the fair to a patient in a sickbed, suffering from the host of ailments that commonly accompany old age. The fair's original purpose, to provide farmers an opportunity to examine and purchase purebred stock and agricultural implements, was no longer necessary in an era in which agricultural periodicals circulated more widely and in which breeders and implement dealers could more easily reach their rural clientele.

As for the future, the fair's secretary, P. L. Fowler of Des Moines, asked whether the state fair ought to be discarded like "the other worn-out forms, usages and implements of the past ages," and replaced with a newer model, one that devoted more to entertainment than agriculture. Fowler was convinced that the only way to put the fair back in the black was to host an "up to date" fair, amply stocked with amusements. Fowler even inquired about booking J. A. Bailey's gargantuan traveling circus for the 1897 fair.

Bailey's circus was well beyond the fair's strained budget, but the fair's entertainment bill for 1897 did include Dr. Carver's High Diving Horses and trick shooting, the Kemp Sisters Wild West Show, and lacrosse matches between members of the Winnebago and Sauk and Mesquakie tribes, who also maintained a small village on the grounds, where they displayed dances and crafts for curious spectators. The 1897 fair, at least in comparison to its immediate predecessors, was a resounding success. When it was over, the agricultural society, which had begun the year nearly \$15,000 in debt, emerged \$49 in the black.

As the fair's organizers began to plan the 1898 exhibition, they confronted the prospect of competing once again with a world's fair, the Trans-Mississippi Exposition, scheduled to open in Omaha. Although considerably smaller than the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, this fair was even closer to Des Moines, and would surely attract Iowans from the western half of the state. The state fair's officers were understandably leery of repeating their disastrous experience of 1893, but were also afraid that discontinuing the fair for even one year would be yet another embarrassment to the society.

Pondering their options, Fowler argued that "we had just as well go in the hole with a fair as without." On April 13, however, the fair's board of directors

The Columbian Exposition in Chicago dwarfed state fairs across the nation, including Iowa's (below). The Manufactures Building (right) was one of several buildings at the 1893 World's Fair devoted to technological progress and cultural wonders. Fountains and lagoons, dramatically lit by electric lights at nights, laced the grounds and awed the fair's 27 million visitors. State fairs in Iowa and elsewhere could hardly compete.



SHSI (IOWA CITY)



SHSI (DES MOINES)



SHS (DES MOINES)

To boost receipts in the late 1890s, the State Fair booked Dr. Carver's high-diving horses (above) and similar crowd-pleasers.

abruptly voted that because of the nearby world's fair "and the feeling existing over the state averse to holding a fair this year, therefore be it Resolved, That no fair be held by the Iowa State Agricultural Society in the year 1898."

For the first time in its 44-year history, the annual state fair, which had been held without interruption throughout the Civil War and the depressions of 1873 and 1893, was canceled. A few days later, after months of escalating diplomatic tensions, the United States declared war on Spain. On April 25, the State of Iowa took charge of the Iowa State Fairgrounds and converted it into a military encampment for the war's duration.

Meanwhile, as 1899 approached, the fair's organizers contemplated how to commemorate its last state fair of the century. In spite of several years of financial travail, the agricultural society's officers knew too well that stinginess with the fair's entertainment budget would diminish the fair's receipts. Accordingly, the Iowa State Agricultural Society booked Dr. Carver's renowned Diving Horses as the fair's main attraction, as well as many lesser acts. Advertisements for the fair in farmers' periodicals and newspapers proclaimed that "You Will Be Royally Entertained This Year."

The society's new secretary, George H. Van Houten, who had previously managed the Lenox District Fair in southwestern Iowa, was convinced that the 1899 fair needed a gimmick to make it more alluring to the public. Perhaps hearkening back to the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition, Van Houten suggested that "we may have to resort to some extension of our fair and attach 'Exposition' or some other scheme that will enlarge our borders, on paper, at least, and our scope of work."

He suggested billing the fair as the "Closing Century Exposition," and including in it an array of historical exhibits of obsolete implements, over-fattened livestock (newer, scientific theories of animal husbandry suggested that leaner animals were both more economical to raise and produced superior meat), and other relics from the pioneer era, as well as exhibits designed to "try to show the development to the present time." Van Houten boasted that his theme for the fair would be inexpensive, compared with commercial entertainers: "It will cost us practically nothing to incorporate this idea and will gain us, in several ways, especially in having something new to advertise."

The agricultural society enlisted the assistance of Charles Aldrich, director of the Iowa Historical De-

partment, in mounting a suitable historical exhibit, and encouraged fairgoers to scour their attics and barns for items of historical interest to contribute to the display.

When the fair opened in late August 1899, the *Des Moines Leader* reported that never before had there been "such a scene of activity, so large a number of spectators, so many exhibits, side-shows, freaks, cane racks, supernatural wonders, unbelievable marvels, merry-go-rounds, steam organs, optical illusions and 'hop-ale' stands." Yet amidst the "endless, confused landscape of tents and stands and shanties" were legitimate educational and commercial exhibits as part of the "closing century" theme. Implement dealers, by far the fair's largest commercial exhibitors, had obliged the fair organizers by displaying outmoded plows and threshers alongside their brand-new counterparts. Exhibits of women's dresses and handicrafts and tools reminded the fair's visitors of the remarkable changes that had occurred in only a few decades, and inspired admiration for the hardships endured by the state's early settlers. As the *Leader* expounded, "The end-of-the-century exhibit, showing curios of half a century and a century ago—spinning wheels, looms, primitive agricultural implements, homespun goods, old-fashioned clothing, bridal gowns of the era of the second war with England, firearms and other weapons a century old, and scores of other interesting relics—alongside their counterparts of the present generation, is one of the most instructive and interesting sections of the show. Contributions have been received from all quarters of the state."

Some fairgoers found the historical exhibits an edifying antidote to the fair's sideshows. The *Leader* hailed the Closing Century Exposition as "intrinsically better worth seeing than its predecessors," noting that it furnished "an interesting contrast between the appliances, processes and methods of life today, and those of the earlier years of the century."

George C. Duffield, one of the state's most prominent settlers, traveled by train from Keosauqua to visit the fair. Duffield, who served as superintendent of the fair's swine exhibits for some twenty years beginning in the 1870s, could plausibly boast that he had attended more Iowa State Fairs than anyone alive. He wrote in his diary that the 1899 fair reminded him of the old-time fairs from the 1870s. The Closing Century Exposition was also a financial success, and the State Agricultural Society closed the century with more

than \$16,000 in its treasury, its first significant surplus since 1891.

The Closing Century Exposition in 1899 was not merely a savvy bit of advertising, but marked a watershed in the fair's role. In earlier decades the fair had been touted as a display of the most advanced agricultural methods available to farmers; the fair's managers had discouraged the display of outworn items and ideas, instead urging farm men and women to adopt labor-saving machines and become familiar with scientific agriculture and home economics. At the end of 1890s, however, the fair became somewhat more backward-looking, more nostalgic. In part this resulted from Iowans' growing awareness of their state's history, which was now long enough for them to take stock of its development since the frontier era. As the pioneer generation receded into the past, Iowans became wistful about the passing of a generation of the "old settlers" who had staked the first claims, broken the prairie, and established homes and communities. (Similarly, early 19th-century Americans lamented the passing of the nation's "Founding Fathers," and contemporary Americans have lamented the passing of the World War II generation.) The 1899 Closing Century Exposition was Janus-faced, gazing wistfully back to the past while surveying the future for the promise of further progress.

Progressive farming techniques would continue to be displayed at the fair, of course. But in the years ahead, the organizers of the fair would acknowledge what *Billboard*, the national entertainment magazine, predicted in December 1899: "The day of the purely agricultural fair is past."

So were the days of the Iowa State Agricultural Society as hosts of the state fair. The society had learned repeatedly in the 1890s that the state fair was susceptible to economic depressions, rival attractions, poor weather, and other difficulties. Nor could the society hope to stage a suitable fair, maintain (let alone improve) its grounds, and pay its other expenses solely from yearly gate receipts. As a result, many of the society's members now conceded that the task of hosting a modern state fair was simply too great to be shouldered by a private organization.

In early 1900, with the Society's recommendation, full control of the fairgrounds and its future improvements shifted to the newly formed state Department of Agriculture. The fair's receipts and expenses would be distinct from the department's other finances, and the fair was expected to be self-supporting. In fact, the state's assumption of responsibility for the fair made

debates over state funding for improving the grounds and covering the fair's shortfalls much less contentious, and paved the way for a massive program of construction on the fairgrounds over the next three decades.

When the 1902 fair opened that summer, the *Des Moines Register and Leader* proclaimed it "A TWENTIETH CENTURY STATE FAIR," in which a well-appointed fairground with permanent buildings had replaced shanties and tents. According to the paper, the improvements in the fairgrounds and in its exhibits marked the beginning of "a new era in such exhibitions," which would only grow more instructive, entertaining, and impressive in the future.

A few years later, *Billboard* published a whimsical article, "The State Fair in 2000," predicting that at the end of the millennium, fairgoers would sail to glass-domed fairgrounds in private "aero-cars." The fairgrounds of the future would rely on technology to bring exhibits to the fairgoers, sparing them from the need to walk in the summer heat. In the livestock pavilion, cattle would be displayed in sanitary, rotating glass stalls. Hundreds of vaudeville acts would perform atop a moving panorama to entertain the fair's patrons throughout the grounds.

At the end of the 20th century, the Iowa State Fairgrounds scarcely resembles the futuristic city envisioned by *Billboard*, but technological changes have altered Iowans' lives more profoundly than even the magazine's fanciful glimpse of the year 2000 dared envision. Yet a hundred years earlier—at the end of a decade marked by economic depression, labor unrest, and the closing of the frontier—Iowans at the 1899 Closing Century Exposition gazed nostalgically back at the American pioneer era, where they envisioned their forebears and themselves as the founders of a vibrant economy and civilization. ♦

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NOTE ON SOURCES

Primary sources include the *Des Moines Register and Leader*, *Billboard* magazine (which began publishing in 1894), and the annual reports of the Iowa State Agricultural Society. This article developed from a portion of the author's dissertation, "State Fair: Culture and Agriculture in Iowa, 1854-1941" (Rutgers, 1992), forthcoming from Johns Hopkins University Press as *Carnival in the Countryside*.



Iowa State Fairgoers Looked Back at the Past in the 20th Century, Too



FOUR PHOTOGRAPHS: SHSI (DES MOINES); DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE



Echoing the "looking back" theme of the 1899 "Closing Century Exposition," the state fair in 1938 (the centennial of Iowa Territory) featured historical period rooms created by the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs. Above: Mrs. Ewing Hertzler in the Burlington club's "territorial" room.



In 1946, the centennial of statehood, the Iowa State Fair featured a historical exhibit of farm equipment and vehicles. Upper left: N. E. Daggett kneels to examine an early plow while B. J. Clark and R. L. Longley look on. Above: J. F. Bailey Jr. sets up a McCormick reaper, and E. F. Pittman builds a rail fence.

At the 1950 State Fair, Farm Bureau women from Mahaska, Madison, and Wayne Counties assembled rooms depicting life in 1900. Left: Mrs. Edgar Moore crochets while Earle Henderson listens to the phonograph.

"It was an ideal
night—for the birth
of a new century.
The crisp night air
acted like a tonic
upon the system, a
beautiful moon
lighted up the scene."

—Burlington Hawk-Eye,
January 1, 1901

"Adieu to thee, 19th century"

Iowans observe New Year's

by Ginalie Swaim and Tracy Cuning

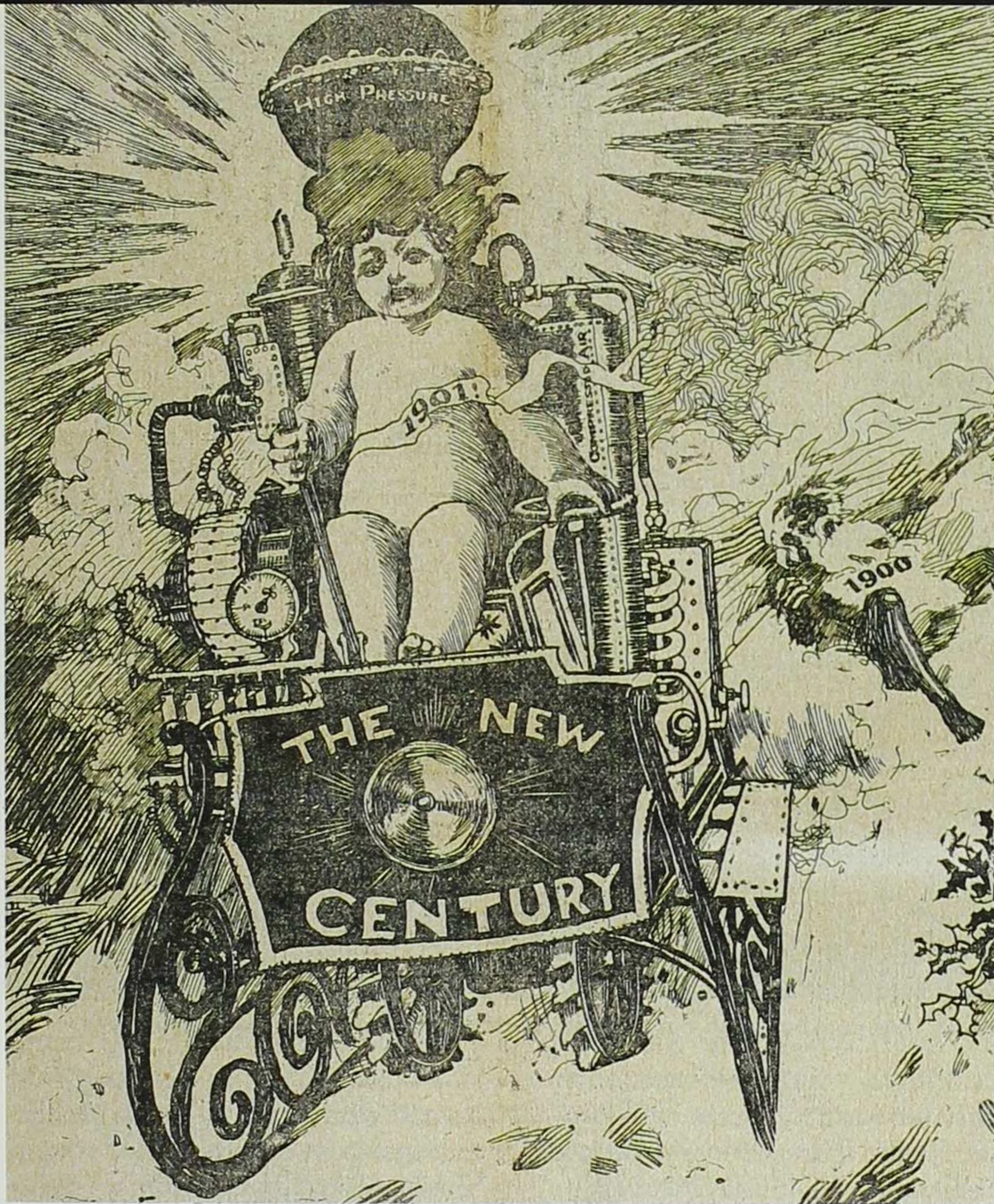
A cold, northwest wind raked the streets and alleys of Sioux City. Drivers tucked heavy furs around their laps. Townspeople walked briskly to work, bundled up against below-zero temperatures. Others, reluctant to leave their warm homes, poured another cup of steaming coffee and lingered over the morning *Journal*. As they turned to page five, they realized that the great event of the day would begin sooner than they thought.

