

Abbie Gardner Sharp • Log Cabins • Rocket Slide • Fred Stice's Carvings • Japanese Sister State
SUMMER 2001 • \$6

Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED



Front Porch

Dear Readers:

This issue's "One in a Million" department, on the inside back cover, actually spotlights eight items—instead of one—from the millions in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa. Jack Lufkin, one of our museum curators, first brought them to my attention. He and I agreed that the butter boxes were just too pretty to choose only one for the back page.

Just too pretty, and just too important, as editorial intern Lori Vermaas explains in the accompanying text. In decades past, these boxes were the colorful packaging for Iowa butter produced at Iowa creameries, many of them cooperatively owned by local farmers.

Before that, much Iowa butter was produced on individual farms by farm women. Early in the century, for instance, my maternal grandmother, Lena Arp, made butter on her farm near New Liberty, Iowa. My mom described to me how her mother patiently churned the cream until it "clunked," then put the butter in molds and swirled a design into the top of each (the design was what most impressed my mom). Grandma Arp cooled the butter in the parlor (which was seldom used and seldom heated) and then sold it in town. "It was just so pretty," my mom remembered.

Flash forward to 1947. Now my father and mother are operating their own farm, near Walcott, Iowa. They no longer make butter, but

they do sell cream. I know this because my father kept every one of the 1947 "cream tickets" he received from the Durant Farmers Creamery Association, to whom he sold his cream. Every other week he was paid for the cream. In the middle of winter, the checks were the lowest (only \$21 in mid-January). But in late spring and early summer of 1947, while the cows were calving and the pastures growing lush, his semi-monthly payments peaked at \$88—a hefty \$750 in today's dollars. Although the amounts varied by season, cream checks came in regularly throughout the year—unlike the infrequent income from selling crops or livestock.

Here's what I remember about cream and butter on the farm (maybe some of you have similar memories). The first was the cream separator in our cellar. The little spigots and valves and the big shiny silver bowl entranced me—but not my older siblings, who had to clean them.

The second memory was that although we no longer churned our own cream into butter, we did steadfastly buy butter at the store—never margarine. My family still jokes about the time some old friends came to call. As the adults visited in the front room, we kids played outside. And then around 10 p.m., before they headed home, we all sat down for the inevitable "bite to eat." (Not much—just sandwiches, cheese, pickles, jello, cakes, cookies, coffee!) One of the kids made himself a thick ham sandwich and took

one bite. A look of pure heaven came over his face. He asked in wonder, "Is this butter?!"

Well, of course. No margarine in our farmhouse! Butter in the cookies we made, butter on the bread we ate. It wasn't my grandmother's beautifully molded butter, but it was from a local creamery and packaged in a box similar to those featured in "One in a Million."

My third personal association with butter and cream relates to an automatic reflex my family developed around pouring milk. Because some of the milk from our dairy herd came straight to our supper table, we always automatically shook the milk bottle before pouring, so that the cream that had risen to the top would be mixed back in. Shaking it was second nature, and it made a nice slooshy, chuggy sound in the bottle.

Five years after my mom and my sister and I had moved into town and were buying milk from the grocery store, I was still automatically shaking those bottles before pouring myself a glass of ice cold milk. Old habits die hard, and a farm kid's appreciation for butter and cream never dies.

I'm sure you'll enjoy this issue. And I'm not just buttering you up.

—The editor

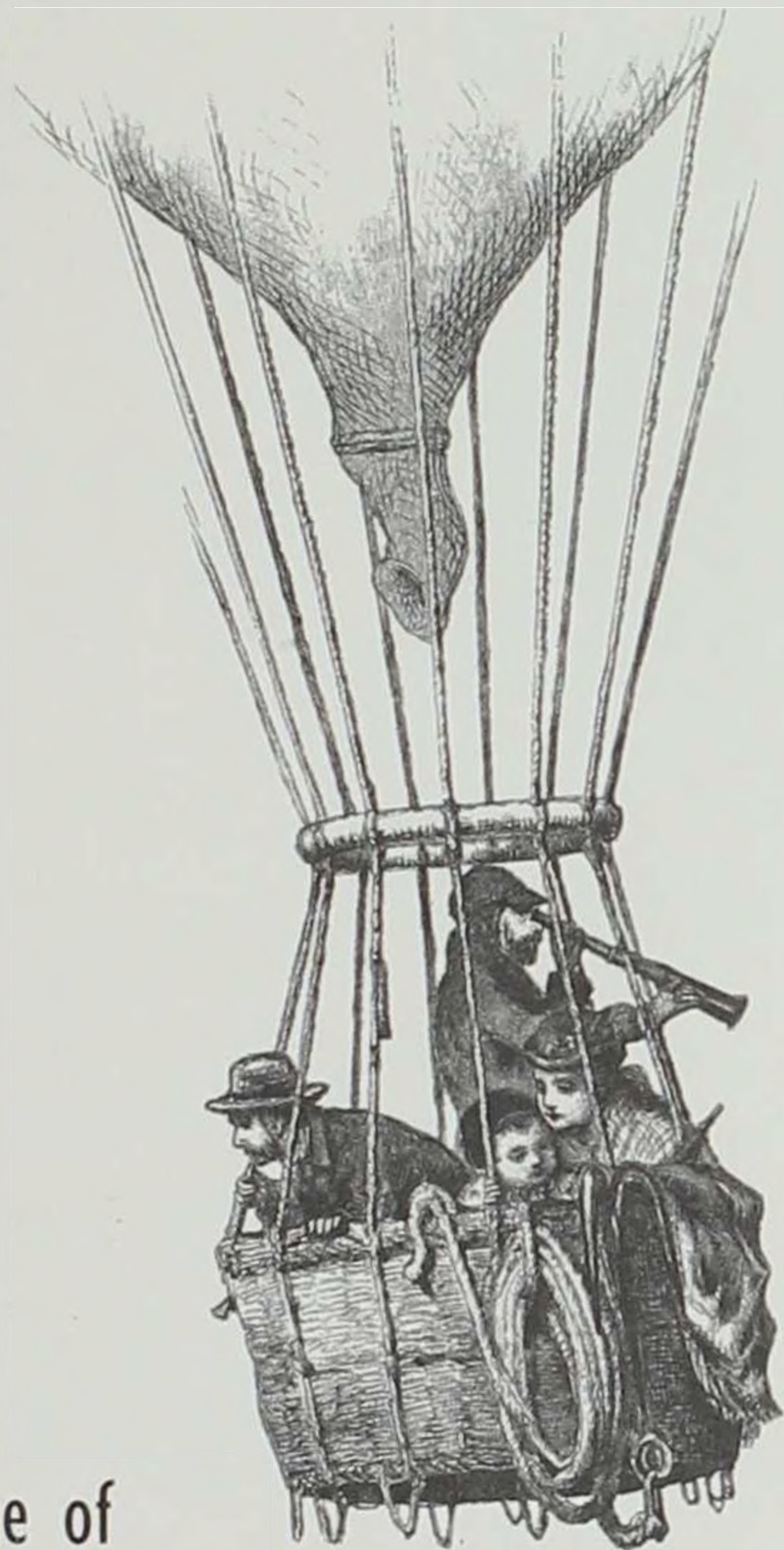
Share your thoughts with the editor and readers here on the "Front Porch" page. Send letters to Ginalie Swaim, editor, *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*, State Historical Society of Iowa, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, IA 52240. Or e-mail at: gswaim@blue.weeg.uiowa.edu. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

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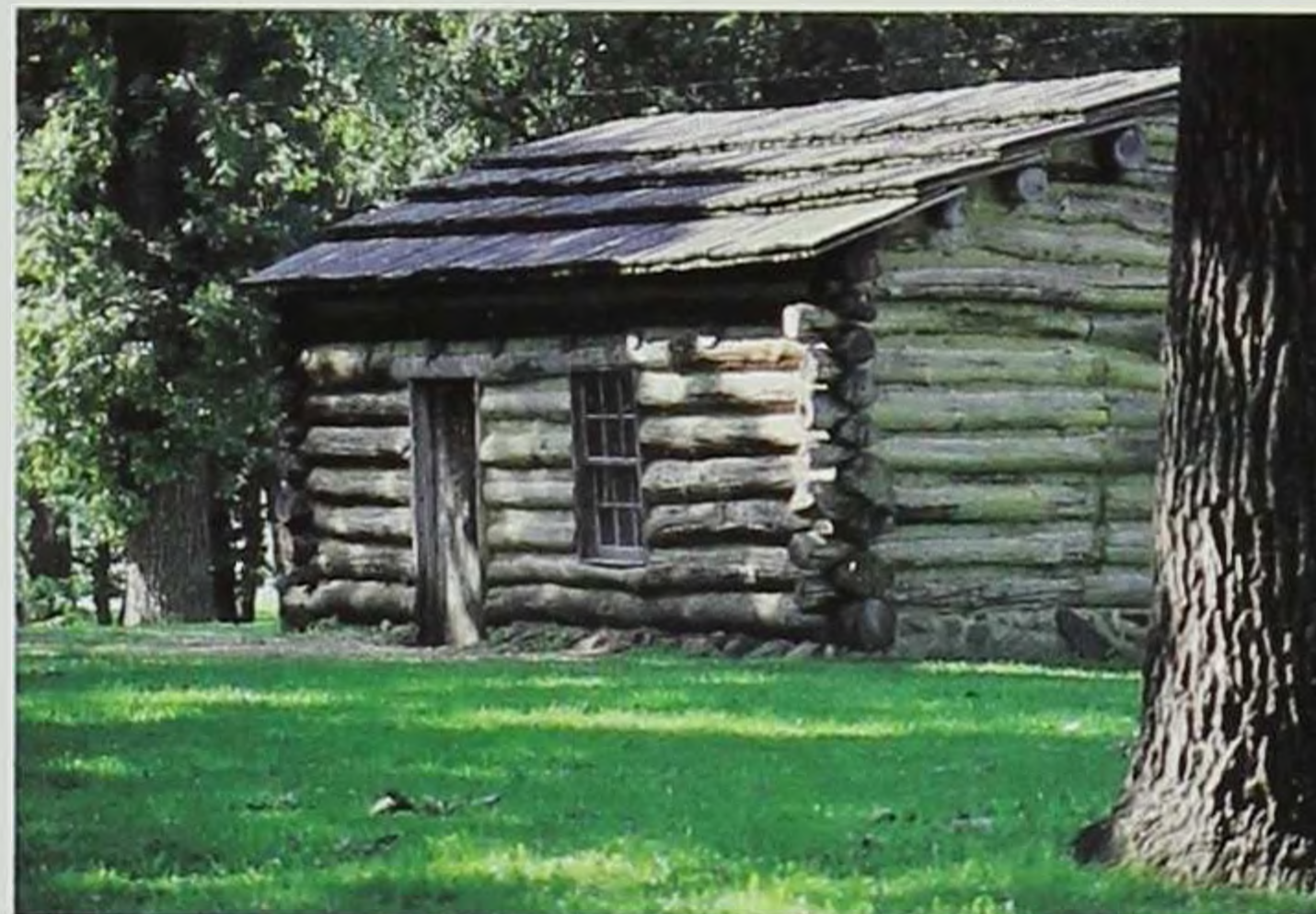
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SHSI: ROGER MUNNS



50 Space Age slide

MIKE WHYE



56 Gardner cabin

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Formerly The Palimpsest

Summer 2001, Vol. 82, No. 2

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On the Cover

At Iowa's Abbie Gardner Cabin Historic Site, tipi poles and an 1856 log cabin remind visitors that the area was home to both Native American tribes and European American settlers. This issue explores the complex story of Abbie Gardner Sharp, the "Spirit Lake Massacre," and the preservation and promotion of settlement history in Iowa.



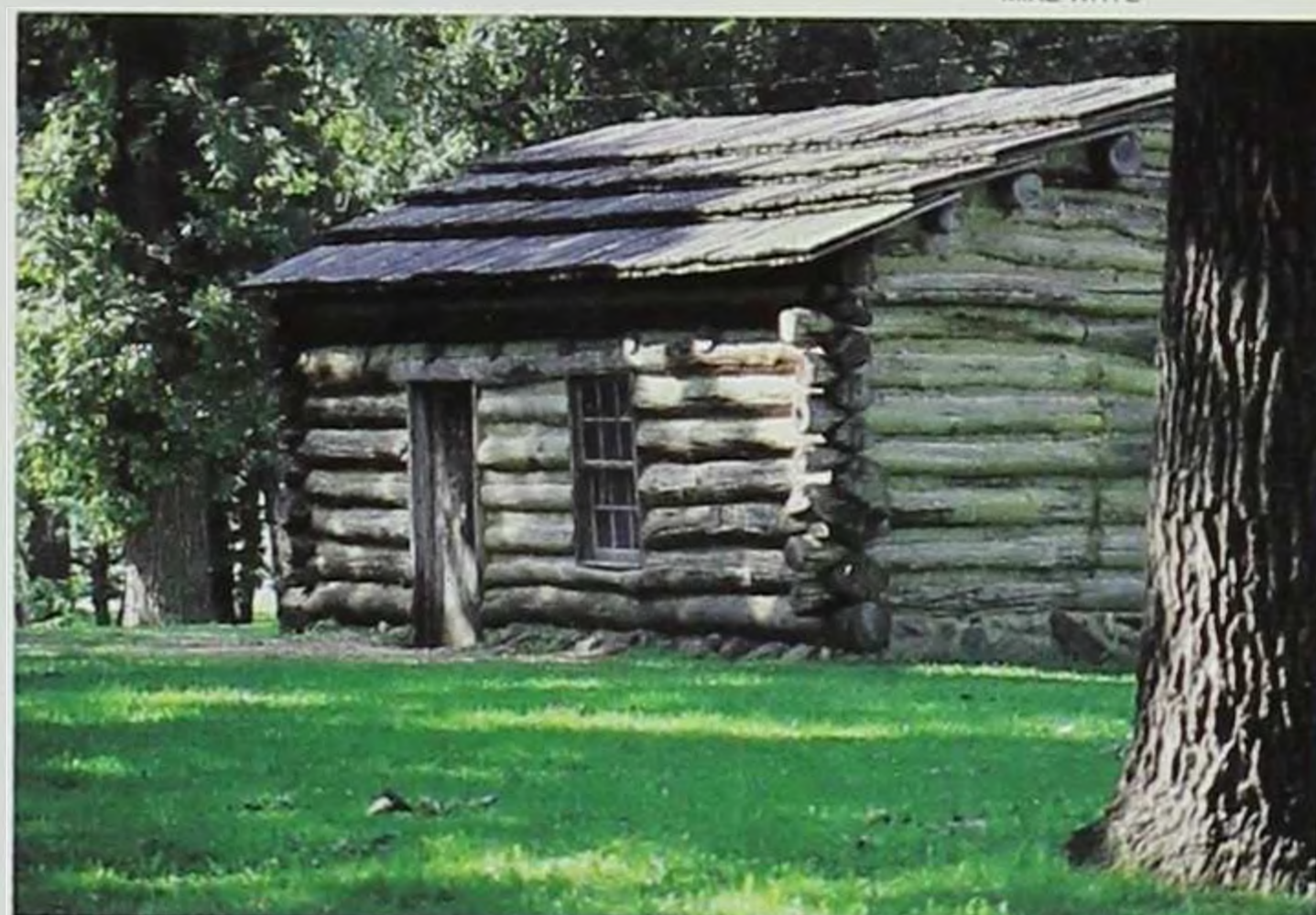
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92 Iowa's "bell of friendship"

