

Hard-Luck Town

College Springs, Iowa

by H. Roger Grant

In most ways Iowa can be considered a microcosm of American urban development. Although it lacked an equal to Chicago, Minneapolis, or St. Louis, Cedar Rapids, Des Moines, and Sioux City became bustling metropolises, and by the dawn of the 20th century the state possessed a rich assortment of villages, towns, and cities. Nearly all American communities, large and small, were founded by boosters hoping to maximize their financial gains, and that "get-ahead" spirit spurred town creation and fostered growth.

Yet in the 19th century a handful of communities

were launched for largely altruistic reasons. Between the 1830s and 1850s a wave of utopianism swept through the Midwest. After all, the optimism of the era, lack of governmental regulations, cheap and expansive lands, and willing communicants made the region an ideal place for creating "heaven on earth." Several utopias appeared in Iowa, including the secu-

Above: An 1856 plat of the projected utopian colony of Amity in Page County in southwestern Iowa. A collegiate institution was in the plans.

lar, communistic, French-speaking Icarian settlement in Adams County, the Mormon Preparation colony in Monona County, and the enduring religious Society of True Inspiration (Amana) in Iowa County.

One of the most obscure utopian ventures in Iowa was Amity, in Page County. What distinguishes this place from most other Hawkeye State utopias is that it would remain on the map, evolving into the town of College Springs as it shifted from utopian values to commercial expectations.

Unlike so many supporters of "perfect" communities, Amity's founders relied not on a specific body of published works, secular or sectarian, but on ideas developed by the Reverend George Washington Gale of Whitesboro, New York, near the Erie Canal city of Utica. In 1825 Gale, a Princeton-educated Presbyterian clergyman, with the aid of local patrons, launched a self-help school for boys "located on a farm with workshops attached [where] young men could secure their education and at the same time be self-supporting." Continued the explanation of his son William Selden Gale, "All should be required to labor on the farm or in the shops three hours a day. Thus they could provide the means of support and secure the exercise essential to their health and yet have sufficient time for study and recitation." The school was named the Oneida Institute (not to be confused with the utopian Oneida Community not far away). It did reasonably well, attracting scores of lads and generating income from school-sponsored farming and business activities.

Yet Gale had other ambitions. In 1834 he proposed creating a utopia of sorts "in the West." The idea was to build a Puritan-like "city upon a hill," based on a manual-labor institution that would instill students with a Christian, sober, and public-spirited worldview and fostered by a like-minded community. The plan involved acquiring a sizeable block of government land at the minimum selling price of \$1.25 per acre. As in many cooperative utopias, investors would purchase shares, and they would be fairly rewarded when the experiment prospered. By 1836 Gale and his 34 investors (or "subscribers") had selected several thousand acres of fertile lands in the mostly unsettled region of Knox County in western Illinois. A year later these people of good hope platted the future Galesburg and started Knox Manual Labor College.

Although largely isolated until the coming of the railroad in 1854, the Galesburg settlement grew from "some 70 dwellings" in 1845 to hundreds of homes and businesses and nearly 5,500 residents in 1857. The college accepted its first class in 1841, and by 1857, 446 male and female students attended the school. Both

the town and college were Christian places. "Profaneness is rarely heard in the streets, and intoxicating drinks have neither foothold nor advocates in the community."

The local Presbyterian body, with Gale as the preacher, gradually changed into a Congregational organization. (Since 1801 Presbyterians and Congregationalists nationally had found themselves in "friendly and mutual understanding.") As more progressive Congregationalists arrived in Galesburg, trouble brewed as the national antislavery debate intensified. Local Congregationalists, many of whom were Presbyterians or "Presbygationalists," embraced the abolitionist crusade, but the area presbytery refused to modify its largely proslavery position. In 1855 this conflict resulted in a break with the Presbyterian establishment, and a year later led to formation of the "First Church of Christ in Galesburg," which, although independent, "became practically Congregational."

Plans emerged out of this religious and reform milieu for another "Colony of Reformers" based on Gale's model of promoting education in a highly moralistic, antislavery climate. In 1853, B. F. Haskins, a local Congregational minister, worked closely with several other Galesburg residents, including William Woods, a co-religionist and an ardent abolitionist, to create a "permanent fund for an institution of learning of a reformatory character," and with it a community of individuals who shared these goals.

The Haskins plan involved acquiring a large block of fertile land from the government at \$1.25 per acre in Iowa or Missouri, and selling it to sympathetic investors. The real estate would be appraised at \$5 per acre and "every shareholder may receive in land at the valuation price, to the amount of his share, or shares." Profits from land sales would be earmarked for a "manual labor system" collegiate institution, and investors' shares "shall be attached [to] a scholarship of five years gratuitous instruction in the institution of learning." The proposal also called for building a town.

The document concluded with this utopian statement: "The plan proposed if properly guarded and successful, will bring together lovers of truth and right, who value the blessings of the gospel above every worldly consideration" as well as "the friends of humanity, who heartily sympathize with the crushed millions of [slaves of] our own as well as other lands." And the school "will check the fearful progress of wickedness, and bless with religion and a religious education hundreds and thousands of the rising generation."

These were hardly the thoughts of schemers seeking profits.

Action followed. The Haskins organization became the Western Industrial and Scientific Association, with a capitalization of \$30,000, and a committee sought out land. By November 1854 the colonists had taken control of 7,000 public acres at the minimum price in southern Page County, Iowa, near the Missouri border (and also additional lands in Cass County and in northern Missouri). In February 1855 the venture was incorporated and renamed the Amity Collegiate Association. The model village and township were also named Amity.

Amity and Amity College did not instantly spring up from the unbroken prairie, but its sponsors toiled mightily to make their dreams come true. The well-chosen townsite was largely level, adequately drained,