It was December 31, 1900. Slowly, slowly, on its rusty, creaking, worn-out axis, the 19th century was preparing to turn.

"At about 5 o'clock this afternoon, according to the clocks of Sioux City," the *Journal* reported with great drama, "a new century

will begin on the Greenwich line and will sweep westward from London bearing its message of great import until at 12 o'clock, midnight, the whistle at the Sioux City Traction company's power house will bellow its signal of the hour, the day, the year and the century. Then the other whistles of the city will take up the chime and the church bells will join with a great, glad chorus and no one in the city will be permitted to overlook the birth of the twentieth century."

Was there indeed a "great, glad chorus" in Sioux City, and across Iowa, as the 19th century ceded to the 20th? How did Iowans celebrate and observe New Year's? Did they privately, as well as publicly, mark the turning of



The new "high pressure" century bowls over Father Time in this cartoon from the *Dubuque Daily Telegraph* (Dec. 30, 1900).

the century? And exactly when did the new century begin? That was the big question.

"There has been so much discussion in the papers of late as to when the present century will end that the question is preying upon our mind," puzzled the editor of the *Alton Democrat* on December 30, 1899. "Some say it will end tomorrow night at midnight and that the twentieth century will kick the cover off and begin to dawn as soon as the nineteenth has curled up its toes and died, and others affirm with equal warmth that the century will not close its books yet for another year—and that's what's worrying us. Night after night we've lain awake and tossed and tumbled and torn our hair in a vain effort

to decide whether we ought to wake up next Monday morning in this century or the next."

The editor in Alton wasn't alone in pondering the big question of 1899: Would New Year's Day 1900 usher in the new century—or merely the last year of the 19th century? "Everybody here has been arguing this question of late," confided Arcadia's correspondent to the *Carroll Sentinel*.

Even the nation's mighty metropolitan newspapers had wrestled with the question. "For more than a year the [Chicago] *Times-Herald* has been in receipt of letters discussing and settling when the twentieth century begins. Some theorists say January 1, 1901, while all practical people

and bicyclists know that it begins at midnight, December 31, 1899, where January 1, 1900, begins. As soon as we cease writing the '18' in our date lines we will be through with the 'nineteenth' century and in the 'twentieth.' How this is arrived at may be best illustrated in the following dialogue: . . . Q.—Then a century begins and ends at each '100' mark? A.—If you doubt it, ask any 'century [bicycle] rider' if he or she has to pass the one hundred and first mile post before he completes a century."

The editor in Orange City, Iowa, saw it differently, however, than "practical people" or faddish bicyclists, and presented this explanation to readers of the *Sioux County Herald*: "If Tony Kuyper or W. S. Short passed nineteen hundred dollars over the counter when the check called for eighteen hundred and ninety-nine, their accounts would be one dollar short. . . . Old Father Time is just as exact as these bankers of ours. He tolerates no short change racket. . . . We cannot have a twentieth and a nineteenth century at one and the same time. A century means 100 years. . . . Nuff said."

The Enright and Myers grocery store in Sioux City skirted the issue in its ad on New Year's Eve 1899: "While a good many people of the country are not satisfied that the Twentieth Century begins with the new year, we are satisfied that here is the right place to buy your groceries Saturday, the last business day of the old year, and you will be satisfied to continue through the year 1900."

The *Burlington Hawk-Eye* took a more abstract, ethereal approach: "At midnight, December 31, 1900, the world passed a purely imaginary line into a new period of time"—while the *Coun-*

cil Bluffs Daily Nonpareil took a historical perspective in its article titled "The Old Disputed Century Question."

"It was the same then as now," the newspaper explained. "When the Eighteenth century was about to die, as the Nineteenth century is now doing, all America prepared to usher in its successor—as we are doing even now. The good citizen of 1801 celebrated, as the more or less good citizen of 1901 is about to do. . . . They had the same old discussion one hundred years ago that has been racking the souls of the latter day public. All through the country discussion was rife for nearly a year as to when the new century began—just as we discussed the matter during the last twelve months. . . . Acrimonious debates ensued. Finally it was decided that the new century began January 1, 1801. Several well-intentioned though mistaken gentlemen had already celebrated the occasion on January 1, 1800, and one of them wrote a harsh letter to the papers announcing that he would take no part in any subsequent chronological jamboree whatever. However, the event passed off very nicely without his abetment."

In reporting an 1899 New Year's party in Forest City, the *Winnebago Summit* deliberately stumbled over the question: "A number of young folks gathered at the home of Mr. and Mrs. F. L. Wacholz and enjoyed their hospitality at a watch party New Year's eve, and watch the coming of the new Cent—er—New Year."

Perhaps for most Iowans, whether the new century began in 1900 or 1901 was a moot point. Diaries and newspaper reveal that



Sarah Jane Kimball with her brother and father in their home in late 1899.

most Iowans were less concerned with debating when the new century began than with confronting the brittle cold, tending to daily tasks, gathering together with friends and family, and taking stock of one's life.

On both New Years, 1899 and 1900, below-zero temperatures chilled Iowans to the bone. "To-day is coldest of all," 62-year-old Sarah Jane Kimball, of Jones County, wrote in her diary on New Year's Eve 1899. "I have done my usual housework and the washing and ironing took care of the chickens and cats and sewed some. Yesterday Merrill put the stove in the cellar then I put up the pipe—It took me two hours as I had to do it alone. I then built a fire as the cellar is getting too cool [and foodstuffs will freeze]. I have to keep a fire in my room night and day when it's so cold to keep my plants from freezing. Father is not a bit well so he hugs the stove rather closely. Merrill has all of the out-doors

work to do. Last night father took a sack of hot coals to bed with him and today feels better. The wind is blowing hard and we all feel the cold in the house. Old eighteen hundred will have us today and tomorrow brings us the new century 1900."

Maria Kromminga, also in Jones County, was restless and bored as she shivered the day away: "Very very cold. The east windows are froze all day lone—some no callers and cant find anything that is interested to read."

To the south, in Van Buren County, farmer George Duffield braced himself against the biting west wind as he cared for his livestock on New Year's morning 1900. "Roy Morrison and I were busy all the a.m. watering and feeding stock," he wrote in his diary. "Water is scarce in the creeks and the River low and difficult to get the stock to go on the ice out to water."

Although New Year's Day a

century ago was considered a special day, it was not a "holiday" as we know it. Businesses, including banks, were open as usual, although some closed early, and mail was still delivered. January 1, 1900, was also a Monday, the traditional wash day, and the task appeared in many Iowans' diaries.

New Year's Day in 1901 did not differ substantially from New Year's Day 1900. As the *Emmet County Republican* reported: "New Years was not generally observed as a holiday in Estherville. Most of the stores and business places were open all day and all part of the day. Our people generally seemed indisposed to begin the year in idleness." Again it was cold, and again Iowans tended to their daily work—duly noting both in their diaries. Eli Mendenhall of Hardin County was "busy all the day long, on this the first day of 1901." In Wellman, Isaac Carr's wife and daughters spent the day sewing. All the members of the Rev. John Hamilton's household in Reinbeck did chores or worked at their routine tasks: Rev. Hamilton called on some parishioners, son Willie sold groceries, son John made pictures, son Tom chopped wood, daughter Belle ironed, and daughter Mary went to school. Paine Howard of Linn County helped "butcher two hogs & hauld two loads of wood." Adaline Kimball Jones "did my ironing" and then "thought I would go over to see Mrs. Crane but it was so cold I gave it up." Mary Eleanor Armstrong Peet of rural Jones County did mending and odd jobs, "caught 4 chickens," "tore carpet rags awhile," and finished the previous day's laundry. "Dried part of the clothes in the house, hung the rest out," she noted. "Very cold last night, 12° below zero this morning."

Very cold or not, some Iowans headed outdoors for recreation. After Lorin Rowe of Eddyville spent New Year's Day 1901 "tending to business matters," he went skating in the evening with his wife and daughter. Cold weather meant strong ice. "In Burlington, the river is the busiest place in the city just now," the *Hawk-Eye* reported. "With the ice crop in full blast, two skating rinks doing a good business, there is more life on Front Street than usual. The busy scene attracts and entertains not a few sight-seers."

In Carroll, youngsters took to the slopes. "The juvenile population of the north side take advantage of these fine moonlight evenings," the *Sentinel* reported, "and are out in large numbers with their sleds to coast down the hill from McLagan's east. The coasting is said to be fine."

Well, perhaps not so fine for Carroll citizen Ray Dunphy, who "indulged" in an afternoon sleighride down by the Middle Raccoon River south of town. "Now, friend Ray has not prospered in but one direction since engaging in the mining business," the *Sentinel* related, "but has taken on rosy health and flesh until he almost tips the beam at 200. The sleighing was excellent and as Ray flew down the icy kopje at the rate of a mile a minute at the least calculation it reminded him of youthful days on the hill by the creek. But all of a sudden was a terrific shock, the 'bob' and rider flew into the air like a feather in a gale, then dropped to earth with a deep, dull thud. For a few seconds all was darkness to Dunphy. The runners of the sled were found next day in the corn field across the river and the merchant tailor

*"There is solemnity
in the sounding of
the fateful hour.
The world looks
'before and after'; it
broods 'on things to
come.' And where
the imagination is
touched, there may
well be, in some
subtle way, an ef-
fect upon human
action."*

—*The Century* maga-
zine, January 1901

*"Life has never
been so complex as
it is to-day. If we
could instill one les-
son on this morn-
ing of the birth of
the new century it
would be the lesson
of simplicity."*

—*Iowa State Register*,
January 1, 1901

*"Despite the black
shadows of crime
and war. . . even a
Faust must recog-
nize progress.
Surely in the 20th
century optimism
and not pessimism
will win."*

—University of Iowa
President George
MacLean's "Christmas
Sentiment" (quoted at
the end of Adaline
Kimball Jones's diary
for 1900)

on New Year's day got a rush order for a pair of trousers."

As dusk settled on New Year's Eve—in both 1899 and 1900—many Iowans gathered to visit, feast, party, and await midnight with friends, relatives, and neighbors. In Carroll, young people celebrated with "A Trip Around the World" progressive party, stopping at homes with food, decor, and costumes representing Madrid, Paris, Berlin, Tokyo, and Washington, D.C. At another young people's party in Carroll, "the early part of the evening was given over to cards and crokinole [a board game] after which courses of dainty refreshments were served," the local *Herald* remarked. "The remainder of the evening was occupied in games of various kinds which were laughable and entertaining in the extreme."

Newspapers frequently announced "watch parties" or "watch meetings," and diarists frequently mentioned "watching" for the arrival of the new year at midnight. Rev. Alexander Cooper (of Wyoming, Iowa) and his wife and son were invited to a watch meeting hosted by the United Presbyterians, but they spent the evening at home instead because the one-year-old was ill. In Allison, Irving M. and Mary Fisher and a friend stayed up to "watch the old year out & the new year in as well as the new Century." Others held their watch parties alone, like George Miller and his wife, in Hazleton. Miller wrote on December 31, 1900: "Mama and I sat up until 12:10 a.m. and are so happy."

Churches across Iowa held



A party watches for midnight in this *Harper's Weekly* illustration (January 1901).

special "watch night" services. The evening of prayer, sermons, addresses, and hymns began at eight or nine and ended at midnight. In the Page County village of Coin, for instance, "Watch night was observed at the Methodist church Sunday evening. The service commenced at nine o'clock with a song and prayer service; next came the sermon and then, a testimony meeting. Promptly at midnight the church bell was tolled, once for each century. Quite a number stayed to watch the old year out."

Many watch night services featured addresses between the opening religious service and the midnight prayer and consecration. In Creston, for instance, the congregation of the Methodist Episco-

pal Church heard speeches on the new century as well as assessments of the church's growth and the accomplishments of its benevolent societies and Epworth League.

For Catholics, observance of New Year's at the turn of the century was especially significant. The Pope had decreed that solemn high masses be held at midnight on both New Year's Eve 1899 and New Year's Eve 1900. As the *Carroll Sentinel* reported on January 4, 1900: "The unusual occurrence of the celebration of midnight mass at the Catholic churches in this city caused both edifices to be crowded with worshipers last Sunday night." The sermon at St. Peter and Paul's Church was given in both English

and German and focused on the importance of the good use of time. Both churches were illuminated by "a profusion of candles and electric lights."

