

Early Color Photography • Prison Journalism • Lowden & the Lincoln Highway • Sand Art
SPRING 1997 • \$6

Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED



Front Porch

Dear Readers:

You'll meet some interesting people in this issue. Andrew Clemens, in McGregor, Iowa, created colorful masterpieces with sand. Fred Kent, of Iowa City, did the same with color photography, as early as 1920. Then there's prisoner-for-life Tom Runyon in Fort Madison, who capitalized on the freedom of the written word; and Celia Clemmens in Lowden, who capitalized on the freedom of the open road.

Of course, Iowa roads were not always accessible to the free-spirited tourist—especially in the spring season of mud. Just ask manners maven Emily Post, who crossed Iowa by auto in 1915 and then wrote in *Collier's*: "An illustration of what the roads of Iowa can do: in twenty-five minutes of rain the nice, smooth, hard surface turned into the consistency of wet soap. The top layer slithered off the under layers and even chains had no more hold than a cake of soap has on slanting wet marble. Furthermore, the road was slightly turtle-backed, and the car not only became a waltzing maniac, but had an impetuous desire to rush backward into the ditch." Post concludes: "We are willing to believe that all the mud championship medals of the world should go to Iowa."

Gee, thanks, Emily. That's all from the front porch for now. But before we enter this issue, let's hear from some of our readers.

—Ginalie Swaim, Editor

"Run of the Mill" at Wildcat Den

We read Cornelia F. Mutel's article on mills in *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* (Winter 1996) and appreciate the references provided in her Note on Sources. Readers may like to know that the Friends of the Mill plan to open the Pine Creek grist mill at Wildcat Den State Park to the public this summer, complete with free guided tours. It will be open every Sun-

day starting with the second Sunday in June through the second Sunday in September from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, September 6, is our ice cream social and 5K run/walk through the park, called the "Run of the Mill." We hope to have the mill operational sometime this summer. The turbine is out and in the process of being repaired, and we'll replace timbers and foundation work this summer. Next year will be the mill's 150-year celebration. To receive our newsletter, please send your mailing address to: Friends of the Mill, Wildcat Den State Park, 1884 Wildcat Den Road, Muscatine, Iowa 52761.

Deborah and David Lash
Montpelier, Iowa

Worked with Floyd Nagler

A niece of mine, who lives in Des Moines, sent me a copy of Cornelia Mutel's recent article, "Floyd Nagler's Passion for Water Power," in the Winter 1996 *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*. I used to see *The Palimpsest* [this magazine's previous name], but I hadn't known that the Iowa Institute of Hydraulic Research had a historian [Mutel] on staff. As a former graduate student (M.S. 1928) under Professor Nagler, I found the article very interesting and of course am familiar with much of the subject matter. On page 156 there is a copy of a glass lantern slide showing the location of water power developments in Iowa. I recognize this as one of the slides I prepared for Professor Nagler, about 1931 or 1932, so I feel a proprietary interest in the article. I was part of the original set-up of the hydraulics institute.

Stuart Meyers
Burlington, Washington

Draped in spools in Waverly

I enjoyed Paul Juhl's recent article (Winter 1996) about the photographs from merchants' carnivals. Enclosed is a photo from my collection that your readers might be interested in. It is a copy of an original held by Mr. Ray Downing, retired banker and son of



Fred Downing, owner of Downing Grocery & Dry Goods stores in Waverly, Iowa. The operations ceased before World War II. I can't verify the date of the picture, but an educated guess would put it around 1900.

We have a large collection of historical Waverly pictures in our library, which I inaugurated about ten years ago. All are cataloged, cross-indexed, in a computer, and ably managed by Mary Cheville at the library. We just completed and sold 1,400 copies of *A Pictorial History of Waverly*.

John E. Meyer
Waverly, Iowa

Come converse on the front porch!

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

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on a voyage to Iowa's past . . .



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ILLUSTRATED

Spring 1997, Vol. 78, No. 1

Iowa's True Colors: Early Color Photography 2
Beauty from dyed grains of potato starch.
Hockett

-Colored Photo 24
Flush to those cheeks, a bit of red to the hair,
green to the trees—and voilà! A color photo. Or is it?
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Life in a Lifer's Notebook: The Tom Runyon Story 26
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"I" wrote the prisoner, "to get to know us as
" Here's how one man behind bars corrected that.
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Trade on the Lincoln Highway
The glorious days of auto travel, many Iowans
opened on the Lincoln Highway. Celia
built a hotel—and it's still standing.
Nash

A Million 48
Candy sticks and a rainbow of colored
New Clemens made masterpieces.
Vagasky



41 Motoring through Lowden

Over
Pick when Iowans wore real hats—not baseball
caps—even to the Iowa State Fair? In this
man and woman in their Sunday best pass a
radio speaker as they head uphill at the 1941
(spot the two girls in 4-H uniforms?) Seldom
1941-1950 Iowa in color, but this issue showcases
color photography was still in its early years.

* off the single-copy price

Iowa Heritage

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Formerly The Palimpsest

Spring 1997, Vol. 78, No. 1



2 True colors

Exposing Iowa's True Colors: Early Color Photography

Dazzling beauty from dyed grains of potato starch.

by Philip G. Hockett

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The Hand-Colored Photo

Add some blush to those cheeks, a bit of red to the hair, a splash of green to the trees—and voilà! A color photo. Or is it?

by Philip G. Hockett

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How to Store and Preserve Your Color Images

The past fades away—and so do our precious color photos. Consider these tips on how to forestall or prevent such losses.

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Leaves from a Lifer's Notebook: The Tom Runyon Story

"People on the right side of the wall don't have time or opportunity," wrote the prisoner, "to get to know us as individuals." Here's how one man behind bars corrected that.

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The Lincoln Hotel in Lowden:

Capturing Trade on the Lincoln Highway

In the first glorious days of auto travel, many Iowans built their hopes on the Lincoln Highway. Celia Clemmens built a hotel—and it's still standing.

by Jan Olive Nash

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One in a Million

With hickory sticks and a rainbow of colored sands, Andrew Clemens made masterpieces.

by Rashelle Wagasky

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41 Motoring through Lowden



26 Prison prose



SHSI (IOWA CITY)

On the Cover

Remember back when Iowans wore real hats—not baseball caps or feed caps—even to the Iowa State Fair? In this panorama, a man and woman in their Sunday best pass a bright orange radio speaker as they head uphill at the 1941 fair. (Can you spot the two girls in 4-H uniforms?) Seldom do we see pre-1950 Iowa in color, but this issue showcases Iowa when color photography was still in its early years.



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PHOTO

Exposing Iowa's True Colors

EARLY COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY

by Philip G. Hockett

Anyone who has ever sifted through a few generations of a family's photograph collection does not expect to find any color images before, say, 1950. It is as if Iowa before midcentury was monochromatic, reflected only in images of sepia or black and white.

What a joy, then, to come across an early image of Iowa in color. These early color images are rare jewels, reminding us that Iowa was as colorful a century ago as it is on a sparkling spring morning in 1997.

In my own experience in teaching photography, I am surprised that even older adult students looking at a color transparency from as late as 1950 assume they are seeing a hand-colored black-and-white image.

Actually, "direct" color photography—in which the color is captured directly on film rather than applied or tinted by hand—has existed for nearly a century in various forms. Yet compared to the millions of black-and-white or sepia images in existence, color images compose a far smaller portion of historical collections. Why

To witness light revealing the life and color of an autochrome image is to delight in one of the earliest achievements of direct color photography.

so little color when it was such a remarkable achievement?

From the consumers' viewpoint, monochromatic images were far easier to view, display, and enjoy. As photography became ever more affordable, an enormous volume of black-and-white imagery was created for viewing in the American household. Format evolved from mounted cabinet cards and stereographs to inexpensive, accessible snapshots.

Snapshots were particularly portable. They could be carried in pockets or purses, passed around at social gatherings, thumbtacked to bulletin boards, written on and mailed, stored in shoeboxes or albums. Like the little pieces of paper they were, black-and-white snapshots turned up everywhere. They drifted in piles on desktops and in drawers, as common as leaves and leading a kind of active life in the material world.

Color images, on the other hand, seemed ungenerous and secretive because they were so inaccessible. The film was expensive to buy and to process, and the resulting transparencies, on glass or film, were cumbersome and fragile. They could be viewed only when light was shone through them, by holding them up to a window or lamp or placing them

in a tabletop viewer or bulky projector. After a time they tended to disappear, retreating in their boxes into garages and attics.

On an artistic level, some critics dismissed color photography as a vulgar and doomed attempt to render the visual truth about the world. Many art photographers and aestheticians defended black-and-white imagery, considering it artistically purer and the camera's only chance to compete on equal terms with drawing, painting, and printmaking.

Like pioneering photographers around the world, Iowan Fred W. Kent tried to capture his surroundings in color, experimenting with and mastering one direct color technology after another (as we shall see, each technology had its own advantages and its own obstacles). He made autochrome images as early as 1920, moved on to Dufaycolor in the 1930s, and through the 1940s and 1950s, assisted by members of his family, took thousands of slides on Kodachrome film.

Most of the images in this article were taken by Kent or his protégés and are now preserved at the State Historical Society of Iowa. Most are published here for the first time, exposing Iowa's true colors from earlier in this century.



BOTH PHOTOS: FRED W. KENT COLLECTION (SHS-IOWA CITY)

Charles Kent (left) poses amiably for his father, Iowa photographer Fred Kent, in this 1930 autochrome. Exposed onto an emulsion-coated glass plate, an autochrome generally had a clear plate of glass on top to protect the image. Because this one did not, the emulsion is deteriorating. Humidity and breakage also have taken their toll on autochromes, making those that have survived all the more rare.

Right: Kent posed his wife, Clara, with a huge bouquet of lilies of the valley in this characteristically idyllic autochrome taken in May 1920.

AUTOCHROME

The luminescent quality of autochromes, which are very rarely found in Iowa, sets them apart from other color images. Their softer, pictorial nature is strikingly different from the supreme clarity and wider palette of colors present in today's color films.

Since the beginning of photography in the 1840s, photographers experimented continually for a process that would create an image with a full spectrum of color. Early experiments relied on reflec-

tors and filters to merge red, blue, and green. The three-color process went through various refinements until the Lumière brothers in France announced a new process using dyed potato starch grains. Introduced in 1907, the Lumières' autochrome was the first practical color process to reach the public.

Most original autochrome images exist on glass plates that can only be viewed if held up to light or inserted into a special apparatus called a diascope (shown on

page 2), in which light strikes the glass plate and reflects the image off a mirror. Viewing the fragile plates is not undertaken casually, but the experience repays the trouble.

The autochrome process was expensive, and the exposure times long. A normal exposure for a summer landscape took one to two seconds at f/8; a portrait in a well-lit studio, ten to thirty seconds at f/5. Developing a single plate was a delicate operation of



up to 16 steps and 30 minutes.

Although the potato starch grains in the emulsion were microscopic in size, they would sometimes clump together and become visible to the naked eye. Yet the reflective grains and subtle shading render an incomparable image. The shimmering, granular iridescence of autochromes imparts a character different from that of any other photographic medium and completely unlike the sharpness of pictures from

early monochrome negatives. Given their granular quality, some autochromes resemble Impressionist paintings, and the often idyllic settings were typical of the period.

Seeing light dazzle through an autochrome and bring up the soft colors is an arresting experience. "The presence of color makes autochromes seem a product of our time," writes scholar John Wood, "but the content of all but a few makes them seem at great distance from it."

Only a few photographers mastered the autochrome. *National Geographic* published autochrome images as early as 1914 and used them extensively until about 1932 and intermittently after that. In 1926, under conditions of nightmarish difficulty, *Geographic* photographers Charles Martin and W. H. Longley succeeded in producing the first underwater color photographs, published in the January 1927 issue. One operated the camera while the other ignited magnesium charges over the surface of the shallow water to enhance illumination for the slow autochrome plate.

The autochrome achieved both commercial and artistic success and was the major color photographic medium for three decades. Nevertheless, the search for proper solutions, gums, and flexible film, as well as for a less cumbersome glass-plate process continued. This was achieved by the early 1930s, when the Lumière company offered sheet and roll film versions of the autochrome plate under the name Filmcolor, and Agfa soon followed with Agfacolor sheet and roll film.

Autochrome was still available in the late 1930s but does not seem to have survived the outbreak of World War II. Both amateur and professional photographers were welcoming alternative color processes, and Dufaycolor soon attracted their attention.





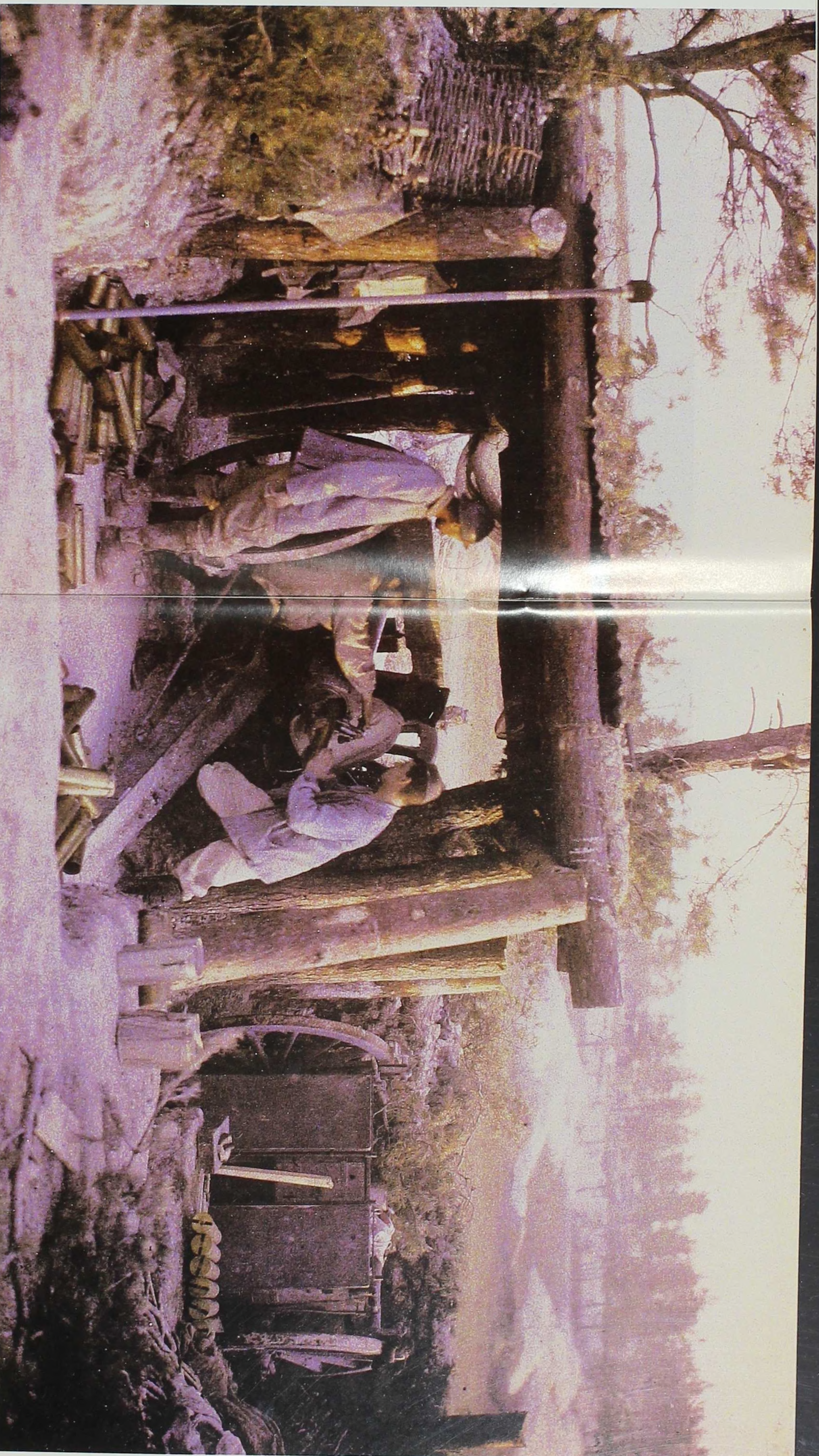
BOTH AUTOCHROMES COURTESY OF PAUL ZIMMER

The tranquillity of a shade-dappled garden in this pre-World War I scene (left) belies the anguish that the war would soon bring. These contradictions of the early 20th century—innocence and world war—are represented here by two privately owned autochromes from Europe. The effect of any autochrome is astounding, but to see World War I in color gives one pause.

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DUFAYCOLOR

Aside from a handful of autochromes, the first evidence of color photography in Iowa can be traced to the use of Dufaycolor and Kodachrome film. Dufaycolor had originally been introduced as movie film, but by 1935 it was also available as sheet film.

Dufaycolor was a dependable color process that clearly met a need, and, like autochrome, it had long-lasting quality and stability.