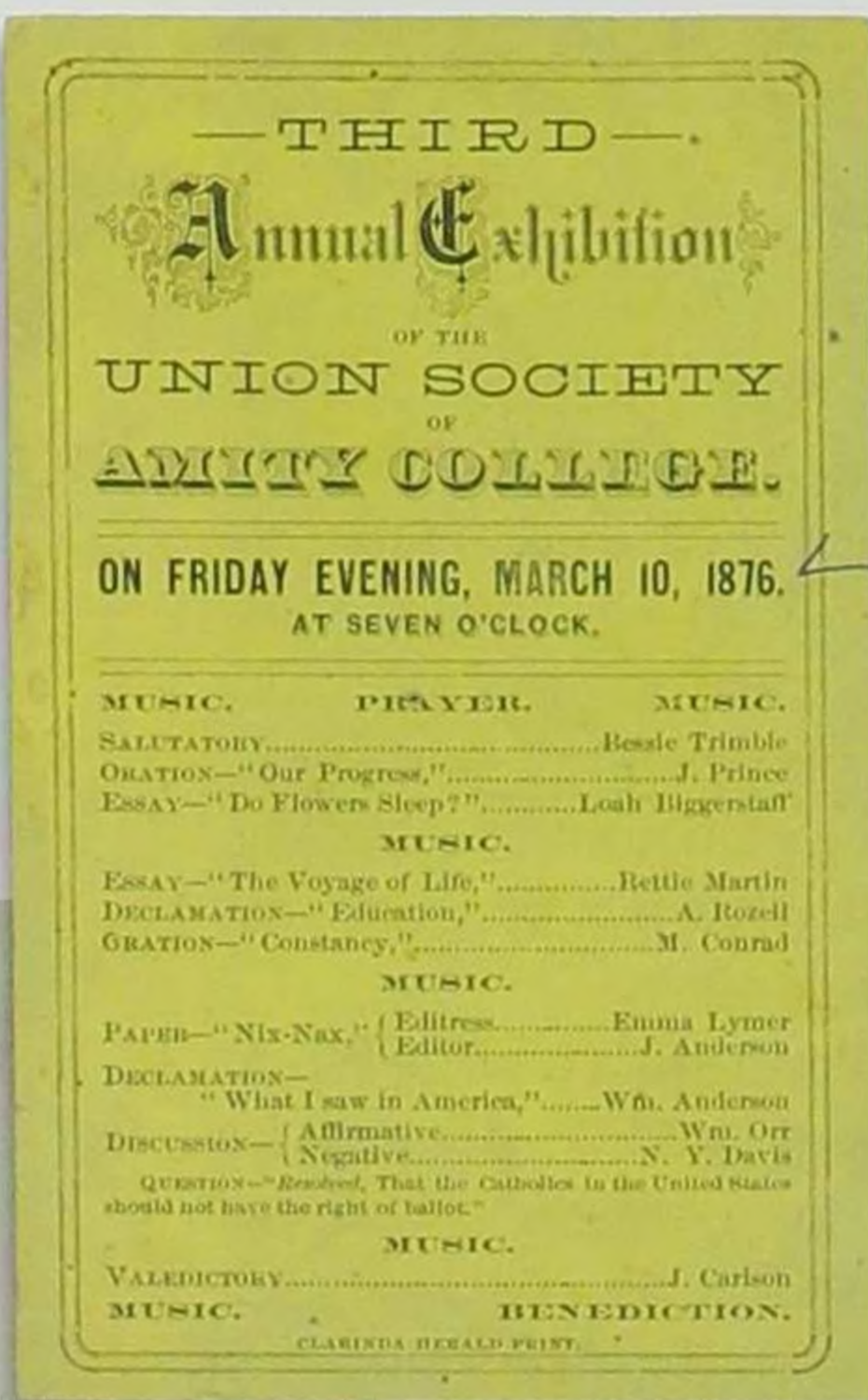
and contained "a large, never failing spring." Streets were staked out in a grid pattern, and wide diagonal streets radiated out of a public square. More land was set aside for the college and parks. The colony plan also featured traditional

The center of Amity College in the 1870s was this elegant brick building.

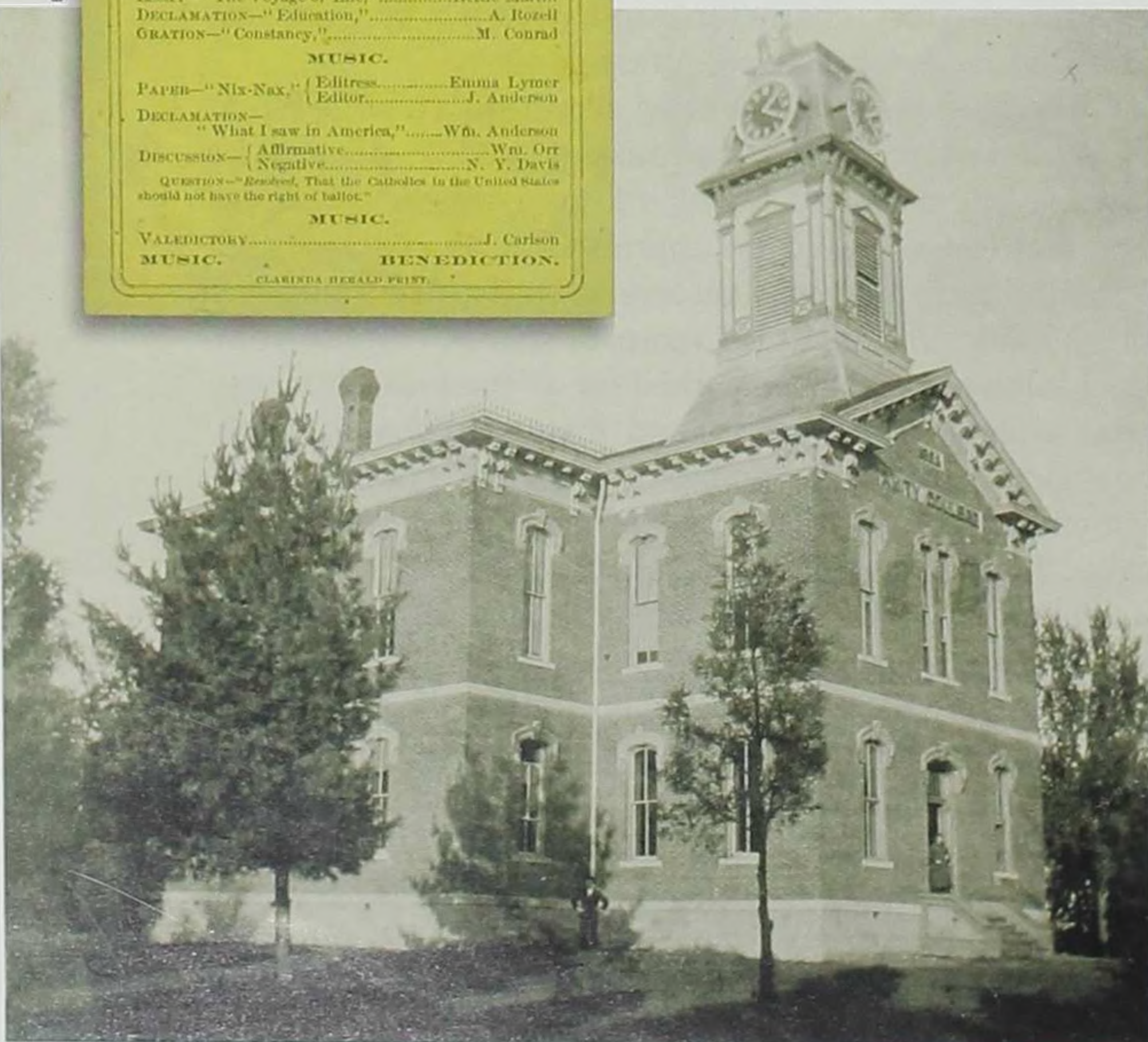


interior building lots and outlots that ranged from approximately 7 to 44 acres. Lot deeds required that owners plant shade trees to beautify the streetscape. By 1857 several structures had been erected, including the "college," a 22x28 foot single-story frame building readied for the first class of 20 males and 10 females. Resembling Knox College, the school, "our great future, [which] gives a liberal education to both sexes," became a pioneer in coeducation. Two years later work began on a larger two-story brick structure. Although this quasi-collegiate operation "was designed for the higher grades only, no pupils being below the age of fifteen," the school was really no more than an academy, broadening its curricula to include elementary-level subjects. The institution resembled other "colleges" scattered throughout the state, including the gestating and also coeducational Indianola Male and Female Seminary, the future Simpson College.