The next year, on December 31, 1900, the *Council Bluffs Daily Nonpareil* described the drama of Catholics gathering around the world for midnight masses: "The earth will be belted with a procession of priests, bishops and cardinals, followed by the white robed boys swinging the censers to the music of innumerable choirs chanting the songs of the church. It will be the most important event in the history of the Catholic church for the past one hundred years."

With pews filled on New Year's Eve, ministers and priests addressed their listeners on closing a momentous century and "facing the future." "This is a boastful age," warned Rev. T. J. McCarty at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Sioux City. "The nineteenth century is the heir of all the centuries that have preceded it. Let it take all the credit that belongs to it, but let it not forget the blessings of inheritance that have come to it."

In Burlington, Congregational pastor William Salter pointed to astonishing progress. "The nineteenth century is especially distinguished by new inventions for the intercourse and commerce of mankind. The steamboat, the locomotive, the telegraph, the trolley, the telephone, have made all men neighbors and friends. Innumerable new tools have come into the industry of the world, for household work, for factory and shopwork, and for every art and trade. In no other equal portion of time have so many tools been invented

to save labor and help man in his work.

"Civilization has been extended to various parts of the globe that at the beginning of the century were in the night of barbarism," he continued. "Large portions of India and China have been opened to intercourse with the rest of the world, and Japan and Corea [*sic*] have come into the family of nations. The sources of the Nile, of the Niger, of the Mississippi, and of the Amazon have been reached. Daring adventurers have ascended almost every mountain peak, sailed the Arctic seas, and almost reached the northern pole."

But Pastor Salter preached caution and humility: "The nineteenth century has an enormous bulk of great events, as has every preceding century. Being ourselves in the nineteenth century, its events appear greater to us and of more importance than the events of any preceding century. Whether or no they were really so, a dispassionate and judicial future will decide. Invariably in the course of human affairs, the history of any century shrivels to smaller proportions as it recedes in distance."

Beyond the warm glow and contemplative atmosphere of Iowa churches, other Iowans celebrated the new year in more riotous surroundings. "The year 1900 was welcomed by Council Bluffs with the blowing of whistles, the ringing of bells, and the firing of pistols and other explosives in the streets," the *Daily Nonpareil* reported. "These were the outward and more boisterous manifestations of the greeting to the new born year."

The next year, young Will Bab-

"The great word of this nineteenth century has been production. The great word of the twentieth century will be—listen to me, you youngsters—markets."

—Character in *The Octopus* (1901) by American novelist Frank Norris

"Whatever else you may resolve, or do, in the new century, don't be a pessimist. . . . Unadulterated pessimism is a brake upon human progress."

—Burlington Hawk-Eye, January 1, 1901

"What 1999 will be, whether all these things are the same as now or worse, or better, depends of course . . . upon what we are doing now, or upon what we are not doing now."

—Florence Nightingale

bington tried to take advantage of the revelry. "Believing that the screaming whistles, ringing bells, tooting horns and other auricular demonstrations . . . would drown the noise of smashing glass and enable him to conduct a successful burglary, Will Babbington, a 22-year-old Council Bluffs boy made a serious miscalculation last night and was caught in the act," the *Daily Nonpareil* related.

Babbington had timed his entry through a skylight into a clothing store to coincide with midnight. "Just as the uproar began he placed his foot on the glass and sent it crashing down into the store. And just at that instant, too, Mrs. Breesee, who occupies the front part, opened her window to hear the bells. She heard the crash of glass and saw the form of a man disappear through the skylight, and realizing that a burglary was being committed she rushed to the front windows and made the welkin ring with her cries for the police."

In Burlington that same evening, the midnight revelry was outdone by fire alarms. "Above all the din of bells and fireworks and noisy shouters, there roared forth the mighty voice of the water works whistle, to which the fire-bell tolled a harsh accompaniment. Many heard and heeded not. Until the rush of the carts from the stations, the reddening glare that lighted the whole city, startled them and ere long they crowded toward the scene of destruction in motley array." The fire destroyed two large commercial buildings.

The next day's newspaper also listed a few Burlington citizens on the police docket who had disturbed the peace or "miscalculated the amount of liquor that he could carry easily and gracefully."



Captioned "Dawn of the Twentieth Century as it Strikes Europe," this cartoon appeared in the *Detroit News-Tribune* and the *Literary Digest* (January 5, 1901).

The newspaper was surprised that the docket was "meager," given "that some people deem it necessary to observe New Year's if not uproariously, at least hilariously."

Apparently the *Coin Gazette's* reading of human nature was correct: "Some men claim that they see the old year out and the new one in by getting so drunk that they can't see anything."

Iowans hosting parties might have turned to Lida Ames Willis, author of *Booklet of Holiday Dinners*, for advice on the proper New Year's celebration: "Not being so essentially a family festival, but ruled almost entirely by the spirit of merriment, the day is given to less feasting, but more to amusements of various sorts," Willis remarked. "Christmas, spite of the spirit of good will, is more or less

conservative in its observances, while New Year is cosmopolitan. Everyone is young again, and expected to enjoy their share of frolic and fun. Many end up the day with an informal dance, introducing old-time figures and costumes, or appearing in masquerade. This occasion, of course, calls for midnight 'collation.'" Willis's advice, reprinted in the *Council Bluffs Daily Nonpareil*, recommended a less elaborate menu than for Christmas, assuming one's guests had "already surfeited on sweets and rich foods."

A new answer to "What shall we have for dessert?" appeared on the front page of the *Creston Gazette* right before New Year's. The answer? "Try Jell O, a delicious dessert. Prepared in two minutes. No baking. Flavors: Lemon, Orange, Raspberry and Strawberry. At your grocers 10 cts."

Other Iowans, however, relied

on serving old favorites. The Carr family in Wellman had oyster soup in 1900 and 1901 (except for Mag Carr, who didn't like oysters; her husband usually brought her "a nice piece of beef steak" instead). Maranda Cline went to "a goos roast" at her son's house in Hills. Sarah Gillespie Huftalen, in Manchester, listed in her diary the leftovers from New Year's dinner: "a lot of suet pudding, beans, pies, cakes, lamb roast, etc." Mary Eleanor Armstrong Peet, a new bride living outside Martelle in Jones County, "made chocolate cream for dinner" on New Year's Day 1901.

Some Iowans continued a formal Victorian social tradition particularly popular earlier in the 19th century. As the *Des Moines Leader* reported in its society column, "The old custom of calling on New Year's day will be revived to a certain extent on the ushering in of 1900." Receptions or open houses were held at several Des Moines residences, including Terrace Hill, "where Mrs. F. M. Hubbell, assisted by her sister . . . and a number of her lady friends will receive their lady and gentleman friends from 2 to 9 o'clock."

Likewise, in Burlington, Isaah and Willie McConnell hosted 200 guests at an elegant New Year's breakfast. "The host and hostess received unassisted, Mrs. McConnell wearing a simple morning house gown of lavender and white muslin, with pearl and amethyst ornaments. The house was tastefully decorated with heavy festoons of southern smilax, hung as a border around the rooms while large holly wreaths tied with bows of red ribbon hung as medallions upon the walls; palms and ferns filled the corners and the hall and there formed a screen behind which Fischer's or-

chestra played," the *Hawk-Eye* detailed. "The dining room table held a large cut-glass bowl filled with flaming poinsettia." The menu included coffee, chocolate, sandwiches, salad, croquettes, ices, cakes, confections, and egg-nog ("served separately in the little north parlor").

While many Iowans gathered to celebrate the new year with parties, dinners, dances, and receptions, not so Ida "Belle" Bandfield Holden, a schoolteacher in the Waterloo area. Holden lost her mother in early December 1899 and buried her husband on Christmas Eve. She and her father were grieving deeply on New Year's Day. As she confided in her diary, "This is a very sad N.Y. for us both. No celebration today—no one felt like it. [Sister] Cora & family came to dinner to help me start up, that was all but we enjoyed their company very much."

Clearly, New Year's could not stave off tragedy. Witness the January 1, 1900, diary entry of Adaline Kimball Jones, of Iowa City: "I went in to see Mrs. Pratt and learned that one of the roomers a Mr. Marshall had shot himself last eve. Soon after I came home and heard the fire alarm & Steve Swishers house & barn & Dr. Hazards barn burned & injured the Dr's house considerable." On a different note, Jones ended with: "Mrs. Greer had another daughter born today."

For many Iowans, New Year's was the time to take stock of their lives. For some, this meant settling up financially. On the final day of 1900, George Merritt Miller of Hazleton did chores, chopped some wood, and "settled with the banks." Lorin A. Rowe, an Eddy-

"The twentieth century will be American. American thought will dominate it, American progress will give it color and direction; American deeds may make it illustrious. . . . The regeneration of the world, physical as well as moral, has begun, and the revolution will never move backward."

—U.S. Senator
Albert J. Beveridge,
December 31, 1900

"Vitality—that should be the watchword of twentieth century religion, morals, business and human progress."

—Burlington Hawk-Eye,
January 1, 1901

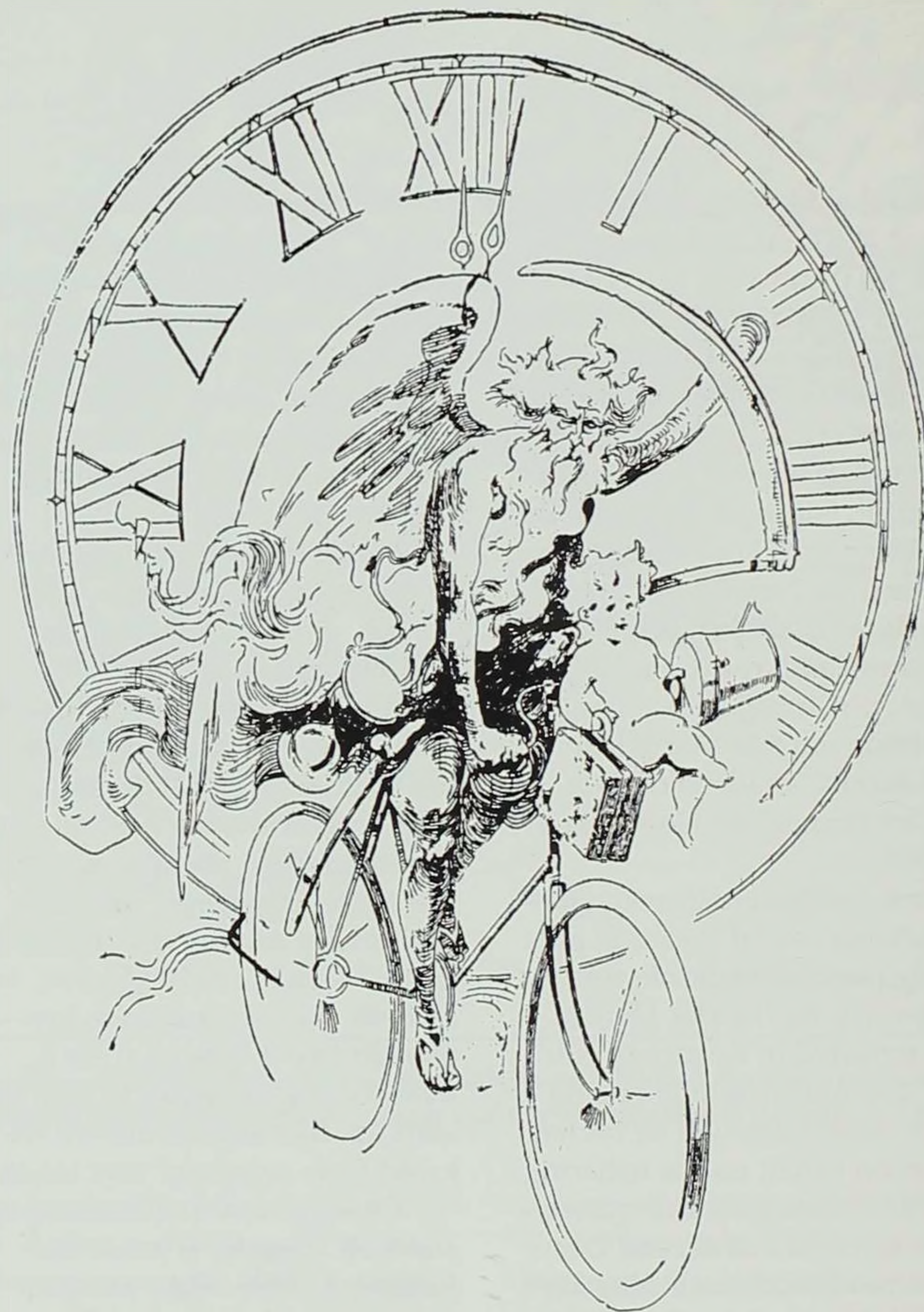
ville businessman, wrote in his diary on January 1, 1901: "I paid Manning and Epperson the last cent I was owing them. Paid Frank \$10.00."

These actions would not have surprised the *Sioux City Journal*, which predicted that "in business circles the interest in the change of the centuries will lie in the settling of many more unpaid bills than is common at the first of the year, which is the general settling time anyway. Many men have determined to pay off every cent they owe in order to start the new cycle with a clear slate. Whether this will be the general course of action the collectors, who will start out Wednesday morning, will soon be able to tell."

For others, taking stock meant tallying up the year's accomplishments. For instance, Alexander P. Cooper, a Presbyterian minister in Jones County, used his final diary entry in 1899 to record his sermon topic for that day, the temperature, and Sunday School attendance. Then he listed a running total of pastoral calls: "Total calls 2000 [and] 321 for 1899. Not as many as I started out to make. I have come far short in this as in many other things. Thank God for time when we are given inspiration for new beginnings & efforts." The next New Year's he continued the tally: "2 below zero. Fine winter weather. Good-bye dear old Century, the last & best of the world up to date. Welcome 20th century. . . . In 1900 I made 335 calls. Total 2335."