Dufaycolor was no quicker to process than autochrome had been, but it cut the number of steps from sixteen to nine. It took about the same effort to process as most contemporary black-and-white films, but the cost was at least three times that of black-and-white film. A photographer could send exposed film to Dufay's American lab in Rockefeller Center in New York and receive paper

prints as well as transparencies. It could also be processed at home by moderately skilled amateurs. Its very fine resolution, increased sensitivity, and relatively simple processing offered superior results compared to earlier techniques, making Dufaycolor popular with amateur and professional photographers. Long available on the market, it was finally discontinued in the 1950s.

BOTH PHOTOS: FRED W. KENT COLLECTION (SHS-IOWA CITY)



Fred Kent used Dufaycolor film to photograph his daughter, Barbara (left), and his son Tom (above) in April 1936, within a year of Dufaycolor's introduction to the public. The soft colors in these images are reminiscent of autochrome's soft colors.



Dufaycolor was capable of capturing vivid colors, as demonstrated in this image from the *National Geographic* archives. J. Baylor Roberts photographed eleven University of Iowa students posed by the 1938 Homecoming Corn Monument, at the intersection of Iowa Avenue and Clinton Street in Iowa City. In monochrome the same image might well have been unremarkable, but in Dufaycolor it is startling and shows the

strength of documentation the medium possesses. The August 1939 *National Geographic* article, "Iowa, Abiding Place of Plenty" by Leo A. Borah, is illustrated by twelve Dufaycolor images, eight in Kodachrome film, and several in black-and-white. This balance of color film types is typical of the late 1930s, when Dufaycolor was a proven quantity and Kodachrome film was still in its marketing infancy.



J. BAYLOR ROBERTS/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC IMAGE COLLECTION

A 1939 advertisement in *National Geographic* for Dufaycolor film alerts readers to the many Dufaycolor images in the magazine. "Natural color" was the preferred phrase in the late 1920s and 1930s to denote color that was integral to the film rather than applied by hand.



Dufaycolor Film Fits All Popular Cameras

**SNAP YOUR CHILDREN
IN NATURAL COLOR**

*Dufaycolor Guarantees
That You Can Get
Good Color Pictures*

YOU can easily take good color pictures with your own camera. Dufaycolor guarantees you satisfaction—or a new roll free.

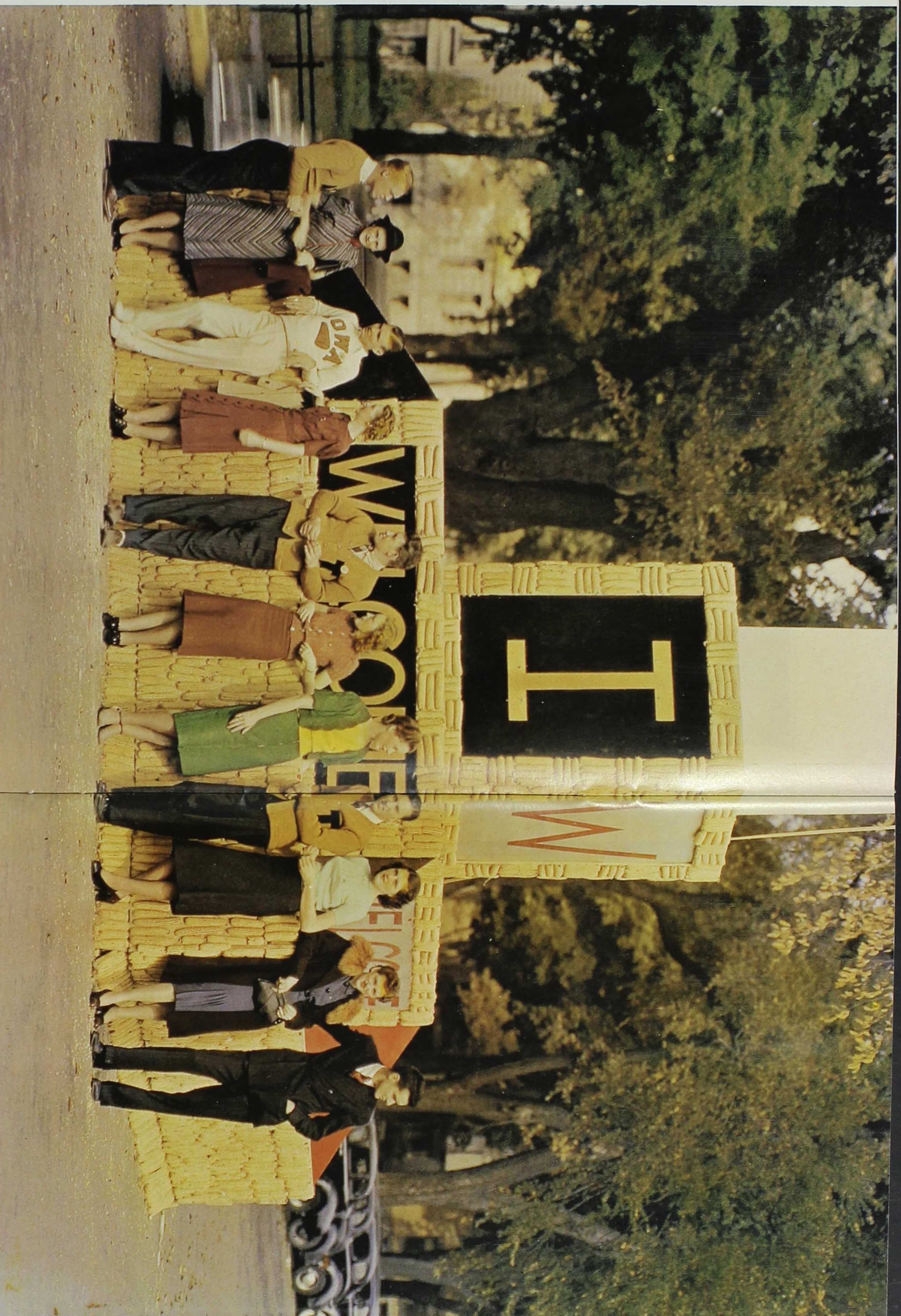
Notice how many of the color photographs in recent issues of the *National Geographic* are marked "Dufaycolor" in the lower right hand corner. Over 187 have appeared in the last 17 issues.

See your dealer today. Try a roll of Dufaycolor film in your camera.



FITS ALL POPULAR CAMERAS

REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION OF ILFORD PHOTO CORP.



J. BAYLOR ROBERTS/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC IMAGE COLLECTION

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FITS ALL POPULAR CAMERAS

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KODACHROME FILM

By 1940, Dufaycolor was being crowded out of the American market by Eastman Kodak's revolutionary new color transparency medium, Kodachrome film. Just as autochrome was an example of a technology that by chance was an exact fit with the

aesthetic of the early 20th century, which favored soft-focus, romantic, pictorial renditions, Kodachrome film, capable of brilliant colors, clean edges, and more mechanical or realistic renditions, was a similar match to the streamlined aesthetics of the 1930s.

SHSI (IOWA CITY)



Track meets and tulips testify to spring in Iowa. Left: Kodachrome film captured runners sprinting to the finish line at a Mount Vernon track meet, May 12, 1950. (The image is not flipped; the athletes are running clockwise.) Above: Images like this one of the 1941 Orange City Tulip Festival on Kodachrome film were produced at the University of Iowa's Department of Visual Instruction to illustrate public lectures that defined Iowa as a land of scenic beauty that also honored its traditions of agriculture and education.

The Hawkeye State on View-Master

Tom Kent, who shared his father's fascination with color imagery, also contributed to Iowa's photographic legacy when he created stereo views for the View-Master Company. Tom was only 19 when he flew to Portland, Oregon, in 1953 to solicit interest in some of the Kent family's bird photos. Instead, he was hired to create "three-dimensional pictures in full-color Kodachrome" of the Hawkeye State's most scenic and historic spots. A small booklet with Iowa facts and figures accompanied the 21 views. Later, Tom Kent created View-Master images for South Dakota and the Black Hills, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. The Iowa images are now in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa.

—Mary Bennett
Photo Archivist
State Historical Society of Iowa



The best of the surviving color photographic record of life in Iowa beginning in the late 1930s is on high-contrast Kodachrome film slides in their readily identifiable red cardboard mounts.

First introduced in 1935 as movie film, Kodachrome film was released a year later in 35-mm format for still cameras. Its commercial production marked the successful end of a ten-year search by Kodak and two young professional musicians, Leopold Godowsky and Leopold Mannes, for an ever simpler, more reliable way to record color images. Kodak advertising stressed that the color was actually in the Kodachrome film, in contrast to hand-colored monochrome photographs.

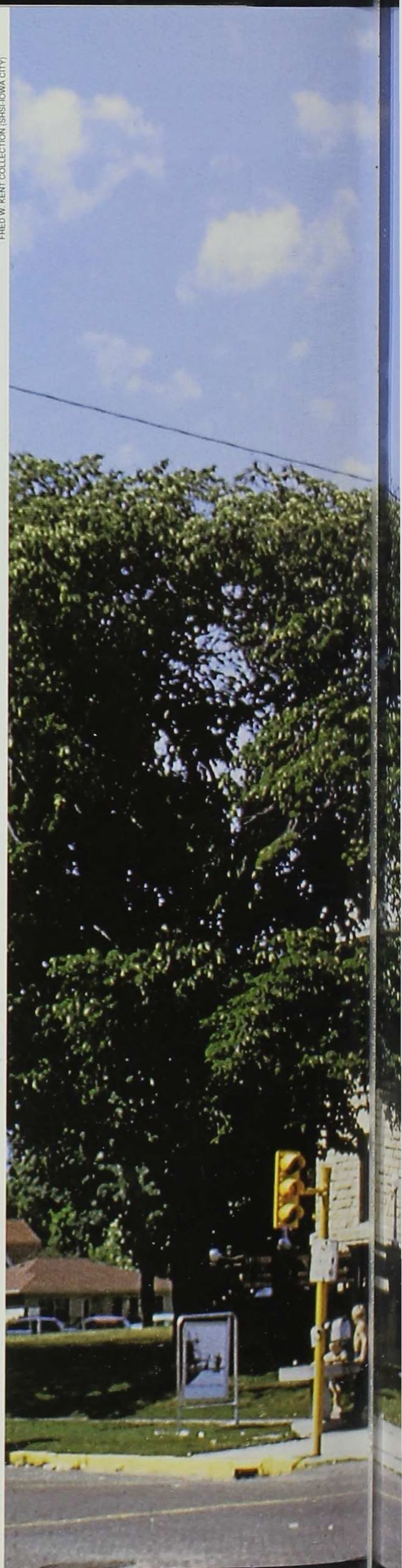
Early problems with rapid fading took two more years to correct, but by 1938 Kodachrome film had assumed what is essentially its present form. It delivered a sharply defined image in richly

saturated color with uniform results. Over time, it also proved highly stable. Slides from Kodachrome film from the 1940s have easily outlasted Kodacolor prints and Ektachrome transparencies from the same period, and the process had no serious competition in America inside or outside the company until Kodak's own introduction of Ektachrome in 1946 and of other competing films by 1965.

Kodachrome film's simple format belied a sophisticated chemistry that required, and still requires, machine processing. Whereas Dufaycolor could be developed and printed by moderately skilled amateurs, Kodachrome film had to be handled in Eastman's own labs. Initially it was expensive: in 1936, for example, an 18-exposure roll of 35-mm Kodachrome film cost \$3.50 with processing, equivalent to about \$30 in 1997.

Youngsters congregate at a stand near the traffic light by the Grundy County Courthouse in Grundy Center, July 27, 1956. Because Kodachrome film worked particularly well for outdoor shots, the color images preserved from midcentury are often rich in documenting the smaller details—like children playing and cars passing by—as well as panoramas and imposing buildings.

FRED W. KENT COLLECTION (SHS-IOWA CITY)





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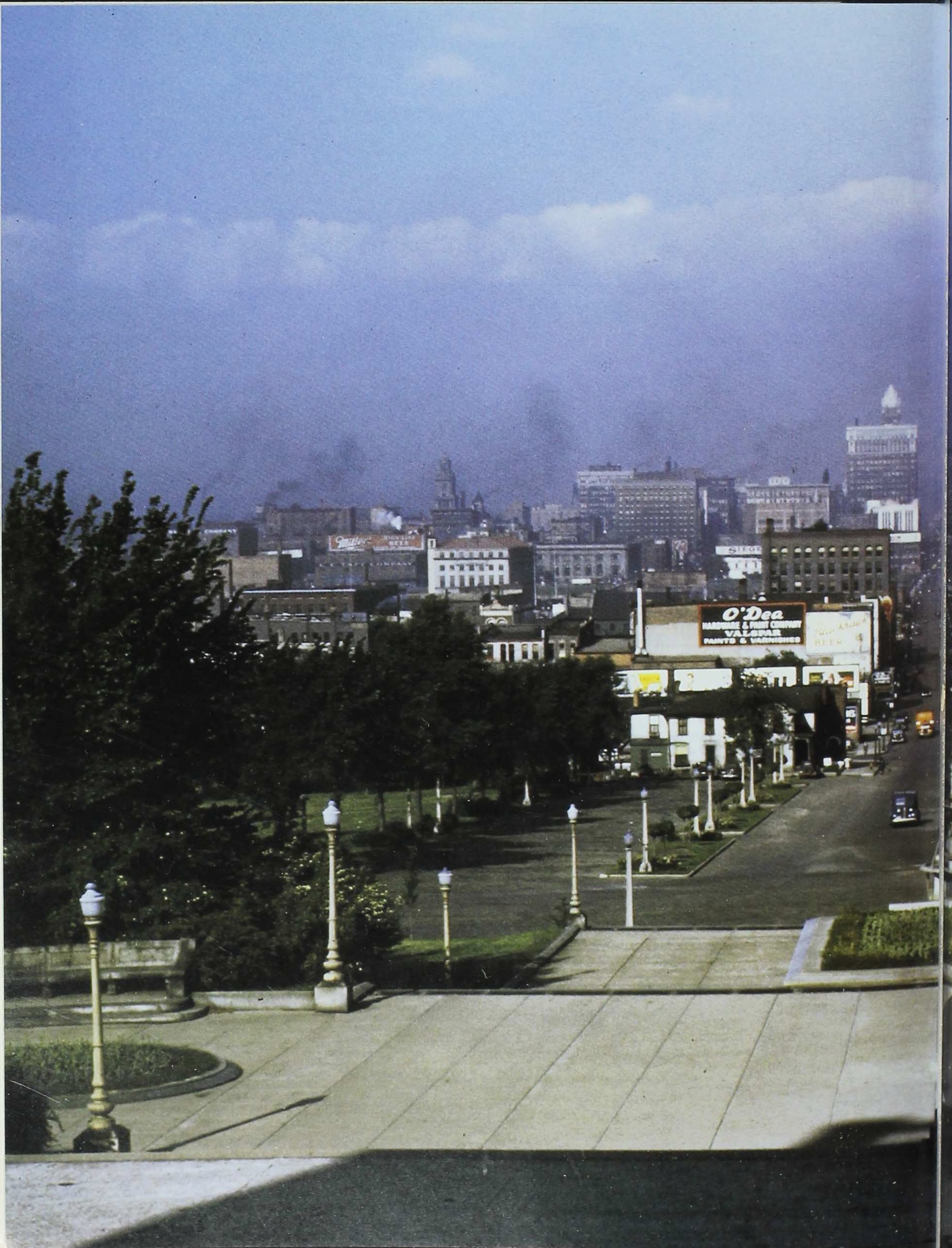
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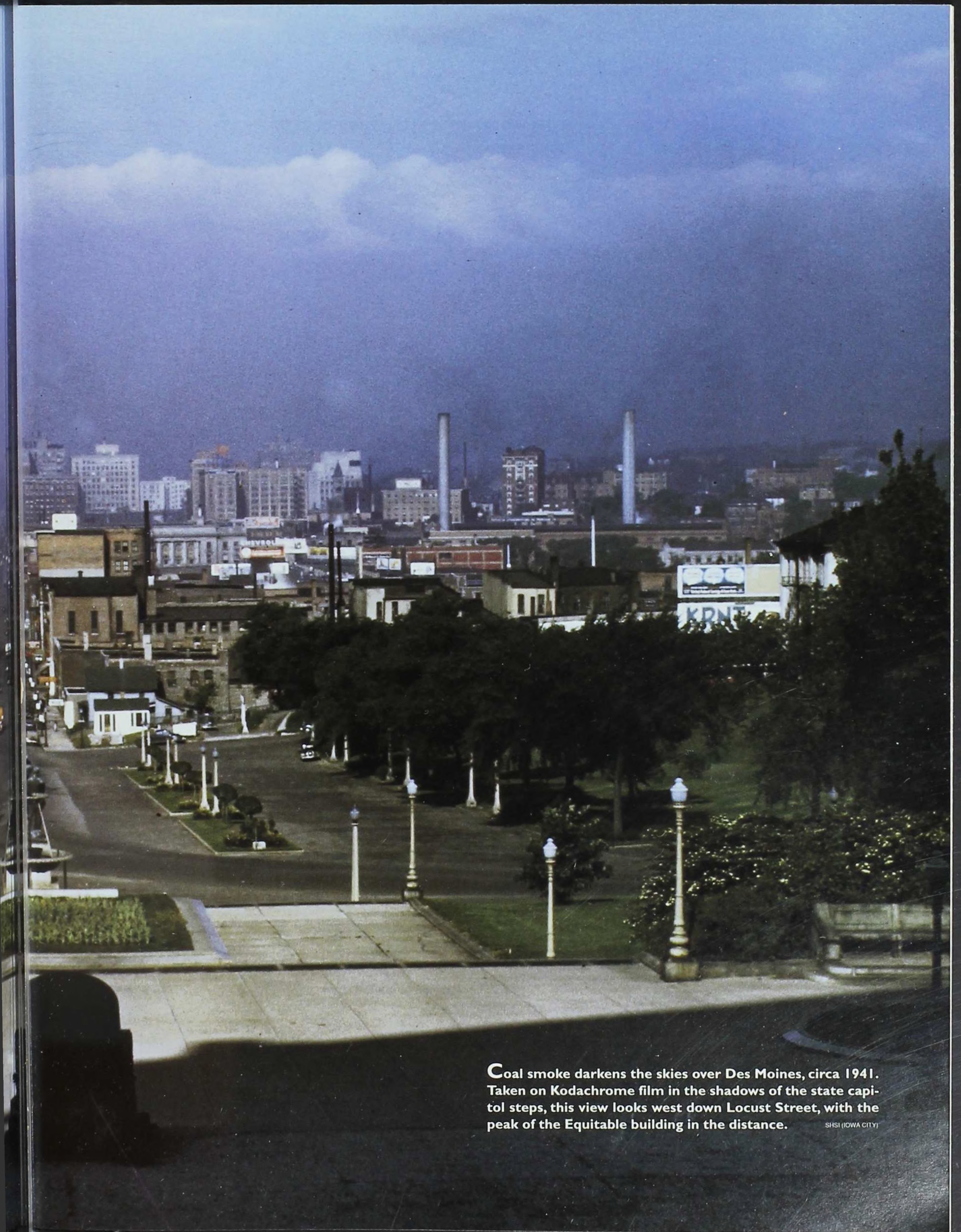
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FRED W. KENT COLLECTION (SHS-IOWA CITY)







Coal smoke darkens the skies over Des Moines, circa 1941. Taken on Kodachrome film in the shadows of the state capitol steps, this view looks west down Locust Street, with the peak of the Equitable building in the distance.