Amity College confronted daunting challenges, especially financing. Even though land sales generated endowment funds, scholarships awarded to shareholders drained resources. "Therefore to trade for a scholarship and thereby escape payment of tuition became an easy matter. This was meat for the buyer but famine for the school." And a bitter fight over prayers erupted between Presbyterians and Congregationalists, causing a split among school supporters and creation of a competing school in a nearby structure. "So small as it was, the town of Amity that year [1859] bore the peculiar distinction of having within its border two separate college-schools in full force, each presided over by



BOTH IMAGES: SHS (IOWA CITY)





LARRY POLSLEY COLLECTION

a most able instructor." The silliness of this dispute led to a truce, allowing Amity College to regain strength until the outbreak of the Civil War led to curtailment of upper-level classes. The brick edifice served as the public school between 1862 and 1864, and the college or academy did not resume operations until 1866. A reorganization that year created the Amity Academic Association, which leased the building for five years.

Just as the school sputtered, the village struggled. Unlike what had taken place in Galesburg, there was no surge in population. On the eve of the Civil War a boiler explosion wrecked the sole industry, a steam-powered sawmill, killing an employee and seriously injuring several others. During the war years, property values fell, grasshoppers ravaged nearby crops, and an exodus occurred. "Seven families from our town picked up their belongings and returned to their former homes—most of them in Illinois," recounted an early settler. "Some of our town's people were attracted by the Pike's Peak [gold] discovery about that time, and set out for their pot of gold at the end of the rainbow."

Once the war and slavery ended, Amity lost much of its utopian flavor, although the spirit of temperance remained strong. The town had no saloons or other places of sin and evil, and also there was no tolerance for secret societies, especially Freemasonry. These attitudes fit nicely with the four churches that led local spiritual life: Congregational, Methodist Episcopal,

Merchants and shoppers pose on College Springs's main street, about 1910.

Wesleyan Methodist, and United Presbyterian (all had been involved in Amity's antislavery movement).

Amity's most obvious difference from neighboring communities was the college, officially chartered after 1871 as a full-fledged institution of higher learning. Although beset by financial worries and frequent changes in faculty, the college boasted a stylish brick building (heated by a steam boiler and lit by acetylene gas), a ladies hall, the earlier brick structure, and later a frame gymnasium. By the mid-1880s the approximately 150 students selected their studies from several educational options: scientific, art, commercial, music, and normal (teacher training) courses, explaining the college motto of "Arts, Religion, Science." Some graduates entered the ministry; others chose occupations ranging from medicine to education.

While there was no apparent feeling of despair among the citizenry of Amity (the town was in the 1870s appropriately renamed College Springs because of another Amity in the state), a pressing problem confronted residents. They had no railroad. Train service would give them a dependable means to reach Clarinda, the county seat; assist the college by having a convenient way for students, faculty, and visitors to travel; and promote commercial growth, especially the movement of livestock, grain, coal, lumber, and an array of consumer goods.

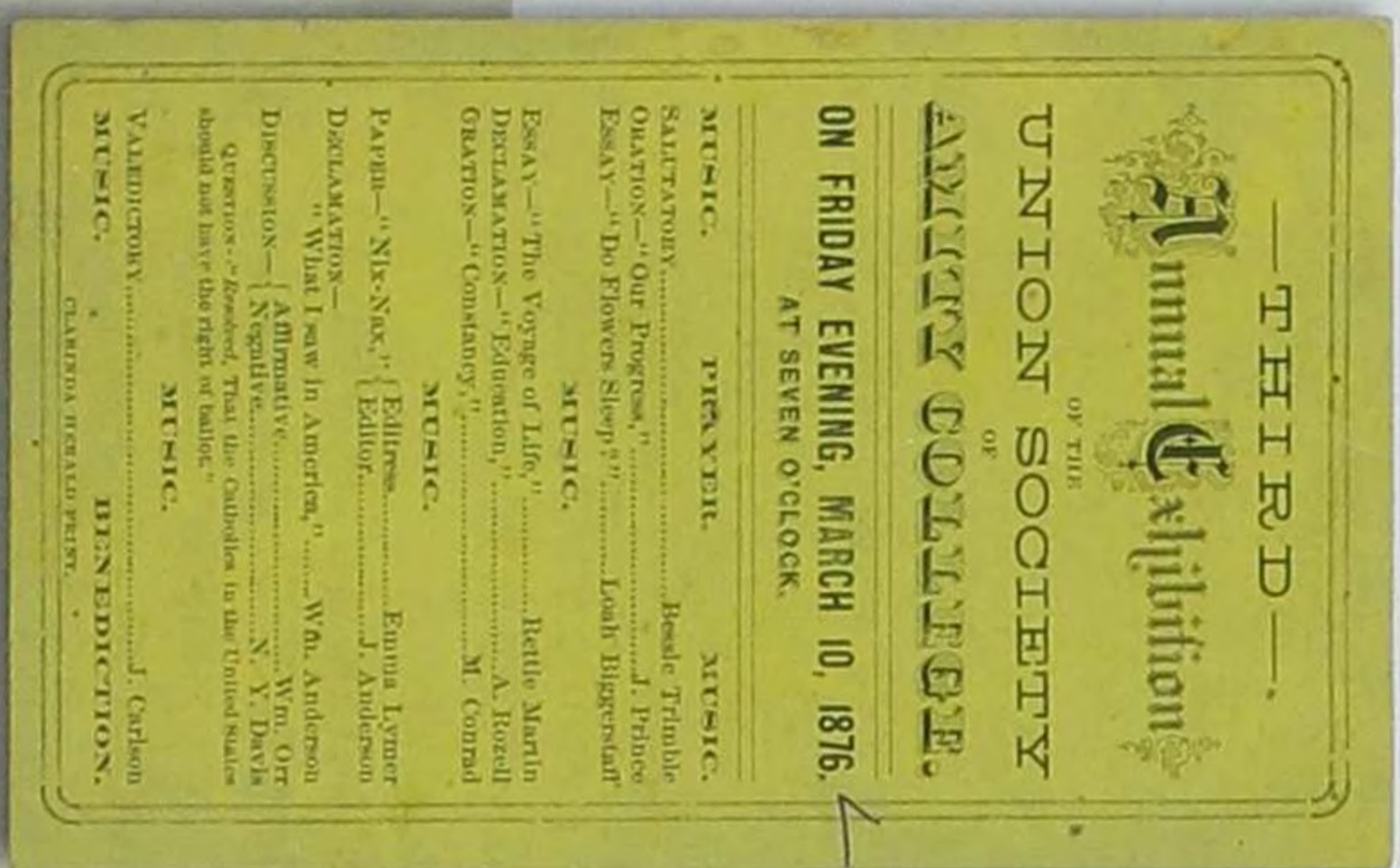
In the 1870s and 1880s rails reached a growing

These were hardly the thoughts of schemers seeking profits.