John McLane Hamilton, a Reinbeck minister, also used his final 1899 diary entry to record the total number of sermons written and preached, books read, "letters & postals" written and received, and pastoral calls made.

The E. A. Rea Company, in



Joining the 1890s bicycle fad, Father Time and Baby Time arrive at the stroke of midnight, in this cartoon from the *Burlington Hawk-Eye* (January 1, 1901).

Corydon, used a full-page ad in the *Wayne County Democrat* for a public tallying-up of its business accomplishments, set within the nation's accomplishments. The ad read in part: "The old year has closed and with its closing the Nineteenth Century has passed into history. It will be known as the most progressive century in the world's history. The material development in the United States has been greater than it will be possible for it to be in any future century unless a new continent should be discovered or upheaved. Of this development there has been no branch in which improvement has been more marked

or useful than in the agricultural department. Farmers have grown morally, physically and intellectually from 'the man with the hoe' to the 'lords of creation' with such rapid strides that if he were not familiar with the facts, it would read like a fairy tale."

A 25-year history of Wayne County followed, highlighted by the growth of the local hardware and implement business, and particularly the staggering sales totals in 1900 by the E. A. Rea Company itself: "We have sold over one thousand Wagons, Buggies, Carriages, Road Wagons and Spring Wagons. These were received in 36 car loads. If driven in a proces-

sion with a team to each one they would make a string eight miles long." The ad concluded, "What of 1901?" and boldly ventured, "We want to increase our business 50 per cent."

In taking stock of his life at New Year's, Isaac N. Carr was more detailed and introspective than most. Carr wrote long diary entries on January 1, 1900 and 1901, beginning with family and social activities and closing with an accounting of his financial status. He and his wife ("Mag") had moved to Wellman from their Washington County farm in 1899.

On January 1, 1900, Carr wrote: "New years day & Mag lay abed most of the day with a headache I chopped & sawed & split some pole wood all I had & the boys carried it down cellar I also sorted over some apples and took a dozen or 2 nice ones to our bank for new years gift I took Holden an orange & some apples he is no better . . . So far this has been a very fair winter very little snow & not Extra Cold no storms & the past year has been good for Crops."

Carr listed the quantity and quality of oats and corn harvested on his farm; amounts of rent paid and still owed to him; how much he spent on potatoes to supplement his own garden harvest; the total of his stocks and bank accounts; and the value of crops and livestock still owned. "I have enjoyed town life reasonably well the last year & my health has been fair we have all had very fair health. . . . I bought us a nice 2 seat carriage for \$85 & the boys & girls 2 bicycles for \$40 & I made a very poor investment they are allways up for repairs and costly

ones too. . . . I have old corn enough in my Wellman crib to feed & 300 bu oats 2 cows a young calf my grey team Prince & Mollie not valuable & my pacer Alex Corning 3 not valuable an old sow & 6 pigs & at least 6000 bu of good corn in cribs waiting for better prices." He concluded: "Verily I have no reason to Complain."

The next year on New Year's Day, Carr again took stock of his life, comparing it to a year ago. He was concerned that his children were asking too much of their mother, Mag. "Tuesday Jan 1st 1901 Colder but Clear & Sunny," he began. "Bell Came Early to get mother to help her do Some Sowing & Maude has a lot of sowing to do I am opposed [to] these girl's finding so much sowing for Mother to do & if there is much more of it I will have to speak about it Mag works entirely too hard & the girls dont realize it as I do I feel better since I quit working so hard & I know she would feel better & enjoy better health to let the work go & take Care of it-self one year ago to day she lay abed all day with her head ache but lately her health has been better my health has been reasonably good the last year & real good so far this winter we all like town life real well & the boys have Each made Enough to by their Sunday Clothes & vic has now got a better chance in the Ottumwa Laundry. . . . We had Oyster Soup for Supper & got a nice piece of beef steak for Mother as she dont Eat Oysters & not very Cold the past year has been good for Crops."

Again, he detailed his crops, livestock, garden produce, rent paid and owed, bank accounts, and other assets. He seemed pleased to have his affairs in order. "Probably 6000 bu of good Corn in crib on the farm waiting

"Hail, glad new year! Bright and beautiful is thy advent.— And though we write thee one thousand nine hundred and nothing, we welcome thee just the same. Bring gladness and peace on thy minions. What thou hast in store for us we may know by thy unfolding days."

—Eli Mendenhall,
diary entry
for January 1, 1900

"The past has gone, all hail to the new! May 1900 be a better year to you all, bringing bigger crops, more barns to hold them and more boys to tend the crops that fill the barns."

—Sioux County Herald,
December 27, 1899

for better prices Much to be thankful for & little to Complain of good by to the old year & may I do as well in the next & may we all have as good health I made another will the 26 of dec & it is quite a relief to me to know I have things in shape so strangers or outsiders cant control my property when I am gone."

Although Iowa editors and pastors used their public forums of newspapers and sermons to assess the old century and predict the next, Iowans writing in their diaries were far less likely to depart from their personal, private spheres in which they wrote about the weather, work, social relations, and financial details—in essence, their own individual lives. Rarely did they comment in their diaries on the larger world around them—even at the close of a remarkable century.

Lorin A. Rowe was an exception. Rowe was involved in several enterprises in Eddyville, including several real estate properties, the municipal water system, and the opera house. He kept a neat and well-organized diary, writing in a careful hand in black ink. Occasionally he used red ink, for entries about political campaigns and other events apparently of special significance. In his mind, the turning of the century was such an event. On December 31, 1900, he dipped his pen in red ink and wrote, "This is the last day of the Nineteenth Century: What wonderful changes have been wrought in the century just now at its end; nothing now seems to amaze people in general; steam cars, steamboats, Electric lights & motors, Telegraphs, Telephones, Phonographs (Talking Machines), Life like moving pictures &c., &c."

Then he resumed his black ink

and added: "A heavy frost and 8° below zero this morning."

As Americans again experience the turning of a century—and this time a millennium—we might consider how we as individuals witness and document the event. Is it a cause for celebration or contemplation, for revelry or prayer? On New Year's, do we set aside our work? Stay close to the hearth? Enter the larger universe of our community, or of nature itself? Are we certain that January 1, 2000, is, in fact, the first day of the new century and millennium? As the world stands poised to enter a new time period, will we take a moment to jot a few lines, in a letter or an e-mail or a diary, to record our activities and our thoughts?

And will someone, a century from now, read those lines, reconstruct through fact and imagination the setting in which we put words to paper or computer screen, and momentarily connect with us, despite the great distance of yet another hundred years? What will have changed to jeopardize that connection, and what will have stayed the same?

A hundred years have passed since Edgar F. Miller, a farmer in Buchanan County, jotted down a few thoughts in his diary on December 31, 1900. Early that day, he had taken six young pigs to market in the bitter cold. The morning was "rough," he noted in his diary, "8 or 10° below."

Now it is night—New Year's Eve—and the day's work is over. Darkness surrounds Miller's farmhouse. He opens a Christmas present from his brother, Ez. He tidies his secretary and sits writing in his diary, waiting for midnight:

"Am some ready for 1901 which will be along in 1½ hrs." He records how much he is feeding his cattle, the value of his steers, hogs, horses, hay, and corn.

Then he takes a longer view on the passage of time: "This closing year of a closing century has been a prosperous year for me, our state, & our country. Time leaves me older in years but I don't much realize my oldness. Am holding my watch party alone in my den. 'Tis a still, cold, clear night with big moon."

The next day, Miller notes cheerfully that it is a "fine" day with "lovely S.E. wind enough" to pump his windmill. After a morning of work, he gathers with his family for dinner. "Nice night," he remarks. Before washing up and going to bed, he adds one more thought in his diary: "Don't see but this new century works all right." ♦

Ginalie Swaim is editor of Iowa Heritage Illustrated. Tracy Cuning formerly worked as a historical consultant and now conducts historical research as a hobby from her home in Marion, Iowa.

NOTE ON SOURCES

Tracy Cuning conducted extensive research for this article in Iowa newspapers, periodicals, and nearly two dozen diaries. The diaries consulted are archived at the State Historical Society of Iowa (SHSI) in the Iowa City center except for the George Duffield diary (SHSI-Des Moines) and the Maria Kromminga and Ida "Belle" Bandfield Holden diaries (Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City). The title, "Adieu to thee, 19th century," is from Eli B. Mendenhall's diary entry for Dec. 31, 1900.

For a broader look at this topic over the last millennium, see Hillel Schwartz, *Century's End: A Cultural History of the Fin de Siècle from the 1990s Through the 1990s* (NY: Doubleday, 1990).

Elevators and Ether, Weather Bureaus and Fountain Pens: 19th-century Bequests to the 20th

Editor's note: At the turn of the century, a professor at Tufts College compiled the following list of what the 19th century had received as legacies from the 18th, and what it bequeathed to the 20th. The compendium, which appeared in various versions in the nation's newspapers and periodicals in December 1900 and January 1901, reminds us today of the astounding technological advances of the 19th century.

"We received the horse and ox; we bequeath the locomotive, the automobile and the bicycle.

We received the goose quill; we bequeath the fountain pen and typewriter.

We received the scythe; we bequeath the mowing machine.

We received the sickle; we bequeath the harvester.

We received the sewing and knitting needle; we bequeath the sewing and knitting machine.

We received the hand printing press; we bequeath the cylinder press.

We received the typesetter; we bequeath the linotype.

We received the sledge; we bequeath the steam drill and hammer.

We received the flintlock musket; we bequeath automatic Maxims.

We received the sail ship, six weeks to Europe; we bequeath the steamship Majestic, six days to Europe.

We received gunpowder; we bequeath nitroglycerin.

We received the hand loom; we bequeath the cotton gin and woolen mill.

We received the leather fire bucket; we bequeath the steam fire engine.

We received the wood and stone structures; we bequeath twenty-storied steel structures on which the sky may rest.

We received the staircase; we bequeath the elevator.

We received Johnson's Dictionary with 20,000 words; we bequeath the Standard Dictionary with 240,000 words.

We received 22,000,000 speaking the English language; we bequeath 116,000,000.

We received the painter's brush and easel; we bequeath lithography and photography.

We received the lodestone; we bequeath the electromagnet.

We received the glass electric machine; we bequeath the dynamo.

We received the tallow dip; we bequeath the arclight and the Standard Oil Company.

We received the four-inch achromatic telescope; we bequeath the four-foot telescope.

We received two dozen members of the solar system; we bequeath 500.

We received a million stars; we bequeath 100,000,000.

We received the tinder box; we bequeath the friction match.

We received ordinary light; we bequeath Roentgen rays.

We received the beacon signal fires; we bequeath the telegraph, the telephone and wireless telegraphy.

We received the weather unannounced; we bequeath the weather bureau.

We received less than twenty known elements; we bequeath eighty.

We received the products of distant countries as rarities; we bequeath them as bountiful as home productions.

We received history as events remembered and recorded; we bequeath the kinetoscope.

We received the past as silent; we bequeath the phonograph, and the voices of the dead may again be heard.

We received pain as an allotment to man; we bequeath ether, chloroform and cocaine.

We received gangrene; we bequeath antiseptic surgery.

We received the old oaken bucket; we bequeath the driven well and the water tower.

We received decomposition helplessly; we bequeath cold storage.

We received foods for immediate consumption; we bequeath the canning industry.

We received butter solely from milk; we bequeath oleomargarine.

We received the pontoon; we bequeath the Brooklyn bridge.

We received the hedgerow and the rail fence; we bequeath the barbed wire fence.

We received cement steel; we bequeath Bessemer steel.

We received unlimited dependence upon muscles; we bequeath automatic mechanism." ♦

Source: Originally published at the turn of the century in the *Congregationalist* and since reprinted in Michael E. Stevens, ed., *Yesterday's Future: The Twentieth Century Begins* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1999), 61-63



A CHRONICLE OF FAMILY CAMARADERIE

by Nancy S. Martin and Anne Bechtel Bakke

The family chronicle that young Billy Bechtel (*left*) unwittingly began in 1912 with his new camera was not completed until 1973, when his sister Adeline put pen to paper.

In 1912, William Henry Bechtel bought a camera with a few weeks' wages earned as a tin-smith in his hometown of Lansing, in northeast Iowa. Over the next five years, Billy set about sharpening his skills by photographing his family.

With two parents and twelve siblings (six older and six younger), Billy Bechtel had plenty of willing subjects to pose before his camera, plenty of opportunities to train his eye for good shots, and plenty of hours in his make-shift darkroom to develop and print his images as 3¹/₂" x 5¹/₂" postcards.

Gradually Bechtel developed a sense of composition as he photographed his family, friends, and neighbors in a variety of groupings and settings. He composed landscape shots with trees framing the foreground for perspective. He lined up his siblings and

friends on a ladder or positioned them on a hilltop. He experimented with backdrops from his everyday surroundings—a woodpile or a haystack. He photographed his subjects at work, in ripped overalls and rolled-up sleeves, and at play, in jaunty caps and hair ribbons. Between 1912 and 1917, as Bechtel chronicled his large family, he often captured on film a vivid sense of family camaraderie.

On Christmas Eve 1917, Billy Bechtel's promise as an amateur photographer ended when he died of complications from an appendectomy. The 23-year-old was survived by his parents and siblings, and dozens of photographs.

More than half a century later, Billy Bechtel's youngest sister, Adeline, wrote a family history and titled it "The Tree and Thee." Its 60 pages are framed by genealogical facts but are fleshed out with descriptive details and characteristic anecdotes about her parents and her dozen siblings. The

same sense of tight family bonds and togetherness captured in her brother's photographs echo throughout her written chronicle.