SHSI (IOWA CITY)



Coal smoke darkens the skies over Des Moines, circa 1941. Taken on Kodachrome film in the shadows of the state capitol steps, this view looks west down Locust Street, with the peak of the Equitable building in the distance.

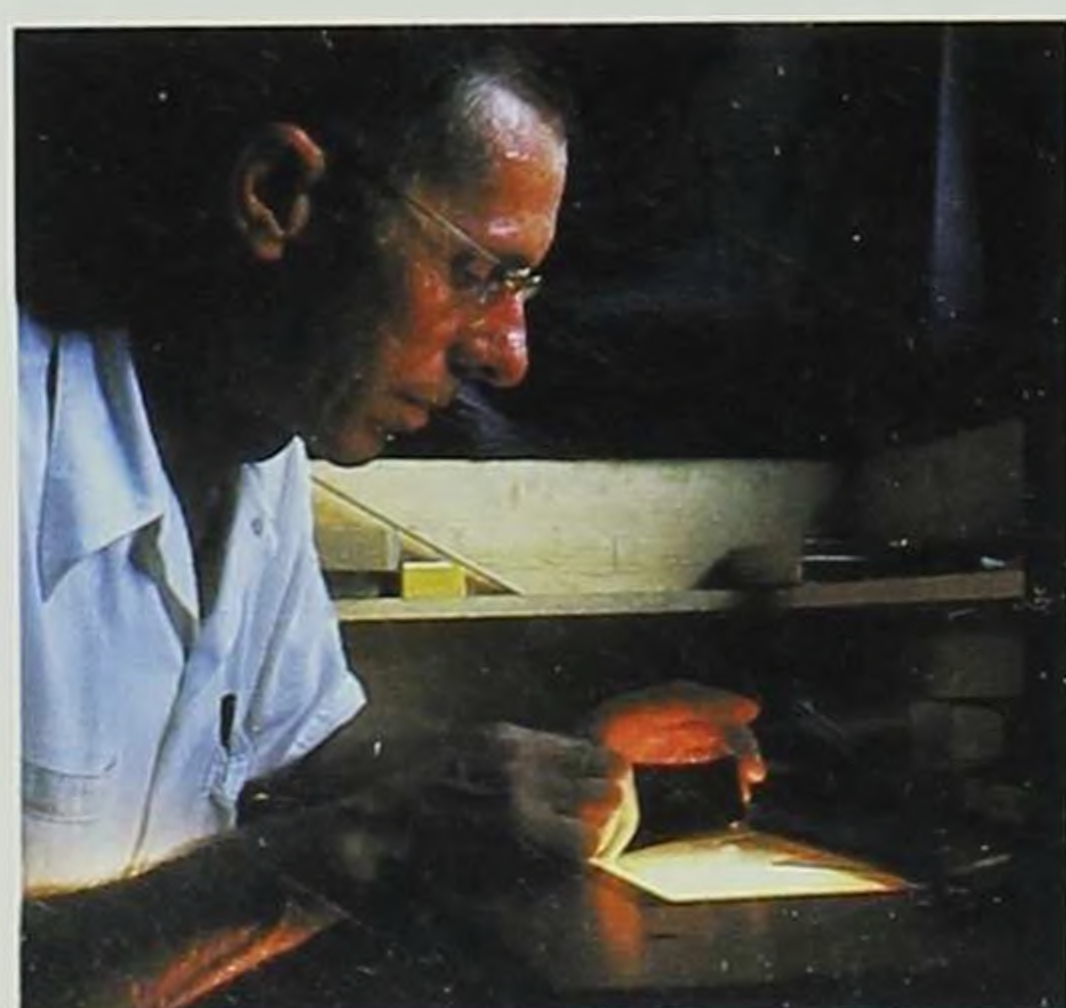
SHS/IDOWA.CITY

BOTH PHOTOS THIS PAGE: FRED W. KENT COLLECTION (SHSI-IOWA CITY)



Besides capturing colorful outdoor scenes, Kodachrome film was also used by Fred Kent for difficult interior shots, like this intimate close-up in an operating room. Kent labeled the image: "Drs. Burr and Lee. Eve OR Aug 48."

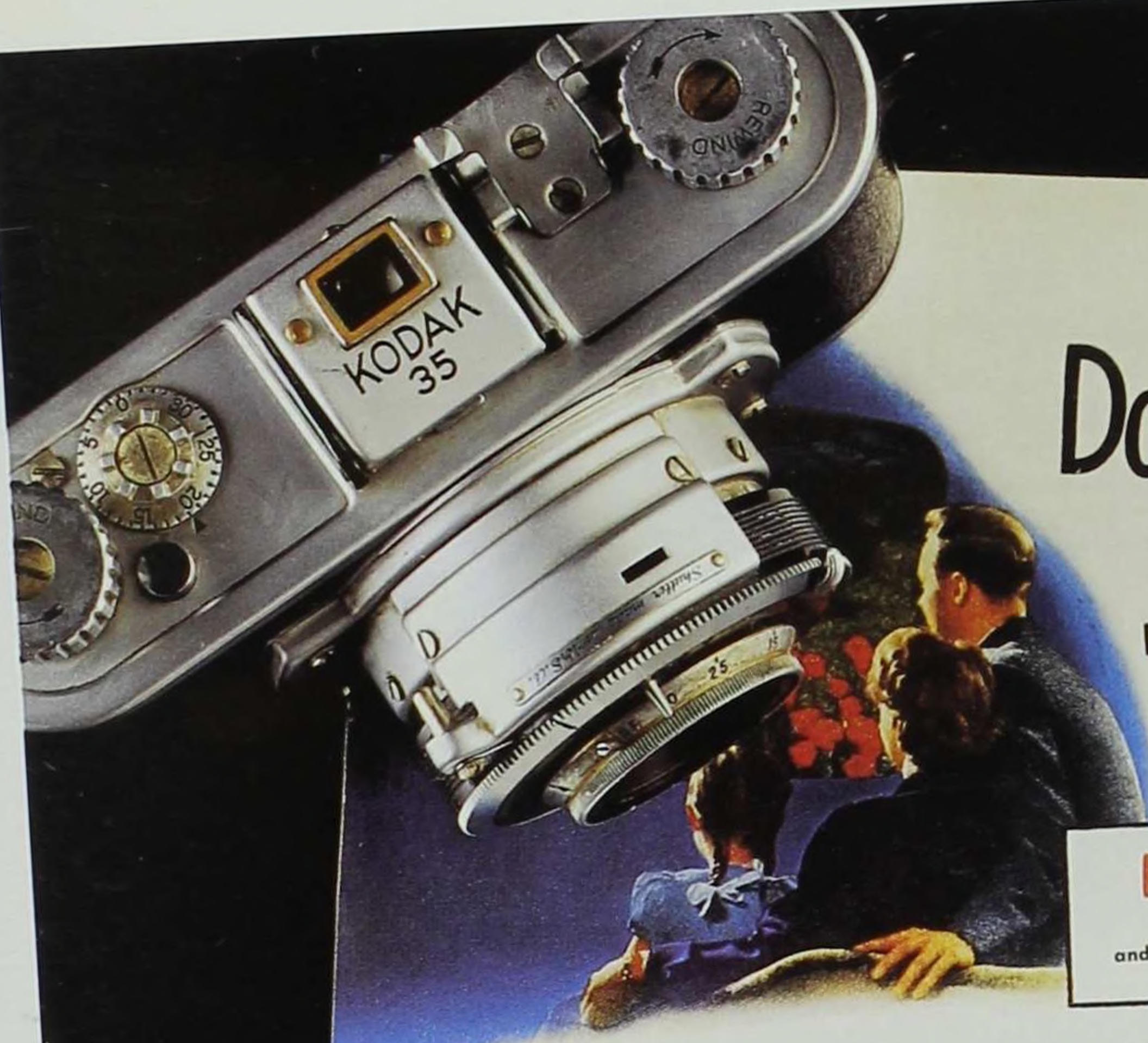
Right: An ad from the May 1950 *National Geographic* invites photographers to enter "the spectacular world of color opened by Kodachrome Film." Mounted in the characteristic red cardboard frames (far right), the film did indeed bring stability and vividness to color imagery.



Fred Kent checks slides, 1949

Fred Kent illuminates the darkness

The power of historic color photographs can be seen in the work of Fred W. Kent (1894-1984). Kent was the University of Iowa's official photographer for 50 years. In his long career he not only produced a superb visual record of Iowa City, the university, and eastern Iowa, but also experimented with many aspects of the medium, including direct color photography and how it could be used in the medical world. Working closely with University of Iowa faculty, Kent knew that the cutting edge of medical research and education relies on the latest developments in photography. He made thousands of color slides that could be used to assist faculty in research and teaching.



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And now Kodak has produced an ultra-modern miniature camera with $f/4.5$ Lumenized lens selling at the remarkably low price of \$29.95, including Federal Tax. Ask your dealer to show you the sensational new Kodak Pony 828 Camera. With it—and Kodaslide Projector, Model 1A, at \$29.50—you're well-equipped to start your Kodachrome career . . . Inspect these, and other Kodak miniatures and projectors . . . all fine instruments at sensible prices.

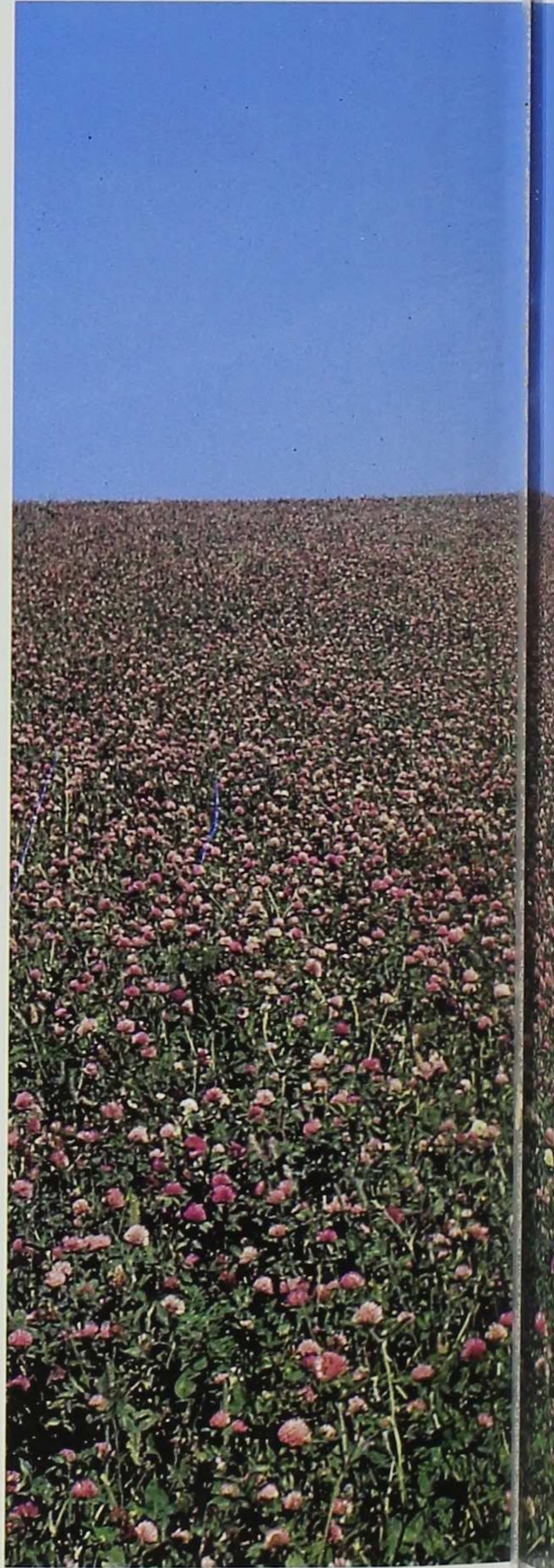
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ALL THREE IMAGES FROM SHSI (IOWA CITY)





Making hay while the sun shines made good sense for Iowa farmers and for photographers using Kodachrome film. This trio of slides (circa 1941) was taken by the University of Iowa's Department of Visual Instruction as part of an Iowa boosterism project to extol Iowa's agricultural abundance. Today, they remind us of changes in farming. Above: Hans Henricksen stands knee deep in red clover. Top left: Farmers demonstrate cutting alfalfa. Bottom left: Bud Sutter with hay rack.

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To be confronted with the sheer authenticity of a color photographic image from early in this century can be a disquieting yet pleasurable experience. The sense of immediacy such an image confers deprives us of the conceptual safe-zone that a monochrome picture provides, and startles us with a sense that the past is truly past—and yet closer to us than we first believed.

The color imagery from this infant period—autochromes, Dufaycolor, and Kodachrome film—has been long overlooked in the historical record. Assuming wrongly that all color images were not stable, we have too often ignored these marvelous images in favor of black-and-white photos. In other cases, we have assumed that an early color image was hand-tinted.

As advocates for historical photography and what it can reveal about the past, we Iowans need to develop an “eye for color.” We need to be alert to the rare examples of early color photography

in Iowa, to the Iowa photographers like Fred Kent who experimented and excelled in the medium, and to three major color formats—autochromes, Dufaycolor, and Kodachrome film—that we might uncover in our public and private collections.

The Fred W. Kent Collection at the State Historical Society of Iowa is in no danger of being lost or overlooked. But many other quality color images are at risk because of their fragility or because of ignorance of their historic value. A coming task of all history-minded individuals, whether working in family collections or institutional archives, is to uncover, identify, safeguard—and enjoy—these treasures of early color photography. ❖

Philip G. Hockett is a graduate of the University of Iowa and has taught photography to adults through the Des Moines school system for 15 years. He first took color photographs of his own in 1962.

Combine the skill of a photographer like Fred Kent with the glory of an Iowa spring and the color capacity of Kodachrome film, and the result is an image like this one of Kent's daughter Barbara daydreaming under apple blossoms, May 12, 1940.



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The hand-colored photo

by Philip G. Hockett



CORA BUSSEY HILLIS COLLECTION, SHSI (IOWA CITY)

Photographers and consumers have searched for ways to add color to monochrome photographs since the beginning of photography. Daguerreotypes were hand-tinted with gold to highlight a necklace, ring, or pocketwatch chain and with light shades of color to accentuate clothing. One method involved mixing dry color tints with wine and applying them carefully with a camel's hair brush.

With the widespread use of albumen prints after the 1850s, commercial photographers offered a variety of monochrome images—portraits, stereographs, or landscapes—that could be colored with oils, watercolors, or crayons. The 1880s cabinet card above shows an amateur's efforts to regain the color of what must have been a fun-filled event.