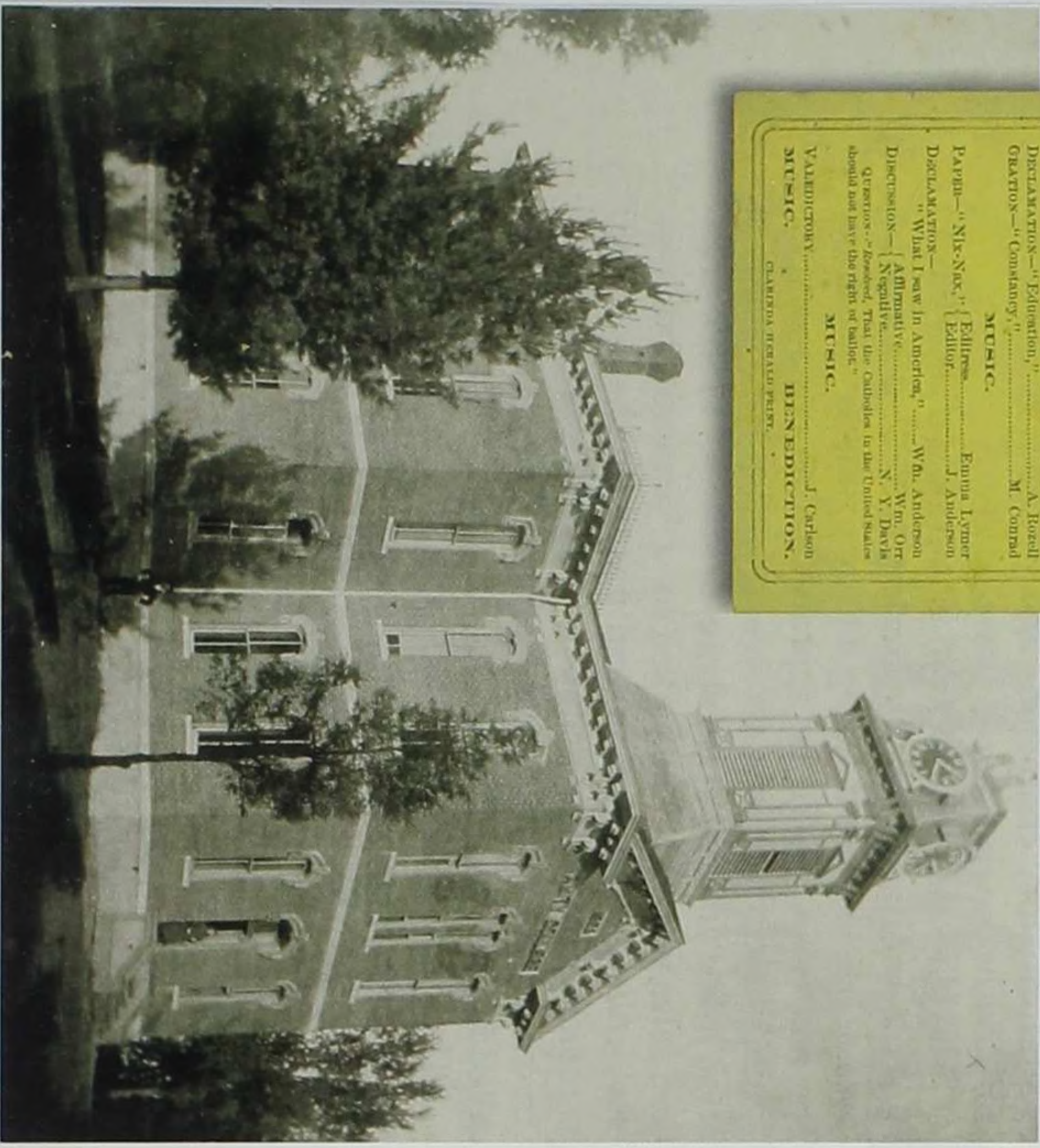
Action followed. The Haskins organization became the Western Industrial and Scientific Association, with a capitalization of \$30,000, and a committee sought out land. By November 1854 the colonists had taken control of 7,000 public acres at the minimum price in southern Page County, Iowa, near the Missouri border (and also additional lands in Cass County and in northern Missouri). In February 1855 the venture was incorporated and renamed the Amity Collegiate Association. The model village and township were also named Amity.

Amity and Amity College did not instantly spring up from the unbroken prairie, but its sponsors toiled mightily to make their dreams come true. The well-chosen townsite was largely level, adequately drained, and contained "a large, newer falling spring." Streets were staked out in a grid pattern, and wide diagonal streets radiated out of a public square. More land was set aside for the college and parks. The colony plan also featured traditional