The following pages give a sampling of how Adeline Bechtel Kerndt's words, written in 1973, add color and richness to her brother's sepia-toned photographs, taken between 1912 and 1917. Together they weave a family history that both documents and delights.

As a new century and millennium inspire us to chronicle our own family histories, we would do well to follow Billy and Adeline's example. For just as names and dates and places are essential to a family history, so too are photographs and stories, the energizing forces that allow the spirit of one individual family to speak to the rest of us. →

Nancy S. Martin teaches English at Waldorf College in Forest City. Anne Bechtel Bakke is a teacher in Forest City and niece of Billy Bechtel and his sister Adeline.

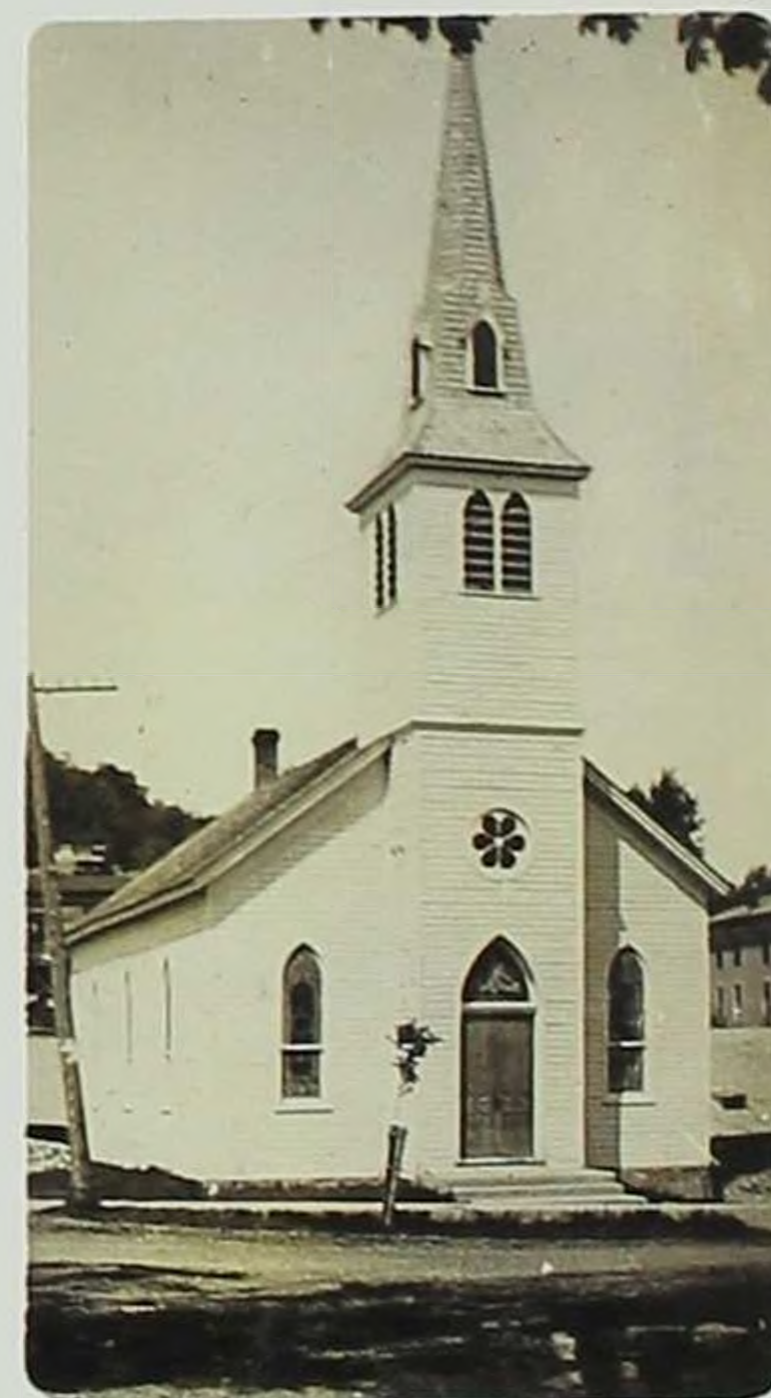


This detail from a large group photo by Billy Bechtel shows his mother, Mary Christoph Bechtel, flanked by Marie and Matt (two of her 13 children).

"Mamma was an early riser, getting up at sunrise to cut grass for her cows when she thought they weren't getting enough from the pasture. The two cows were named Daisy and Rosy. Mamma always did the milking, the boys helping out in an emergency. Dad never went anywhere near them, as far as milking was concerned.

... Mother's life centered much around this church, as she was the janitor for so many years. ... Asking her to give up this work was almost like asking her to quit breathing. She was at least 75 years old when she did finally agree. The walking was getting to be difficult. I don't remember her ever missing a Sunday to make the fire in the winter, only when she was ill; and Mother, never professing anything but good health, never let sickness keep her from this work. On cold mornings, she'd leave as early as five o'clock so the church would be warm for Sunday School. ... She said that in building the fires and sitting in the quietness of this church all her problems could be met. (I'd say she had many in the raising of her thirteen.)"

Adeline Bechtel Kerndt



The Bechtels attended the German Presbyterian Church in Lansing.

"I remember my Father as a painter and a paper hanger. How fascinated I was in watching him papering a ceiling. Often humming, he would get up on the scaffold, paper folded, hanging over his shoulder, and with a quick swish of the brush it was on. If not straight or a little wrinkled, off it would come. . . .

. . . Father spent much time away from home, especially in the summer months. He'd work for farmers repairing and painting buildings. . . . [My brother Ted remembered that] they'd work from Monday through Saturday until 6 o'clock. Rather than wait for the farmers to take them home after chores, Dad would say, 'These people will be too tired after working all day, we'll walk home.' This was possibly a distance of four or five miles. In the painting of a school house—if they didn't complete the job—the floor of the school was their bed.

. . . Dad had a little black book in which he kept the painting and paper hanging hours he worked. . . . He would call up different members of the family to add up the figures, charging 25¢ or 35¢ an hour. He asked what amount they got. He, figuring in German or his own way, would say, 'Yes, that's what I got. But I can't charge that man that much; I'll have to throw some off.' "

Adeline Bechtel Kerndt



Matthew Bechtel poses with tools of his trade—ladder and brush.





With flowers in hatband and pipe in hand, Billy's father, Matthew Bechtel, stands next to his wife and amidst eight of their 13 children. From left: Carl ("Brownie"), Ted, Esther, parents Matthew and Mary, Dorothy, Jack. Front row: Marie, Matt, and Adeline. Years later, Adeline wrote a lengthy family history, excerpted on these pages.



With flowers in hatband and pipe in hand, Billy's father, Matthew Bechtel, stands next to his wife and amidst eight of their 13 children. From left: Carl ("Brownie"), Ted, Esther, parents Matthew and Mary, Dorothy, Jack. Front row: Marie, Matt, and Adeline. Years later, Adeline wrote a lengthy family history, excerpted on these pages.



The ages of the Bechtel siblings spanned 27 years. The eldest, Sam (left, on boulder), was born in 1884; the youngest, Matt (above in knickers), in 1911. Lydia's son, Roy Frankhouser (in overalls), was the first grandchild, born in 1913. Below: Edward George ("Butch") Bechtel, born in 1890.



"Butch [see left] as a youth was a loner, always restless. . . . [He and a friend] planned many different adventures. Once they decided to build a raft to go down the Mississippi and see the world. . . .

[Years later, as a world traveler] Butch wasn't the best letter writer; but as for remembering the family with gifts, he was great. . . . elephants from India, carved from teakwood; silk from Japan for a dress for Dorothy; fans; shells; wooden shoes; coins; an accordion from Germany, which Dad played while he was sitting in his lawn swing; and a clock from the Black Forest in Germany that had the Westminster chimes.

Much of this brother's life is remembered in bits and pieces as he stayed only a short time on his visits home."

Adeline Bechtel Kerndt



Billy created this double exposure of his brother Carl ("Brownie") to fool the eye. Often a dapper dresser, Brownie was the first child of Mary and Matthew Bechtel to graduate from high school, in 1914.

"The Bechtels . . . were great for putting on shows, Brownie in particular. Brownie had a way of advertising the coming event, and the charge for admission was common pins. A common pin in those days wasn't 'common,' and to take them from your mother's pincushion wasn't the best idea. So with advance notice of the coming shows, all the kids would go up to the Catholic church and dig in the church sweepings thrown out by the Sisters. Brownie was the writer and producer, the kids were the puppets. He also was the best reader, stopping at an exciting part, telling the kids it would be continued the next day. . . . The ticket taker's mother was the only one who never complained about not having enough pins."

Adeline Bechtel Kerndt



For this "stairstep" photo, Billy posed his four youngest sisters and two older friends from tallest to smallest. From left: Margaret and Mimi Warren, Esther, Dorothy, Marie, and Adeline Bechtel.

"I wonder how many pairs of mittens and stockings Mother knitted in her lifetime. There was always a new pair of each for Christmas, and maybe some one of us would get a new pair of shoes. Again I look back and wonder how something so limited and frugal could have been such a tense, thrilling, happy time.

... The parlor was off-bounds for about two weeks before Christmas. ... There was a front door which opened directly onto the street, and it was through this door that the tree and all the secrets were brought. The floor was carpeted with long strips of rag carpeting sewn together and stretched tightly over the clean straw (changed every fall). It rustled when you walked over it."

Dorothy Bechtel Harvey,
quoted by Adeline Bechtel Kerndt

"How Dorothy ever put up with two giggly girls, I'll never know. At night when going to bed (there were the two beds in the one room) Dorothy tried to read and Marie and I had other crazy ideas like repeating the alphabet and books of the Bible forward and backward. I never could come up to any of her performances."

Adeline Bechtel Kerndt

"Matt and I fought, argued, and teased each other very much in growing up. We always shared, even if it meant Matt getting the short end. Our favorite sliding place was Nopper Hill, which was the main highway. Those years we only had to watch for sleighs, and as it was in the evening we never saw many. School nights were out, but Friday nights we were allowed to stay until the curfew bell rang at nine o'clock. Going down the hill, the one that got down first would holler, 'All clear.' Pete Moeller had a team and cutter, and we didn't realize he was coming that fast, so Matt wasn't warned soon enough. Seeing the team, Matt went off at an angle to avoid the team, but went right through and under the sleigh, kitty corner over a bank. Matt wasn't hurt but the sled was flat. It happened so fast, but I still can hear Pete hollering about the blankety-blank kids, but never stopping to see if he had run over anybody. We really lived charmed lives."

Adeline Bechtel Kerndt



The two youngest, Adeline and Matt, pose in a woodpile on a wintry day.



From top, seated in hay: Mary Bechtel and Lydia Bechtel Frankhouser. Standing with pitchfork: cousin Frank Bechtel. Front row: young Roy Frankhouser (Lydia and Ed's son) and Ed, holding dog. (The woman standing at the top and the man in the dark hat are unknown.)

"Lydia, . . . the first daughter, was born in the family on January 17, 1892. . . . At 16, she went to work at the 'Capoli,' an old stone building in South Lansing, which was a button factory. This was a good two-mile walk from the west part of town. She worked from 7 in the morning until 6 at night for a dollar a day. Her pay check was given to Mother, who allowed her to buy an ice cream cone on Sunday.

At the age of 15, Lyd had a bout with inflammatory rheumatism, which was very painful and kept her bedridden for months. Touching the bed made her scream with pain, and Mother had to feed her. She had to learn how to walk again by pushing a chair ahead of her to get from place to place. This illness came just before Christmas, and Adeline (me) was born the following March. Lydia, never knowing at the time that Mother was expecting another baby, remarked, 'What a winter that must have been for you!'"

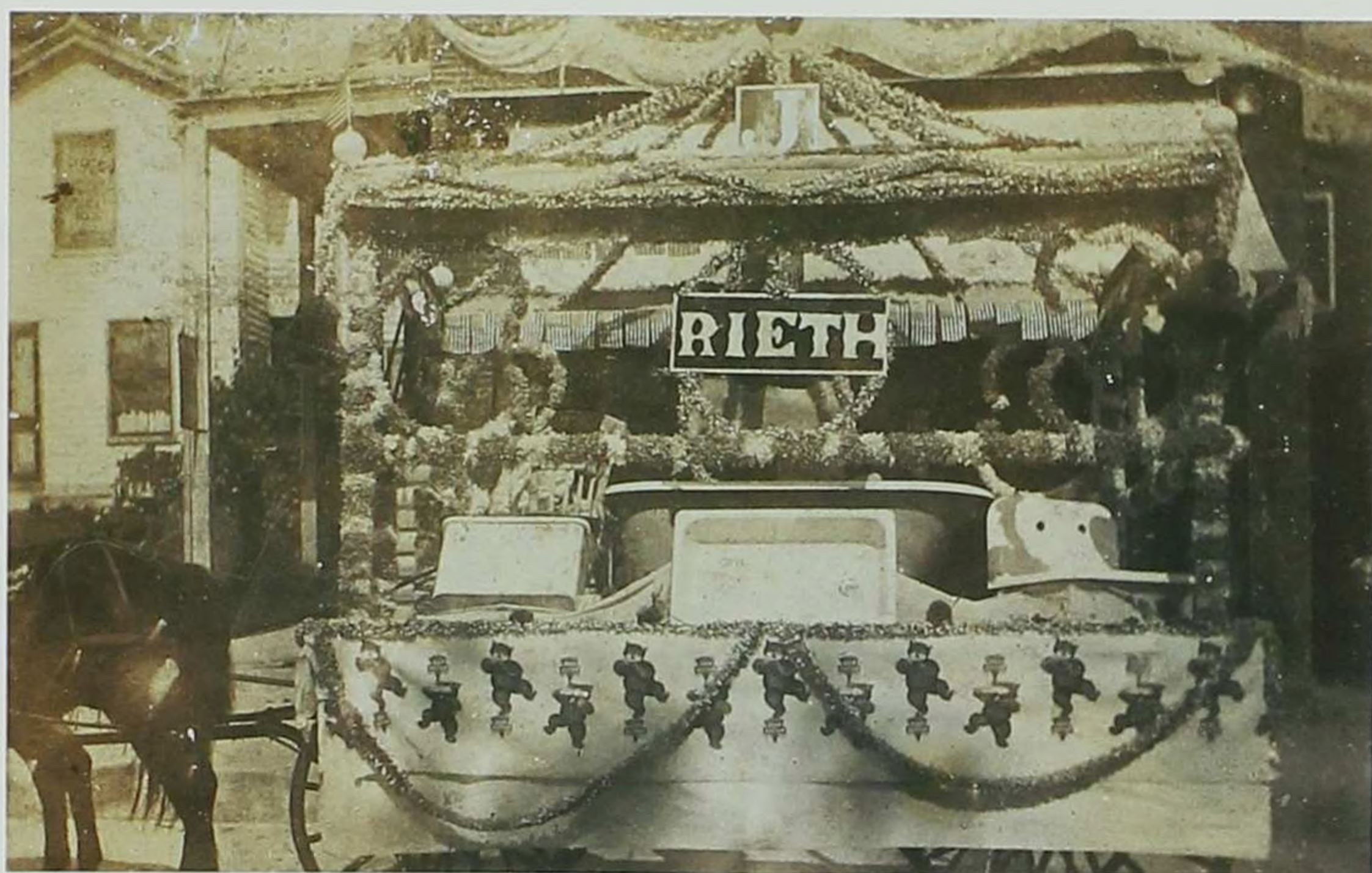
Adeline Bechtel Kerndt

Using a ladder propped against a woodpile, Billy playfully posed his subjects on each rung. From the top: Friends Margaret and Mimi Warren, Billy's siblings Esther, Dorothy, Ted; cousin Willy Schmidt; and the three youngest Bechtels, Marie, Adeline, and Matt.