In the hands of a professional, far more sophisticated results could be obtained—consider the 1940 graduation portrait on the right. A product like Marshall's Oil Photo Colors (see sample tubes) offered hues ranging from "cheek," "lip," and "flesh," to "tree

green," "Chinese blue," and "raw Sienna," and could be applied with cotton tufts to "hair, grass, rocks, roads, tree trunks, brick walls, etc." The Marshall brochure also explains that everyone from "children who want to apply a few simple washes of color to a print to amateur and professional colorists making colors for studios or . . . magazine covers" could use the transparent oils to transform their "black-and-white prints into gorgeous color photographs," and that the advantage "over direct color photography is that the colorist is not limited by the original color of the subject."

The persistence of hand-tinting long after direct color images became readily available is hard to explain. Perhaps some photographers believed that so intimate a thing as color had to be applied by hand, and that the artificial look that resulted bridged the arts of painting and photography, thus providing the best of both worlds.

Hand-coloring became a skilled craft, that lasted well into the 1960s as a mainstay of portraiture and wedding photography. ❖



NOTES ON SOURCES FOR "EXPOSING IOWA'S TRUE COLORS" AND "THE HAND-COLORED PHOTO"

For an extended discussion of the cultural context of the autochrome process, see John Wood, *The Art of the Autochrome: The Birth of Color Photography* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993). Other sources include: Robert Mason, Paul Trachtman et al., *Color* (Time-Life Books, 1975?); Walter W. Sipley, *A Half Century of Color* (New York: Macmillan, 1951); Sylvain Roumette, Michel Frizot et al., *Early Color Photography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986); Brian Coe, *Colour Photography: The First Hundred Years, 1840-1940* (London: Ash & Grant, 1978); Clifford A. Nelson, *Natural Color Film: What It Is and How to Use It* (New York, Galleon, 1939; 2nd ed.); Mary Bennett, "The Man Behind the Camera: Fred W. Kent," *The Palimpsest* (Fall 1994); and Leo A. Borah "Iowa, Abiding Place of Plenty," *National Geographic* (Aug. 1939). Also consult Henry Wilhelm, *The Permanence and Care of Color Photographs* (Grinnell, Iowa: Preservation Publishing Co., 1993). Thanks to the University of Iowa Press for allowing Tom Jorgensen and SHSI staff to use their 19th-century window as the backdrop for the page 2 photo. Thanks also to Barbara Kent Buckley and Paul Zimmer for their assistance. Mary Bennett, photo archivist at the State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City), was instrumental in the preparation and shaping of this presentation. Annotations are kept in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files.

How to preserve and store your color images

The prevalence of color photography in our lifetime belies the fact that many of our heirloom color images will fade over time. Fading does seem less severe with certain films, and recent improvements in film transfers, duplicating, and digitizing may actually enhance the quality of some images thought to be lost or irrevocably faded. But even with proper storage, we can expect color photos to lose their best qualities. In nearly all cases—except with color Kodachrome film—we will see severe shifts in color.

Once a print has faded there is no way to accurately restore the color balance. Because color prints fade and deteriorate faster than negatives and slides, perhaps the best protection for your color imagery is to carefully preserve the negatives and positive transparencies (or slides). As a last resort, color negatives and slides can be printed as black-and-white images.

Remember, an original color slide is one-of-a-kind and should be treated as such. If you plan to use the slides frequently in a projector, use duplicate copies rather than the original.

The basic principles for care of photographs and negatives apply to color photography. Maintain a proper storage environment: consistently cool and dry—no basements or attics! If your color photographs are mounted on album

pages, place a piece of 100 percent rag paper between facing pages to protect each image. Some photo albums with clear plastic pages can be especially damaging if the cover sheet is vinyl-based or if sticky adhesives were used for mounting.

To stabilize a photograph, negative, or slide transparency, place it inside archival envelopes or sleeves. Choose high-quality materials—either envelopes made of buffered, acid-free, lignin-free paper, or clear sleeves composed of polyethylene or mylar. Poor-quality papers, polyvinyl sleeves, or the original wrappings from the photo processing company can jeopardize your images and should be replaced. File news clippings separately from photos because the acidic paper stock can do damage. Of course, always record dates and identification when transferring materials.

In general, the same principles apply to autochrome and Dufay-color images. Autochromes are at risk due to the delicate emulsion layer, which can separate from the glass plate and flake off, resulting in image loss. Sandwich the image between two layers of glass to protect the image, and store it vertically in an archival sleeve.

Dufaycolor, which shares many of the same characteristics of other sheet film, should be cared for in the same manner as other transparencies: limit the projection

time and store in archival sleeves.

The wonderful news from the opening article about early color is in regard to the color permanence found in Kodachrome film. Photographers shooting the Iowa landscape today can rely on Kodachrome 64 film for outdoor shots of historic value. (This film may be too slow for indoor shots unless a flash is used.) When seeking professional photographers for wedding or family portraits, be sure to address your concerns regarding permanence with the studio.

Consider occasionally shooting a roll of black-and-white film. What you will trade off in color, you'll gain in permanence.

Sadly, original color images last longest when we do not use them for display or projection. Unless you have the good fortune to own images taken on Kodachrome film, most color slides, photographs, and films produced during the last 50 years will eventually need to be duplicated in order to retain the best qualities and full color range of the original image. Consult your local photography specialist or Henry Wilhelm's *The Permanence and Care of Color Photographs* (Grinnell, Iowa: Preservation Publishing Company, 1993) for suggested color film products tested for long-lasting properties.

—Mary Bennett

Photo Archivist

State Historical Society of Iowa



PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION, HARRY RANSOM HUMANITIES RESEARCH CENTER, THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

Leaves from a Lifer's Notebook

The Tom Runyon Story

by James McGrath Morris

Tom Runyon introduced himself to Iowans wielding a gun, but won himself a lasting place in Iowa history with a typewriter. A Depression-era bank robber, Runyon was sentenced in 1937 to spend the rest of his life in prison. But, despite his confinement to the Iowa State Penitentiary at Fort Madison, Runyon did not fade from the public's attention, as one might have expected. Quite the contrary, it was from behind prison walls that he attracted the most notice.

At Fort Madison, the 31-year-old criminal began a new career writing for the penitentiary's inmate-produced magazine, *The Presidio*. Within a little more than a decade, his writing won him national acclaim. *The New York Times*, for instance, called him "a remarkably gifted observer of the passing penitentiary scene." Louis Messolonghites, writing in the *Reporter*, told his readers that Runyon had "become one of my favorite authors." And perhaps most significant, famed mystery writer Erle Stanley Gardner launched a nationwide campaign to win Runyon's release from prison after reading one of his columns. Runyon became, as his fellow inmates were fond of calling him, the nation's "dean of prison writers."

By the time of his death in prison in 1957, Runyon's work had appeared in such national publications as the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Collier's*; his autobiography had been brought out by a New York publisher and reprinted in at least three other countries; he had written a chapter of a college textbook on criminology; and an Iowa newspaper had enlisted him to write a column.

Despite his fame, Runyon's most important audience remained behind the walls of the Iowa State Penitentiary. There, for 20 years, Runyon championed the inmate's cause in the pages of *The Presidio*. Each month, he invigorated the convicts' magazine with poignant stories of life in the penitentiary. Although Runyon wrote about many of the general themes of prison, he was at his best when he wrote about other lifers and how they faced each day with no hope of ever again being free. As Ernie Pyle's reporting had done for the GI during World War II, Runyon's writings in *The Presidio* became the letter of the inarticulate prisoner to the outside world.

Runyon's efforts are part of a long-running tradition in American penal history. Since 1800, when an inmate of a New York City debtors' prison began publishing a newspaper to campaign for an end to imprisonment for debt, hundreds of periodicals have been published by and for the inmates of America's prisons. From the early part of the 20th century until about

the 1950s, the prison publication, like the one Runyon wrote for, grew into an important cultural institution of prison life. This coincided with a period of great change in Iowa's penitentiary and in prisons across the nation.

In the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, Iowa prison officials—like most across the country—practiced and preached the creed of a progressive prison movement that reached its apex during this era. The apostles of this new faith believed that inmates could be transformed into productive, law-abiding citizens, given the proper conditions, resources, and "scientific" methods. In some sense, the prison keepers' culture had come full swing back to its 19th-century roots, when prisons were first built to create a place in which criminals could repent and achieve redemption. From our vantage point at the end of this century, when a crime-weary public will no longer brook talk of rehabilitating criminals, the 1930s to the 1950s looks like the time in which this notion would breathe its last breath. And Tom Runyon was the last of his kind.

Thomas Jefferson Runyon was born on September 12, 1905, in Nehawka, Nebraska, the older of two children born to native West Virginians. He was close to his sister and loved and admired his mother. She was, he recalled, "the fountainhead of all wisdom and all goodness and all security." His father, on the other hand, repulsed him. "A heavy drinker, he was more than brutal when he came staggering home to his wife-beating and hell raising," wrote Runyon. "I can't remember a day when I neither hated nor feared him."

Years later Runyon's sister told a reporter that her father "didn't treat Tom as he should have treated a son." Because of their father's shiftlessness, the Runyon family moved frequently. Over the years, Runyon's father became a painter, decorator, timber contractor, farmer, and used-car salesman. At first, he was usually successful in each job but soon "wound up with a drunken spree in which he threw away everything he had made, grew disgusted and possibly ashamed, and we moved again," Runyon explained.

It would be easy to blame the father for his son's later criminal life. Runyon, however, resisted that temptation. "Don't think for a moment I haven't tried to find a way to pin some of the blame for afterward on him," wrote Runyon years later. "It would be comforting to be able to blame someone besides me for my troubles."

Runyon quit school a few weeks into the seventh grade and left home to work on road-building crews

Left: Tom Runyon holds his autobiography, October 1953.



An inmate drives carts full of dirt from a hillside near the penitentiary, as part of a 1938 WPA riverfront development project in Fort Madison—a year after Tom Runyon was imprisoned at the state penitentiary.

SHSI (DES MOINES)

in several states. At 18, he joined the navy and worked for three years as a pharmacist's mate before receiving an honorable discharge in 1926. In 1928 he reenlisted for another three years. After completing his second hitch in the navy, Runyon settled in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, in 1931 with his mother and found work as a painting crew foreman.

"You don't stop being honest and become a thief, almost overnight, without a reason," Runyon wrote. His stated reason was the Great Depression. "Within two weeks that season's work disappeared under a storm of cancellations, and insecurity rolled over me like a wave of tumbleweeds," he wrote. "There I was, with payments due on the car, a girlfriend I wanted to entertain . . . and no work to be had at any price." While working as a painter, Runyon had developed a friendship with two brothers, Carl and Ira Dugan. Their real names, as he learned later, were Claire and Ira Gibson.

Now without work, the three talked over their problems. According to Runyon, it was the Gibsons who first suggested robbery. Regardless of who made the first suggestion, Runyon became a member of the "Gibson Gang." For five years the gang terrorized bank tellers throughout the Midwest, rising at one point to the top of the FBI's most wanted list.

The first bank the gang robbed netted each of the accomplices \$1,700—a fortune in the Depression years. Runyon, who still saw bank robbery as a temporary profession, used his portion of the loot to open a restaurant. After it failed, he returned to the gang's fold. "My ethics proved to be remarkably flexible once they had thawed out," he wrote. Now robbing banks regularly with the Gibson Gang, which had a fluid membership of 15, Runyon had cash with which to fall back on when he could not find work or his latest business venture failed.

It seemed as if the charade could continue forever. But early one morning in November 1935, on a small dusty road, it began to unravel. Runyon, Claire Gibson (Ira had died), and Bob Markwood were returning from a bank robbery in Pennsylvania. The car veered off the road two miles southeast of Britt, Iowa, and Markwood was seriously hurt. Coming down the road in the early morning mist were James Zrostlik, a young farmer, his wife, and their infant son on the way to church. Desperate to continue their journey, Runyon and Gibson decided to seize the Zrostlik automobile. The pair ran out onto the road to flag the oncoming car down but Zrostlik refused to stop, according to Runyon's statement in court over a year later. "It was pretty foggy, well, and [Gibson] just dodged in

time to keep from getting run over, then he fired," Runyon said. "I debated for a second shooting the tire off. And I realized if I shot the tire we could not use the car and I tried to shoot the windshield out from in front of the man," he continued. "Right after this shot the lady screamed, that is the first time we knew that there was a lady in the car."

Zrostlik's wife had a different recollection. Runyon and Gibson, she told the court, came up on their car after it slowed down for the wreck and, without warning, fired shots. The men then opened the door on her husband's side of the auto and ordered him out, she said. James Zrostlik, whose spinal cord apparently had been severed by one of the shots, replied that he couldn't move. He was jerked out of the car and died on the road, Mrs. Zrostlik said. In the end, regardless of whose account was accurate, James Zrostlik lay dead on the road and his wife lay by his side, her face permanently disfigured by fragments of broken glass from the windshield.

Runyon, Gibson, and Markwood escaped from that corner of Iowa using the Zrostlik automobile. The incident, however, caught up with them. In February 1937, Runyon was picked up by the Wichita, Kansas, police on charges of car theft and was tied to the Zrostlik murder. One month later, he was escorted into a packed courtroom in Garner, Iowa, to stand trial before Judge Henry Graven. Guards armed with machine guns kept watch in case, as rumored, the Gibson Gang tried to free Runyon or silence him.

Runyon's lawyer, Carlos Gotz, proposed a deal. His client would tell all he knew about the gang, still at large, if he were given a life sentence instead of the death penalty. Judge Graven was reluctant to forgo a death sentence, according to a confidential letter he wrote to the parole board years later. But he decided to go along with Gotz's offer. In part because of information supplied by Runyon, Gibson was arrested several months later. He later committed suicide in a jail cell while awaiting trial. Markwood was never located, but authorities were convinced that they found his corpse. They believed Claire Gibson had killed him.

Escorted by 15 armed guards, Runyon was delivered on March 9, 1937, to the Iowa State Penitentiary at Fort Madison, along the banks of the Mississippi River. The facility, really a compound comprising a medley of buildings encircled by a stone wall with turrets, had been home to the region's most notorious criminals since 1839 when the territorial legislature created the first prison west of the Mississippi. For the

guards receiving their new ward, it was all in a day's work. For Runyon, on the other hand, arriving at the prison was an unforgettable event.

Taken to his cell after being fingerprinted, photographed, and issued prison garb, the five-foot six-inch prisoner surveyed his new dwelling. It only took a few seconds to make a complete inventory of the small cell. Illuminated by a bare 25-watt bulb, it contained only a bed, a chair, a wash bowl, a mirror, and a toilet. As the cell door closed behind him, Runyon faced the stark reality of what, up until then, had seemed to be only a bad dream from which he would soon wake. "I began to realize dimly that once and for all I was different from others," he recalled. "I was a convict, a convict lifer—I was here from now on."

"I had been told that I'd find a jail smell when I came here, but I didn't find it," he wrote. "Instead, I found an atmosphere of hate and fear so strong it seemed I should be able to touch it." It didn't take him long to learn the routine of prison life, nor did it take him long to understand that he no longer had any rights. "Over and over again that fact was dinned into us," he wrote. "Every single thing that made life bearable was a privilege. It was a privilege, not a right, to eat a meal or sleep or look at the sun or receive a letter, and that galling knowledge was with me every waking moment."

By the fall, Runyon had managed to create his first refuge from prison life. Time in his cell, which he previously feared would be the worst part of prison, turned out to be the only time when he could "escape" his confinement: "With my back turned to the bars so I could ignore passing guards, and with a book on my lap, I could quite often forget my troubles for many minutes at a time."

In time, Runyon also discovered the prison library. It contained a thousand volumes, and he started making daily use of them. Despite his meager education, he had always been an indiscriminate but avid reader. "Now I tried to read with a purpose," he said. Runyon looked to books for answers as to how he had gotten into his predicament. His soul-searching, however, led him nowhere. "Poring over Sigmund Freud and William James and Herbert Spencer like a kid turned loose in a candy store," he wrote, "I succeeded in getting a fine case of intellectual indigestion and little else."

About this time Runyon became wrongly convinced, after hearing a casual remark made by an FBI interrogator, that he could win his release in ten years. It was, thought Runyon, only a matter of passing the time. Hunting for a hobby, Runyon decided to try his hand at writing, for reasons he never fully explained.

"It was just a case of putting one word in front of another until you had an *Anthony Adverse* or *Gone with the Wind*, wasn't it?" he asked. "If they could do it good, why couldn't I learn to do it at least so-so?"

At the time, one of the few inmates he had befriended was the editor of the prison's 32-page monthly magazine, *The Presidio*. Runyon submitted a short article, a "two-chewed-up-pencils, surprise ending four-hundred-worder," as he called it. Not only did it appear in *The Presidio* the following month, but a number of other prison periodicals reprinted it. "I hugged my little triumph desperately, waiting more than a month before risking my writing reputation by showing him another story," Runyon wrote.

He did submit another story and again the editor accepted it, as well as the next and the next. Buoyed with his initial success, the 32-year-old convict began applying himself to the task of learning to write. He carefully read books on writing and subscribed to a writer's magazine. Each month he turned in his effort to *The Presidio*. Years later, after Runyon had gained a reputation for his writing, he would say, "What little I know about writing I learned while writing for *The Presidio*. . . . If not for *The Presidio*, I wouldn't be writing."