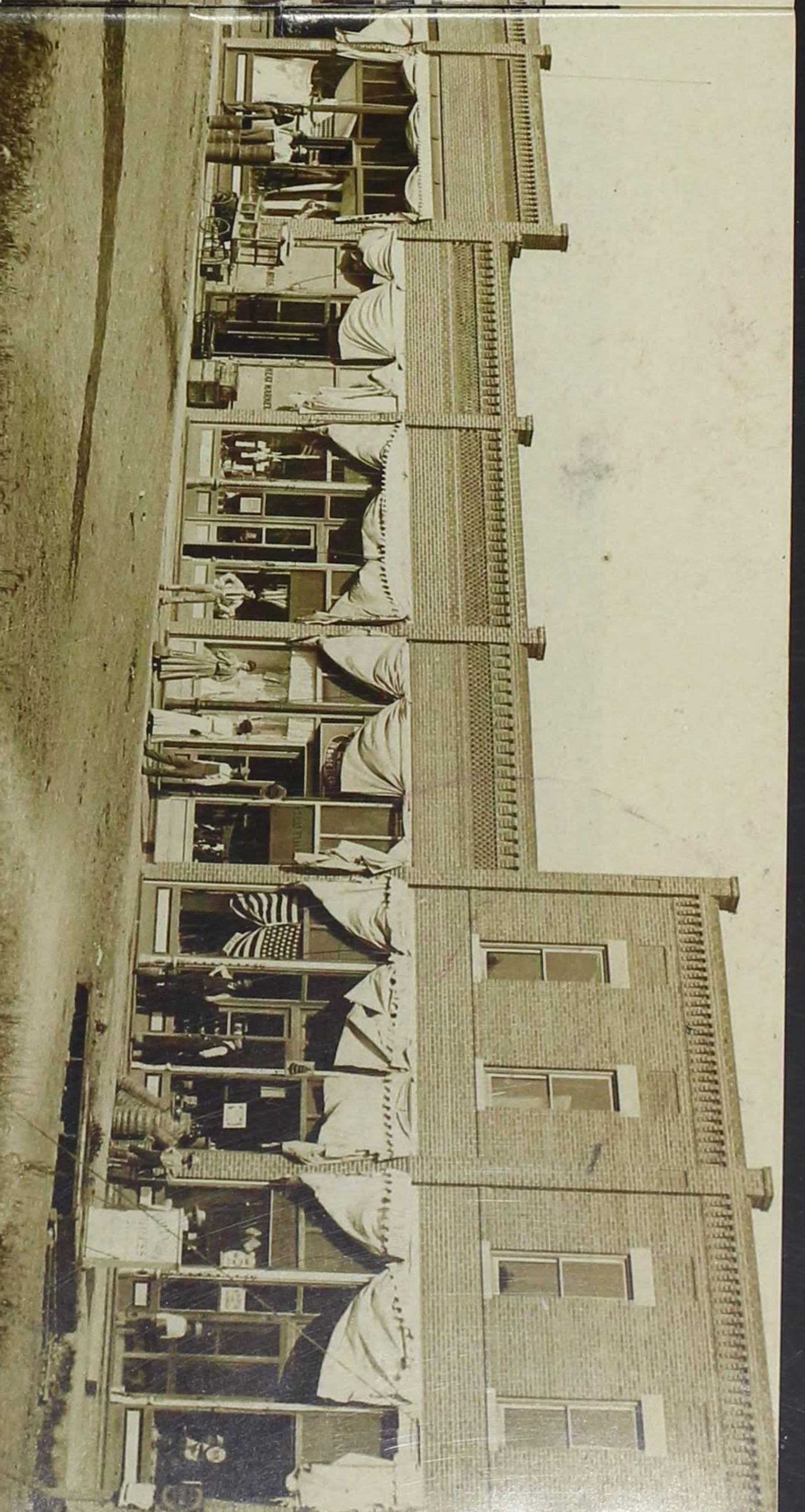
The center of Amity College in the 1870s was this elegant brick building.



BOTH IMAGES: SHSI (IOWA CITY)



4 Iowa Heritage Illustrated



LARRY POLSLEY COLLECTION

interior building lots and outlots that ranged from approximately 7 to 44 acres. Lot deeds required that owners plant shade trees to beautify the streetscape. By 1857 several structures had been erected, including the "college," a 22x28 foot single-story frame building readied for the first class of 20 males and 10 females. Resembling Knox College, the school, "our great future, [which] gives a liberal education to both sexes," became a pioneer in coeducation. Two years later work began on a larger two-story brick structure. Although this quasi-collegiate operation "was designed for the higher grades only, no pupils being below the age of fifteen," the school was really no more than an academy, broadening its curricula to include elementary-level subjects. The institution resembled other "colleges" scattered throughout the state, including the gestating and also coeducational Indianola Male and Female Seminary, the future Simpson College.

Amity College confronted daunting challenges, especially financing. Even though land sales generated endowment funds, scholarships awarded to shareholders drained resources. "Therefore to trade for a scholarship and thereby escape payment of tuition became an easy matter. This was meat for the buyer but famine for the school." And a bitter fight over prayers erupted between Presbyterians and Congregationalists, causing a split among school supporters and creation of a competing school in a nearby structure. "So small as it was, the town of Amity that year [1859] bore the peculiar distinction of having within its border two separate college-schools in full force, each presided over by

a most able instructor." The silliness of this dispute led to a truce, allowing Amity College to regain strength until the outbreak of the Civil War led to curtailment of upper-level classes. The brick edifice served as the public school between 1862 and 1864, and the college or academy did not resume operations until 1866. A reorganization that year created the Amity Academic Association, which leased the building for five years.

Just as the school sputtered, the village struggled. Unlike what had taken place in Galesburg, there was no surge in population. On the eve of the Civil War a boiler explosion wrecked the sole industry, a steam-powered sawmill, killing an employee and seriously injuring several others. During the war years, property values fell, grasshoppers ravaged nearby crops, and an exodus occurred. "Seven families from our town picked up their belongings and returned to their former homes—most of them in Illinois," recounted an early settler. "Some of our town's people were attracted by the Pike's Peak [gold] discovery about that time, and set out for their pot of gold at the end of the rainbow."

Once the war and slavery ended, Amity lost much of its utopian flavor, although the spirit of temperance remained strong. The town had no saloons or other places of sin and evil, and also there was no tolerance for secret societies, especially Freemasonry. These attitudes fit nicely with the four churches that led local spiritual life: Congregational, Methodist Episcopal,

Merchants and shoppers pose on College Springs's main street, about 1910.

Wesleyan Methodist, and United Presbyterian (all had been involved in Amity's antislavery movement).

Amity's most obvious difference from neighboring communities was the college, officially chartered after 1871 as a full-fledged institution of higher learning. Although beset by financial worries and frequent changes in faculty, the college boasted a stylish brick building (heated by a steam boiler and lit by acetylene gas), a ladies hall, the earlier brick structure, and later a frame gymnasium. By the mid-1880s the approximately 150 students selected their studies from several educational options: scientific, art, commercial, music, and normal (teacher training) courses, explaining the college motto of "Arts, Religion, Science." Some graduates entered the ministry; others chose occupations ranging from medicine to education.

While there was no apparent feeling of despair among the citizenry of Amity (the town was in the 1870s appropriately renamed College Springs because of another Amity in the state), a pressing problem confronted residents. They had no railroad. Train service would give them a dependable means to reach Clarinda, the county seat; assist the college by having a convenient way for students, faculty, and visitors to travel; and promote commercial growth, especially the movement of livestock, grain, coal, lumber, and an array of consumer goods.