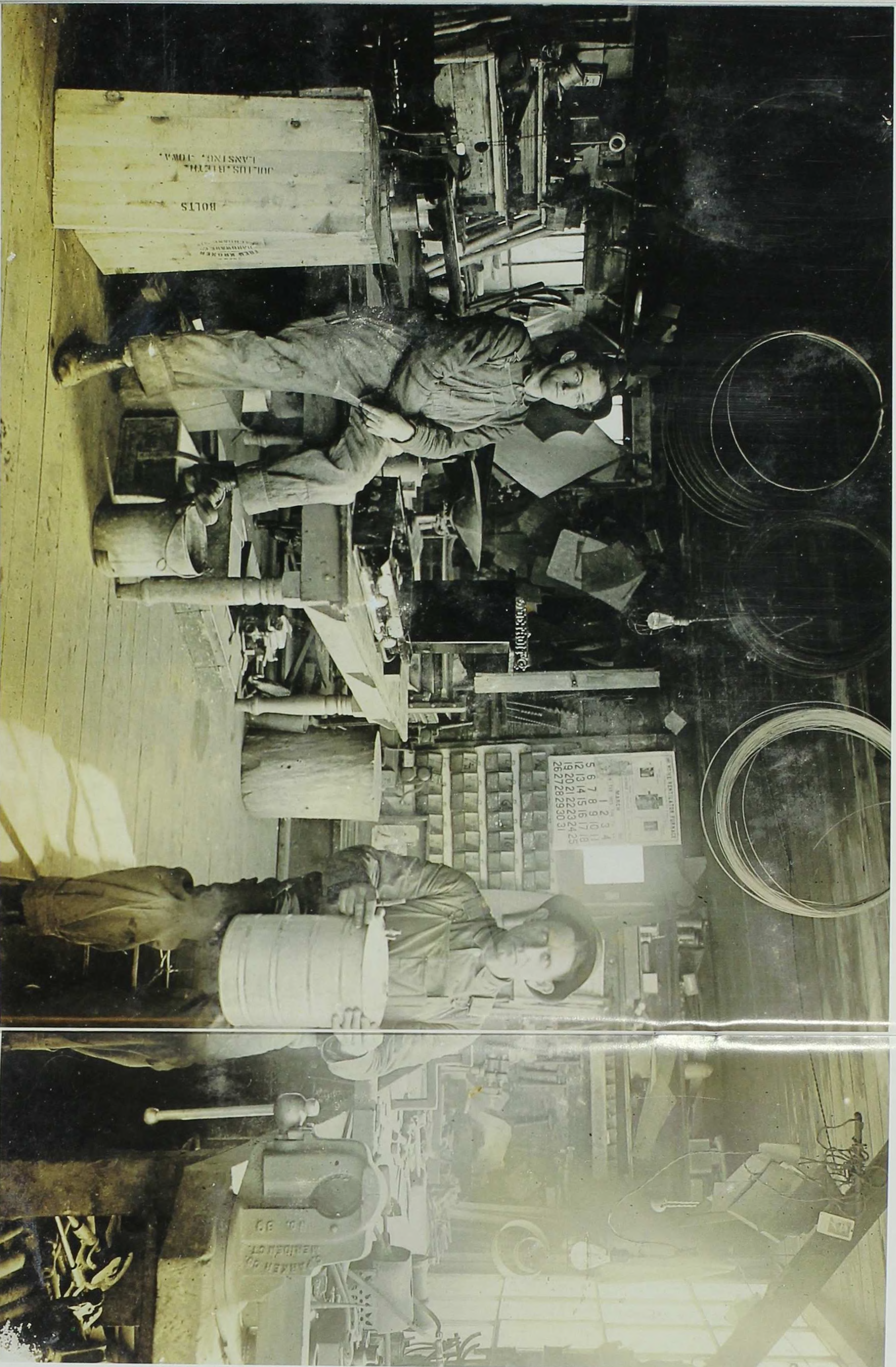
Billy Bechtel (left) learned tinsmithing and plumbing from **Julius Rieth**, in his shop in Lansing. Although such shops were commonplace in small-town Iowa, interior photographs like this one (dated March 1916), showing the everyday clutter of tools and workbenches, are relatively rare today.



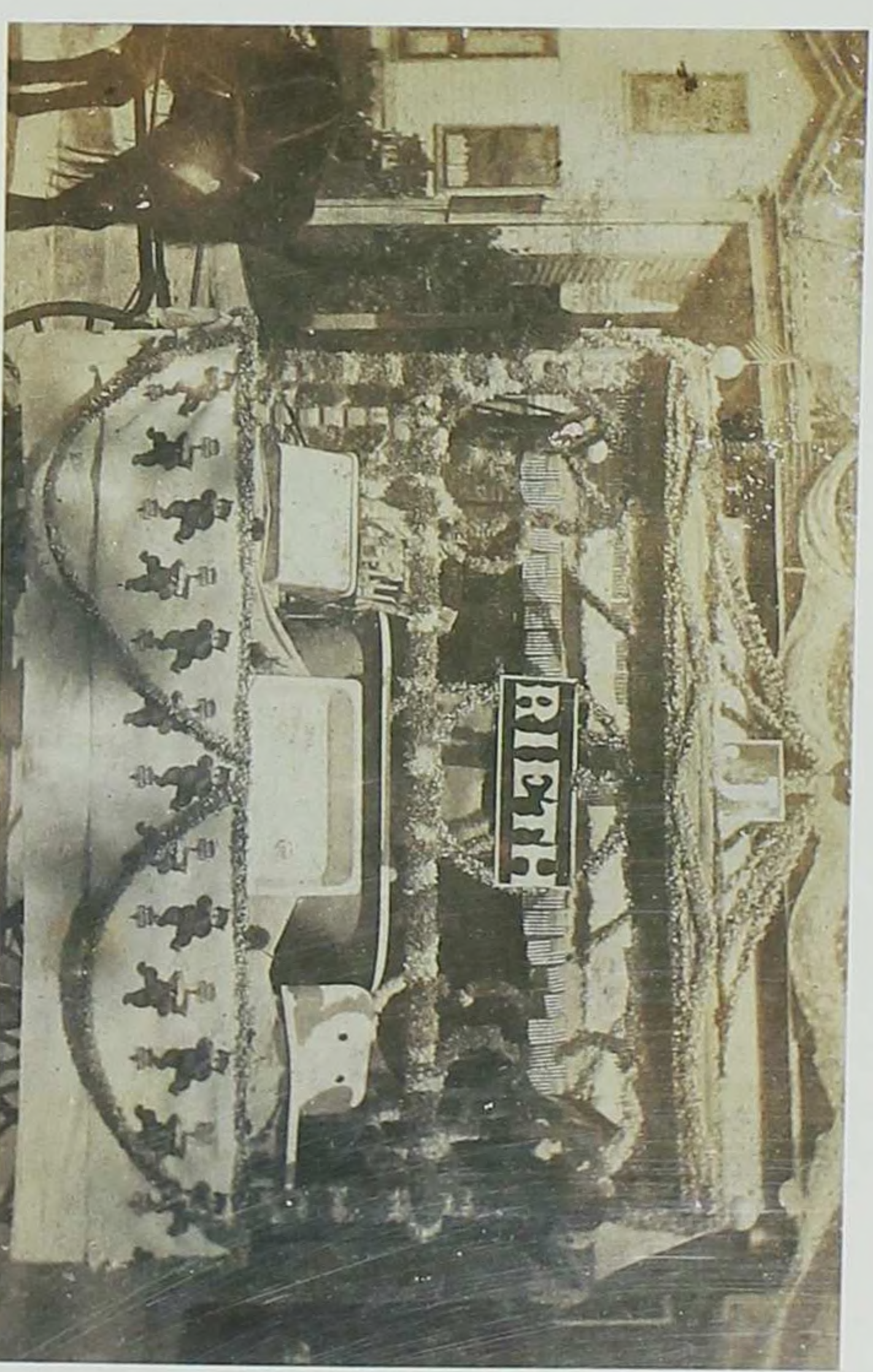
A float decorated with bunting, sinks, and signs advertises Julius Rieth's plumbing business.



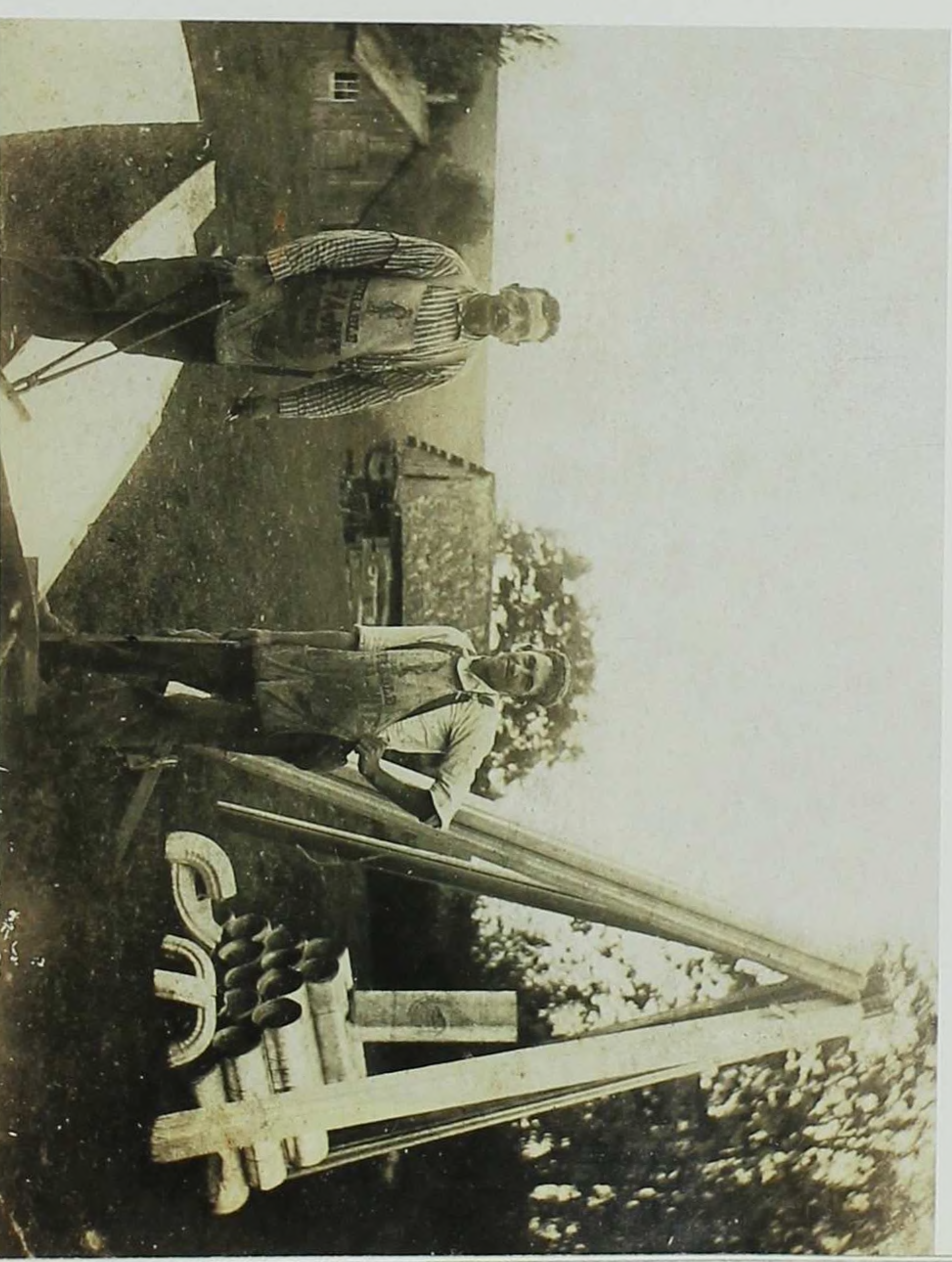
With hand on hip, Billy Bechtel stands beside a pyramid of gutters and downspouts. On the ground, sheets of tin await cutting and crimping.