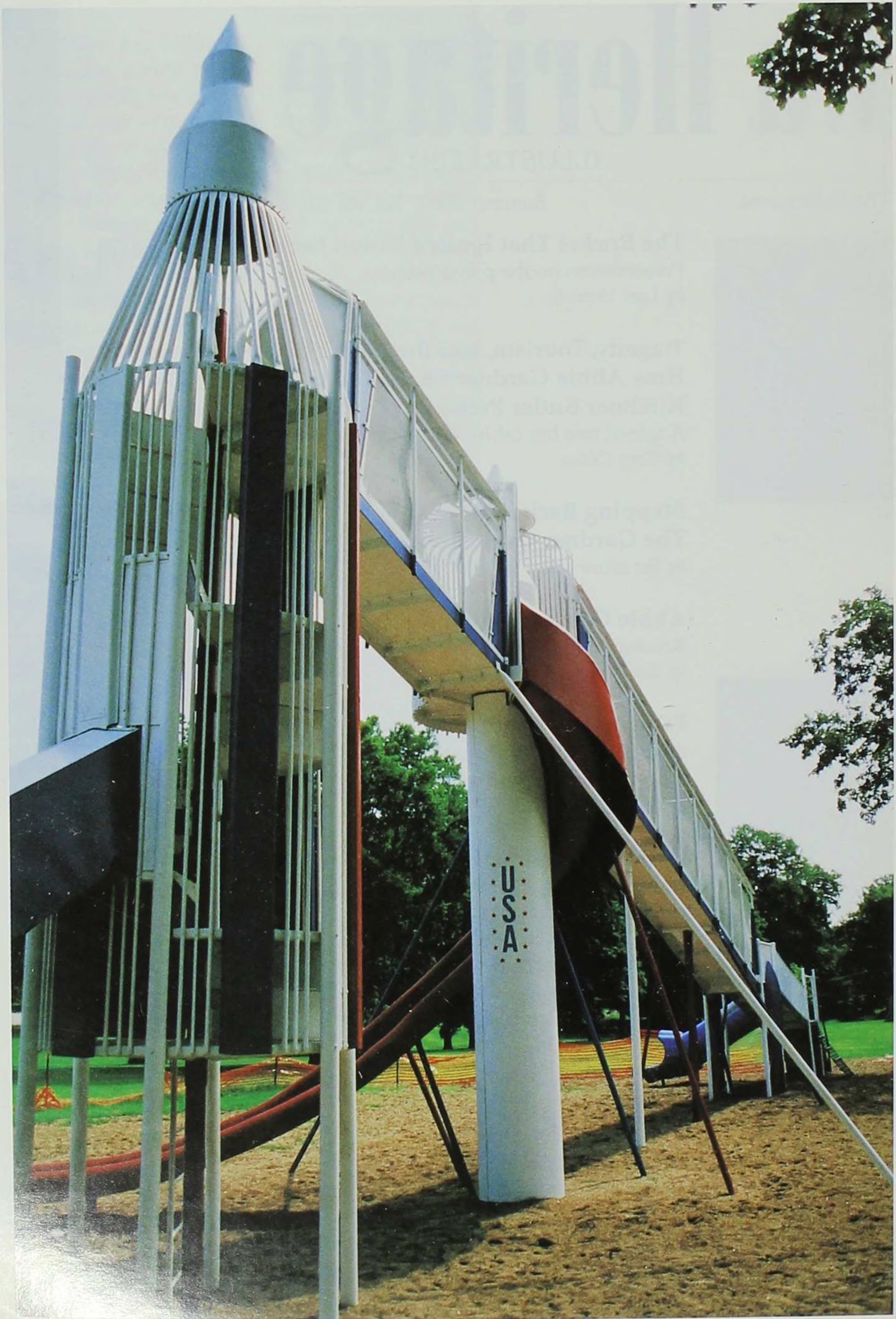


56 Gardner cabin

MIKE WHYE

SHSI: ROGER MUNNS

JOHN ZELLER



SHS: PHOTO BY ROGER MUNNS

THE ROCKET THAT IGNITED UNION PARK

BY LORI VERMAAS

Many residents of Des Moines's northeastern neighborhoods call it a landmark. Children revere its uniqueness, a nine-year-old expertly once claiming that "it's not like any other around." Citizens champion its preservation. Towering 33 feet, the red-white-and-blue slide in Union Park certainly is unlike most historic structures.

The "rocket slide," as it is popularly known, is actually a sprawling, 92-foot-long playground climbing apparatus. It contains three slides: one linked to a spiral staircase coiled inside the main rocket structure; another that twists down from the caged hub of its 60-foot connecting ramp; and a small tunnel slide that shoots off a platform at the ramp's base. In 1992, about two decades after the rocket slide was installed in Union Park, the prospect of its removal ignited a firestorm of protest from the community. Indeed, the story of its repair and preservation confirms the rocket slide's value as a recreational and nostalgic object for Iowans of all ages. But its design and creation as playground equipment during the space

race of the 1960s adds to an even fuller understanding of the celebrated fixture.

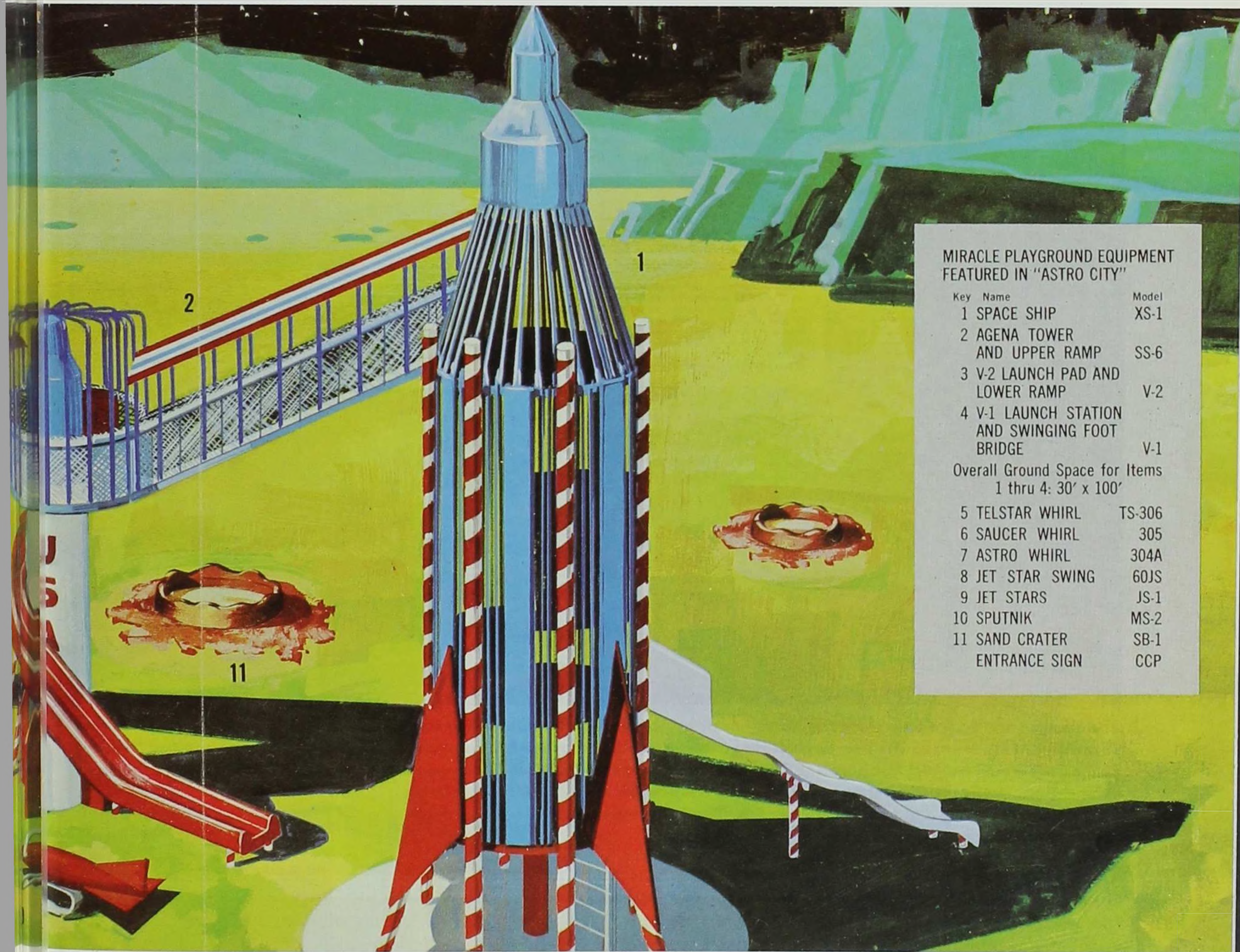
In the late 1960s, the Miracle Equipment Company, owned by the Ahrens family of Grinnell, Iowa, and headquartered in the eastern Iowa town from 1927 to 1989, began selling space-age playground equipment during the height of America's frenzy and fascination over space technology. Christened "Astro City," the company's stellar product line of eleven different playground installations enthusiastically expressed the nation's faith in space-age engineering. One of the company's colorful, multi-page sales brochures, now archived in the State Historical Society of Iowa's collections, showcased a wondrously encompassing view of an idealized recreational landscape inhabited by astronautic-shaped objects, designs that responded to "the biggest challenge facing recreation today," according to its copywriter. Contending that Miracle's product line was helping to ready American "youth for the marvels of tomorrow's space age," the writer dared prospective



This three-page fold-out from Miracle's advertising brochure lavishly illustrates the "Astro City" complex's other-worldly layout and atmosphere. Resting in a green moonscape orbited by Saturn, the space-age playground contains rides resembling those that might be found in an intergalactic carnival. The Miracle Space Ship, with its ramps, slides, and walkways fully extended, runs through the center, spanning nearly the entire playground. As the site's connecting element or star attraction, the sprawling apparatus unifies Miracle's colorful and astronautic-themed recreational environment.

customers to "meet that challenge [by using] the futuristic equipment featured in Astro City."

Guided by such promotional intentions, Miracle's engineers crafted each component of "Astro City" to prepare children imaginatively for entry into the space age and its stunning promise of discovery and technological progress. There was Sputnik, a pendulum-based contraption dependent on momentum; riding it allowed children to "orbit the earth." The Astro, Saucer, and Telstar Whirl were UFO-shaped updates of the traditional merry-go-round that colorfully mimicked "a spin in space." Missile-shaped



MIRACLE PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT
FEATURED IN "ASTRO CITY"

Key	Name	Model
1	SPACE SHIP	XS-1
2	AGENA TOWER AND UPPER RAMP	SS-6
3	V-2 LAUNCH PAD AND LOWER RAMP	V-2
4	V-1 LAUNCH STATION AND SWINGING FOOT BRIDGE	V-1
Overall Ground Space for Items 1 thru 4: 30' x 100'		
5	TELSTAR WHIRL	TS-306
6	SAUCER WHIRL	305
7	ASTRO WHIRL	304A
8	JET STAR SWING	60JS
9	JET STARS	JS-1
10	SPUTNIK	MS-2
11	SAND CRATER	SB-1
	ENTRANCE SIGN	CCP

jet stars and jet star swings afforded children the illusion of supersonic flight, while sand craters, actually miniature sand boxes, stimulated fantasies of moon walks. The Miracle Space Ship, finally, was the progenitor of Des Moines's Rocket Slide.

A product of its time, Miracle's "Astro City" was one more way America's fascination with space-age technology found expression in 1960s popular culture—television programs like *Star Trek*, which debuted in 1966, and furnishings made of modern materials like fiberglass being other instances. While some of these fads and artifacts have vigorously

endured, many have disappeared or gone out of style. It is not known how many "Astro City" components Miracle installed in America's parks and playgrounds, but today's rocket slide at Union Park may be its only extant example. Yet it is a significant survivor, given a Des Moines neighborhood's steadfast protection of it nearly ten years ago.

By the 1990s, Miracle had expanded into one of the world's oldest and largest manufacturers of park and play equipment. Early in 1992, the company recommended the rocket slide's removal because of a lack of replacement parts and liability concerns. Such a



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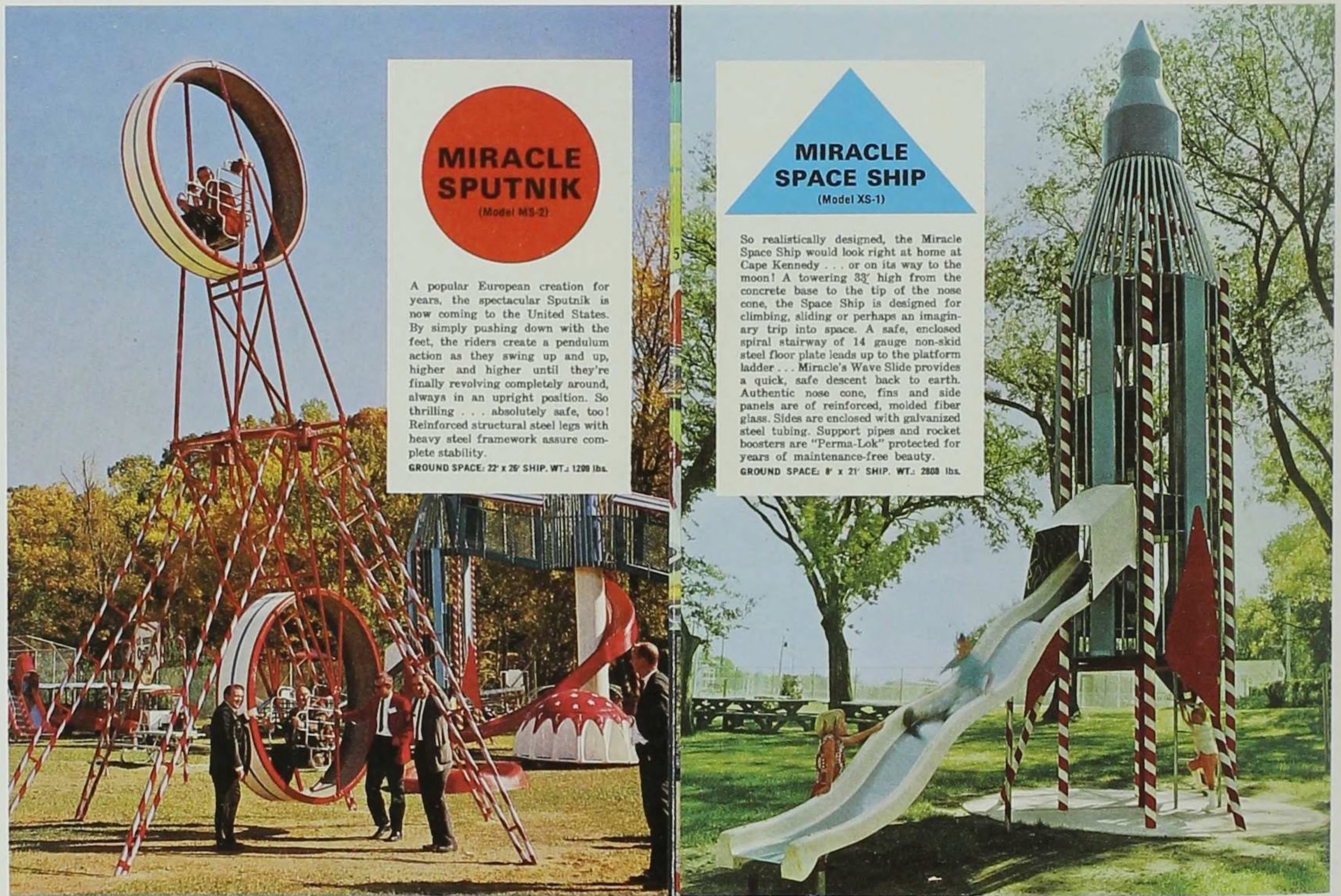
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**MIRACLE
SPUTNIK**
(Model MS-2)

A popular European creation for years, the spectacular Sputnik is now coming to the United States. By simply pushing down with the feet, the riders create a pendulum action as they swing up and up, higher and higher until they're finally revolving completely around, always in an upright position. So thrilling . . . absolutely safe, too! Reinforced structural steel legs with heavy steel framework assure complete stability.