In the 1870s and 1880s rails reached a growing

number of other area communities. The Chicago, Burlington & Quincy (Burlington) and Wabash railroads laced parts of Page County, but not College Springs or the surrounding Amity Township. Citizens felt elated when the Clarinda, College Springs & South Western Railroad was projected through College Springs, but the Burlington, on a branch-line building blitz in Iowa, decided that this road, which it controlled, would extend from Clarinda through Page Center and Coin to a connection with its Tarkio Valley branch at Northboro. This route missed by a dozen miles the town honored in its corporate name. A nearby Missouri newspaper suggested tongue-in-cheek that the loss gave its residents an option: "The only thing that remains for them is to let some responsible party have the contract of moving their town to Blanchard," a growing community recently established on Wabash rails about six miles away.

Even without a railroad and notwithstanding the five troubled years sparked by the Panic of 1893, College Springs grew and Amity College survived. New businesses bolstered community pride, as did the launching of a weekly newspaper, the *Current Press*. After 1900, a widespread upsurge in agricultural prices and land values began, which would continue through World War I. The population rose from 491 in 1890 to 693 in 1900. College enrollment stood steady at approximately 200 students.

But in early 1901, fire—the scourge of communities—struck. "COLLEGE SPRINGS IN ASHES!" screamed the *Current Press*. "Greatest Fire In the History Of The Town. Everything Between McLean's Store and Methodist Parsonage Burned. Loss Will Exceed \$40,000; Insurance Less Than Half That Amount." In the unhappy account, editor J. G. McCormick described the event. "It is our sad duty this week to chronicle the destruction of the best business portion of our little city. The town was without fire protection and so when the fire got a good start it swept the town like tinder." Although efforts by community responders to use bucket brigades and wet blankets did little good, fire fighters showed real imagination. "A piece of strategy in quickly tearing away the Hullinger building and topping the post office into the fire after its contents had been removed only made it possible to save McLean's store."

Notwithstanding the conflagration, the business district rose phoenix-like from the charred remains. A brick "business row" of more than a dozen stores and shops took shape, and the Methodist Church, which the flames also consumed, was rebuilt. William Smith

Farquhar, a prominent farmer, soon opened the Farquhar Savings Bank, the town's first financial institution. Perhaps the remarkable recovery from the fire helped to renew railroad enthusiasm.

This happened to be the time of "twilight rails" in the Midwest, a series of last-ditch railroad projects, including some that employed the recently perfected electric interurban. "One thing is a certainty," opined the *Current Press*, "and that is: Page county is wealthy enough, and thickly settled enough to make it an object for some electric railway line or lines to engage here in business."

But these electric dreams went unrealized. It would not be until the latter part of 1908, when the Panic of 1907 had mostly run its course, that there was renewed hope among area residents for at least a short-distance electric line, likely extending the 17 miles between Clarinda, College Springs, and Blanchard. Helping to achieve this traction quest were the owners of the Engineering, Construction & Securities Co. of Chicago, a small firm that became involved in several electric and steam railroad projects in southern and western Iowa.

At organizational meetings held on the Amity campus, the railroad scheme took shape. College Springs residents opened their pocketbooks to finance what became the Iowa & Southwestern Railway, dubbed for some inexplicable reason the "Ikey." And they received support from the surrounding area. Stung by the arrogance of a Burlington monopoly, Clarinda passed a special tax assessment and its citizens purchased debt and equity securities. Blanchard residents, who wanted a direct route to Clarinda, also invested. But it was College Springs and the immediate environs that proportionally contributed the most—\$300,000 [about \$7 million in today's dollars]. Backers, however, opted for a steam rather than an electric road, a decision that saved tens of thousands of dollars.

After fits and starts, construction began in 1910. But installing track did not commence until the latter part of 1911. To receive Clarinda's tax money, the rails had to reach that town by the end of 1911. Fortunately, the deadline was met on a bitterly cold December 30, as the construction train whistled into the corporate limits of the Page County seat.

Just as every twilight railroad in the Midwest caused an initial wave of real-estate gains and economic expansion, the arrival of the "steam-car civilization" energized College Springs. Although Blanchard and Clarinda benefited from Ikey rails, the epicenter of development was College Springs. "The 'Athens' of Page County is beginning to wake up," correctly observed a Clarinda journalist. The Green Bay Lumber

COURTESY JAMIE BERANEK



Passengers wait at the College Springs depot, about 1914. The grain elevator rises behind it. In recent years the depot was moved to the grounds of Clarinda's Nodaway Valley Historical Museum.

Company, a major regional chain, came to town. "College Springs has long been in need of a lumber yard," observed the *Current Press*, "and now we have one, conducted by a good reliable firm." Turner Brothers, based in Red Oak and owner of several grain elevators, erected College Springs's first grain facility. It sported a 10,000-bushel storage capacity, "but it will be capable of handling daily, if necessary 30,000 bushels of grain and so constructed that the largest [railroad] car may be loaded without shoveling." Then Clarinda's Lee Electric Company received a 25-year franchise to provide electricity. And Wells Fargo Express Company began service, paying the Ikey depot agent to represent the firm. "This will be a great convenience for College Springs people as it will save the trouble of having their express hauled over from Coin or Clarinda." A local landowner cashed in by selling "good one acre lots" in the north part of town, and reports followed that carpenters had contracts for five new houses. Townspeople and college students alike applauded the opening of a "first-class" restaurant. Soon, too, a bandstand appeared in the central park, and the town organized its own summer Chautauqua program.

In August 1912, the editor of the *Clarinda Herald*



LARRY POLSLEY COLLECTION

Amity College students brave frigid weather to board the Ikey in College Springs.

visited College Springs and updated his readers on this lively place. "Mr. A. M. Abbott has a large double store and does a big business in furniture, hardware and undertaking. He keeps four regular men busy waiting on customers." A smart \$600 marble soda fountain gleamed in Dr. S. E. McClymonds's drug store. In his dry goods, shoe, and grocery store, William Jacobson stocked merchandise "probably valued at \$12,000 or \$15,000." R. A. Hawthorne, a newcomer from Nebraska, operated the Amity Store, which "handles books, stationery, men's furnishing, and talking machines [which] will undoubtedly appeal to the discriminating buyer." Other shops also earned the editor's praise. Prospects looked bright, indeed. "[Realtor Steele] Finley says that since the new railroad has been built there are a number of well to do families thinking of locating at the Springs with a view of obtaining educational and other advantages."

But bad luck befell College Springs. Amity College, never a dynamic institution, soon faced a fatal crisis over leadership, faculty, and finances, which triggered its closing in spring 1914. But the educational picture was not all gloom. Three years later a \$65,000 bond issue passed for construction of a public grade and high school. The board of the defunct Amity College donated the real estate and other assets to the school district, and residents contributed \$1,500, "as a matter of sentiment," to house the old college clock in the tower of the new three-story brick school.