Billy Bechtel (left) learned tinsmithing and plumbing from Julius Rieth, in his shop in Lansing. Although such shops were commonplace in small-town Iowa, interior photographs like this one (dated March 1916), showing the everyday clutter of tools and workbenches, are relatively rare today.

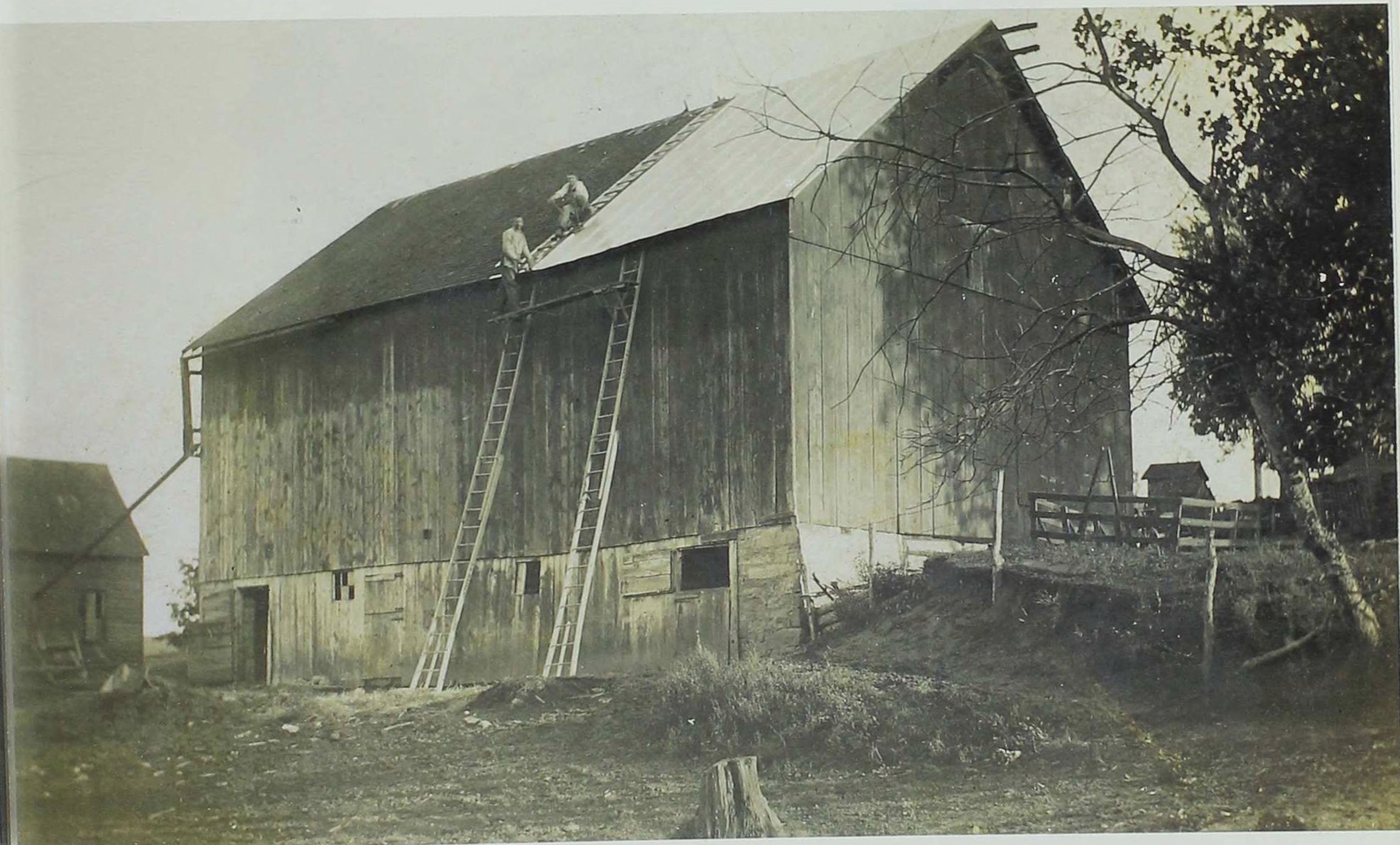


A float decorated with bunting, sinks, and signs advertises Julius Rieth's plumbing business.



With hand on hip, Billy Bechtel stands beside a pyramid of gutters and downspouts. On the ground, sheets of tin await cutting and crimping.





Left: Billy (hat-less) and another worker take a break, surrounded by lumber and scaffolding at the building site of a new barn.

Above: From atop an old barn, Bill Wilkinson and Joe Wihopper pause in their work of reroofing with shiny new sheets of tin.

Right: A crew poses willingly for Billy's camera.





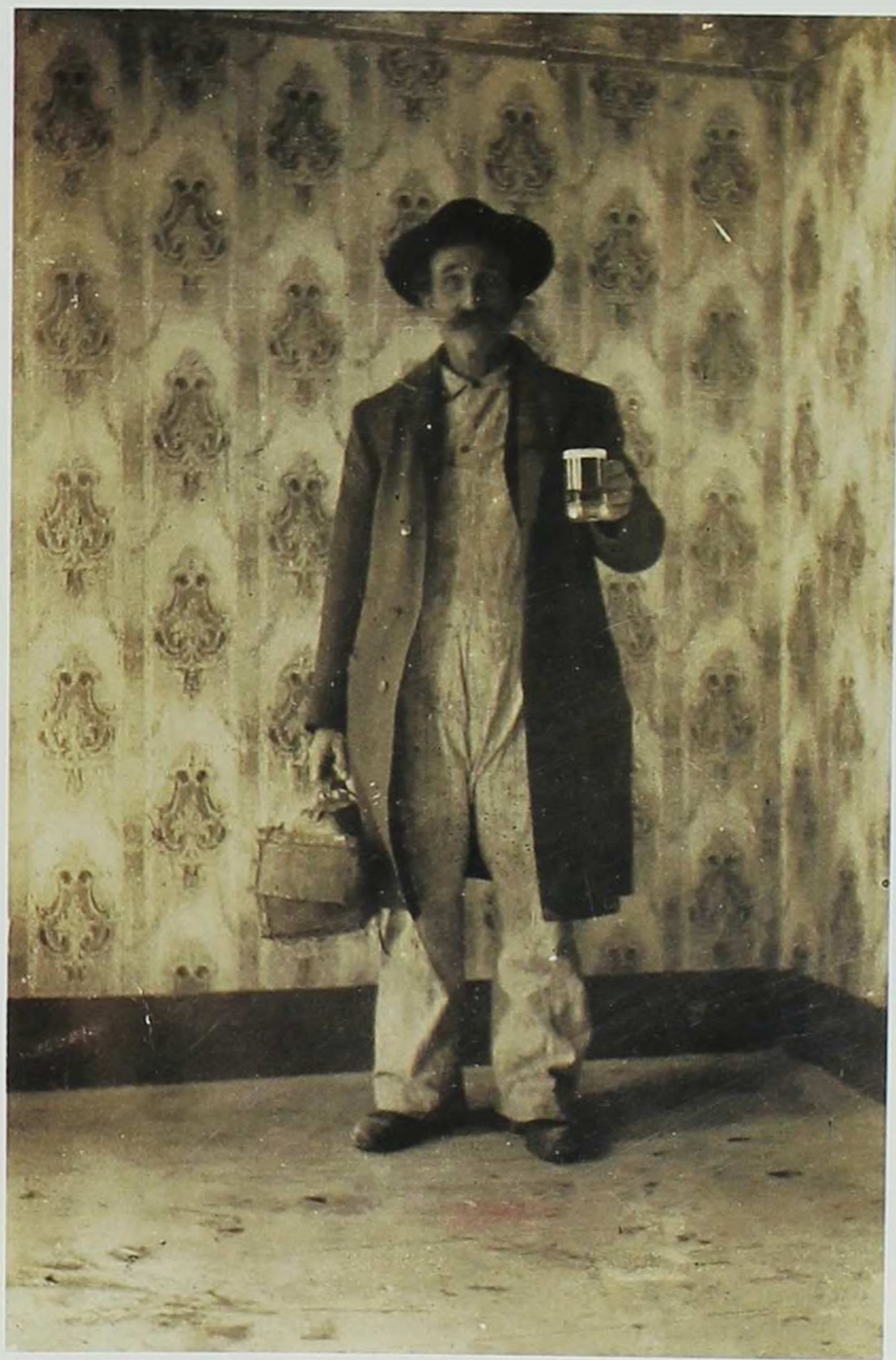
Presiding from a farm wagon, Matthew Bechtel (upper right) receives refreshment. Note the bouquets of flowers held by the boy (Ted Bechtel) and man resting on two wagon wheels caked with mud.

Probably using a shutter release cable, Billy (holding plate) included himself in this photo of a special family occasion. Surrounded by family portraits, the Bechtels prepare for a toast. From left: Lydia, Esther, Carl ("Brownie"), Mary, and Billy Bechtel. Aunt Hannah Boettcher holds baby Arthur.



"Dad would get thirsty for more than water and would send the boys to Lansing for a 10¢ bucket of beer. Dad had the pail marked to keep the boys honest in not drinking any of it. They finally figured out a method to at least get a taste. The walk to Lansing was a good two miles, and they would get plenty dry. This was the scheme they decided on: By putting a nail hole below what they considered would be the foam line and sealing it with gum, they at least could have a sip. Dad's thirst was quenched and, he no more the wiser, everyone was happy."

Ben Bechtel,
quoted by Adeline Bechtel Kerndt



Against a wallpaper backdrop and with toolbag in hand, painter and paper hanger Matthew Bechtel hoists a beer.



Presiding from a farm wagon, Matthew Bechtel (upper right) receives refreshment. Note the bouquets of flowers held by the boy (Ted Bechtel) and man resting on two wagon wheels caked with mud.



Probably using a shutter release cable, Billy (holding plate) included himself in this photo of a special family occasion. Surrounded by family portraits, the Bechtels prepare for a toast. From left: Lydia, Esther, Carl ("Brownie"), Mary, and Billy Bechtel. Aunt Hannah Boettcher holds baby Arthur.

"Dad would get thirsty for more than water and would send the boys to Lansing for a 10¢ bucket of beer. Dad had the pail marked to keep the boys honest in not drinking any of it. They finally figured out a method to at least get a taste. The walk to Lansing was a good two miles, and they would get plenty dry. This was the scheme they decided on: By putting a nail hole below what they considered would be the foam line and sealing it with gum, they at least could have a sip. Dad's thirst was quenched and, he no more the wiser, everyone was happy."

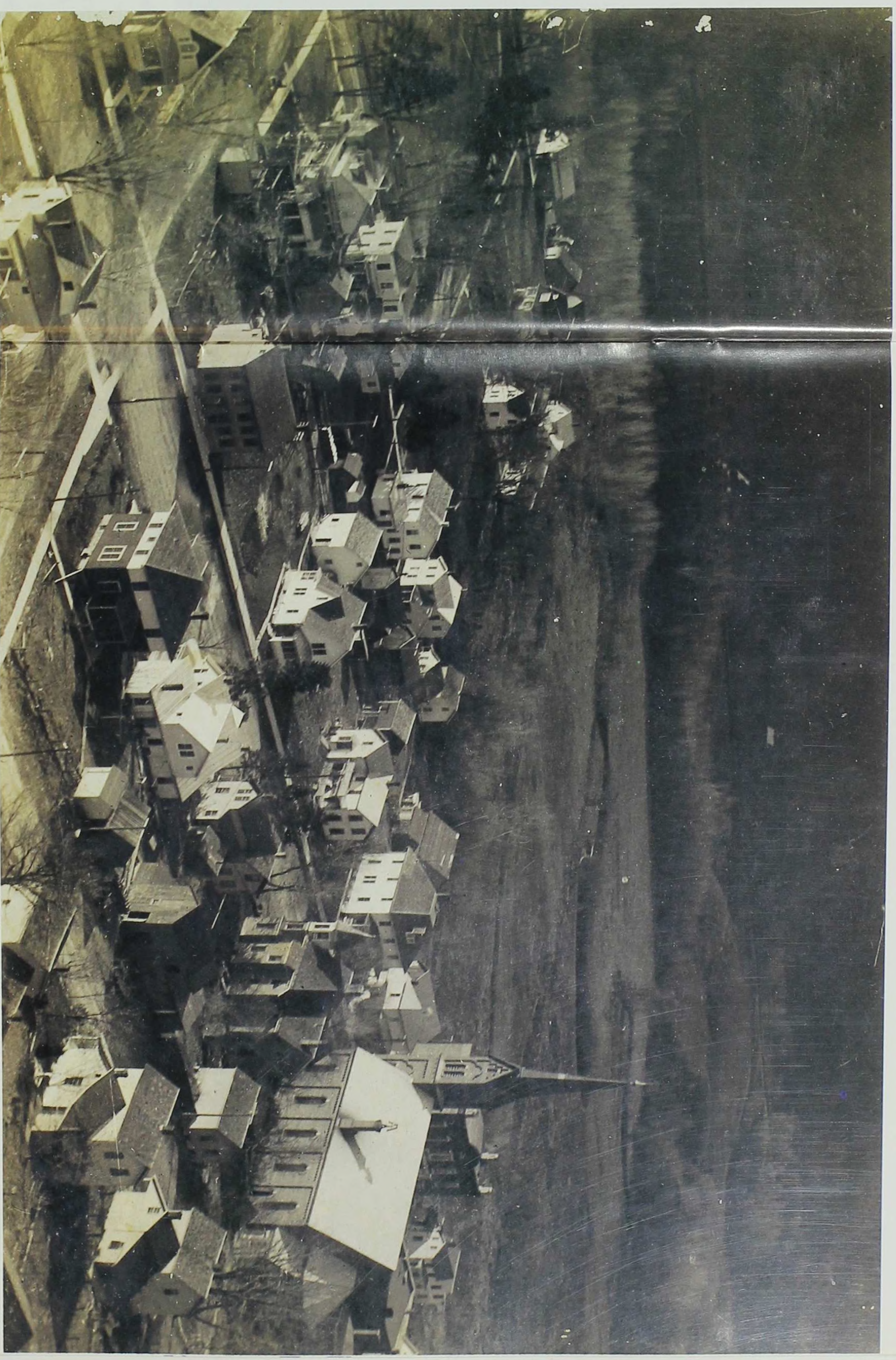
Ben Bechtel,
quoted by Adeline Bechtel Kemdt



Against a wallpaper backdrop and with toolbag in hand, painter and paper hanger Matthew Bechtel hoists a beer.