Writing challenged Runyon. "I found it the hardest work I had ever tried—because of my meager education—and the most fascinating," he wrote. "Often I would spend half the night with scratch-pad and pencil, propped on an elbow in bed, trying to whip some story problem." Runyon began sending his stories, along with a \$3 "criticism fee," to a West Coast agent. Agent Gene Bolles must have detected Runyon's potential because he told the budding writer to dispense with sending the fee. "Here was someone who thought I could do something," Runyon wrote.

Unfortunately for him, so did the federal authorities. With the announced intention of making sure

Runyon would never again be free, the Department of Justice began legal proceedings against Runyon for his involvement in an Eyota, Minnesota, bank robbery. Because the robbery had included taking hostages, the department invoked the new Lindbergh kidnapping laws. On July 3, 1939, Runyon was taken to federal court in Winona, Minnesota. He pleaded guilty to the bank robbery and was given another life sentence, to be served should he be released from the Iowa penitentiary. Now for the first time, Runyon faced the fact that he might never leave prison. "I began to realize

how hopeless my situation was, and my mind was never far from plans or dreams of escape," he wrote.

At first he stopped writing. "It went by the wayside within a month. It left when hope left. I tried hard to go on with it. I tried desperately, but the press of the load of time I was carrying was too much. . . . Planning escape became my hobby."

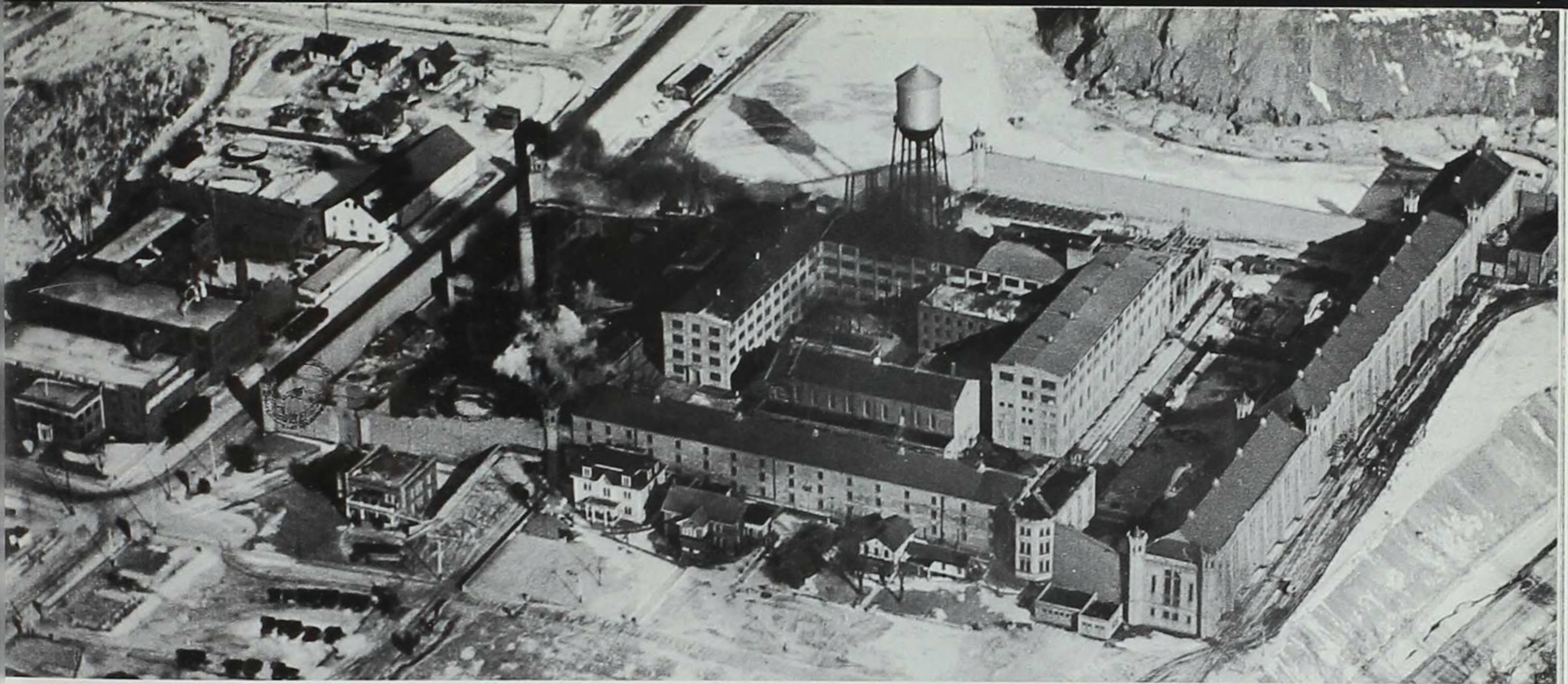
After a while he did resume writing. In 1941 he was made assistant editor of the magazine. Although still bitterly brooding over his imprisonment, Runyon felt *The Presidio* gave him a reason to get through each day. "Where I had been angry about my own troubles, I began to be more concerned over injustices to others, for many a man

brought his problems to me, hoping I would help him," he wrote. "Instead of hating wildly and uselessly, I had to channel and control my bitterness and put it into words."

"Full of ideas, I kept my typewriter keys warm," he wrote. "My cry in the penological wilderness was faint but I kept at it so hard I lost track of personal troubles for hours at a time." Not long after Runyon became assistant editor, the editor's post became open and he applied for the job. Warden Glenn Haynes was reluctant to appoint him. Haynes did not question Runyon's talent, but all the previous editors had been trustees with privileges. More troublesome to Haynes



Inmate and guard, Fort Madison, circa 1960.



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Iowa State Penitentiary at Fort Madison in 1938, the year after Runyon arrived.

was that Runyon was marked as one of the prison's two most dangerous security risks. The warden came up with a compromise. Runyon could have the position if he agreed to complete his work during regular hours. He would not be allowed out of his cell at other times. Runyon agreed.

Warden Haynes had reason to be concerned. Escape had never faded completely from Runyon's thoughts, and two events made him consider it again seriously. First, in 1942, Runyon's wife, Winnie, told him that she was seeking a divorce and a few days after Runyon got that news, his mother died. Second, in 1943, he made an enemy of the parole board with an editorial outlining five reasons why parole "is a near failure." The editorial was reprinted in different newspapers around the state, and Runyon believed it doomed whatever slim chance he might have had of eventually being released on parole.

In the summer of 1942, Warden Haynes died. Percy A. Lainson, a former sheriff, was appointed to the post. Lainson, to his misfortune, gave Runyon what Haynes had denied. Runyon would be allowed to be out of his cell in the evening to work on *The Presidio*.

One Monday evening in early September, Runyon dug his way under a heavily charged electric fence and escaped. Authorities launched one of the biggest manhunts in Iowa. For five days Runyon remained on the lam. He held up and terrorized several farm families, took hostages, and stole at least two cars. On Saturday, a lonely and confused Runyon was arrested in Fort Dodge after a brief exchange of gunfire.

His freedom was short lived and bittersweet. "I learned how much prison had hurt me," he wrote

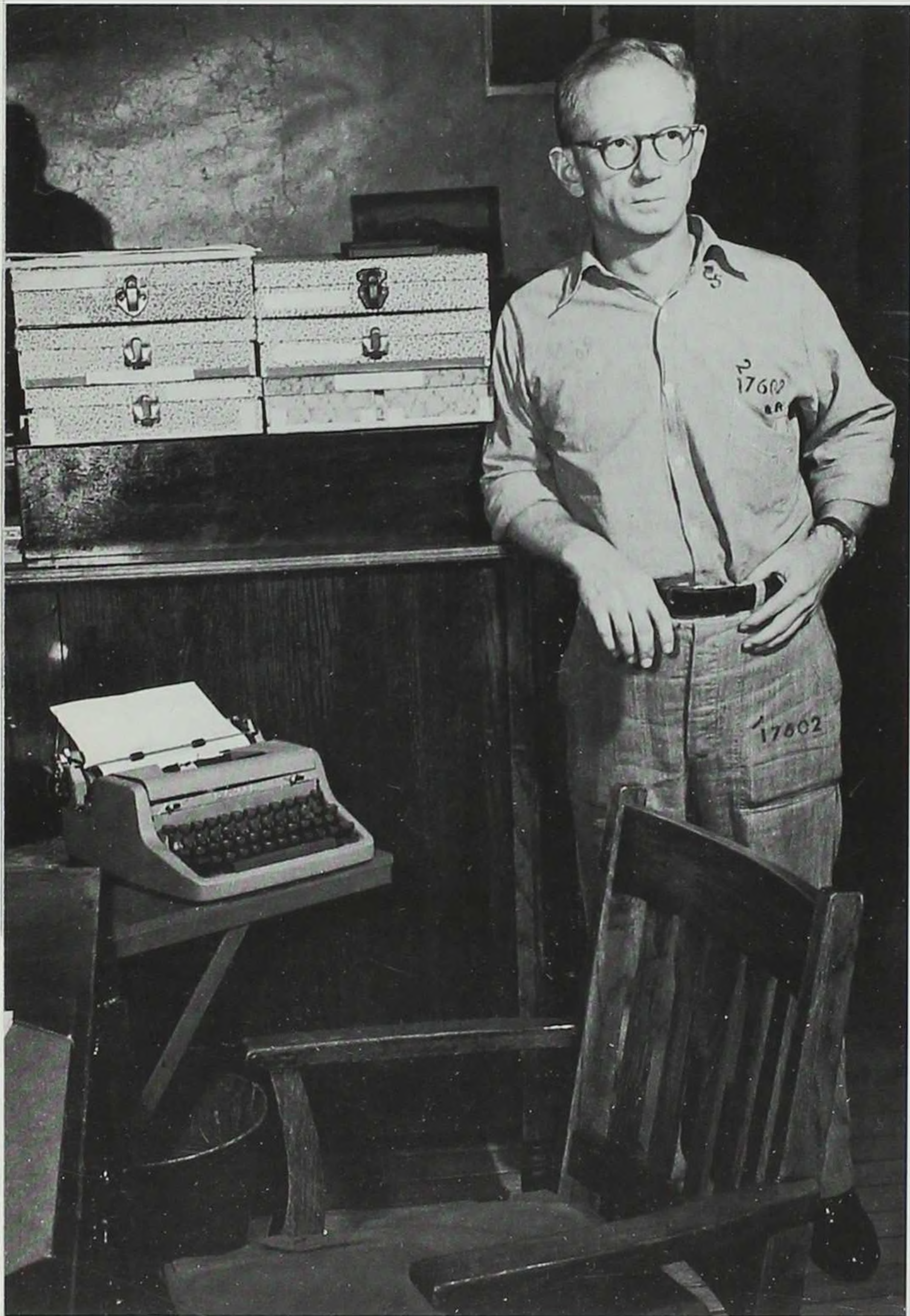
later. "And I found myself in a world almost as alien as prison had once been, for the war had changed conditions unbelievably." Ironically, after his arrest, police officers were able to reconstruct Runyon's journey across the state because, bitten by the writing bug, Runyon had kept a detailed diary.

Back at Fort Madison, an angry Lainson placed Runyon in "solid lockup," a section of solitary confinement, for ten months. Located in a basement, his new cell was damp and cold. "Water trickled down the walls for weeks, and no amount of wiping could get the floor dry," Runyon wrote. "Magazines were limp as rags, and cigarettes had to be dried against the light bulb before they could be smoked."

The escape cemented the parole board's low opinion of Runyon. In January 1944, the board told Governor Bourke B. Hickenlooper that it "will be wise to let him spend the balance of his time" in prison. "This board considers Runyon a very dangerous man, who would stoop to nothing to gain his own selfish ends. We strongly recommend against any consideration of this man at any time," the three-member board wrote.

In June, Runyon was released from lockup and back into the prison population. Assigned to work in the furniture factory, he mutilated his left hand on a spinning saw. For three years, he drifted through the days and months, becoming increasingly absent-minded. "Practically everything I did was ruled by habit now," he wrote. "At times I caught myself wearing what I called the 'old lifer look'—the unseeing, preoccupied stare that seemed to stiffen the faces of so many long termers in the crowded prison yard."

One summer evening in 1948, much like the one five years before when Runyon had made his run for



PHOTOGRAPHY COLLECTION, HARRY RANSOM HUMANITIES RESEARCH CENTER, THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

Runyon in 1953; critics called him "a man worth knowing."

freedom, Lloyd Eddy, *The Presidio's* editor, approached Runyon in the prison yard. Eddy asked Runyon if he would be willing to come back to the magazine. Since Runyon's departure from *The Presidio's* staff, the magazine had fallen on hard times. Runyon's assistant editor, who had taken over as editor, had quit because the magazine had become increasingly censored. The succeeding editor had let the magazine further deteriorate by publishing mostly poor-quality inmate fiction. Eddy, however, had not forgotten the old *Presidio* and wanted to bring it back. Runyon told Eddy the warden would never approve the idea.

"Can you see me asking the Old Man to put me back up there after the way I messed him up the last time?" Runyon said.

"You won't have to ask," replied Eddy. "I'll do the asking. All you need to do is agree to come back if I get it fixed."

In September, Runyon's name was once again on *The Presidio's* masthead. "Five wordless years made a difference," recalled Runyon of his first days back in the magazine's office. "My writing was rusty, but the ideas were there." His first contribution was a short allegorical essay called "In the Shadow of the Walls," in which he urged his fellow convicts to combat the prison's power to stifle their ability to think for themselves. "Like any other shadow, the wall's effect is slow," he wrote. "Its advance is so stealthy that the prisoner may be all but drowned in its painless apathy without being aware of it at all." In the end the prisoner must depend on himself to keep his mind sharp and preserve his ability to make decisions for himself. "No one will drag him away if he chooses to sit in the shadow of the wall," Runyon wrote.

He followed his own advice and threw himself into his work, hogging *The Presidio's* only typewriter. He moved his old desk into a corner of the office, facing the wall. There he remained day after day, "torturing the typewriter" (a Runyonism) from his swivel chair. Walter Lunden, an Iowa State University professor inspecting the prison for the Department of Corrections, met Runyon for the first time that fall. "After you broke the ice and you sort of gained his confidence he opened up and talked quite definitely," Lunden recalled years later. "His writing was an outlet for him. While there was still some resentment at the same time it gave him some satisfaction that he was doing something he was interested in."

In November, Runyon took over a new column, "Leaves from a Lifer's Notebook," to take care of the small random ideas, reminiscences, updates, and other items he accumulated but couldn't find a place for elsewhere. It was, Runyon said, "a rambling kind of dissertation on how little things can have far-reaching effects on a lifer." The column soon became a popular feature of *The Presidio*, much like a personal letter from Runyon to his readers.

But Runyon's greatest skill, the one that distinguished him from generations of prison writers, remained his ability to write profiles. Ever since he first began writing for *The Presidio* in 1937, Runyon had demonstrated an interest in writing about his fellow lifers. "Be sure to write something about lifers, Tom,"

advised Ernest "Ole" Lindquist, a fellow lifer who would later play an important part in Runyon's career. "These others are just visiting the joint. We live here." In the early 1940s, before his escape, Runyon had written, almost monthly, stories about some of the unusual lifers who inhabited the prison. "The Planter," written in April 1943, was a typical example of his work. It told the tale of "Walnut Seed Edwards," who, after spending most of his life in a New York City tenement, now passed his years planting walnut trees in and around the prison.

In 1949, a little after a year back on the staff of *The Presidio*, Runyon returned to writing profiles, choosing Ole Lindquist as one of his first subjects. Lindquist's story was a sad one. On December 17, the month Runyon published the profile, Lindquist was completing his 40th year in prison. During that time he had never received a visitor, or a Christmas package in 30 years, or even a personal letter in 20 years. He was a forgotten man.

Lindquist had been sent to prison for killing a policeman when he was 19, shortly after arriving in the United States as an emigrant from Sweden. In "Christmas Behind the Eight Ball," Runyon told Lindquist's story: "When asked about Christmas, he merely smiled. 'It's just one more day for me,' he said."

Newspapers and radio stations picked up the story and spread it across the country. Soon Lindquist was buried under an avalanche of presents, letters, and cards. The mail crew piled about two hundred packages into Lindquist's cell, while he stood helplessly looking from package to package, unable to de-

cide which to open first. Lindquist's tale did not end with that flurry of Christmas presents. Some people took to writing to the governor. Wealthy correspondents promised to look into hiring a lawyer and others, with less money, offered prayers. Because of the outpouring of support, Governor William S. Beardsley commuted Lindquist's sentence, making him eligible for parole.