GROUND SPACE: 22' x 26' SHIP. WT.: 1200 lbs.

**MIRACLE
SPACE SHIP**
(Model XS-1)

So realistically designed, the Miracle Space Ship would look right at home at Cape Kennedy . . . or on its way to the moon! A towering 33' high from the concrete base to the tip of the nose cone, the Space Ship is designed for climbing, sliding or perhaps an imaginary trip into space. A safe, enclosed spiral stairway of 14 gauge non-skid steel floor plate leads up to the platform ladder. . . Miracle's Wave Slide provides a quick, safe descent back to earth. Authentic nose cone, fins and side panels are of reinforced, molded fiber glass. Sides are enclosed with galvanized steel tubing. Support pipes and rocket boosters are "Perma-Lok" protected for years of maintenance-free beauty.

GROUND SPACE: 8' x 21' SHIP. WT.: 2800 lbs.

The Sputnik and Space Ship were the most vibrantly interactive examples of Miracle's "Astro City" playground installations. Shrewdly linking them to the new engineering marvels produced by NASA, company brochure copywriters boasted that the Space Ship would be "right at home at Cape Kennedy" and that its Wave Slide provided "a quick, safe descent back to earth." Both the Sputnik's and Space Ship's steel framework and non-skid floors promised safe and stable entertainment, while their high-flying and towering designs thrillingly encouraged child's play—promotions of the optimism and excitement associated with space technology during the 1960s.

suggestion immediately antagonized residents, whose reactions sparked newspaper coverage. In an early April letter to the *Des Moines Register*, Wendy Overton, then a third-grader, anguished over its removal, maintaining that kids and adults from "all over" Des Moines flocked to the park just to play on the rocket slide. "It means a lot to . . . kids, parents and grandparents," she declared. Reasoning that because "buildings, pools, landmarks, houses get restored every day," she questioned why the Des Moines City Council couldn't "spend the money to restore our rocket slide." In another account, a father reminisced about his eagerness to play on the rocket slide while it was being installed some 20 years earlier, contending that he would now "be real mad if they tear that slide down."

Other residents soon joined the fight. Less than a week after hearing of the possibility of its destruction,

four children created the "Save the Rocket Slide for Kids Kommittee," while other neighborhood groups, particularly the North Park Jaycees and the Union Park Neighborhood Association, formed their own lobbying coalitions. The children's involvement included penny fundraising, petitioning for signatures, writing letters to newspaper editors, and attending city council meetings and other public hearings. The activism soon paid off. Nearly a month's worth of agitation encouraged the city council to devote \$2,500 toward the rocket slide's rehabilitation, and it inspired the Sheet Metal Workers' Local 45, among other volunteers, to donate the labor.

By early July, the rocket slide sported a fresh coat of paint, new metal mesh fencing along the walkway, and improved traction on its ramp and interior spiral staircase. Its resurrection prompted a grand opening



The powerful cover image of a United States rocket launch in one of the company's brochures showcases Miracle's vigorous enthusiasm for space technology's progressive influence.



The slide's deterioration (left) was clearly evident before city workers implemented this summer's improvements (right). The slide's new paint job, along with other repairs, has upgraded the Des Moines icon's appearance to one that more capably approximates the dynamic spirit of the product line promoted in Miracle's flagship brochure cover image (top).

ceremony three weeks later. Community activists, including one member of the Kids' Kommittee who showed up wearing a hardhat, helped to cut a 600-foot red ribbon connecting the rocket slide and other playground equipment.

Such affection continues for the "grand-daddy" of all city slides, as one newspaper reporter labeled it. Realizing that the rocket slide required still more safety improvements, the city council allocated \$75,000 for its repair and improvement last year, ultimately spending \$51,000 of it for repainting the structure, replacing many of its metal parts (some with fiberglass paneling), installing a curb, and providing a deep bed of sand within its perimeter to cushion any falls. Its removal not even a question this time around, the council and Parks Department regard its historic value as the main reason for its preservation.

Evidence of the 1960s excitement and optimism inspired by America's forays into space, the rocket slide today is more than just a local community landmark or paean to childhood. Part of a series of playground equipment that emerged in the late 1960s, the slide is a complex historic structure that not only expresses the nation's space-age ambitions but also reveals local Iowa park preservation history. Indeed, although its designers originally intended to enhance American children's preparation for a presumably grand, hi-tech future, the rocket slide's 30-year presence in Union Park has instead triggered in Iowans—of all generations—an assured appreciation for the past and its preservation. ❖

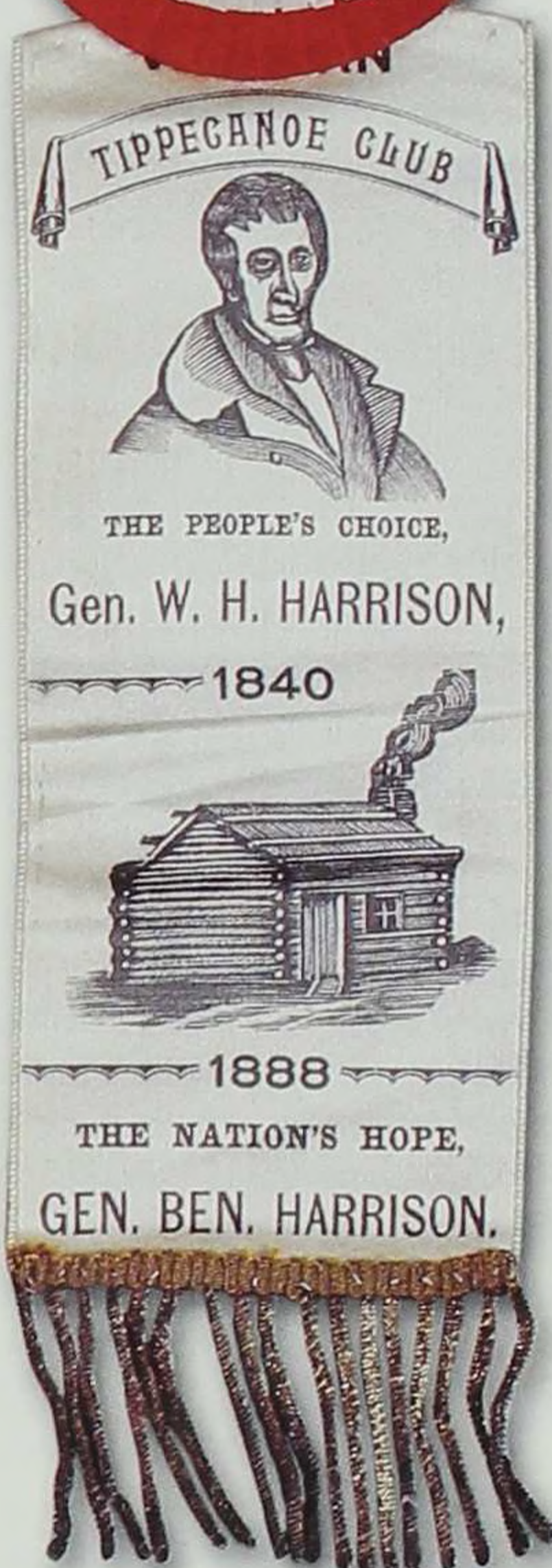
Lori Vermaas is an independent scholar and free-lance writer who specializes in American popular and visual culture. Currently a summer editorial intern with Iowa Heritage Illustrated, she continues to contribute articles and anticipates the publication of her dissertation, the first systematic study of the Giant Sequoias' visual culture from the Civil War to the World War II era.

NOTE ON SOURCES

For those interested in finding out more about historic playground equipment, unfortunately no study has been written, nor has anyone completed an inventory for those that remain in Iowa. The most promising sources to begin such an investigation probably are local newspapers—they are the proverbial haystack for locating this kind of information, but they usually have not been indexed. See the *Des Moines Register*, particularly for 1992 and June 2001, for the story of the rocket slide's preservation and restoration; and the Miracle Recreation Equipment Company's website, <www.miracle-recreation.com/site/frame.cfm?root=1207> for a brief description of the company's history. Thanks to Ralph Christian and Beth Foster of the Historic Preservation Bureau, State Historical Society of Iowa; Will Page, president of the Union Park Neighborhood Association; Lorna Caulkins, director, Stewart Library, Grinnell; Mark Boland, sales representative for Miracle Recreation Equipment Company; and Donald Tripp, director, Des Moines Parks and Recreation Department. Their generosity filled in some of the gaps and led me to other helpful contacts.

Tragedy, Tourism, a

by Greg Olson



The log cabin is a powerful and familiar American icon to Iowans and has appeared in various settings and uses. Here, for example, as a centennial logo; on an 1888 campaign badge; on a parade float in Ossian; in a historical village at Midwest Old Threshers in Mt. Pleasant; and as a 1960s children's playhouse in Cedar Rapids.

As the 19th century drew to a close, many of the log homes built by Iowa's first wave of settlers began to disappear in the wake of economic prosperity. While some Iowans mourned the passing of these picturesque relics, many others were glad to be rid of the visual reminders of their humble first homes. In the years before groups like the Daughters of the American Revolution began their organized crusades to restore log homes in the state, preservation, when it happened at all, was the prerogative of a few inspired individuals. Two of the oldest surviving log homes in northwest Iowa exist today because of the efforts of two such individuals, early settlers Abigail Gardner Sharp (1844-1921) and Charlotte Kirchner Butler (1846-1932).



and the Log Cabin

How Abbie Gardner Sharp and Charlotte Kirchner Butler Preserved and Promoted the Past

Each used a simple log cabin as a vehicle for telling her settlement story.

The log cabin is one of the most beloved icons of our national heritage. No other image depicts American history as romantically as a simple, hand-hewn home in the woods. It is a symbol of modest beginnings and of our anti-aristocratic ideal of equality. As children we are taught that many of our most revered national heroes like Abraham Lincoln began their lives in one of these rustic dwellings. In 1840, William Henry Harrison defeated Martin Van Buren in a presidential campaign centered around the image of the log cabin. Portraying their candidate as a common man who preferred to live his life in a simple log house in the woods, Harrison's

supporters appropriated the image wherever they could. Popular songs and marches sang its praises, cabins became props in parades and rallies, and Horace Greeley published the pro-Whig *Log Cabin* weekly newspaper. Harrison's successful candidacy capitalized on the American people's belief in the image of a simple, rustic life on the frontier. The log cabin was equated with the paragon of the self-made man who reached his goals through hard work, yet never forgot his humble roots. In Charlotte Kirchner Butler's mind, her own particular log cabin in northwest Iowa resonated with these messages of hard work and humble roots.

The American log cabin also stands in our national consciousness (as it did in Butler's mind) as a symbol



CAMPAIGN RIBBON: SHSI (DES MOINES). OTHER IMAGES: SHSI (IOWA CITY). IMAGE ON FAR RIGHT: JOAN LIFFRING-ZUG BOURRET COLLECTION, SHSI (IOWA CITY).

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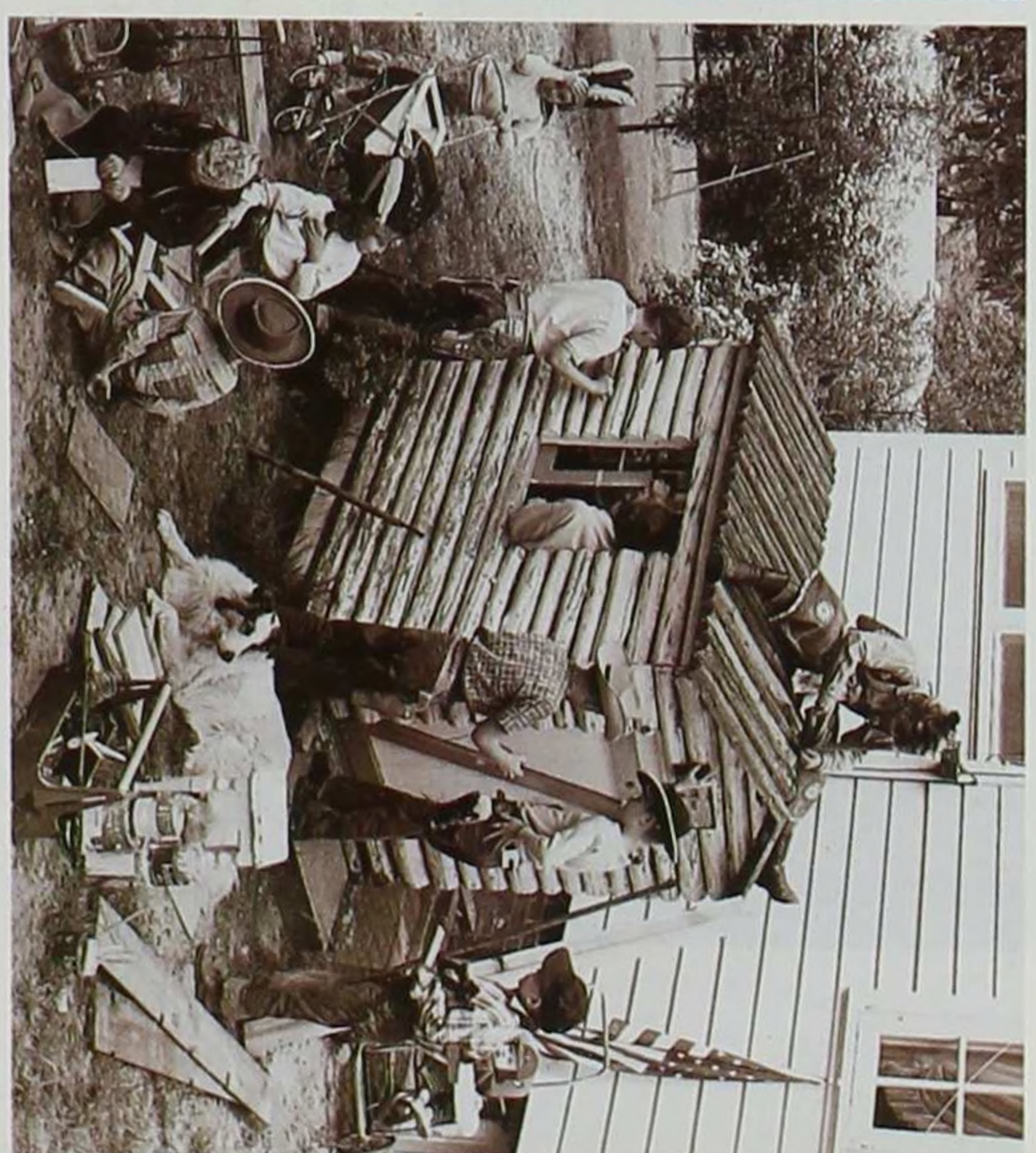
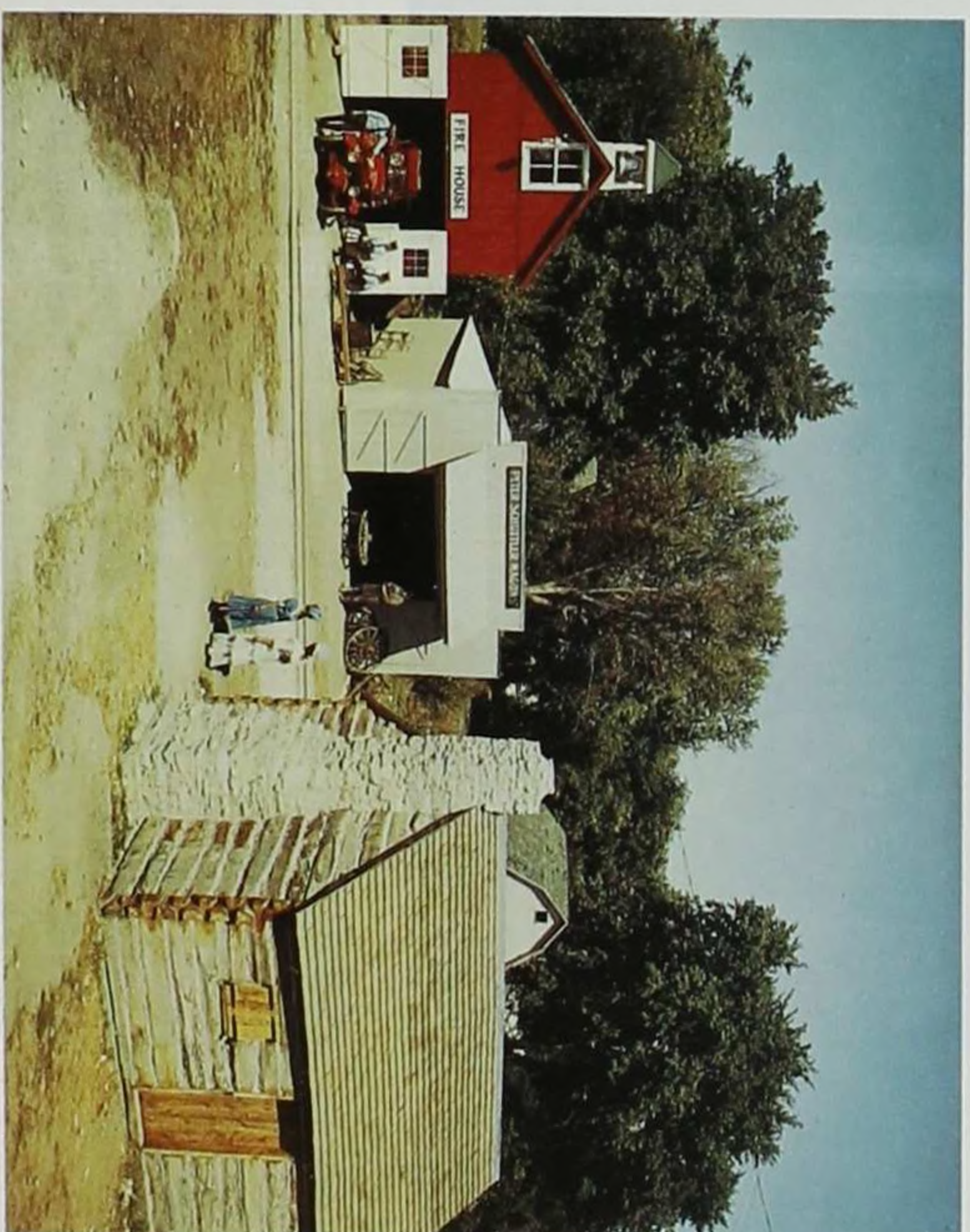
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The log cabin is a powerful and familiar American icon to Iowans and has appeared in various settings and uses. Here, for example, as a centennial logo; on an 1888 campaign badge; on a parade float in Ossian; in a historical village at Midwest Old Threshers in Mt. Pleasant; and as a 1960s children's playhouse in Cedar Rapids.