Esther, Dorothy and their friend Lizzie Gee stand behind birch saplings, while on the grass, Ted pretends to take aim and a companion remains hidden behind the tree trunk. The hills surrounding Lansing and overlooking the Mississippi River figured frequently in Billy's photos and in the family's leisure time. The Bechtels often climbed Mt. Hasmer, Mt. Ida, and other nearby hills, to pick wild-flowers, enjoy picnics, and play in the woods.



Billy used a hill as a vantage point for this bird's-eye view of a portion of Lansing and the woods and fields beyond the town.

"The older brothers' fun on Sunday afternoons was climbing the hills. Mother went along to pick flowers or just watch them running off their energy. Their swing was small hickory trees because of their elasticity in bending and not breaking. They would climb to the top, go to the end of a branch, and come down. If a child's weight would leave him in mid-air, an older brother would climb up; and they came down together. Never an arm or leg was broken in this sport."

Adeline Bechtel Kerndt



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"Ted's going into the woods to pick wildflowers in the spring was another thing enjoyed by the sisters and brothers that tagged along. Many different hills were climbed, depending on the wildflowers desired. Kersteins' hill for the Crowfoot Violet and Crocus, Schafers' Hollow for the Lady Slipper, Hale's Garden (a wooded area near the railroad tracks) where wildflowers of many varieties grew profusely. Ted sensed when the Spring Beauty, Squirrel Corn, Dutchman Breeches and Dogtooth Violet were in bloom. The Shooting Star was a beautiful flower but was found growing on cliffs that were rather steep. Reaching them was done in this manner. The boys formed a human chain—the top one, holding to the tree trunk or wrapping his leg around it, would take a younger one holding on to his legs, while the smaller child would pick the flower. I remember doing this, but only once!

For Decoration Day Ted would sell wildflowers for people to put on graves, getting 25¢ for a big bunch. Lady Slippers were in bloom around this time so off he'd go with Marie to see how many they could pick, finding a wash tub full."

Adeline Bechtel Kerndt



Esther Bechtel dangles a basket of wildflowers and holds the hand of her friend Mimi Warren.



Billy (left, perhaps holding a shutter release cord under his hat), and his sister **Esther** (dark dress) pose with friends **Alice Marley** and **Wallace Cooper**, on the hills beyond the Mississippi.

NOTE ON SOURCES

This photo essay developed from a photo exhibit, "Portrait of an Iowa Family," coordinated by Anne Bechtel Bakke. Funded by Humanities Iowa and Lansing Stone School Corp./Kerndt Brothers Savings Bank (Lansing, Iowa), the exhibit traveled to Forest City, Lansing, and Sheffield, Iowa, in the summer of 1999.

Background sources include Adeline Bechtel Kerndt's "The Tree and Thee" and "The Tree and Thee, Book 3" (Lansing, 1973). Marie Bechtel Bieber (age 95) of Portland, Oregon, verified information and identified people in the photographs. Esther Snitker Bechtel (Sheffield) and Mary Kay Kerndt Winke (Waukon), daughter of Adeline (age 93), were interviewed. All photos courtesy of the Matt Bechtel family (Sheffield). Special thanks to Gus Kerndt for archiving the photographs at the Lansing Museum. Copies of some of the photos have been donated to the State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City). Thanks to archivist Mary Bennett (SHSI) for advice on preservation of the photographs. For presentation on these pages, some images have been altered electronically to remove smudges or rips accumulated on the photos over the decades.

"Billy took ill on a Saturday. He went to the Doctor, and he told him he should have surgery as soon as possible. Since the passenger train [to La Crosse] didn't run on the weekend, he had to wait until Monday. By this time his appendix had ruptured. Billy came through the operation fine and was recovering very well. He was planning to come home, when he took a turn for the worse, and a second operation was performed. He knew he was going to die. He was young and planning to be married when he came back from the war. He had his induction papers, and the day he went to the hospital, he was supposed to leave for the Army. These things made his dying so much harder for one to accept. . . ."

Adeline Bechtel Kerndt ❖



OUR READERS TALK ABOUT IOWA IN HOLLYWOOD FILM

Four issues ago, we invited readers to participate in our special survey, "If Iowans made movies about Iowa." (You'll remember that this was connected to the article "Visions of Iowa in Hollywood Film," by Marty S. Knepper and John S. Lawrence.) Several readers responded to our five survey questions, and we're delighted to reprint portions of their replies.

—The Editor

❶ In your opinion, what images are the most common and the least common in movies with an Iowa setting?

For "most common" images, our respondents added these to the authors' list: cornfields, men in overalls, old barns, windmills, State Fair animal barns, white houses with picket fences, farmers in pick-ups, gravel roads, grain elevators, and people waving to each other.

Among the least common images, they suggested: highways, schools, the state capitol, architecture, Iowa's mining industry, "sophisticated" businesses, the Des Moines Regional Opera (Simpson College, Indianola), hills, symphony concerts, posh homes, houses with broad lawns, big cars, classes of business students, African Americans, hunting and fishing, U.S. Senior Open Golf Tournament, home offices of insurance companies, art festivals, recreation facilities, plants and industries, caucuses, sports achievements, drugs and crime, police officers, gangs, prostitutes, and run-down neighborhoods.

❷ Of these films (*State Fair*, *The Music Man*, *Country*, *Field of Dreams*, *The Bridges of Madison County*, *A Thousand Acres*, or name your own), which gives the best portrayal of Iowa or Iowans; which do you like least?

Mary L. Ellis (Des Moines): "My favorite of the Iowa movies was *Field of Dreams*. I think that rural Iowa was portrayed pretty well in regard to dress, speech, relationships. (It is hard to go wrong with Kevin Costner.) Actually all of these movies with a rural theme do portray rural Iowa as it is. However, they never portray any other part of Iowa. Apparently the only reason that movies are made in Iowa is because they are looking for a setting that includes rural culture. They must not think we have anything else unique to offer. Although I liked all of these films, I don't think that *The Music Man* actually gave a good portrayal of Iowans. I grew up near Mason City ("River City"), I am not aware that people were much like those portrayed in the movie during that time period. But then, I don't think that movie was really attempting to portray Iowa. It was about the music."

Leslie Poulson (Colfax): "*Thousand Acres* shows the problems with farms and how they are having problems staying above water. *Field of Dreams* is just stupid and portrays Iowa as Hicksville USA. Makes people think we're a bunch of nuts who hear voices."

Winifred Kelley (Des Moines): "*A Thousand Acres*—family life."

William T. Miller (West Des Moines): "*Pleasantville*. None of the above give a fair, general view of Iowa, only 'specialties,' which are half-truths. *Flight 232*, Sioux City, is best and truthful."

Cathy Sloan (Atalissa): "I think *Country* portrays Iowa and Iowans the best."

Ann Wilson (Altoona): "I loved *Music Man* because of the music. Didn't see the others but suspect *Bridges* would be the least liked."

❸ Suppose you're a filmmaker with a huge budget and top-name stars. What would your film or documentary portray about Iowa or Iowans?

Sloan: "How Iowans jump in and help others who are in need of help. Example: A family member is hurt or becomes ill. Iowans who help after a disaster."

Marita Mastrofski (West Des Moines): "Buxton, an all-black community mining town."

Kelley: "Rise of Pioneer Hi-Bred Seed, showing a city man growing corn near a city, coat and tie; professors of genetics; Cedar Rapids CEO coming home to a big mansion, parties."

Miller: "Get interesting Iowa history events to filmmakers"; Mormons on the trail west; settlement of eastern Iowa; foreign investments and intrigue in Iowa; Iowans' roles in national politics; septuplets and good neighbors; floods and tornadoes; Iowa's war record; the arts and night life; Des Moines as insurance capital.

Ellis had several ideas to "emphasize some other positive Iowa features besides its rural character," including "1. Public education success stories (a child winning a national spelling bee; or state band contests; or Ivy League colleges competing for Iowa scholars but the scholar instead chooses an Iowa college/university because they love Iowa and don't want to leave their families). 2. Healthy family lifestyles (e.g., both parents work but are still actively involved in their children's lives and activities. Show how it can be done here because parents don't work long distances from their homes. . . .) 3. Community fund-raising efforts for civic improvements. 4. University or hospital research setting (something about gene therapy? Check with the IA Health System Gene Therapy Institute). 5. Dog shows. Iowa has one of the largest dog shows in the country each September. . . . 6. Government (There are lots of good stories about the Iowa legislature and the people who run state government or the Governor's office. Show off our Capi-

tol. Sit in on a few appropriation subcommittee meetings for topic ideas. Some crazy things go on there.) 7. Casino gambling—How it can have a negative effect on someone's life."

4 How does your experience with films about Iowa or Iowans affect your assessment of Hollywood's treatment of other regions of America or of historical events in America's past?

Sloan: "I do think Hollywood sometimes makes other places better than what they are."

Mastrofski: "Probably the filmmakers do best in portraying an area they are really familiar with."

Ellis: "Movies are a very powerful public relations tool. We tend to think that New Yorkers are sophisticated and wealthy and that there are also drug addicts on every street corner. Everyone in California is trendy. Texans all think and talk 'big.' I know people in all of these places and they are not at all like they are portrayed in the movies."

Wilson: "If they are as historically correct as regarding Indians/settlers, let's just keep them [Hollywood filmmakers] out!"

Poulson: "I think they overdo the things and exaggerate. I don't believe just what the movies show."

5 Do film images of Iowa really make a difference? Or, as they would say in Hollywood, is it just entertainment?

All respondents except Wilson thought that the images make a difference. Kelley thought films could affect "others' perceptions of where they might like to live." Poulson commented, "People who have never been to Iowa really think it's like that." Miller noted that "KCCI-TV weather shots give [images of] staggering beauty the world doesn't see." Ellis wrote, "Video rentals and TV allow the movies to be played over and over and firmly implant those images in peoples' minds."

Mark Singsank, executive director of the Dyersville Chamber of Commerce, commented on the local impact of *Field of Dreams*: "We can't estimate precisely how many people have come to visit, but 60,000-75,000 seems reasonable. Restaurants, gas stations, motels have all noticed the positive impact. Most [visitors] seem to be first-time travelers to the area. They comment on how nice Iowa is, and how nice the people are. . . . A woman from the East who lived in a pretty congested area. . . . commented on how the people here are laid back; life doesn't seem as stressful. She thought it might be nice to have a job here, or to retire here."

Readers also added to the list of films with Iowans as characters or Iowa as a setting:

Dan Sullivan (Cedar Rapids) suggested *Dribble*, "shot in Cedar Rapids 20 some years ago" with the Iowa Cornets women's professional basketball team and "Machine Gun Mollie" Bolin.

Fred Crane (Mt. Pleasant) suggested *What's Up Doc?* (1972) with Barbra Streisand and Ryan O'Neal, who plays a musicologist from an Iowa university; and the 1982 TV movie *Bill*, for which Mickey Rooney won an Emmy.

Another reader added *High Barbaree* (1947), starring Van Heflin, John Payne, and June Allyson; in the first half, the characters are childhood friends in idyllic Westview, Iowa. As one character says, they were "born in the best possible place." The film is based on *The High Barbaree*, written by Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Hall and published in 1945.

Perhaps the newest film set in Iowa is *The Straight Story* (1999), starring Richard Farnsworth, Sissy Spacek, and Harry Dean Stanton. The plot is based on the true story of Alvin Straight, a widower from Iowa who drove his riding mower across Iowa to Wisconsin to reconnect with his ailing brother. One reviewer wrote that director David Lynch "looks at America's small-town eccentrics without mocking them [and] celebrates family ties without schmaltz."

And finally, we received this letter from another reader:

In June I sat on my Iowa deck, on my Iowa glider, bathed in Iowa humidity, and read the Winter '98 *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*. What enjoyment I got from the articles about Iowa-related films, especially *State Fair*. I remember being taken by my parents, as a young girl, to see the 1945 version. Later, of course, I saw the 1962 remake with (swoon) Pat Boone.

I lived in Oregon, in the high plains desert region, for a short time. Folks there mostly don't know where Iowa IS, much less what it looks like. A conversation might go like this:

ME: I'm going to Iowa next week.

COFFEE COMPANION: I'm sorry.

While I was in Oregon, *Bridges of Madison County* was released. I encouraged people to see it, and went myself. What happened at the end of the movie was not normal theater behavior. Usually, people leap up and rush out as the credits roll. The film ended, and the camera panned up and away, showing a bird's-eye view of the scene, showing the Iowa landscape. No one moved toward the exit; they just sat silently watching. I heard someone say, "Look at all the big, old trees." I was PROUD.

Anita Hartley (Wilton)

Editor's note: To order the back issue featuring "Visions of Iowa in Hollywood Film," "Your Guide to Iowa Films," and a profile of *State Fair* author Phil Stong, send \$6 (plus \$1 shipping) to: Publications, State Historical Society of Iowa, 402 Iowa Ave., Iowa City, IA 52240. Be sure to specify "Winter 1998 *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*."

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