Addie Jackson, a widow from Indianola, Iowa, had also read Lindquist's tale. She began a regular correspondence with the inmate. Following a visit to the prison, the two fell in love. In 1952, Lindquist was released after spending 42 years in the Iowa State Penitentiary. Six months later, after obtaining the necessary permission from the authorities, parolee Lindquist and Jackson were married. The now-famous couple—especially after appearing on television's *This Is Your Life* program—settled in Addie's hometown, and Lindquist opened a small shoe repair shop using the skills he had acquired from 20 years' work in the prison's shoe factory. But after getting settled into his new life, Lindquist began suffering from what the doctors diagnosed as rheumatism. On Christmas Day 1954, Lindquist broke his leg while turning over in bed. The doctors had been wrong. Now they told Addie Lindquist her husband was dying of cancer; his bones were as brittle as dried twigs. Addie Lindquist brought her husband home from the hospital so she could care for him. She broke the news to Ole. "Oh,

Fort Madison inmates in the prison yard, 1930s.

SHSI (DES MOINES)





THE PLANTER



By TOM RUNYON

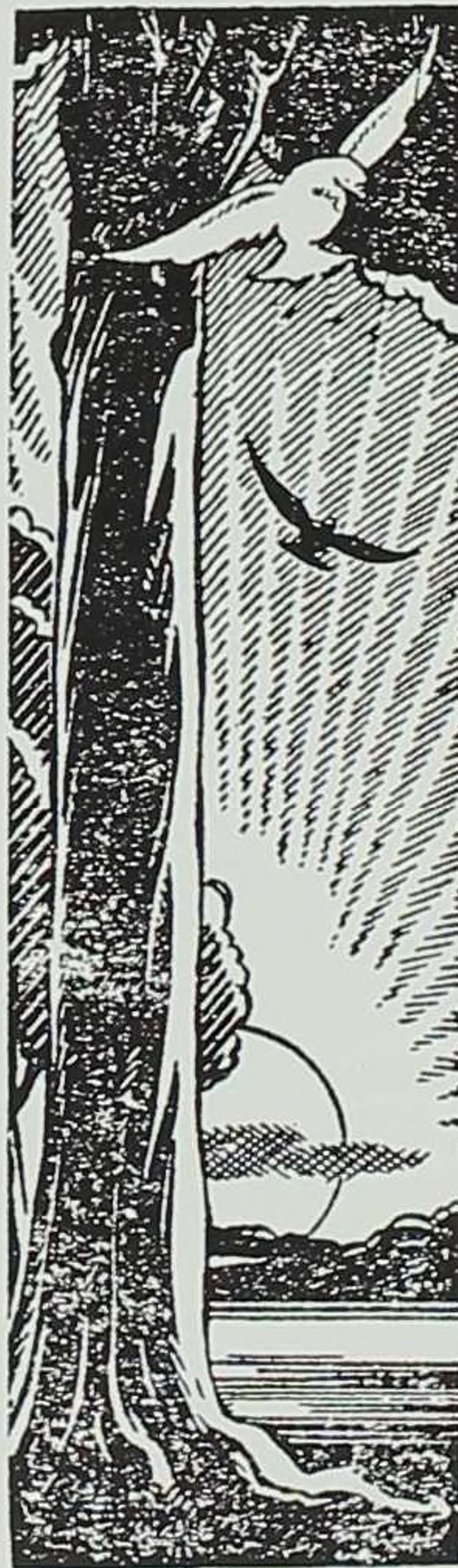
N EARLY EVERYONE has heard of "Johnny Apple Seed," but few have heard of Walnut Seed Edwards. Clifford Edwards has earned the right to that nickname by spending his spare time—the few precious times outside the walls that his status of "Trusty" earns him—planting black walnuts and other tree seeds. And only a born conservationist would attempt to follow an avocation like that while serving a prison sentence. "It seems like a good idea," said Edwards. "I just stick a few in my pockets, then when I find a likely looking spot it only takes a minute to dig a hole and plant a walnut."

Born in a New York tenement, Edwards was 14 years old before he knew that "Keep off the Grass" signs were not standard equipment on the "Great Outdoors." Central Park was the only part of nature that he knew, except for pictures in books, but even then he loved it. And when he left New York, to wander over most of the U.S., the Red Gods took firm hold of him.

From the first he was interested in conservation. He reasoned that if seeds were planted trees were bound to grow, and to him a growing tree was much more beautiful than a pile of lumber or a suite of expensive furniture. Knowing little of methods or plans, he simply pushed a hole in the ground and planted a walnut. "Just think," he says today. "If every hunter would plant a few nut or fruit tree seeds there would be millions more trees. And think of the birds and animals the trees would attract. Or if Boy Scouts

would plant seeds instead of trying to rub fire out of two sticks of wood—can't you just see what a wonderful country this would be?"

It would not be surprising to hear that some American Legionnaire, or an Izaak



Waltonite, had that nut planting hobby. But Edwards is a convict. He is an ex-heister; has served eleven years of a life sentence. He is no native son planting trees to enjoy in his old age. When and if he goes free he will promptly shake the dust of Iowa from his feet. He will not be back to see the trees he has planted, the squirrels and other game that will be attracted to them. There will be no harvest for him—others will reap where he has sown. And so it would surely surprise and please the Ding Darlings of this world to see the wide-eyed enthusiasm in the eyes of this prison-bound conservationist.

Edwards has little opportunity to practice his hobby. Few and far between are the times that he can spend a few minutes in the nearby woods. But there are many men in the free world who might well envy his love for his hobby. He is one of those men blessed with the eternally open heart of a boy. Eleven years behind the walls have not left him a mental cripple. He is one of those rare men that stone and steel cannot whip. Open minded, open hearted, he will go his way with new dreams always in his eyes. The rocking chair may get his body, some day—it will never get his mind.

"Now don't forget," he cautions. "Leave the hull on the walnut. That hull supplies food to start the tree."

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Tom," she wrote Runyon. "It is awful to just have to sit by and watch the one you love die by inches. He has suffered more than any little man should."

Lindquist had always told his supporters who wrote to him not to forget Runyon, whose words had set him on the road to freedom. "He's a lifer, too," Lindquist would say. Lindquist's wish came true. The whole episode brought tremendous national attention to Runyon. His story about Lindquist was bought by *Collier's*, and the *Saturday Evening Post* published a story by Runyon about the inmates who fished unsupervised in boats on the Mississippi to supplement the prison's food stocks.

Runyon's years of sitting behind a typewriter, enveloped in a bluish cloud of smoke from a constantly burning cigarette, began to pay dividends. Some rewards were more important than the \$1,600 in checks the New York editors sent him. "I achieved a kind of precarious peace and shaky courage," he wrote. "Time was when I helped myself to other men's money. Time was when I helped myself to another man's life," Runyon told the audience of Edward R. Murrow's *This I Believe* program. Time had changed all that, he said. "I am even forced to try to be honest with myself, and that has a way of turning into honesty with others. I must help others as I help myself," he said.

Runyon continued to apply himself to his monthly portraits of the Iowa lifers. "When I write about a prisoner I look for the good in him; look for the story that has never been told," he wrote. He was especially attracted to other inmates who, like himself, had retained their dignity and wit and continued to avoid what Runyon had called the "shadow of the wall."

"No doubt I'll go on writing those little stories," Runyon said, "because of those who come to me in the yard with 'Say, I'm glad to see your write-up on Joe, Tom. He's over-due for a break.'" Runyon's stories continued to make a mark on outside readers as well. "His name has become well known around Iowa, the Midwest and the nation for his writing," noted John Reynolds in the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*.

In October 1951, Runyon received a letter responding to a recent column in which he had expressed curiosity about how outside readers reacted to his articles. "You have nothing to worry about," the letter said, "you're doing a swell job of writing." The new fan was Erle Stanley Gardner, creator of fictional lawyer-detective Perry Mason and one of the most popular mystery writers of the time. Gardner had be-

come interested in prison reform and had been reading *The Presidio* for some time. "Here's a pat on the back from one writer to another," Gardner wrote.

Several months later, W. W. Norton & Co. asked Runyon if he would consider writing his life story. "Consider it?" said Runyon. "The typewriter was being practically pecked to death before the editor's letter fluttered to the floor." With permission from Warden Lainson to sleep beside his desk, Runyon worked day and night on his autobiography, leaving almost all else aside.

In October 1953, *In For Life* was published to considerable acclaim. "Since the publication a quarter of a century ago of Victor Nelson's *Prison Days and Nights*, no other convict has written so sensitively of the torments of penal purgatory," said Frank Leary, reviewing Runyon's book in *The New York Times Book Review*. "Runyon," said J. R. Perkins in the *Chicago Tribune Sunday Book Review*, "seems to have lived confused in the world of freemen—perhaps most lawbreakers do—but he walks with understanding among the imprisoned. His portraits of them and of himself have no dim strokes." Penologists and general readers should buy the book, said Stafford Derby, writing in the *Christian Science Monitor*. "Both readers will find Runyon a man worth knowing."

Though W. W. Norton refused to release sales figures three decades later (citing company policy), Runyon wrote that only about three thousand readers followed the reviewers' advice. That year readers were flocking not to Runyon's book but to Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* and to James Jones's *From Here to Eternity*. The money Runyon hoped the book would bring, the money he wanted to earn for his son's college education, never materialized. "I had almost set my heart on its seeing the boy through college and having to give up that dream hurt," Runyon wrote Gardner.

While writing the book, Runyon and his son had ended their estrangement. His son, Thomas Jefferson Runyon Jr., was only four months old when his father had entered prison. At Runyon's request, the young boy had been led to believe his father was dead. One day while visiting his aunt, 16-year-old Runyon Jr. came across a *Presidio* with an article by his father and demanded an explanation. Within weeks he visited his imprisoned father and the two became acquainted.

Though Runyon's book did not sell well enough to even pay for a year of his son's college education, "There were other compensations," Runyon said. One

Runyon's profile of lifer "Walnut Seed Edwards" (left, April 1943 *Presidio*) called him a "prison-bound conservationist."

of them came in the form of letters. *In For Life* had been reprinted in England and translated for publication in Argentina and France. As a result, Runyon received fan mail from around the world.

One series of letters in particular caught Runyon's attention. They came from a woman who had read his book in a British Columbia hospital. Twenty-two years old, she had a two-year-old son whom she could only watch grow up through snapshots because she was confined with tuberculosis. Although the windows of her room were not barred, there was something familiar in her plight, noted Runyon. "She has all the courage in the world, and she faces that world with a smile," he wrote. "But between the lines of her letters is the possibility that Carol will not go home again—that she, too, is serving a life sentence under far worse conditions than I face."

Another reward from Runyon's book was that it became a rallying tool for his growing ranks of supporters outside the prison. The book, Gardner's increasing interest, and Runyon's growing fame all gave rise to the hope that perhaps he might once again be a free man. Since his first letter to Runyon in 1951, Gardner had become a regular correspondent and had journeyed to Iowa twice to visit Runyon. Over the years, the mystery writer had taken on as a personal crusade trying to win the release of rehabilitated or wrongly convicted inmates. For cases that the system would not reconsider, Gardner used his most famous vehicle, his "Court of Last Resort," to rouse public support and publicity. These cases were then publicized in the men's magazine *Argosy*.

In Runyon, Gardner saw a symbol for his campaign. "I think your case may turn out to be quite important because I think it may clarify quite a principle in penology," Gardner told Runyon. "You are in a position where you can probably do more good for more people in prison than anyone I know of." At first, Gardner believed that quiet diplomacy might secure Runyon's release. "I had some faint hope that we could do things the easy way by getting some of these guys to listen to reason, but the [U.S.] Attorney General's office has tried to give me the brush-off," he wrote Runyon.

Instead, Gardner decided to turn Runyon into a *cause célèbre*. To accomplish that, he sought first to enlarge Runyon's readership. Gardner began drumming up subscribers to *The Presidio* with stories in *Argosy*. "If we can build up a greater outside circulation for *The Presidio* and it can tell the story of a modern, practical

experiment in the field of character development, it may do untold good," Gardner wrote to Runyon shortly after publishing the first of his stories about the Iowa inmate.

In four months, Gardner's efforts increased *The Presidio's* subscription rolls by more than a thousand. With the new readers on his mind, Gardner now counseled Runyon on his writing. His stories would now be read by a number of influential people "who are going to judge your character, your outlook on life, and your rehabilitation by what you put on paper," Gardner wrote. "This means that your writing during the next few months is going to be very, very important. A good many people are going to become Runyon fans if you play it right," he wrote in another letter. "Your writing, Tom, can convince them that prisoners are human beings."

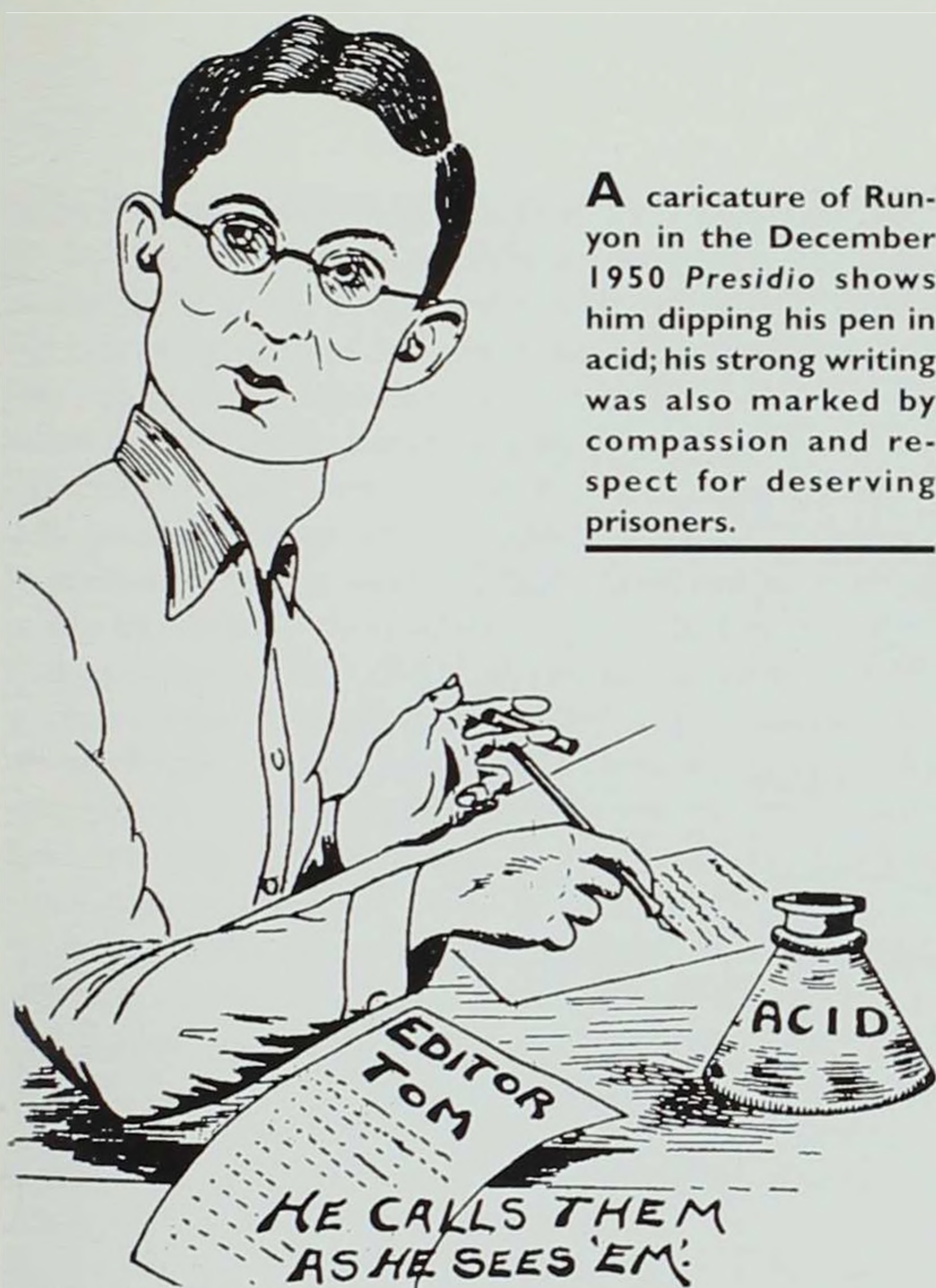
Gardner also began including Runyon's story in many of the speeches he gave around the country and began organizing Runyon's supporters into a committee to work for his release. "I hope by this fall to have gathered a group together who will start slugging, not so much for your case as that of an individual but for the principle involved in your case," Gardner wrote to Runyon in the summer of 1954. "Dammit, if we are going to adopt a sadistic attitude in regards to punishment, we're turning back the hands of the clock by a hundred years."

Twice in 1955, Gardner traveled to Washington, D.C., with his committee in hopes of persuading federal justice officials to remove the detainer on Runyon. The problem, as Gardner saw it, was that Iowa would never reduce Runyon's sentence unless the federal government moved first. If the detainer was removed, said one of the committee members, "we had a chance to help commute the Iowa sentence into a number of years—and then parole."

On his first Washington trip in May, Gardner was accompanied by Iowa journalists Charlie Gebhard and John Reynolds; *Argosy* publisher Harry Steeger; detective Raymond Shindler; Rital Reil of the International Press Alliance; and Negley Teeters, professor of criminology at Temple University and president of the Pennsylvania Prison Society. Despite friendly meetings with a congressman and with White House officials, no progress was made.