CAMPAIN RIBBON: SHS (DES. MONES); OTHER IMAGES: SHS (IOWA CITY); MADE ON FARM RIGHT: JOAN LEFFINGO-ZIG BOQUIET COLLECTION, SHS (IOWA CITY).

of conquest over the wilderness. The log walls of the first humble homes built by settlers provided a physical and metaphorical contrast to the vast expanses of wilderness and, as historians John R. Stilgoe and Roderick Nash have suggested, became a metaphor—with ancient roots—for vanquishing evil. In European folk traditions the woods had been thought to be inhabited by both good and bad spirits. As pagan customs gave way to Christianity, society shunned these “wildings,” who took on darker, more threatening connotations, and the forests came to be feared as the home of demons. This connotation of the wilderness as evil transferred along with European settlers to the American frontier. If, as art historian Vivien Green Fryd has argued, the westward expansion of the United States can be read as an allegorical struggle “between the cultivated and the wild of nature,” the domestication of the land not only made way for fields, homes, and roads, it prepared the land to be cleansed of “evil.” (To Iowan Abbie Gardner Sharp, her family’s log cabin came to symbolize such a struggle, and she used the cabin as a stage on which to recount her story of conflict, violence, and victimization.) Many believed that in the battle to fulfill America’s Manifest Destiny, early settlers were the foot soldiers who carried the torch of civilization into that wilderness. Only after the land was settled, the wilderness domesticated, and the native population subdued, they believed, could the great resources of the North American continent be used for the good of the emerging nation.

Therefore, what had begun as a vernacular building type imported into the United States by northern European immigrants rapidly became a symbol of the very process of creating a nation or empire. Part of the log cabin’s allure was based on the fact that trees, which had to be cleared to make way for the plow, could be fashioned, through skill and enterprise, into material useful for building shelter. The builder of a pioneer log home, armed with determination and a few hand tools, could harness the vast wilderness.

The settler’s success in clearing the woods signaled victory in this battle, and the image of logs stacked in the form of cabin walls became one of the struggle’s most satisfying trophies. American painters of the early 19th century incorporated this theme into their magisterial landscapes. Thomas Cole, for example, painted various works during the 1840s in which a cabin carved out of the pristine wilderness symbolized the emergence of a new empire (*right*). In their efforts to tell Iowa history as they viewed it, Abbie Gardner Sharp and Charlotte Kirchner Butler would also adopt the powerful image of the log house.



REYNOLDA HOUSE, MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART, WINSTON-SALEM, NORTH CAROLINA

The log cabin was already an established frontier icon by the time settlers began to populate the prairie of northwest Iowa in the mid-1850s. Arriving separately as young girls in 1856, Abbie Gardner and Charlotte Kirchner were among the first European Americans to settle this region of tallgrass prairie. Abbie’s parents homesteaded along the shores of Lake

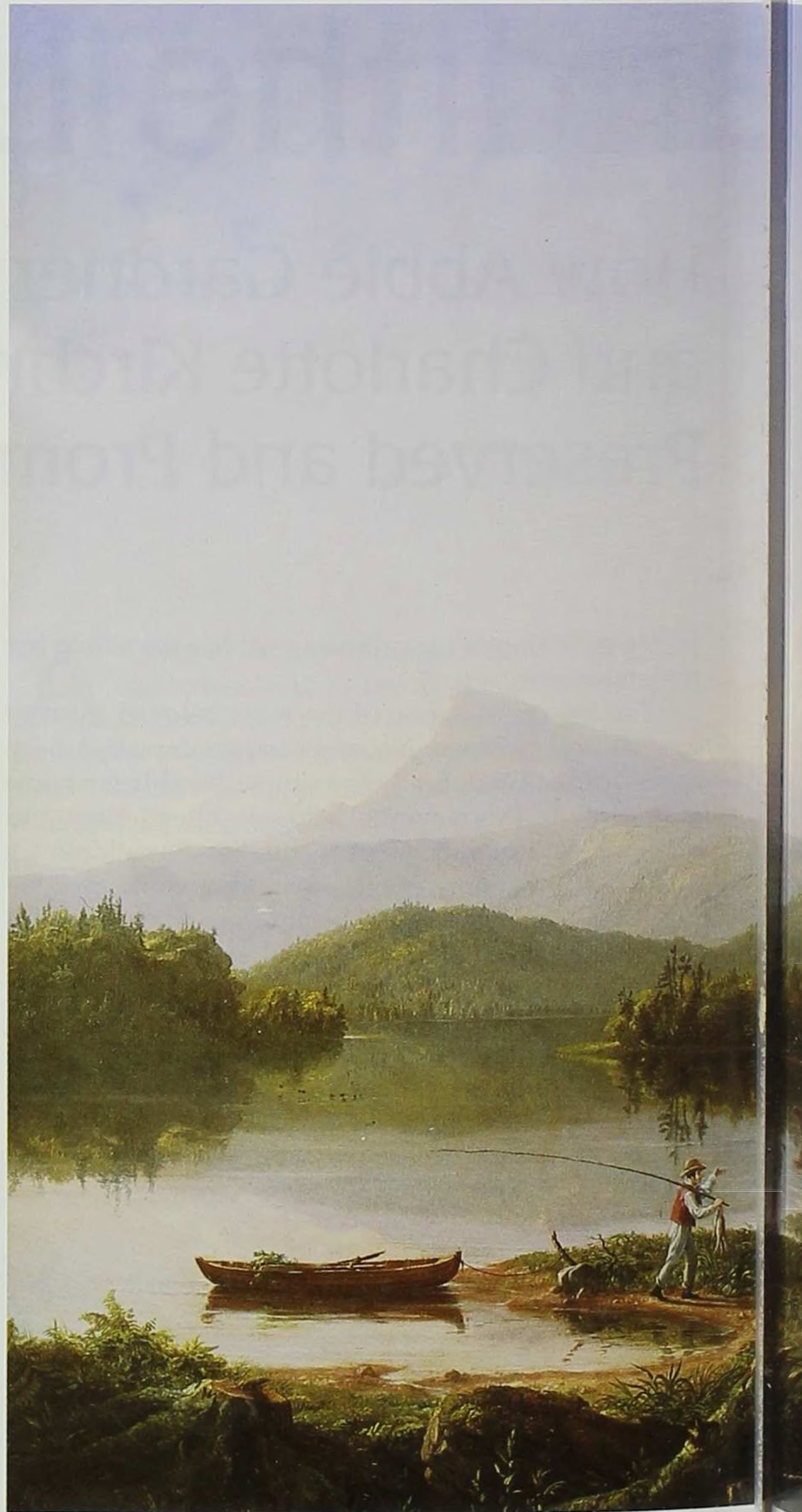
Okoboji, in present-day Arnolds Park, and Charlotte settled with her family along the Little Sioux River 40 miles to the south, near the present town of Peterson. The first seasons in their new homes proved difficult for both families. The Gardners arrived in July, too late to plant crops and with time enough only to finish one of two log cabins needed for their extended family. The

Home in the Woods (1847), by Thomas Cole, depicts the log cabin as a family’s haven in a quickly vanishing wilderness. Ax-hewn stumps, broken limbs, and fallen trees fill the foreground, while neatly notched logs constitute the cabin. The peak in the background is Mt. Chocorua, in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. The log cabin functioned as a powerful icon for a number of American painters, sculptors, writers, and their audiences.

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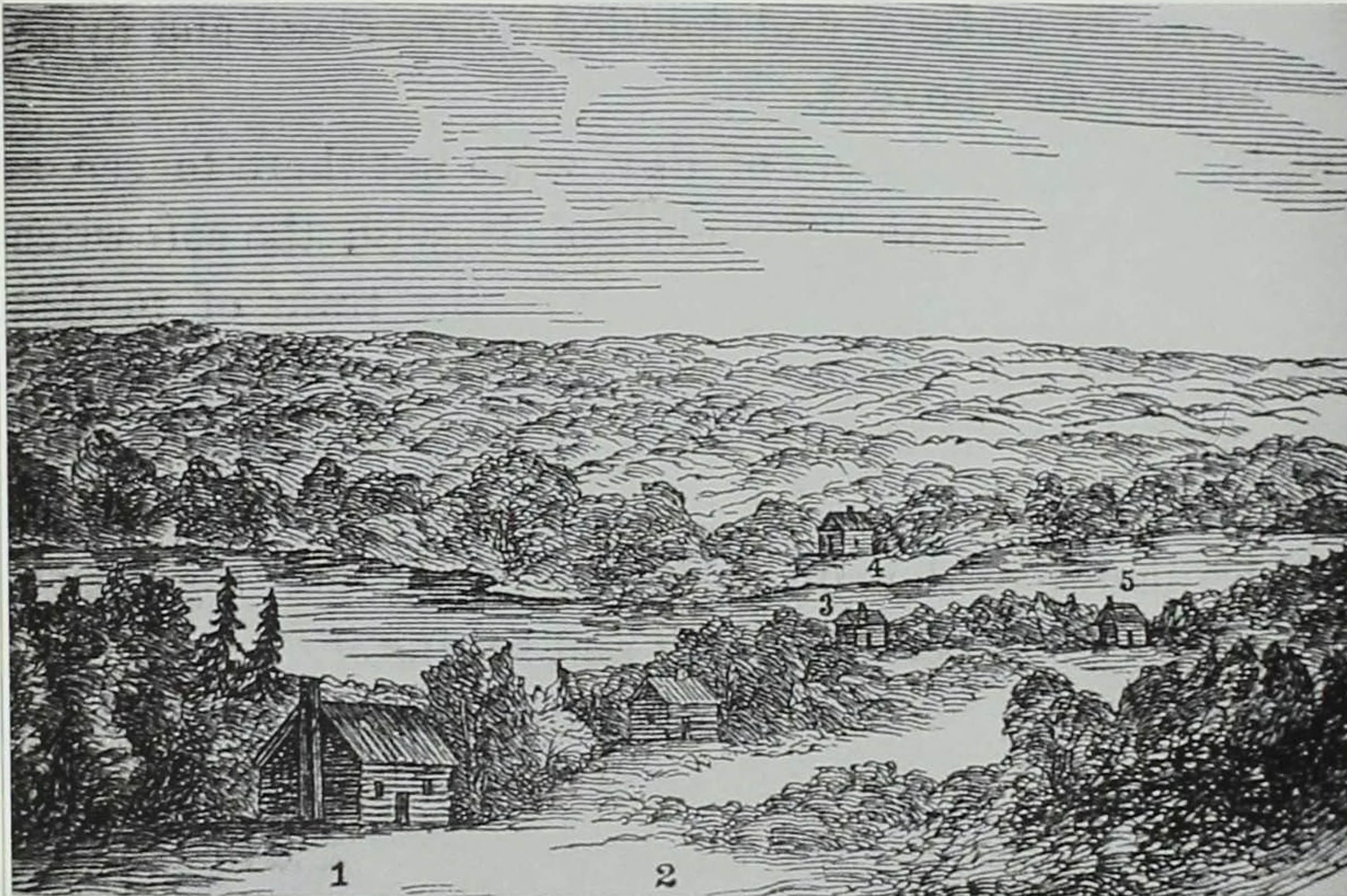
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"It was in July, 1856, that the hills around Spirit Lake, on the northern boundary of Iowa, first echoed the woodman's axe," wrote Lorenzo Porter Lee. As the first chronicler of the "Spirit Lake Massacre," Lee called the Gardner family's home (No. 1, above) "one snug little log cabin, hewed and dovetailed into shape ... on the south side of the lake."

(In the preceding years, encounters between the Wahpekute and settlers had ranged from conflict to cooperation; see below.)

By February, when Inkpaduta and his band stopped in Peterson, their situation had become desperate. For

Kirchners, who had to meet the challenge of moving west with ten children, did not arrive at their destination until the fall. Then, as winter set in, the settlers had to negotiate unusually harsh weather. Deep snow and bitter cold cut them off from the nearest supplies in far-distant settlements.

About 50 Wahpekute Dakota trying to wait out the winter in the shelter of the Little Sioux River valley were also suffering immensely in the cold and snow. Competition for game, which was already scarce during the particularly severe winter, aggravated relations between the newly arrived settlers and the Indians. Not surprisingly, the Wahpekute and their leader Inkpaduta called upon settlers who lived near the river, asking them to share their winter stores. While some settlers complied, many others resisted.

A collision course towards tragedy

Compared with settlement in the rest of the state, European Americans came late to northwest Iowa, where they faced isolation and harsh frontier living conditions.

Meanwhile, the Dakota Indian nation had for years led a successful hunting and farming way of life in the same area. Relations between the original inhabitants and the new settlers were usually peaceful, but there was little friendship as the two groups competed for the land and its resources.

One of the few violent conflicts between European Americans and Native Americans occurred at present-day Arnolds Park in what became known as the "Spirit Lake Massacre." One of the major players was a Wahpekute Dakota chief named Inkpaduta. Here, briefly, is what is known about him during the years leading up to the events at Spirit Lake, and their aftermath.