As the college died, the railroad faltered. Early on there had been encouraging signs. Traveling salesmen (or "drummers") preferred rail access to the town instead of renting a horse and buggy. At times there had been enough passengers to fill the Ikey's lone coach and occasionally the railroad borrowed equipment from the connecting Wabash. Routinely the Ikey shipped out farm commodities and brought in coal, lumber, and other freight. But from the outset the railroad faced a hostile Burlington, resulting in lengthy litigation over rate divisions and reciprocal switching rights in Clarinda. Burlington officials seemed determined not to share revenues with the upstart shortline, and it took nearly two years for the Ikey to get regulatory redress. Inefficient management also plagued the Ikey, as did outdated, second-hand locomotives with their inadequate pulling power and poorly constructed earthen roadbed fills. Tardy arrival and departure times characterized operations, assuming that trains ran at all. Forced into receivership in 1915, the Ikey was reorganized a year later. There were rumors (and hope)



that the Wabash would buy the property, but that did not happen. Another reorganization went nowhere, and the railroad continued to hemorrhage red ink.

By the eve of World War I, the Ikey was nearly out of service. Yet an enterprising College Springs resident transported the U.S. mails and package shipments by laboriously using a handcar. Later he acquired a truck, fixed with flanged wheels, so that it, too, could run on the deteriorating track structure, thus handling "the freight business as well as the mail and express." But the need for scrap metal during the war prompted the railroad's owners to abandon the line. It was a wise decision, being both a patriotic act and cashing in on high junk prices.

Amity College and the Ikey were dead. Surprisingly, the double blow did not trigger the immediate demise of College Springs. Businesses that had benefited from the railroad did not close their doors. The elevator, which now stood astride the naked grade, moved grain by wagon and truck to nearby towns, and the depot became a private residence. "College Springs was a flourishing little town in the 1920s notwithstanding it was an inland town with no railroad and dirt roads in all directions," remembered a resident whose family had operated Stanton Brothers Store. "There was a bank, a hardware store, a drug store, a dry goods store, at least one other grocery store, a restaurant, several small shops including two barber shops and a lumber yard on the edge of town."

But changing modes of transportation, the Great Depression, the intense drought of the mid-1930s, pop-



When the short-lived Ikey came to an end, the crews that lifted the rails through College Springs employed a modern truck that was capable of traveling on the track.

ulation shifts to larger towns, and the trend towards bigger farms took their toll. By 2010 the Census Bureau reported fewer than 220 residents, making College Springs a good candidate for becoming a poster child for the badly broken small communities of Iowa and the nation. A tangible indication of a dying place had occurred in November 1990 when volunteers from seven area fire departments supervised the controlled burning of most of the town's old commercial district.

This planned destruction, however, permitted construction of a much-needed, centrally located community hall. Still, a town icon remained; the bandstand built in 1912 stands in the public park.

Nevertheless, the utopian past of College Springs left a legacy. Writing in 1930, Donald Murphy, editor of *Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead*, sensed that College Springs and Amity Township were not typically Iowan. He described briefly the town's past, focusing on its educational heritage then represented by that splendid school. Murphy concluded that the community's history, especially its commitment to learning, made it different. "This tradition is carrying on. Amity [Township] takes pride in having folks who read books, who value education in music, who send their children thru high school and college and who support the church." That heritage remained long after Murphy penned these observations. But certainly, too, residents of this quickly faded utopia experienced some nasty setbacks, much more pronounced than its historic sister community, Galesburg, ever encountered, and best seen in those disappointing collegiate and railroad experiences. College Springs should be remembered as that hard-luck town—but one with a distinct past. ❖

H. Roger Grant, a native of Albia, Iowa, is a transportation historian who teaches at Clemson University in South Carolina. His most recent book, Railroads and the American People, is forthcoming from Indiana University Press.

NOTE ON SOURCES

Sources consulted on Galesburg and Knox College include these: *Atlas Map of Knox County, Illinois* (Davenport, IA: Andreas, Lyter & Co., 1875); *Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois and Knox County* (Chicago: Munsell Publishing Co., 1899); *History of Knox County, Illinois* (Chicago: Blakely, Brown & Marsh, 1878); and Albert J. Perry, *History of Knox County, Illinois: Its Cities, Towns and People* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1912).

Regarding Amity/College Springs and Page County, see: "Plat of Amity, Page County, Iowa, June 20, 1856," Knox College Archives, Galesburg, IL; *Clarinda Herald*, *Current Press*, *Page County Democrat*, *Winterset Madisionian*, and *Atchison County [Rock Port, MO] Journal*; James Patrick Morgans, *John Todd and the Underground Railroad* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2006); Elaine Christensen, letter to author with Nov. 14, 1990, clipping; and Donald Murphy, "Amity Township Makes Its Mark," *Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead*, Nov. 15, 1930, p. 1799. Local and county histories include these: *A History of Amity College, College Springs, Iowa* (Bedford, IA: Waubonsie Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, 1977); *History of Page County, Iowa* (Des Moines, IA: Iowa Historical Co., 1880); and W. L. Kershaw, *History of Page County, Iowa* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Pub. Co., 1909). These sources in the Nodaway Valley Historical Museum in Clarinda were helpful: Esther Morris, *Grandpa's Legacy: Short Stories of My Life* (n.p., 2001); Clark T. Smith, "Boyhood Recollections Connected with the Early History of Amity" (1921); and undated clippings.

For railroad history, see: W. W. Baldwin, comp., *Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company: A Documentary History* (Chicago: Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Co., 1929); Ray L. Bryant, comp., *A Preliminary Guide to Iowa Railroads, 1850-1972* (Iowa City: Bryant, 1984); *Electric Railway Journal* 34 (July 3, 1909), 57; H. Roger Grant, "Iowa's Brightest Railway Project: The Creston, Winterset & Des Moines Railroad, 1907-1920," *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* 89 (Fall 2008); J. W. Kendrick, "Report of Valuation, Iowa & Southwestern Railway, April 15, 1915," John W. Barriger III Papers, St. Louis Mercantile Library, St. Louis; Richard C. Overton, *Burlington Route: A History of the Burlington Lines* (New York: Knopf, 1965); and the 36th and 38th annual reports of the Board of Railroad Commissioners (Des Moines: State Printer, 1914 and 1916).

Amity, Iowa, would not be the only utopian or quasi-utopian venture with that name. In the late 1890s the Salvation Army created a farm colony in Colorado known as Fort Amity or Amity. See Clark C. Spence, *The Salvation Army Farm Colonies* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985).

Complete annotations for this article are housed in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files (SHSI-Iowa City).

visited College Springs and updated his readers on this lively place. "Mr. A. M. Abbott has a large double store and does a big business in furniture, hardware and undertaking. He keeps four regular men busy waiting on customers." A smart \$600 marble soda fountain gleamed in Dr. S. E. McClymonds's drug store. In his dry goods, shoe, and grocery store, William Jacobson stocked merchandise "probably valued at \$12,000 or \$15,000." R. A. Hawthorne, a newcomer from Nebraska, operated the Amity Store, which "handles books, stationery, men's furnishing, and talking machines [which] will undoubtedly appeal to the discriminating buyer." Other shops also earned the editor's praise. Prospects looked bright, indeed. "[Realtor Steele] Finley says that since the new railroad has been built there are a number of well-to-do families thinking of locating at the Springs with a view of obtaining educational and other advantages."