In October, Gardner returned to Washington alone and met with James Bennett, head of the bureau of prisons, a White House lawyer, and John V. Lindsay, an assistant to the attorney general, who later became mayor of New York City. Again no luck.

In Iowa, meanwhile, Lainson was making life



A caricature of Runyon in the December 1950 *Presidio* shows him dipping his pen in acid; his strong writing was also marked by compassion and respect for deserving prisoners.

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easier for his ward, who was now a celebrity. After *In For Life* was published, Lainson made Runyon a "consultant" to *The Presidio* so that he could have more free time to write. The warden had become so convinced that Runyon should be freed that he offered to assume "the responsibility of a federal parole" if it would help convince the Justice Department.

Lainson also gave Runyon his first opportunity in more than a decade to see the outside of the prison. In 1954, Lainson began to give Runyon permission to leave the prison to take photographs for *The Presidio* with a camera purchased the year before with royalties from his book. By the end of 1955, Runyon had been outside the prison a half-dozen times. On one of those trips, Runyon realized how much 18 years behind bars had changed him. In his youth, Runyon had been a sharp-eyed hunter and had tracked animals through the hills of West Virginia and the prairie of South Dakota. "On that morning we had driven fifty miles before I noticed rabbit tracks pockmarking the snow at every culvert. Indeed, walled-in years had taken their toll."

On another occasion, the warden allowed Runyon to join other prisoners along the banks of the Mississippi for a catfish fry. Accompanied only by an unarmed guard, Runyon recalled, "We were free to eat or

wander around or sit and soak up the quiet and peace there on the bank as we pleased."

Gardner's campaign, despite its setbacks in Washington, was gaining steam in Iowa. Several newspapers began demanding that at the very least Runyon should be allowed a hearing before the parole board. Runyon's supporters were becoming convinced that their chances for success were growing. Runyon, however, knew better. Even though he had become a model prisoner, he was hardly a favorite of the parole board. First, there was Runyon's 1943 attack on the board that had been reprinted in many newspapers. Second, his escape a few months after the article was evidence for the board that he could not be trusted. The three-member board had written in a 1944 memo to Governor Hickenlooper that "Runyon is apparently one of these 'brilliant criminals' who are more dangerous than many who do not have as good mentality."

In 1950 the board again reviewed Runyon's case after being requested to do so by Governor Beardsley. "Despite considerable political pressure brought from relatives and friends outside the State of Iowa," wrote the board members, "we see no reason why this man should receive any consideration for executive clemency." In 1954, Beardsley again asked the board to re-examine Runyon's case. The board's reply was terse. "We gave considerable time and thought to this case because of the widespread publicity this man has had as former editor of *The Presidio* and because of articles contained in the prison magazine and published in magazines of national reputation," the three-member panel replied. "This Board believes, in spite of his apparent ability and his brilliant writing, that he should be required to serve his natural life within the Penitentiary as ordered by Judge Graven. We feel he was very lucky not to have been hung," the board wrote in its seven-page opinion.

Runyon had been realistic about his chances, so perhaps he was less disappointed than those who held unreasonable expectations. Nonetheless, he was becoming rancorous about the walls that continued to surround him. "Every now and then I'm told that my writing is too bitter. Some readers seem to feel that I should be more mellow," he noted. "Perhaps they're right. But, the fact is, quite often I *am* bitter."

"I've stood aside and watched the blundering herd parade into prison—and usually out again—and very seldom indeed have I seen a convict helped by imprisonment," he wrote. Surely, he said, society could find a better way to handle people who broke the law. "But I see few signs of a really determined hunt for that way." In his case, for instance, the parole

board had never even taken the time to meet Runyon in the eleven years that had transpired since it first looked at his case. This was about to change.

In 1955, the Iowa Legislature enacted a law requiring the parole board to review the cases of lifers who had served more than 15 years and interview personally each of these inmates. After years of attacking each other in the pages of *The Presidio* and newspapers of the state, Runyon and the board would meet. The press could not wait for the hearing, insisting on prompting board members to comment on the case. Feeding the frenzy was the apparent feud between Warden Lainson and the board's most senior and most vocal member, Virginia Bedell, of Spirit Lake in Dickinson County. A former county attorney, Bedell regularly attacked Runyon in public forums and belittled Lainson's efforts to win his release. "If Warden Lainson will take care of his work and let us do ours, the state of Iowa will be better off," she said in a public meeting.

In January 1956, testifying before a state assembly committee, Bedell said that Runyon had shown no evidence of rehabilitation. Parole board chairman O. H. Henningsen, three weeks later, added his opinion that Runyon "will never be fit to enter free society again." In part, Runyon's fame seemed to work against him in the eyes of the board. A frequent target of their annoyance with Runyon was his autobiography. "You can search Runyon's book from cover to cover and find no real expression of remorse or contrition—nor can you find any positive statement about no further wrongful act," said Bedell. "If he were reformed, would he still be so full of venom?" The book, said Henningsen, "doesn't exactly lie, but it is filled with half truths."

The public comments of the board members enraged Runyon's supporters. In March, the *Belmond Independent* wrote that the "parole board's attitude toward Runyon is completely inexcusable." The *Des Moines Register* joined the fracas with an editorial and two long articles by Gilbert Cranberg addressing the question of granting parole to Runyon. Runyon had shown himself to be an unusually gifted and creative individual, the *Register* said in its editorial. "The board owes it to Runyon and to itself to make certain that the unfortunate hostility that has developed between Warden Lainson and the board, and the board and Runyon over some of his writings, does not figure in its decision."

On October 24, Runyon finally met the board. The

interview lasted all of 15 minutes. Bedell sat well off to one side, Runyon wrote in an account mailed to Gardner the next day. A transcript of the interview is missing from the state files, but references to the encounter exist in the board's recommendation to Governor Leo Hoegh against commutation. "In his interview before the Board he [Runyon] had a shifty appearance which did not impress us as showing any earnest desire to attempt to show any reformation of spirit or attitude," the report stated. "The Board of Parole does not wish to appear to be vindictive in this matter," the report said, mindful of the press attention to the Runyon case. Nonetheless, the pages of the report echoed many of the public statements made earlier by board members. For example, one can find Bedell's criticism of the book: "One can search Runyon's book throughout and find no indication of remorse;" or Henningsen's charge that Runyon was untruthful: "Many of those stories are not true to fact and entirely and falsely colored."

Moreover, much of the report was devoted to Runyon's original crime and to rebuffing the board's critics, rather than addressing the merits of Runyon's case. For example, the board tried to discredit Gardner's articles faulting the board for not having released Runyon, by pointing out that he had never met with members of the board. It is a deeply ironic retort, considering the board never cared to meet Runyon. Runyon took the board's inevitable decision as best as he could. "I'm neither worse off nor better off than before. I'll just go on plugging and see what the future brings," he wrote to Gardner.

Demand for Runyon's writing did not abate. Editor L. Dale Ahern of the *Decorah Public Opinion* asked him if he would write a regular column about prison life. Other newspapers had reprinted his articles, but this was a crowning achievement. He was not yet a free man, but he was being offered an open, unfettered podium.

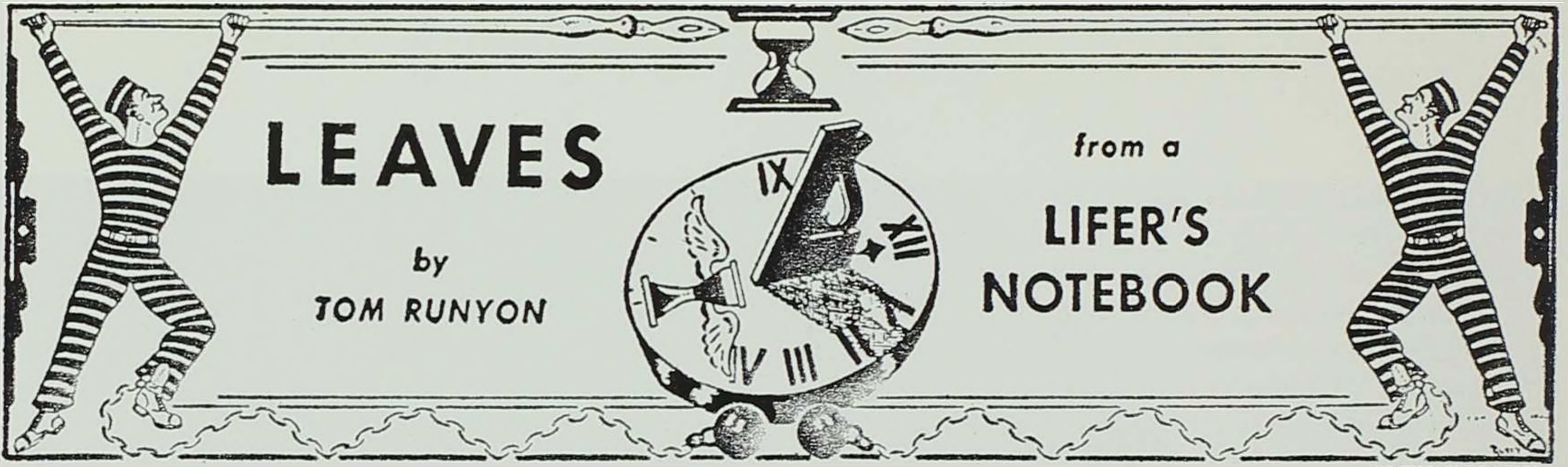
By the beginning of 1957, Runyon had become the country's best-known prison writer, and that March he observed the 20th anniversary of his imprisonment at Fort Madison. "Thinning hair and bi-focals those years have brought," he wrote, "but other things as well—they have brought some satisfaction and a great deal of hard work and a kind of concentration that at times make a man unconscious of passing time."

"Where did those years go?" asked Runyon. "They went into a battle for what I believe, and the

Exterior wall of cell block at Fort Madison, circa 1960s.



SHS (DES MOINES)



COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

Above: Heading from Runyon's popular *Presidio* column.

other editors believed, was right." Runyon was now 51 years old. To his fellow prisoners he was a calm, confident veteran prison lifer whom everyone knew. But underneath the polished exterior, Runyon was one of the loneliest inmates. His only steady companions over the years had been his typewriter and the acclaim it won him. Aside from Gardner, he had no friends in which he could confide. During all of the events of 1956, Gardner had again taken the time to come to Iowa and visit Runyon. "While I by no means live in a dungeon, somehow or other the world suddenly seems much larger when you're in the room," Runyon wrote after the visit.

In April 1957, Gardner was worried that perhaps Runyon had lost hope. "I think the most tragic thing that could happen on earth would be to give you any false hope," he wrote Runyon. "But I think it would be equally disastrous to have you feel the fight was lost." Less than a week after Gardner wrote those words, in the early morning of April 10, Runyon suffered a massive heart attack. The prison physician, "Doc" Peiper, attended to him, but there was nothing that could be done.

The *Des Moines Register* said, in an editorial about Runyon's death the next day, that "Gardner had hoped to make of Runyon a nationwide symbol of his campaign to emphasize prison rehabilitation." Now gone, Runyon would not be that symbol. "But through determination and the aid of a sympathetic prison administration he did show that prison need not be a

place of punishment and hopelessness," the editorial continued, "but of accomplishment and hope."

News of Runyon's death traveled far. In a tribute to his influence, his obituary was carried in newspapers from the *Oskaloosa Daily Herald* to *The New York Times*. Friends and supporters wrote to Lainson and Gardner. Gardner closed his file on Runyon with a terse memo: "Tom Runyon is dead. . . . There was no excuse for letting Tom Runyon die in prison. . . . Heaven knows how many persons will be discouraged from putting their feet on the comeback trail because of society's vengeful determination to get its full pound of flesh in the case of Tom Runyon."

Runyon had won his reprieve from imprisonment only through death. But in all his years, he had never succumbed to the shadow cast by the prison's walls that he so feared. And, in the end, it was his magazine, *The Presidio*, that had the last word. "Thanks to Runyon lifers in Iowa are no longer forgotten men," wrote fellow lifer Warren Bianco in its pages. "For a man carrying two life sentences it must have been a struggle to see so many men he helped leave prison. Men like Ole Lindquist and so many others. He could help everybody—except himself." ❖

James McGrath Morris, a high school history teacher in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., is the author of Jailhouse Journalism: The Fourth Estate Behind Bars, to be published this fall by McFarland & Company (PO Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640; 1-800-253-2187). Portions of this article are excerpted from the forthcoming book with permission of the publisher.

NOTE ON SOURCES

Besides *The Presidio*, published at Iowa State Penitentiary at Fort Madison (1934-1977), a fairly complete collection of which is available at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., other major sources include Tom Runyon, *In For Life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1953); Tom Runyon, "Prison Shocks," *Criminology*, ed. by Robert G. Caldwell (New York: The Ronald Press, 1956); correspondence between Erle Stanley Gardner and Tom Runyon and to various recipients regarding Runyon at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin; documents of the Iowa Board of Parole, State Archives, State Historical Society of Iowa (Des Moines); "The Multiple-Property National Register of Historic Places Statement of Historic Contexts for Iowa Corrections Institutions" by Joyce McKay, loaned to me by Marvin Bergman. In addition to Mr. Bergman, thanks are also owed to Edward N. McConnell, former state archivist; the late Walter Lunden, of Iowa State University; and Kathy Henderson, of the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center. Annotations to this article are in *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files. Further bibliographical information is also available in James McGrath Morris, *Jailhouse Journalism: The Fourth Estate Behind Bars* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., forthcoming in 1997).



PHOTO COURTESY OF LVELL HENRY

The Lincoln Hotel in Lowden Capturing Trade on the Lincoln Highway

The Stories Behind the Sites

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

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

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

by Jan Olive Nash

Celia Daehn Clemmens saw a golden opportunity in a jog in the road. Clemmens worked in the Railroad Hotel in Lowden, Iowa, halfway between Clinton and Cedar Rapids. Well aware that railroad travelers needed food and lodging, she realized that the new kind of traveler of the 20th century—the automobile tourist—would need the same.

Thus was born Lowden's Lincoln Hotel, built in 1915. Today it stands as a significant state and local example of the tremendous

Above: The Lincoln Hotel in Lowden, from an early postcard.

impact the automobile had on the culture and physical fabric of small towns in Iowa during the early 20th century. Located on a Main Street corner of the Lincoln Highway, the first coast-to-coast highway in the nation, this little hotel was among the first of a number of downtown Lowden businesses eventually established to serve the automobile trade and traveler.

When the first transcontinental automobile crossing was made in 1903—a 63-day trip from San Francisco to New York—most roads in Iowa were unimproved dirt wagon roads running along section lines. Roads to and from Iowa's small towns were intended to serve the local farmers' need of transporting crops and livestock to market by getting them to the nearby towns' railroad stations. Most communities were best linked to each other through their rail connections. If one needed to travel beyond one's hometown, one usually did it by rail rather than by dirt road.

Iowa's sorry roads—dusty in the summer and quagmires of sucking mud in the spring—were particularly daunting for non-local travelers. There were few directional or locational signs, and few guarantees of readily available gasoline or lodging. Yet the demand for good roads and for services geared to auto tourists was growing in response to Americans' lust for cross-country trips.

What cross-country travelers needed were established routes that identified and linked existing dirt roads. Ambitiously labeled

The early Lincoln Highway paralleled the CNW Railroad. Trains still speed by today, but this abandoned stretch of the Lincoln near Lowden carries no traffic.

“highways,” these routes usually jogged along right-angle section lines and through towns. Years later, some would be paved as main routes, and shortcuts would be devised that ignored Iowa's grid system. But early highway boosters had to look first to existing transportation routes—and they found one through Lowden.

The Yankee Run stream runs past Lowden, cutting a diagonal swath to the southeast as it drains the surrounding floodplain and heads towards the Mississippi. The upland ridges on either side of Yankee Run rise a hundred or more feet, making the low, flat prairie in between a natural transportation corridor. Early wagon roads followed Yankee Run, and so did the Chicago, Iowa and Nebraska Railroad Company when it was built in 1857. Renamed the Chicago & North Western (CNW) in 1864, the railroad was able to build double tracks through the county and Lowden by 1891 because of this flat, accommodating terrain.

This natural transportation

corridor through Lowden was one of many considered by the leaders of the Lincoln Highway Association as a likely route through Iowa. Henry B. Joy, former president of Packard Motor Car Company, originator of the name for the Lincoln Highway, and first president of the highway association, selected the route. “Joy had traveled back and forth across Iowa at least ten times in five years. He felt that there were as many as fifty possible routes across the state,” Drake Hokanson writes in *The Lincoln Highway: Main Street across America*. “They were all about equal in length . . . but they also were uniformly unimproved and tended to zigzag all over the map following a haphazard arrangement of section-line roads. . . .”