- 1800–1810: Inkpaduta is born into the Cannon River band of the Wahpekute Dakota in Minnesota. His father, Black Eagle, is a chief.

- 1837: Smallpox hits Black Eagle's people, already diminished by battles with neighboring Sauk and Meskwaki.

- 1841: Inkpaduta and several hundred Wahpekute are banished from the Cannon River tribe for the assassination of Dakota chief Tasagi ("Cane").

- 1850: Inkpaduta and his brother Sidominadota lead the dissident band along the Des Moines River valley near Fort Dodge, Iowa.

- 1851: Left out of negotiations that transferred much of the Dakota nation's lands to the U.S. government, Inkpaduta refuses to recognize the

treaty. He is soon used as a scapegoat for tensions between the new settlers and the native Dakota. In the next few years, he is involved in several conflicts with settlers.

- 1854: Inkpaduta's brother Sidominadota, plus Sidominadota's mother, wife, and five children, are killed by whiskey trader Henry Lott at Bloody Run Creek (near Livermore, Iowa). Government officials recognize that Lott had started the problems years earlier, but refuse to apprehend him. Later, settlers in Homer, Iowa, hang Sidominadota's head on a cabin. Inkpaduta moves west to the Little Sioux River valley.

- 1856: In the fall Inkpaduta's band travels south, following the Little Sioux. They will winter near Smithland, as in the previous two years. Winter

several days the Indians visited the log home where ten-year-old Charlotte Kirchner lived with her parents and siblings, and where another family, the Bicknells, had joined with them in anticipation of trouble. After receiving food and searching the premises for weapons and ammunition, the Wahpekute left. Although one of the Wahpekute men killed the family dog, the Kirchners fared better than two neighboring families, whose log cabins were ransacked. The Wahpekute also killed several head of livestock and briefly held two women in their camp before releasing them.

Over the next two weeks, Inkpaduta led his group farther north along the river toward the region of Lake Okoboji. Along the way there were more confrontations between the Wahpekute and the settlers. By March 5th or 6th Inkpaduta's band had reached the lakes region. Then on the 8th of March, several Wahpekute men entered the log home of 13-year-old Abigail Gardner and her family. Struggles over food and ammunition triggered violence and ultimately led to the killing of her parents, Roland and Frances Gardner, a daughter and son, and two of their grandchildren (third daughter Eliza was in Minnesota at the time). The deaths of the Gardners were part of a string of killings attributed to the Wahpekute over the next few days. In all, 33 settlers in the area of Spirit Lake and Lake Okoboji died in

what became known as the "Spirit Lake Massacre." Four women were taken hostage, including young Abbie Gardner. (Any Wahpekute deaths went unrecorded.)

Inkpaduta held Gardner captive from early March through May 30. During that time, she witnessed the killing of two fellow captives, Elizabeth Thatcher and Lydia Noble, and the release of a third, Margaret Ann Marble. She was forced to march hundreds of miles through southern Minnesota to the James River in eastern Dakota Territory before three Wahpeton Dakota—Mazakutemani, Hotonhowashta, and Chetanmaza, supplied by Major C. E. Flandrau from Ft. Snelling—bought Abbie Gardner for 2 horses, 12 blankets, 2 kegs of powder, 20 pounds of tobacco, 32 yards of blue cloth, and 37½ yards of calico and ribbon.

Newspapers in Minnesota and Iowa that had reported extensively on the massacre now followed the return of Abbie Gardner to Iowa. The first to chronicle Gardner's ordeal in detail was Colonel Lorenzo Porter Lee, the officer assigned by the army to serve as the young orphan's escort. Lee traveled with her from St. Paul, Minnesota, the site of her official release, to Fort Dodge, Iowa. During the journey, he interviewed Gardner extensively. Later that year, back at his home in New Britain, Connecticut, Lee published a 48-page *History of the Spirit Lake Massacre!*, with the expressed

brings deep snow and bitter winds. Wahpekute women foraging for unhusked corn are accused of stealing and are beaten by settlers. Inkpaduta's son shoots a few of their cattle. A militia of Smithland settlers destroys Inkpaduta's village and steals guns.

- February 1857: Inkpaduta's band heads north, shooting livestock and stealing food and weapons. They stop at Long Grove (present-day Peterson) looking for food at the Kirchner cabin and at other settlements (Cherokee, Correctionville). At Lost Island Lake, a settler named Gillett kills and beheads one of Inkpaduta's band who had approached his cabin.

- March 1857: Inkpaduta's people arrive at Lake Okoboji and set up camp on a Dakota site, now occupied by the Mattock family's cabin.

Tensions run high as they try to get straw and supplies from the settlers. On March 8, a gunfight breaks out at the Mattock cabin, and precipitates the "Spirit Lake Massacre." Over the next several days, Inkpaduta's men kill 33 settlers and abduct three women and one girl, Abbie Gardner.

Inkpaduta's band travels north, attacks settlers at Jackson, Minnesota, and then flees west to the Dakotas. There they kill two of the four captives. Gardner and the third captive are released later that spring.

- In 1862, after the Dakota uprising in Minnesota is ignited by denial of annuities and supplies, Inkpaduta's reputation grows as a Dakota hero, partly because he continues to elude capture. Over the next several years, Inkpaduta engages the U.S. Army in the Dakotas and plays a major role in the



Above: The only known image of Inkpaduta (date and place uncertain).

Battle of the Little Big Horn. Later he seeks refuge in Canada with Sitting Bull, where he dies an old man about 1880.

intention of raising money to aid the young girl. Sharp later reported, however, that her share of the royalties only amounted to six copies of the book, five of which she sold for the designated price of 25 cents each.

As a literary genre, captivity narratives like Lorenzo Porter Lee's have been popular in America since the 17th century. While numerous first-hand accounts were published by survivors of captivity, the subject also became common in literature and the visual arts. Popular novels, such as *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) by James Fenimore Cooper, revolved around a white woman held captive by Native Americans. Joel Barlow's epic poem *The Columbiad* (1807) recounted the abduction and death of captive Jane McCrea. Sculptures done for the nation's capitol by

Thomas Crawford and Horatio Greenough also dealt with this theme, as did paintings by such noted artists as Asher B. Durand, George Caleb Bingham, and John Vanderlyn.

Captivity narratives fed on the fear and isolation many settlers felt as they left their familiar settings of family and home and moved west, entering tribal lands. On one level, they can be read as struggles between "civilized" Christian virtue, embodied by young white women like Abigail Gardner, and the dark, evil forces of the untamed wilderness, represented by "red devils" such as Inkpaduta.

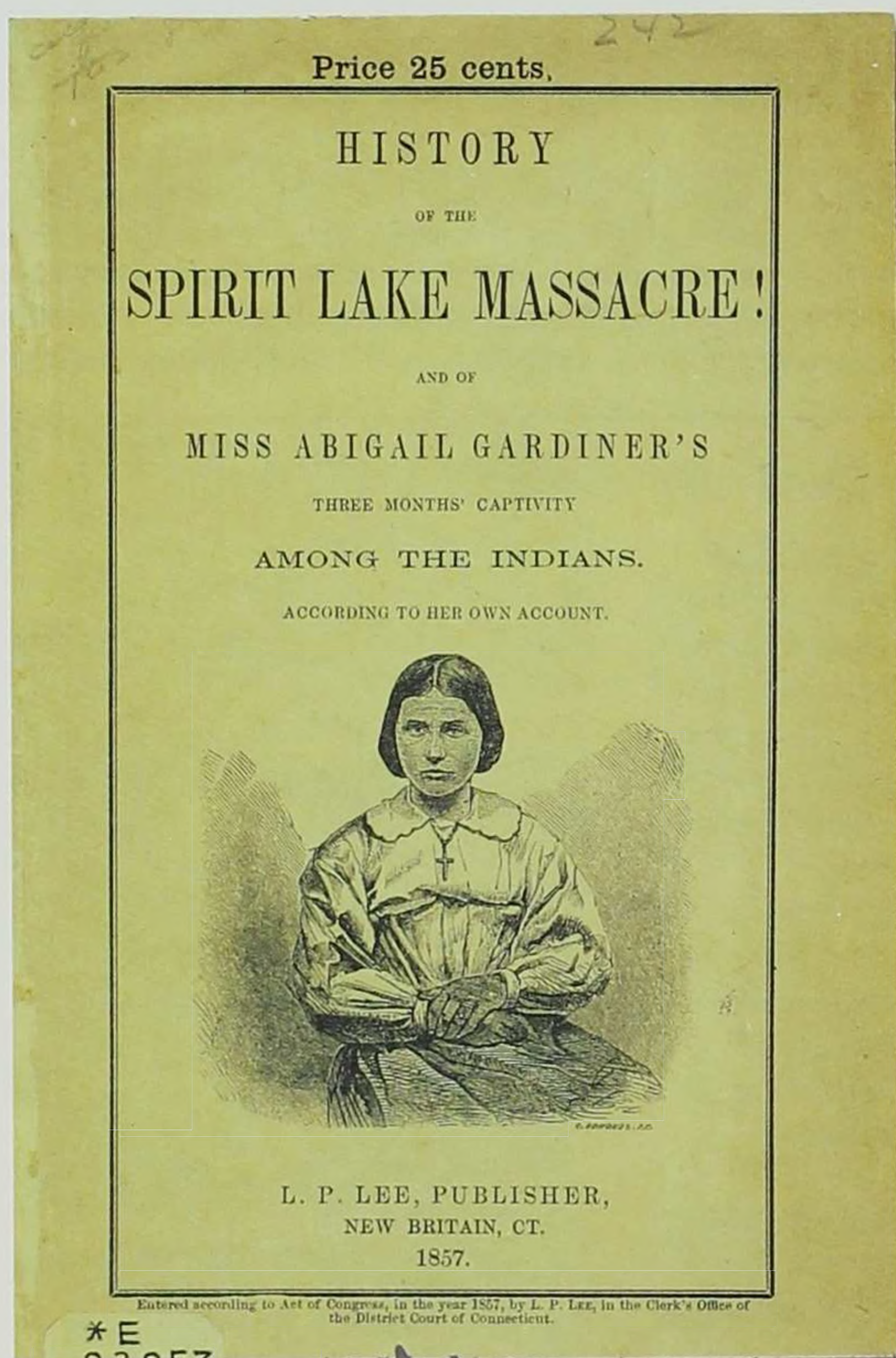
While the earliest versions were written as parables of religious faith and transformation, captivity tales in America became increasingly sensational and melodramatic during the 19th century. Lorenzo Porter Lee's *History of the Spirit Lake Massacre!* falls into this category. It features engraved illustrations, including one depicting the beating death of Gardner's fellow captive, Elizabeth Thatcher. For dramatic effect, Lee punctuated his own sensational description with quotes from Darwin, Shakespeare, and Milton. His work portrayed the event as a classic struggle between good and evil. In this drama, Inkpaduta acted out the role of arch-villain. Gardner, whom Lee presented as the paragon of virtuous youth whose innocence was "nipped off in the bud," was cast as a helpless victim whose rescue came only at the hands of others.

Historian June Namias calls this the "Frail Flower" style of captivity narrative writing. Namias discovered that the "Frail Flower," or hapless victim, was common in 19th-century narratives and may have been modeled after the heroines of popular sentimental fiction. The Frail Flower, Namias tells us, "is shocked and distressed by her capture and by the deaths and dislocations that go with it. . . . She rarely emerges from her shock, distress and misery. Frail Flower narratives include brutality, sadomasochistic and titillating elements, strong racist language, [and] pleas for sympathy and commiseration with the author's suffering."

Lorenzo Porter Lee's book set the tone for many subsequent interpretations of the "Spirit Lake Massacre" and cast Abigail Gardner in the perpetual role of the "Frail Flower." Lee's book also became the model for Gardner's own captivity narrative, which she published 28 years later.

In the years following her captivity, Abigail Gardner's personal life was marked by many difficult and tragic events. Two months after her release, Gardner (probably still only 13) married 19-year-old

SHS: (IOWA CITY)



Lorenzo Porter Lee's account of Abbie Gardner is an example of a captivity narrative, a literary genre often characterized by racism and sensationalistic, melodramatic language.

Casville Sharp in Hampton, Iowa. The marriage produced three children: Albert (born in 1859), Allen (1862), and Minnie (1871), who died 19 months later. The Sharps moved often, living in various locations in Iowa, northern Missouri, and Kansas. On two separate occasions, house fires consumed the family's belongings. One of the fires destroyed an early version of Abbie Gardner Sharp's manuscript about the "Spirit Lake Massacre."

Sometime in the late 1870s, the Sharps' marriage failed. In 1883, Abbie Gardner Sharp returned to the shores of Lake Okoboji. Separated from her husband and suffering from ill health, she supported herself by soliciting speaking engagements. She began work again on her manuscript and by 1885 was able to finance the first printing of her own *History of the Spirit Lake Massacre*. Greatly expanded from Lorenzo Porter Lee's slim history, Sharp's 352-page book would go through numerous reprints and revisions.

Through her lectures and book, Sharp presented the story of her ordeal to the public. She did so, however, by perpetuating the image of herself as a victim. "Because the awful events of the massacre transpired here, I have, amid physical ills which have disqualified me for the active pursuits of life, devoted two years of painful labor to indicting the bitter reminiscences, and gathering the facts, dates, and events recorded in this volume," she wrote in her preface. "I would have been glad, for the sake of history, to impart my knowledge of the bloody drama to one whose gifted pen would have been more worthy of the subject; but, by sad misfortune—which has followed my captivity—the duty has fallen upon me."

Throughout her narrative, Sharp painted the Wahpekute Dakota as blindly cruel and challenged her readers' to imagine the hardships and violence endured by the victims and captives. A Gladbrook, Iowa, newspaper correspondent who read the book found it "full of thrilling incidents," and reported that it "reads like an enchanting novel, and yet is but the true, sad history of what actually happened."

By 1887, Sharp also had expanded her entrepreneurial activities at the lake. During the summer months she sold Indian carvings, pieces of her own handiwork, and copies of her book. She operated from a tent set up next to the log home built by her father in 1856, which had since passed into other hands.