But bad luck befell College Springs. Amity College, never a dynamic institution, soon faced a fatal crisis over leadership, faculty, and finances, which triggered its closing in spring 1914. But the educational picture was not all gloom. Three years later a \$65,000 bond issue passed for construction of a public grade and high school. The board of the defunct Amity College donated the real estate and other assets to the school district, and residents contributed \$1,500, "as a matter of sentiment" to house the old college clock in the tower of the new three-story brick school.

As the college died, the railroad faltered. Early on there had been encouraging signs. Traveling salesmen (or "drummers") preferred rail access to the town instead of renting a horse and buggy. At times there had been enough passengers to fill the Ikey's lone coach and occasionally the railroad borrowed equipment from the connecting Wabash. Routinely the Ikey shipped out farm commodities and brought in coal, lumber, and other freight. But from the outset the railroad faced a hostile Burlington, resulting in lengthy litigation over rate divisions and reciprocal switching rights in Clarinda. Burlington officials seemed determined not to share revenues with the upstart shortline, and it took nearly two years for the Ikey to get regulatory redress. Inefficient management also plagued the Ikey, as did outdated, second-hand locomotives with their inadequate pulling power and poorly constructed earthen roadbed fills. Tardy arrival and departure times characterized operations, assuming that trains ran at all. Forced into receivership in 1915, the Ikey was reorganized a year later. There were rumors (and hope)



LARRY POLSLEY COLLECTION

This planned destruction, however, permitted construction of a much-needed, centrally located community hall. Still, a town icon remained: the bandstand built in 1912 stands in the public park.

Nevertheless, the utopian past of College Springs left a legacy. Writing in 1930, Donald Murphy, editor of *Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead*, sensed that College Springs and Amity Township were not typically Iowan. He described briefly the town's past, focusing on its educational heritage then represented by that splendid school. Murphy concluded that the community's history, especially its commitment to learning, made it different: "This tradition is carrying on. Amity [Township] takes pride in having folks who read books, who value education in music, who send their children thru high school and college and who support the church." That heritage remained long after Murphy penned these observations. But certainly, too, residents of this quickly faded utopia experienced some nasty setbacks, much more pronounced than its historic sister community, Galesburg, ever encountered, and best seen in those disappointing collegiate and railroad experiences. College Springs should be remembered as that hard-luck town—but one with a distinct past. ❖

H. Roger Grant, a native of Albia, Iowa, is a transportation historian who teaches at Clemson University in South Carolina. His most recent book, *Railroads and the American People, is forthcoming from Indiana University Press.*

NOTE ON SOURCES

Sources consulted on Galesburg and Knox College include these: Atlas Map of Knox County, Illinois (Davenport, IA: Andreas, Lyer & Co., 1875); *Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois and Knox County* (Chicago: Munsell Publishing Co., 1899); *History of Knox County, Illinois* (Chicago: Blakey, Brown & Marsh, 1878); and Albert J. Perry, *History of Knox County, Illinois: Its Cities, Towns and People* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1912). Regarding Amity/College Springs and Page County, see: "Plat of Amity, Page County," *Register and Advertiser* (Rock Port, MO) *Journal*; James Patrick Morgan, John Todd and the Underground Railroad (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2006); Elaine Christensen, letter to author with Nov. 14, 1990, clipping; and Donald Murphy, "Amity Township Makes Its Mark," *Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead*, Nov. 15, 1930, p. 1799. Local and county histories include these: *A History of Amity College, College Springs, Iowa* (Bedford, IA: Waboussie Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, 1977); *History of Page County, Iowa* (Des Moines, IA: Iowa Historical Co., 1880); and W. L. Kerstow, *History of Page County, Iowa* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Pub. Co., 1909). These sources in the Nedarway Valley Historical Museum in Clarinda were helpful. Esther Morris Grandpa's legacy, *Short Stories of My Life* (n.p., 2001); Clark T. Smith, "Boyhood Recollections: Connected with the Early History of Amity" (1921); and undated clippings. For railroad history, see W.W. Baldwin, comp., *Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Company: A Documentary History* (Chicago: Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad Co., 1929); Ray L. Bryant, comp., *A Preliminary Guide to Iowa Railroads, 1850-1972* (Iowa City: Bryant, 1984); *Electric Railway Journal* 34 (July 3, 1909), 57; H. Roger Grant, "Iowa's Brightest Railway Project: The Creston, Writerset & Des Moines Railroad, 1907-1920," *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* 89 (Fall 2008); W. Kendrick "Report on Valuation, Iowa & Southwestern Railway, April 15, 1915," John W. Barriger III Papers, St. Louis Mercantile Library; St. Louis, Richard C. Overton, *Burlington Route: A History of the Burlington Lines* (New York: Knopf, 1965); and the 36th and 38th annual reports of the Board of Railroad Commissioners (Des Moines: State Printer, 1914 and 1916). Amity, Iowa, would not be the only utopian or quasi-utopian venture with that name. In the late 1890s the Salvation Army created a farm colony in Colorado known as Fort Amity or Amity. See Clark C. Spence, *The Salvation Army Farm Colonies* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985). Complete annotations for this article are housed in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files (SHS-Iowa City).

that the Wabash would buy the property, but that did not happen. Another reorganization went nowhere, and the railroad continued to hemorrhage red ink.

By the eve of World War I, the Ikey was nearly out of service. Yet an enterprising College Springs resident laboriously using a handcar. Later he acquired a truck, fixed with flanged wheels, so that it, too, could run on the deteriorating track structure, thus handling "the freight business as well as the mail and express." But the need for scrap metal during the war prompted the railroad's owners to abandon the line. It was a wise decision, being both a patriotic act and cashing in on high junk prices.

Amity College and the Ikey were dead. Surprisingly, the double blow did not trigger the immediate demise of College Springs. Businesses that had benefited from the railroad did not close their doors. The elevator, which now stood astride the naked grade, moved grain by wagon and truck to nearby towns, and the depot became a private residence. "College Springs was a flourishing little town in the 1920s notwithstanding it was an inland town with no railroad and dirt roads in all directions," remembered a resident whose family had operated Stanton Brothers Store. "There was a bank, a hardware store, a drug store, a dry goods store, at least one other grocery store, a restaurant, several small shops including two barber shops and a lumber yard on the edge of town."

But changing modes of transportation, the Great Depression, the intense drought of the mid-1930s, pop-