“The route Joy selected between Chicago and Omaha had little significance as a through road prior to the coming of the automobile,” Hokanson continues. “It was by no means a standout among poor options. What pulled Joy to this route was simply that it



PHOTO BY JAN OLIVE NASH

had grown to be the route of common usage. Long before any Lincoln Highway markers went up, this path had been used by people traveling cross-country in automobiles [including the first auto crossing of the continent in 1903, and the New York to Paris Race in 1908]. . . . By the time Henry Joy came looking for his Lincoln Highway route, the Iowa portion had been dubbed the Iowa Official Trans-Continental Route."

The *Lowden News* confirms that the town saw its share of Trans-Continental Route travelers. For example, on September 12, 1913, the paper reported: "Yesterday after filling the tank of a large touring car at the corner of H. L. Deichmann's Store, the chauffeur cranked the engine without setting the brake and the machine started backwards, crossed the street and climbed the two and half foot embankment just missing the large tree on the C. F. Richmann place. The lady in the back was not injured."

With the September 1914 announcement that the Lincoln Highway would run through Lowden, the newspaper editor roused local citizens: "A meeting will be held in every town along the Transcontinental Highway in Iowa on the night of October 31st to ratify the selection of it as the Lincoln Highway across the state. . . . Every town from coast to coast has been requested to hold meetings and as Lowden is in a very important position on the route plans should be made by some of our road boosters for this meeting."

Although backers of the Lincoln Highway originally tried to raise \$10 million for improvements to the highway, that idea eventually was scaled back to paving "seedling miles" of con-



COURTESY OF SUE LICHT

crete and promoting the highway in other ways. One was the marker program. "At the encouragement of the [Lincoln Highway] association, civic groups, business people, and general citizenry from communities along the route fanned out to paint Lincoln Highway markers in patriotic red, white, and blue stripes on barns, trees, rocks, telephone poles, and fence posts," Hokanson explains. "What the marking job lacked in standardization or neatness it made up in enthusiasm. Anybody lucky enough to live or do business along the Lincoln Highway was proud of the fact." The markers, along with published guides and maps, would keep the wayward traveler on the jigs and jags now christened the Lincoln Highway.

In Lowden, a traveler heading



Top, from left: Vera, Beatrice, and Celia Clemmens on the Lincoln Hotel porch. Inset: A. F. "Frank" Clemmens.

to California on the new Lincoln Highway would turn right at the corner of Main and Clinton Streets, jogging north and leaving town before ever getting to the main business district. And at this jog in the route, Celia Daehn Clemmens took advantage of the opportunity offered by an empty

corner lot. On March 1, 1915, Celia's husband, A. F. Clemmens, purchased the lot.

With the Lincoln Highway route announced and California's Panama-Pacific International Exposition pulling adventurous auto travelers westward, Celia Clemmens no doubt knew that once the Iowa mud dried, the trickle of auto travelers through Lowden would increase dramatically, and these travelers—midway between Clinton and Cedar Rapids—would be looking for food and lodging. Working with builder Emil Mahlstedt, the Clemmenses had no time to waste. Excavation for their new

Lincoln Hotel commenced immediately, despite Iowa's notorious March mud.

Opening for business on June 17, 1915, the Lincoln Hotel offered rooms for \$2 per night and steak dinners for 75 cents. The next day the *Lowden News* pronounced it "one of the finest buildings in the town" and predicted that, "situated as it is on the main corner of the Lincoln Highway, it will no doubt receive good patronage."

To further their hotel's association with the highway, a few days later the Clemmenses placed an ad in the newspaper featuring a picture of the Lincoln Highway

Association pennant that association members were to display on their automobiles as they traveled.

The Clemmenses' daughter Vera remembers living in the family's quarters and helping with the noon meals that drew not only hotel guests—she remembers them mostly as tourists and "traveling men"—but locals, too. On occasion, the big dining room would be used for special events, such as the local firemen's banquet.

Emily Post, author of etiquette books and writer for *Collier's* magazine, was in one of the estimated five to ten thousand autos that traveled the Lincoln Highway in 1915 to the California exposition. Coming west from New York, Post certainly must have driven through Lowden. She told her readers: "Every town through the Middle West seems to have a little grill of brick-paved streets; a splendid post-office building of stone or brick or marble; a courthouse, but of an older period generally; and one or two moving picture houses; two or three important-looking dry-goods stores, and some sort of hotel, and in it a lot of drummers [traveling salesmen] in tilted-back chairs exhibiting the soles of their shoes to the street."

Sheltered by a wide porch supported by Tuscan columns, the Lincoln Hotel's front door opened into the lobby, beyond which were the guests' parlor and dining room, and the Clemmenses' living quarters. A dogleg staircase of yellow pine rose from the lobby to the second-floor central hall, where doors opened into a dozen guest rooms.

A stretch of abandoned Lincoln Highway a mile west of Lowden reveals the narrowness of the paved road.



PHOTO BY JAN OLIVE NASH



COURTESY OF LOWDEN HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND JAN OLIVE NASH

One hand resting on a Quaker State Motor Oil sign, August L. Kreinbring in white uniform and bow tie beams in this photo sent as his 1938 Christmas greeting. In 1934 Kreinbring opened this Tudor Revival-style Phillips 66 gas station two blocks east of the Lincoln Hotel, on a prominent corner near where westbound highway traffic zigzagged onto Main Street. The photograph reveals much about 1930s auto travel and Lowden's roadside architecture. To the right, gasoline pumps in a tidy filling station stand ready to serve motorists. To the left is a park area that is obviously a part of the filling station—and a forerunner of today's rest areas. A grassy lawn, picnic table, and rock-bordered flower beds entice weary travelers to stop and enjoy a cold Orange Crush or Coca-Cola. (The Coca-Cola sign is, in fact, the largest commercial sign visible.) Kreinbring also fashioned rock sculptures and a cannon out of oil cans to decorate the park. The station still stands, though the highway has passed it by and the rest area has been replaced by a concrete-block service bay and a small house.

The hotel's modest style was born of function and commercial necessity, but the shallow-pitched hipped roof, wide overhangs, and heavily textured, buff-colored stucco also reveal the influence of Prairie School architecture as it was often interpreted by local builders. These vaguely Prairiesque features furthered its commercial attractiveness and projected a modern, up-to-date appearance. Part of the Lincoln Hotel's local historical significance today is that it is one of a very few buildings in Lowden, and likely the only commercial building in town, to have been influenced by the Prairie School style of architecture.

But more significant, the Lincoln Hotel marks the transition in traveler accommodations from ex-

isting railroad hotels to the soon-to-come motor courts and tourist cabins. Like America's earlier railroad hotels, the Lincoln Hotel was located near the center of town rather than in the countryside, and it offered meals to the traveler and town resident alike. But like the later motor courts and tourist cabins that would dot American highways in the 1920s, the Lincoln Hotel was built to attract automobile travelers and soon became neighbor to a variety of new businesses that located nearby in order to attract tourist dollars.

When the Clemmenses built the Lincoln Hotel, a large livery stable was behind the lot, still serving horse-drawn transportation. But across the street was Lowden's first auto garage, owned by the Kemmann family.

Like Celia and A. F. Clemmens, the Kemmanns had been quick to spot the trend towards automobile travel—but then they'd been in the transportation business for some time. H. D. Kemmann had arrived from Germany in 1875 to operate a blacksmith's shop. Together with his sons, he had expanded the business to include selling buggies, surreys, and farm implements. By 1912, they began selling Marathon cars, adding Ford cars in 1913, Case in 1914, Overland in 1915, Chalmers in 1916, and finally, Chevrolet in 1923.

Finding gasoline in Lowden would not have been difficult for overnight tourists at the Lincoln Hotel; just as travel lodging was evolving in response to auto tourists, so was gasoline distribution.

Historian Kenneth Jackson traces five stages in the evolution of service stations, and the changes in Lowden echo those early stages. "The first stage was clearly the worst for the motorist, who had to buy fuel by the bucketful at a livery stable, repair shop, or dry goods store" and pour it through a funnel into the tank, a messy and sometimes dangerous maneuver, Jackson writes. The second stage (1905-1920) began with the invention of an inverted gasoline storage tank and pump for directly fueling the automobile. These single-pump "filling stations" were often operated by retail stores, at the curb right outside the stores. By 1920, the third stage, service stations provided "under one roof all the functions of gasoline distribution and normal automotive maintenance," Jackson says. "These full-service structures were often built in the form of little colonial houses, Greek temples, Chinese pagodas, and Art Deco palaces. Many were local landmarks and a source of community pride." (By 1935, the fourth stage, the standardized "corporate look" gas station would take over, but by the fifth stage, in the 1970s, these would be replaced by major oil companies' "super stations" and locally owned "mini-mart" convenience stores.)

In Lowden, some residents recall the town's pharmacist selling the first gasoline, but by 1915 the general mercantile store, Freund's, sold gasoline, too—as well as Buicks. Single-purpose filling stations eventually opened to compete with Freund's. In the 1920s Kemmanns replaced their blacksmith shop across the street from the Lincoln Hotel with a Standard station, and the Victorian house next door was replaced by Gade's

Garage, with a gas pump and a mechanic on duty. By the late 1930s three more gas stations would open within three blocks of the hotel.

In the mid-1920s the Lincoln Highway was re-routed. Instead of turning north at the Lincoln Hotel, it now continued straight past the hotel down Clinton Street. Though this meant no loss of visibility for the hotel, it did bring the highway traffic through the heart of the original 19th-century commercial district.

Anticipating the new route, the town renamed its streets in 1924. Clinton Street, the east/west corridor through town, became Main Street. The former north/south Main Street became Washington Street. When the new route—which included a rural segment west of town—was opened in December 1925, the town paper boasted, "The new relocated Lincoln highway west of town was officially opened this week. The new road is much better than the old highway, and the distance is shorter. There are ruts in it but they are not so deep as those on the old highway."

In the same decade Celia Clemmens increased the family's living quarters with a small ground-floor addition. She managed to keep the hotel operating through the Great Depression, but once widowed she finally sold it in 1946. A series of owners contin-

ued to operate the hotel until 1981, although by the mid-1950s, a new section of Highway 30, as the Lincoln Highway was then numbered, had been completed south of Lowden. It bypassed the town and diverted all but local traffic away from the hotel. An ad for the hotel in the town's centennial publication indicates that by 1957, rooms could be rented on a nightly or weekly basis. The hotel's slow conversion to residential housing had begun.

After sitting vacant and deteriorating from water leaks for a dozen years, the hotel was purchased and rehabilitated in 1994 and 1995 by Sue Licht and Brad Norton of Lincolnway Hotel, Inc., and converted to apartments. The public lobby was reduced in size, and several upstairs hallway doors were eliminated. The small rear wing added by Clemmens in the 1920s was removed, and a third rear door and ramp were added for a ground-floor, handicapped-accessible apartment.

Because the exterior stucco was too water-damaged to repair, new stucco of matching color and texture was applied using the original technique. The sagging and rotting front porch was dismantled and rebuilt. New wood storm windows were fabricated to fit in the original window frames, and the original sashes and panes were carefully preserved. New asphalt shingles replaced rolled

Years of water damage required tearing off old stucco down to the wood sheathing, and rebuilding the front porch.

BOTH PHOTOS COURTESY OF SUE LIGHT





PHOTO BY JAN OLIVE NASH

Now rehabilitated and converted to apartments, Lowden's Lincoln Hotel sits proudly as a reminder of the decades when the Lincoln Highway wound through Iowa's small towns, bringing weary travelers to local businesses in search of food, rest, and auto repairs.

asphalt roofing paper, which had been simply tarred at the seams.

The project benefited from two grants—from Iowa's Resource Enhancement and Protection Act-Historic Resources Development Program; and from Home Funds (Housing and Urban Development funds available through the Iowa Department of Economic Development) as one of their first preservation projects that also created low- and medium-income housing.

Now in excellent condition and fully occupied by tenants, the building exemplifies adaptive reuse of a historically significant building. (Because the building is now private residential space, the interior is no longer accessible to

the public.) In 1996, the Lincoln Hotel was listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and won the residential Preservation At Its Best Award from the Iowa Historic Preservation Alliance.

Clearly, Lowden's physical environment was changed with the coming of the automobile and the Lincoln Highway. The Lincoln

Hotel stands as a reminder of early travelers who chose the independence and adventure of their own automobiles over the smoother, faster, and surer transportation of the trains. ❖

Jan Olive Nash is an architectural historian and a partner in Tallgrass Historians L.C. in Iowa City.

NOTE ON SOURCES

Much is owed to Drake Hokanson for his lucid text on pre-World War I rural Iowa and its road systems in his *The Lincoln Highway: Main Street across America* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1988). His descriptions of setting and context paint a picture in words to complement his photos. Other useful sources were Rebecca Conard, "The Lincoln Highway in Greene County, Iowa," NRHP Multiple Property Documentation Form (1992), adapted for publication in *The Annals of Iowa* (Fall 1993); Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Jan Jennings, ed. *Roadside America: The Automobile in Design and Culture* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990); Tania G. Werbizky, "Accommodating the Traveler: The Development of Tourist Courts along US Route 20 in New York State," in *Preserving the Recent Past*, Deborah Slaton and Rebecca A. Shiffer, eds., II 41-52 (Washington, D.C.: Historic Preservation Education Foundation, 1995); and Lincoln Highway Association, *The Complete Official Road Guide of the Lincoln Highway, 1916* (Detroit: Lincoln Highway Association, 1916; Pleiades Press reprint, 1984). Also helpful were the author's personal communication with Bob Ausberger, Lincoln Highway Association president, and photos and interview from Vera Clemmens Koch to Sue Licht. Local sources include the *Lowden News* (1913-1928), and Lowden Historical Society holdings: *Lowden Centennial 1857-1957* (Lowden Centennial Comm., 1957); *The Northeastern Cedar County Post 75th Anniversary Edition, 1857-1932* (10 Oct. 1932); *We Remember When . . . Our Tribute to America's Bicentennial* (Lowden: Lowden Historical Society, 1976); "Lowden Historical Society 1987" (typescript); 1914 Sanborn fire insurance map; and pertinent photos. Emily Post's travels are described in *Collier's* (Sept. 11, 1915); and her *By Motor to the Golden Gate* (Appleton, 1917). This article was adapted from a National Register for Historic Places nomination form by Jan R. Nash, Tallgrass Historians L.C. Annotations are in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* files.

One in a Million



Among the millions of items in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa is this astonishing three-dimensional "sand painting" completed in 1888 by Andrew Clemens of McGregor.

Clemens was not the first to layer varicolored sands into a bottle, but certainly he mastered and perfected the art, creating incredibly intricate designs and pictures.

He gathered the sand from a stratus of St. Peter sandstone known as Pictured Rocks, a mile or so south of McGregor near Pike's Peak. In this nearly pure silica, the small traces of iron oxide present produced more than 40 exquisite colors.

To make a sand painting, Clemens first spread a particular color on blotting paper and rubbed it gently with a teaspoon. He used only the sand that adhered to the paper—the finest and most uniformly sized grains.

The work was executed upside down through the narrow mouth of the bottle—meaning that for the 12-inch bottle shown here, he first built the decorative bands above George Washington's head, not the reddish-brown layers at the bottle's neck.

Though his designs were sophisticated, his tools were not. He used a long, thin hickory stick with a quarter-teaspoon tin scoop on one end to put a chosen color of sand into the bottle; a similar stick with a hooked end to control the sand; and another to measure the outside of the bottle for perspective. With four more sticks of various weights and lengths, he packed and tamped the dry sand. No adhesives were used. The

(Article continues with another photo on inside back cover; please turn page.)

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completed artwork was sealed with wax at the neck and inverted.

Clemens was born on January 29, 1857, in Dubuque, Iowa. A year later his family moved to McGregor, where his father opened a wagon shop. When Clemens was five he took ill and was diagnosed as having "brain fever," or encephalitis. Although he survived, his hearing was lost and his speech impaired.

First schooled by his mother at home, Clemens at age 13 entered the Iowa Institute for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb in Council Bluffs, where he enjoyed his studies and learned carpentry. But back in McGregor, during summer vacations and then permanently at age 20, he experimented with creating artistic designs of colored sand in bottles, beginning with simple patterns of diamonds, serpentines, and flowers, and then mastering miniature landscapes and pictures, with delicate writing and shades of color as overtones.

As his skills grew and his reputation spread, his artwork found a ready market, first among traveling salesmen and train and riverboat traffic, and then through mail orders from across the nation and Europe.

Clemens died in 1894 at age 37, but several of his fragile sand masterpieces have lasted a century—even though the slightest crack in the glass would disrupt the pressure, shift the sands, and ruin the image. Six bottles and a set of his tools are in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa—wondrous testaments to this young man's astounding patience and devotion to his art.

—Rashelle Wagasky
Special Collections Assistant
State Historical Society of Iowa

SHSI (DES MOINES), PHOTOS BY CHUCK GREINER



Sand art in the round: On this side of the bottle, Clemens layered sand to depict two Native Americans, the Great Seal of the State of Iowa (including the motto on thin white streamers), and a steamboat. Also note his signature in the red sand below the boat. The other side (see earlier photo) shows a gallant George Washington astride a white horse. Clemens clearly perfected the art form; note how he delicately shaded the horse, Washington's jacket, the grasses, and the sky.