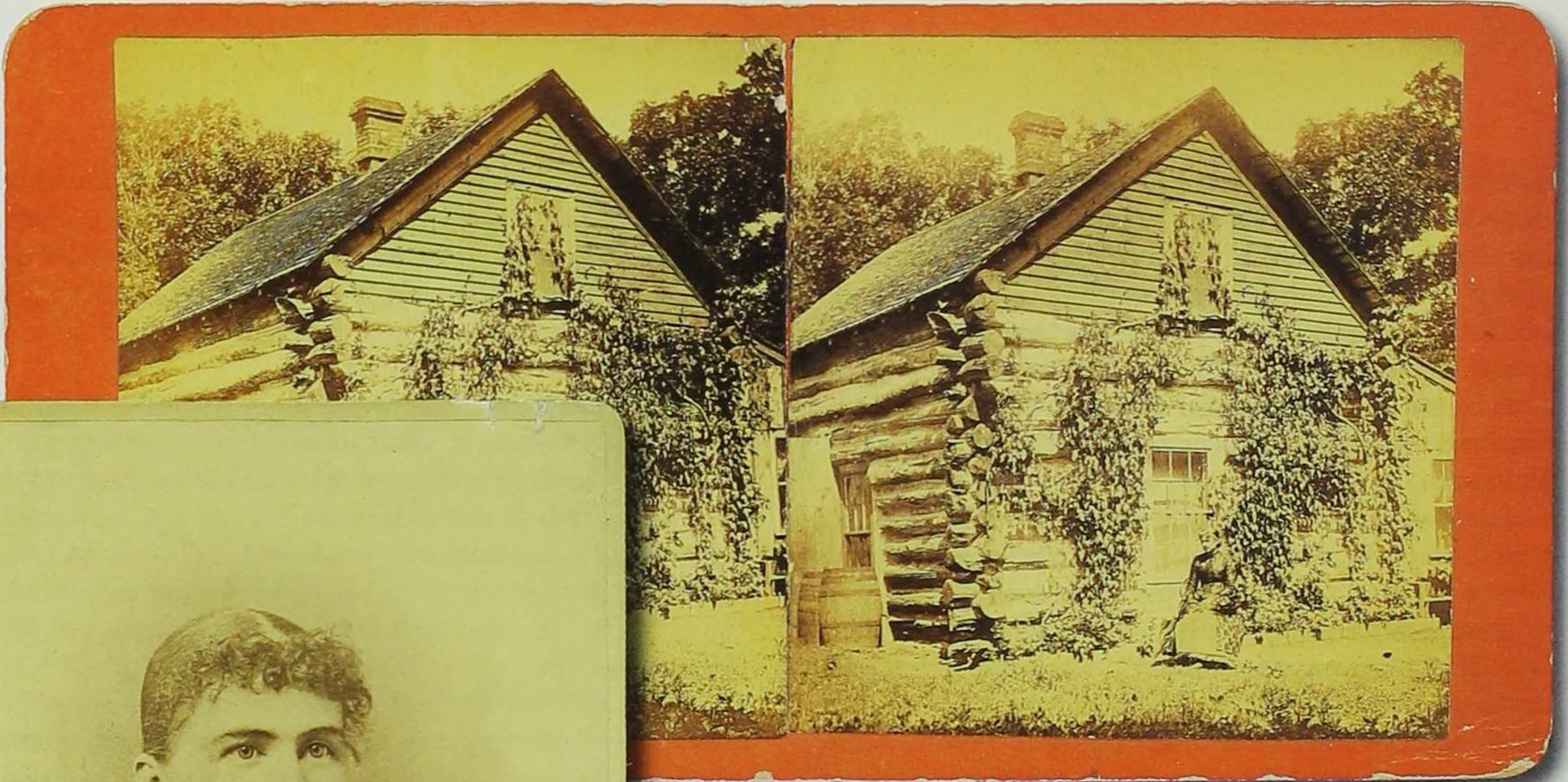
Just weeks after the massacre, in fact, the Gardner claim and cabin had been jumped by a settler, J. S. Prescott, who believed the entire family had died in the incident. Upon discovering that Abigail and her elder sister Eliza had survived, he offered payment and retained the property. In 1863, Samuel Pillsbury purchased the property. He and his family were still living in the cabin in the 1880s when Sharp returned to the area. Over the years the Pillsburys had expanded the house by adding a second story and constructing lean-to additions.

By 1891, the cabin was in danger of being torn down to make way for lake-front lots. With profits from the sale of her book and souvenirs, Sharp purchased the lot on which the cabin stood and immediately began to rehabilitate the deteriorating structure as a log home and souvenir shop. With considerable savvy, she promoted the cabin as what she called "the most prominent historic site in the state of Iowa." As the only home still standing from the time of the massacre, the cabin had been recognized as a historic curiosity even before she purchased it. Now, as its popularity increased, she proceeded to separate it from the surrounding landscape by constructing an elaborate lattice covering, which ensured that only paying customers could see



SHSI (IOWA CITY)

Sharp built a lattice work around the cabin, thus restricting its view to paying visitors only. Advertising on the roof promised tourists "the sights of a lifetime."



STEREOGRAPH, COURTESY PAUL JUHL. CABINET CARD, ALBUMEN PRINT: SHSI (IOWA CITY), POSTCARD: SHSI (DES MOINES)



Mrs. Abbie Gardner Sharp.

THE ONLY SURVIVOR OF THE SPIRIT LAKE MASSACRE IN 1857. She was then a girl of fourteen years, and captured by the Indians. Out of forty persons who were then residents of Dickinson county, she is the only one now living who was at home when the Savages came. [Copyrighted 1884.]



As 19th-century photographic technology expanded, so did the opportunities to market images of Abbie Gardner Sharp and her cabin, which appeared in formats ranging from stereographs, albumen prints, and cabinet cards, to color postcards.

In the center right image, the woman in the plaid dress is probably Sharp. She sits outside a tent marked with a banner reading "Massacre of 1857.")



Interior of the Gardner Log Cabin Okoboji Lake, Ia.

Copyright,

Made in Germany for Mrs. Abbie Gardner Sharp, Arnolds Park, Okoboji Lake, Ia.



At the dedication of the monument in 1895, Abbie Gardner Sharp (center) is flanked by Chetanmaza (Iron Hawk), one of the Wahpeton who rescued her, and Charles Flandrau, the Sioux Indian agent at the time of her captivity.

the cabin. A bold sign painted on the lattice roof advertised: "Within this lattice work you see the sights of a lifetime! The only log cabin and historical relics of the Indian Massacre of 1857." Stepping through the proscenium of the front gate and into the shelter of the lattice, visitors experienced a sacred, shrine-like atmosphere carefully created and controlled by its proprietor.

A popular postcard from the period (*opposite*) shows the interior of the Gardner cabin museum. Sharp and her son Allen are shown with a display of souvenirs, artifacts, and pictures. On the wall behind the counter hangs one of five paintings illustrating the events of 1857. (The largest ones may have been painted by her.) These "memory paintings" depict in explicit detail the bloody deaths of the Gardner family, the burning of a neighbor's cabin, and the killing of a fellow captive. She used these paintings to vividly illustrate the massacre

and captivity to visitors, and she also reproduced them in later editions of her book.

Sharp spent the winter of 1893/94 in Des Moines lobbying the Iowa legislature for funds to construct a monument dedicated to all the victims of the Spirit Lake Massacre. She succeeded. On the 37th anniversary of the killings, the state appropriated \$5,000 for the construction of the monument and appointed a commission, which included Sharp, former Governor Cyrus Carpenter, attorney John F. Duncombe, Dickinson County settler R. A. Smith, and former state representative (and first curator of the state's historical collections) Charles Aldrich, to oversee its completion. Sharp wrote: "All those who have ever stood by the grave wherein lie six of my family near the cabin door . . . will rejoice with me to know that . . . the hearts of statesmen have been touched by the story of . . . tragic death, and

the quiet bravery which inspired these people to seek homes in the wilderness." A 55-foot granite obelisk was erected next to the cabin on a lot purchased by the state. The bodies of 17 of the victims were removed from their original graves and reinterred at the foot of the column.

Some 5,000 people attended the dedication of the monument on July 26, 1895. Presiding over the ceremonies were the monument commission and others, such as Charles Flandrau and Chetanmaza, a Wahpeton Dakota who was involved in the effort to buy Abigail in May 1857. In his remarks, commissioner R. A. Smith emphasized the cultural virtues of bravery, endurance, and sacrifice, and compared the Spirit Lake monument to the new Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument in Des Moines: "While [the state of Iowa] is spending her hundreds of thousands of dollars in giving fitting

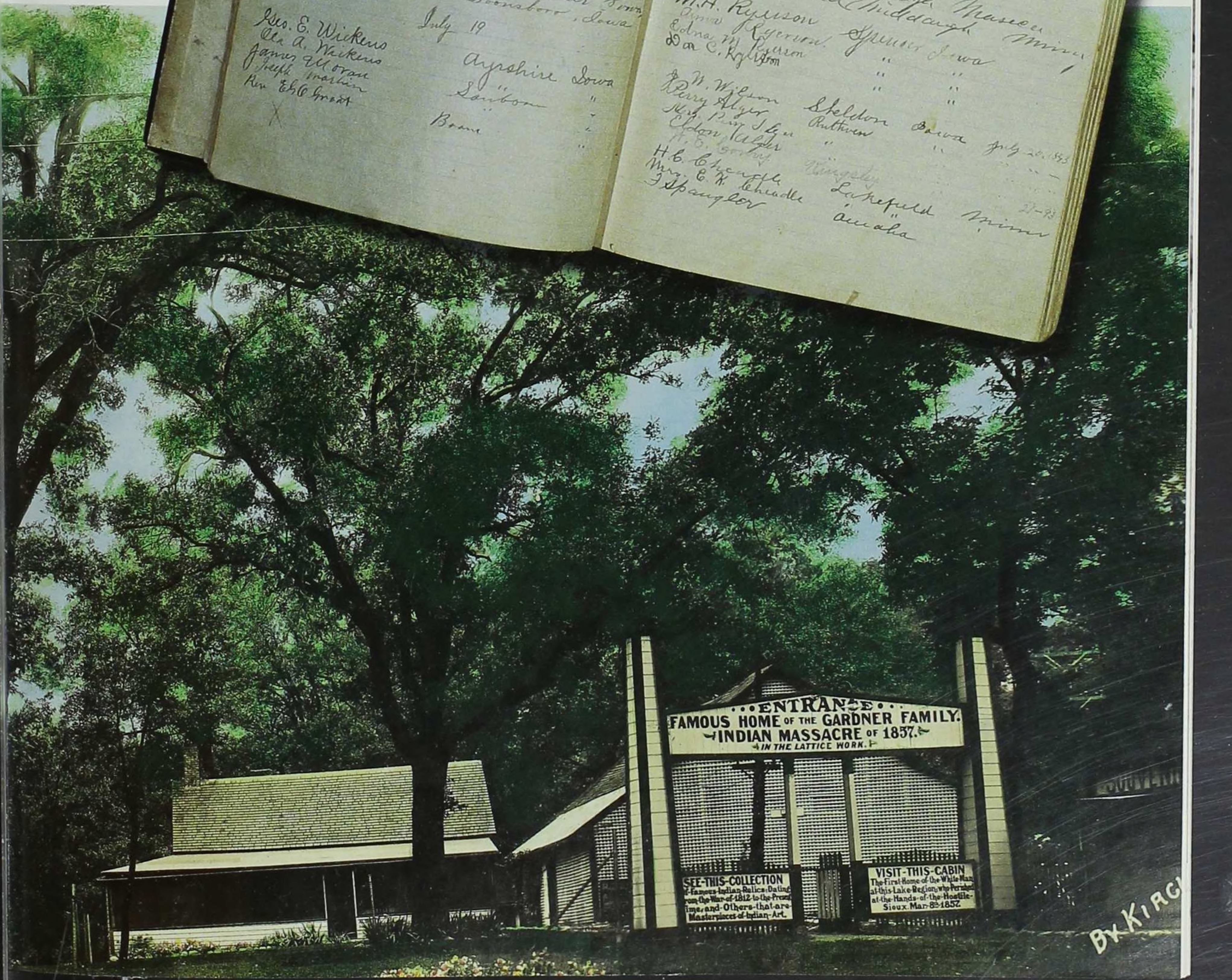
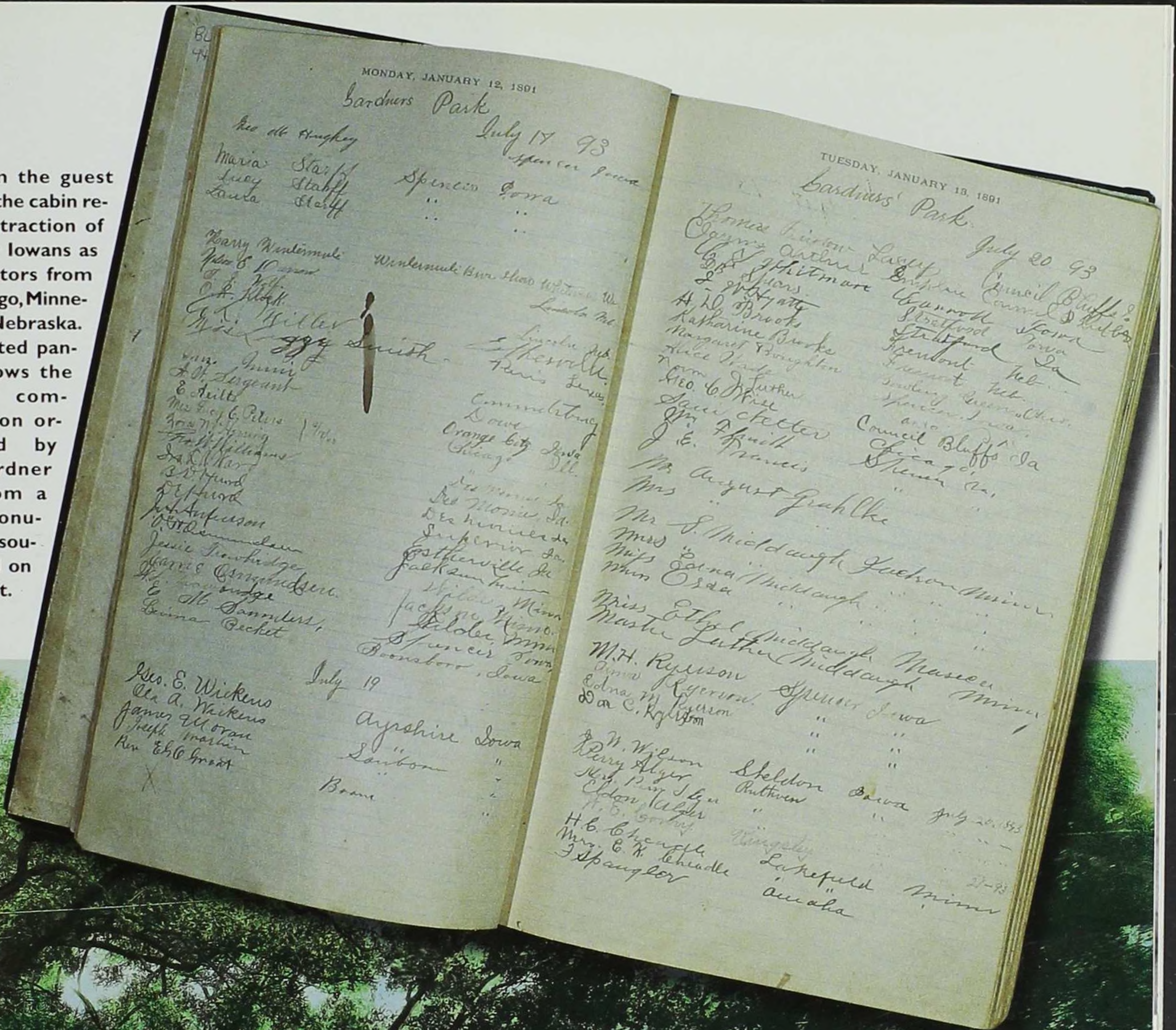
recognition to the glorious deeds of her brave soldiers and sailors who fought and bled on so many battlefields, [Iowa] should also . . . give recognition to the . . . band of patriots and heroes, who, taking their lives in their hands struck out on her northwestern border and after braving dangers such as fall to the lot of but very few, finally gave their lives as a sacrifice to their intrepidity and courage."

While the preservation of history might have motivated her original decision to open the doors of the cabin to the public, it was the flow of tourism and commerce that allowed them to remain open. The enduring popularity of the Gardner cabin was partially predicated on the titillation of the

SHSI (IOWA CITY). BOOK PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHARLES SCOTT



Pages from the guest register at the cabin reveal the attraction of the site for Iowans as well as visitors from Ohio, Chicago, Minnesota, and Nebraska. A hand-tinted panorama shows the range of commemoration orchestrated by Abbie Gardner Sharp, from a granite monument to a souvenir stand on the far right.



BY KIRBY

public's taste for lurid stories. In his study of 19th-century American tourist attractions, John F. Sears notes that "Americans had developed an almost morbidly avid appetite for the sublime terror of huge devastation." Though Sharp portrayed herself in her book and lectures as a victim, in actuality she was also an aggressive entrepreneur who was able to capitalize on the tragic events of her life and appeal to the public's interest. Visitors were lured from great distances by the grisly tale of conflict between white settlers and Native Americans and, in particular, by the lurid details of the captivity of young Abigail Gardner. A visit to the cabin offered the public a chance to step into the scene of an infamous event and to learn, firsthand, the explicit details of the killing, mutilation, and abduction that took

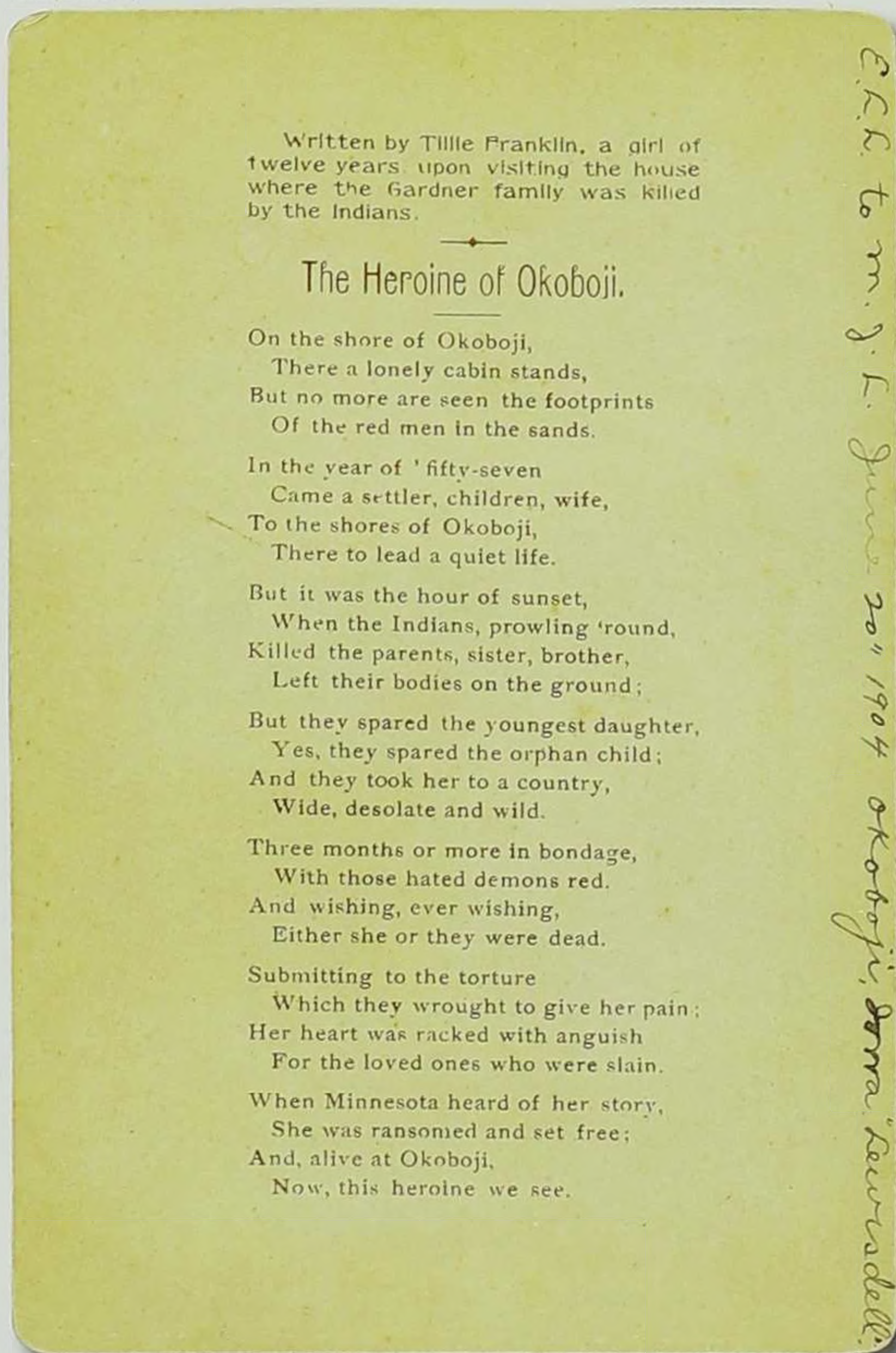
place there. Though mixing tragedy and tourism might seem paradoxical, Sharp made each visitor feel privileged to hear the details of this horrific event by personally recounting her story. In later years, when she was too frail to repeat her story several times a day, she delivered it via a phonograph recording.

The Gardner Cabin was also popular because of its fortuitous location. Many of the same natural attributes that had drawn the Gardner family to the lakes region in 1856 brought thousands more in the decades that followed. By the time Sharp returned to the area in 1883, resorts were already being constructed to accommodate tourists who were arriving in large numbers at the newly completed railroad depot. "Here, where once stood the grimy tepees of the Dakotas, may be seen, in the summer, the white tents of people of culture and refinement," Sharp commented in her memoir. Capitalizing on the local tourism, Sharp inserted into later editions of her book several postcard scenes of Okoboji hotels, sailboats, and vacationers—amidst the grisly illustrations of massacre and murder.

She also tapped into the romantic curiosity tourists held for the indigenous inhabitants of the Iowa lakes region. She wrote, "The weird traditions of the dusky race that once haunted these shores, and the stories of the dark tragedies enacted here, have laid over all a more powerful spell than beauty; the subtle one of romance." Legends such as the one that attributed the name Spirit Lake to the Indian spirits that supposedly guarded it also enhanced the popularity of the area. Once the Dakota were safely subdued and no longer a threat, tourists quickly became intrigued with their enigmatic culture and the romance of their "primitive" ways. Sharp catered to this fascination by peddling Indian crafts and by recounting her experiences as their captive.

In her later years, Sharp wholeheartedly endorsed the system of government and mission schools that were established for Indians in the Dakotas. She visited reservation schools in such places as Fort Totten, North Dakota, and Flandreau, South Dakota. In her travels she retraced the journey she first made as a captive, visiting some of Inkpaduta's former camp sites and even encountering one man who claimed to be a member of the band that had held her captive. A convert to Christian Science, Sharp expressed great confidence that "the Indian possesses the quality of mind sufficient to elevate him above the low plane of thought and habit in which he has groveled along ever since he was found by Columbus." Many times she addressed Indian groups in

SHSI (IOWA CITY)



A child's poem about the "Heroine of Okoboji" fills the back of this cabinet-card portrait of Sharp and continues the tradition of captivity narratives.



Abbie Gardner Sharp (above) died in 1921 at the age of 77, in Colfax, Iowa. She left the cabin to her family. Right: Daughter-in-law Mary Sharp (left) poses with a friend in 1928 outside the entrance gate.

schools and churches, shared her well-known story with them, and gently admonished them to learn to read and write and to live in harmony with the whites. She died in Colfax, Iowa, in 1921. She left the cabin to family members, who transferred ownership to the State of Iowa in 1942 and moved to California.

In many ways Abigail Gardner Sharp was an extremely strong figure who crusaded not only to memorialize the "Spirit Lake Massacre," but also to "reform" the Indian population through Christianity. Along the way, she became a savvy entrepreneur and aggressive promoter. So why does the image of Sharp as a victim persist? Because the story of her life was filled with tragic events? Because she was a symbol of lost virtue? Or perhaps because she was an orphan who was later separated from her husband?

Perhaps we continue to see her as a victim partially because it was the role Gardner herself perpetuated in her writing and in her museum. While the stereotype of "Frail Flower" implied limits to her capabilities and aroused pity in those who were familiar with her story, it also endowed her with a certain amount of notoriety and power. Her status as victim presented her with an audience. Through



BOTH PHOTOS: SHSI (IOWA CITY)

her lectures and memoir, she was able to cultivate that audience and to muster popular support for such causes as the construction of the Spirit Lake monument and the reform of Indian civilization. The Gardner log cabin became a symbol of her views and causes while serving as a stage on which to recount the horrendous details of one of Iowa's most tragic events.

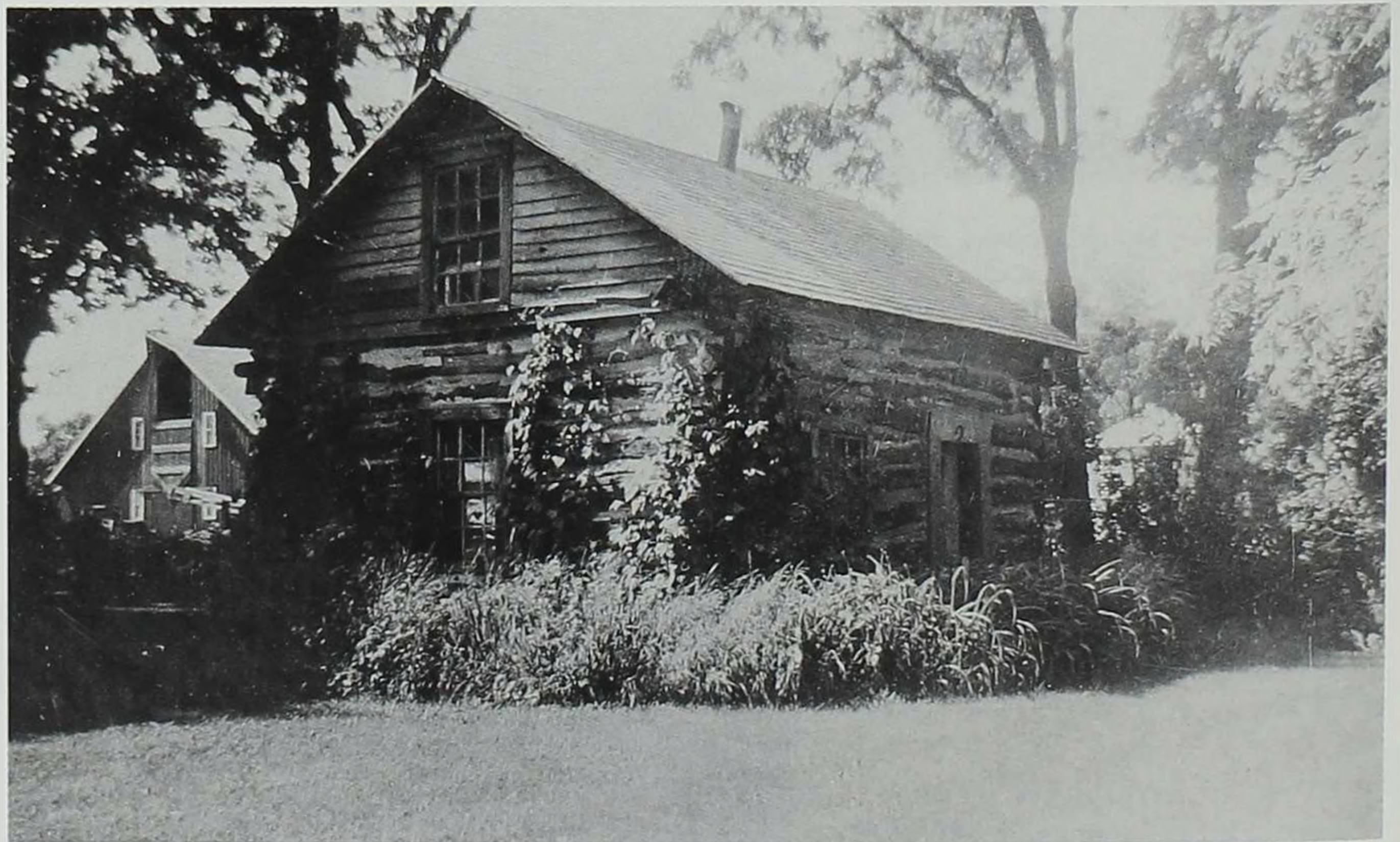
Abbie Gardner Sharp's log house museum was well established by 1907 when 61-year-old Charlotte Kirchner Butler and her only child, 23-year-old Hortense, returned to Peterson, Iowa, 40 miles south of Spirit Lake. Charlotte Kirchner had been ten in the winter of 1857, when Inkpaduta and his band of Wahpekute had stopped at her family's cabin in search of food a few weeks before they reached Spirit Lake.

Much had happened in the Kirchner family since that harsh winter. The little settlement of Long Grove had changed its name to Peterson. Charlotte had left northwest Iowa to study in Grinnell and Iowa City and then returned to teach school. In 1880, she married Moreau Butler, the first doctor to establish a permanent practice in Cherokee County. Meanwhile, in 1867, Charlotte's older brother Phillip and his new wife, Anna Parrish Kirchner, had moved to 320 acres of farmland just northwest of Peterson. There they built a modest and unassuming log house—15 by 20 feet, and a story and a half—as their first home. Although hand-hewn logs formed the walls, dimension lumber cut at a mill owned by Phillip's brother Gust Kirchner was used for floors, joists, roof, doors, and window frames. This method of mixing traditional log and modern frame building techniques was sometimes used toward the end of the region's period

of settlement as a means of constructing homes and businesses quickly and inexpensively.

Inside the log home, a wood-burning stove served for cooking and heating. A loft space provided sleeping quarters, and a trap door led to an earthen storage cellar. As the farming operation expanded, the Kirchners enlarged their log house by building two frame additions. Many years later, Hortense Butler Heywood, Charlotte's daughter, recalled these spaces: "On one side was a shed containing anvil and forge with a bellows so large that a child's utmost strength scarcely served to force a puff of air from it; on the other side was the kitchen and in it a kettle once used for rendering the fat used in the making of soap and large enough to hold three or four children." From this small home, Phillip and Anna Kirchner operated their farm until 1882, when they built a two-story, white frame house only a few yards away.

Changes came quickly to Clay County and the surrounding region during the last decades of the 19th century. Farms covered much of the prairie, and due partly to improvements in transportation and agricultural technology, the business of farming grew beyond the level of mere subsistence. As farmers expanded their operations to remain competitive, they often tore down the original pioneer homes to make way for larger, more permanent dwellings. Yet amidst the new buildings the successful Kirchners had added to their farm—the frame



As the Kirchner farm prospered and new outbuildings rose, the 1867 cabin held its own on the farmstead and found new purposes—first as a workshop and then as a museum and landmark.



BOTH PHOTOS: SHS (IOWA CITY); PETERSON, IOWA, NOTEBOOK

Charlotte Kirchner Butler (in dark dress) undertook the preservation of her brother's cabin and transformed it into a historical landmark. Here, she poses outside the cabin with another brother, William, and his wife.

house, a huge barn in 1890, then a tenant house and several outbuildings—the small log home remained in its original location, serving for a time as a workshop and spared for its practical utility, its sentimental value, or simply its novelty.

The couple died childless—Anna in 1891 and Phillip in 1903—and the farm was rented out until 1907, when Phillip's sister Charlotte and her daughter, Hortense, returned to live there. It seems doubtful that, in 1907, many of the neighbors would have imagined that the log house in the Kirchner front yard was destined to become a historical landmark. "This was the only one of these primitive homes left," Charlotte later related, "and it was ready to tumble down. A kind neighbor offered to take it down and haul it away for . . . firewood."

Instead, Charlotte Kirchner Butler initiated the careful restoration of the log house. Though her brother Phillip had constructed the cabin eleven years after Inkpaduta's much-remembered visit to Peterson and the surrounding area, she saw the log house as a symbol of the struggles the Kirchner family and their neighbors had faced during their first years on the banks of the Little Sioux River and as a reminder of the part the settle-

"THE HOUSE BUILDING had progressed rapidly. Trees had been cut, scored, hewn and marked, ready to be put up. When enough had been cut, all the men in the new settlement met and had a 'raising.' One by one, the logs were rolled and lifted into place. At the first story lighter logs were put cross-wise to support the second floor; then more logs and then the gables, on which rested the ridge pole, securely fastened to support the rafters. As there were no shingles to be had, their place was taken by slabs made by splitting logs, which had been sawed into two and a half foot lengths, lengthwise into even thickness and then smoothing the slabs roughly. They made a fairly tight roof. The puncheon floors were made by splitting logs about four feet long into thick boards and smoothing them with a broadax. These floors were not too bad when you knew that they were the best you could have and that no one on the frontier had better ones."

Charlotte Kirchner Butler wrote these words to her daughter, recalling the log cabin built by her parents in Clay County in 1856. Her brother's log house, which she later preserved, is believed to have been one of the last log homes built in the county, and its construction varied significantly from that of the earlier structures described above. Yet for Butler, her brother's log house came to embody the memories she carried from her frontier childhood. —Greg Olson

ment played in the prelude to the "Spirit Lake Massacre." Butler saw to it that the log home was restored to look exactly as it had when her brother and sister-in-law first moved into it in 1867. The chinking between the logs was replaced, the windows and roof were repaired, and the add-on summer kitchen and blacksmith shop were removed.

In the next years, Butler began to display a collection of artifacts in the Kirchner log house, including agricultural tools, Native American arrowheads, some family furniture, and the bellows from Phillip's blacksmith forge. Soon, Charlotte and Hortense opened the log house for tours. By the 1920s, their "museum" began to receive publicity in several regional newspapers as a site of historical significance. "Dear Girlie," Butler wrote her daughter at one point, "The little log house in my front yard seems to be quite popular."

Butler understood that the Kirchner log house appealed to visitors partly because it served as a sort of picturesque curio. But there was more to it. Set in the beautiful surroundings of the farm, which came to be

known as "the Oaks," the cabin became a striking visual symbol of the romance and nostalgia many Americans associated with frontier and early agrarian life. Butler was highly educated and well traveled (widowed in 1894, she had lived in Chicago from 1899 to 1905, and then traveled in Europe until 1907), and she understood the widespread sentiment for the image of the hand-hewn log home, and its power to symbolize westward expansion and the nation's emerging identity. As tour guide, Charlotte Kirchner Butler added a personal touch to the pioneer saga by recounting childhood memories to visitors. The cabin and its artifacts illustrated her tales of hardships in the winter of 1857, the Kirchners' brush with the starving Wahpekute, and the trail of trouble that led northward.

Like Abigail Gardner Sharp, Charlotte Kirchner Butler and her daughter opened their log house museum to the public. Unlike the Gardner cabin, however, the Kirchner log house was free to all visitors

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR



Visitors to the Kirchner cabin saw an array of furnishings, farm tools, and arrowheads collected by Charlotte Kirchner Butler.

Knowing your interest in all of our history I thought you might like this sketch of my log cabin. It was a project of our church Circle and we have sold nearly 175 of the boxes. This summer I have had over four hundred visitors to the cabin, the interest seems to be increasing.

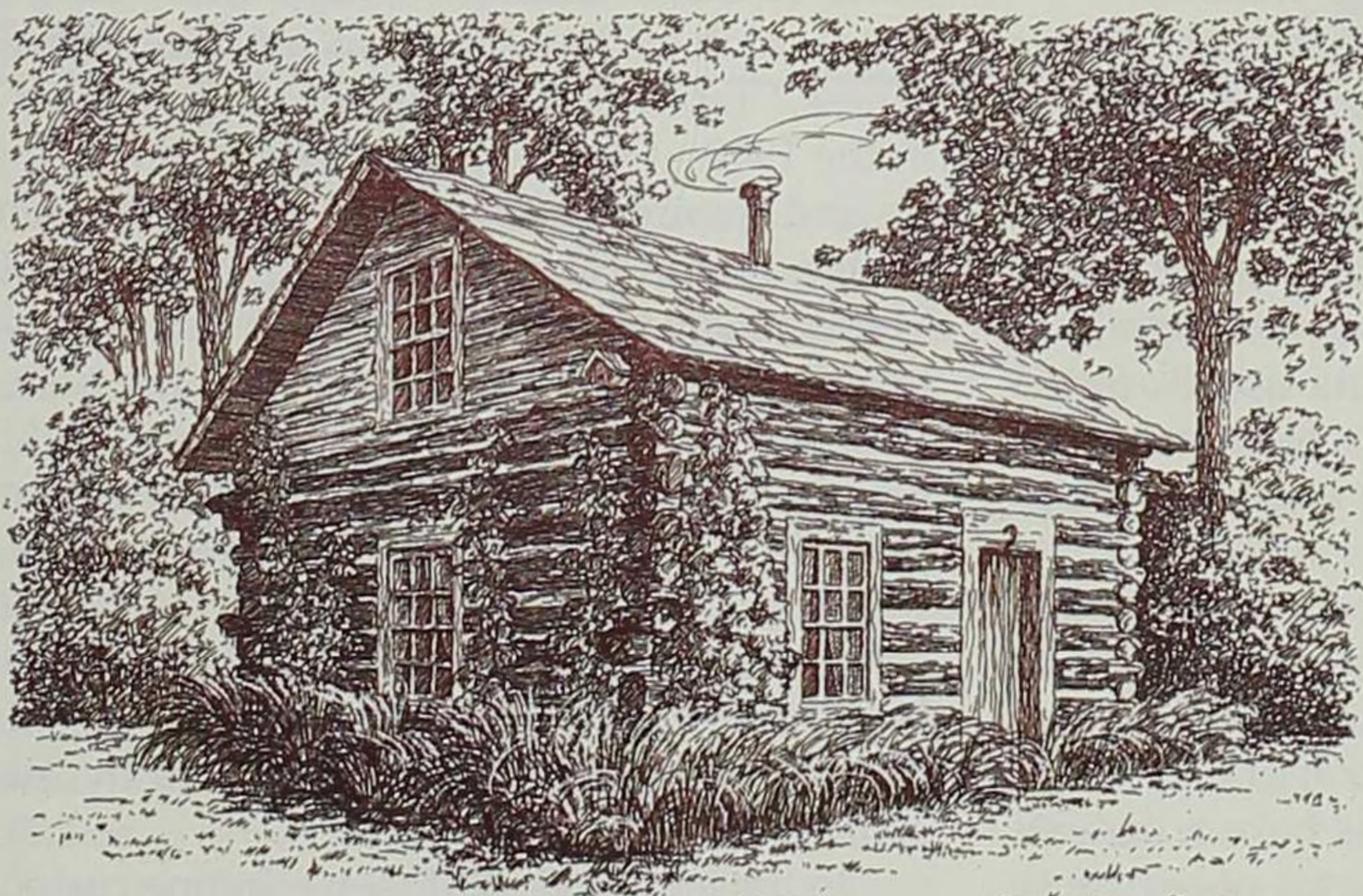
With Christmas greetings and good wishes to you both.

Dec. 3, 1967
The Oaks,
Peterson, Iowa

Hortense B. Heywood

Hometown Prints
HOMETOWN, WISCONSIN

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Philip Kirchner Cabin - built in 1867

Peterson, Iowa

After Butler's death in 1923, her daughter, Hortense Butler Heywood, assumed the role of the cabin's protector, historian, and promoter. Above: Heywood examines artifacts in a March 1956 article for *The Iowan*.

The typed message on this illustrated notecard demonstrates Heywood's passion and energy for bringing the cabin to the public's attention. The notecard is in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa and may have been sent to its superintendent.

and none of the objects in it were for sale. While the Gardner cabin attracted thousands of visitors each year, thanks largely to Sharp's promotional ability and its location near several popular lake resorts, visitors to the Kirchner cabin were primarily area school groups and occasional travelers who stopped by to visit the rustic curiosity in the front yard of this Clay County farm.

Butler's descendants believe she intended the Kirchner log home to serve as an antidote to the commercialism of the Gardner cabin and Sharp's mix of history and commerce. Butler, a woman of more independent means, felt that steering clear of profit would enable her to depict a more genuine picture of Iowa pioneer history. Yet both women clearly shared similar beliefs about the significance of the history they had participated in, and both felt uniquely qualified to present that history to others.

Butler and Sharp were not alone in this respect. During the first decades of the 20th century many Iowans reflected on the settlement history of their state. Hamlin Garland's *A Son of the Middle Border* (1917), Josephine Donovan's *Black Soil* (1930), and Herbert Quick's *Vandemark's Folly* (1922) are just a sample of the Iowa novels that brought the saga of the rapidly changing prairie into the canon of contemporary literature. Preservation efforts by groups such as the Daughters of the American Revolution and Old Settlers Associations contributed to a general awareness of Iowa's heritage, and local residents began to recognize many of the buildings and sites that were of historical significance.

After Butler's death in 1932, Hortense Butler Heywood worked to preserve her mother's stories and to ensure the Kirchner log home's place of importance in local and state history. She was responsible for much of its publicity and occasionally wrote articles for newspapers such as the *Peterson Patriot* and the *Sioux City Journal*. Her activity in the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs and the State Historical Society of Iowa provided her with a forum from which to speak publicly on topics of historical interest.

Trained as an entomologist at Cornell University and co-author of *A Handbook of the Dragonflies of North America* (1929), Heywood brought the analytical perspective of a scholar to her interpretation of the history of Iowa. Yet, perhaps because she was born a generation after the settlement of Peterson, some of her prose revealed a streak of romantic sentiment. In an unpublished article titled "Yesterday," she described a scene that, most likely, she had not personally witnessed: "Despite the terror they spread about them the Indians gave the frontier life a touch of picturesqueness; the stolid braves, draped in gaudy blankets, bearing their

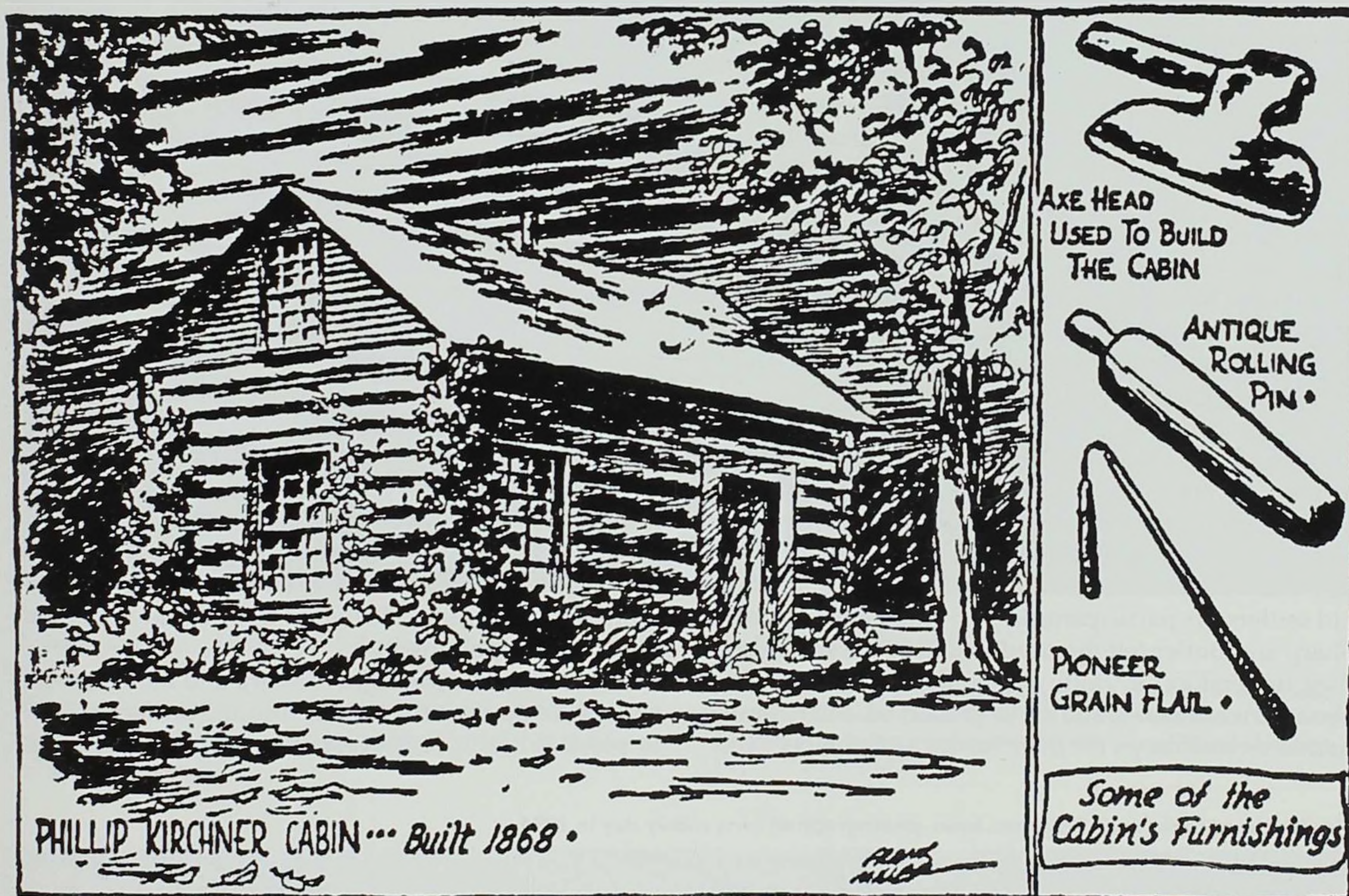
guns over their shoulders; the squaws, with their pa-pooes strapped to their backs, struggling with restless ponies and with the awkward 'travois' in which their household goods were packed; the camp with clustered teepees outlined against wood or hill, were objects of never ending interest to those to whom such a sight was incredibly novel."

Through a shared interest in history, both mother and daughter had understood that the log house museum they had created was more than a monument to the family's founding role in the history of Clay County. Butler had realized immediately that the Kirchner log house was historically important because it remained intact and in situ. She believed that this log house, unlike cabins that had been altered or moved, was an accurate example of a pioneer home and that it stood as an important contrast to the Gardner cabin, which had been remodeled as a museum and souvenir shop. To her, it was important that Iowans never become so busy improving their homes, farms, and businesses that they forget their humble and rugged beginnings or their ancestors' heroic conquest over the wilderness.

Many of these deep cultural themes can be detected in various newspaper features written about the Kirchner log house. The home "contained two rooms, one downstairs and one up and the life lived there was of necessity bare of many of the comforts which we have come to consider essential to happiness," reported Ruth Fraser in the *Sioux City Journal* in the 1940s. Other writers described the house as rustic and quaint, staunch and sturdy. "When Grandpa Built a Home Here He Built to Last," proclaimed the *Spencer Daily Reporter* in a 1939 photo essay, while a 1928 headline from the *Des Moines Register* stated that the Kirchner log house was "Still Defying [the] Elements." Nearly all articles faithfully, if not always correctly, reported Charlotte Kirchner Butler's story of the harsh winter and Indian/settler conflict of 1857. More than one reporter confused the log house—built by her brother in 1867—with Charlotte's and Phillip's own childhood log cabin that was visited by Inkpaduta in 1857.

In the late 1960s, Pulitzer-winning cartoonist Frank Miller produced an illustrated essay for the *Des Moines Register* that perhaps best articulates the enduring power of the Kirchner log house. Titled "Pioneer Cabin: Symbol for Americans," the feature expressed Miller's strong belief that this modest home was a reminder of the pioneer spirit of survival. Based on information gathered

Pioneer Cabin: Symbol for Americans



from Hortense Butler Heywood, Miller's essay recited the litany of hardships faced by the Kirchners, Bicknells, and Meads, the first families to settle in Clay County. Miller concluded that "the Kirchner cabin stands as a tribute to a people who faced annihilation, yet never gave up the things they had worked for, or the hopes they had lived for; who set an example that should stand as a lesson to Americans today." Miller's accompanying drawing (*above*) presented the Kirchner log house as an idealized log cabin, standing straight and strong under a darkening sky. In a small side panel, Miller included sketches of three of the tools displayed in the log home: a grain flail, an antique rolling pin, and an axe head "used to build the cabin."

Miller's essay illustrates the ability of Kirchner's log house to transcend its local historical significance. Although Charlotte Butler seems to have viewed the house as an accurate artifact of a specific time and place, she also successfully empowered it as a cultural icon. By

restoring the cabin without its two frame additions and by weaving the experiences of her frontier childhood with the cabin's own history as the first home of newlyweds Phillip and Anna Kirchner, Butler endowed the structure with an identity that easily blended with the stereotype of a pioneer home. As such, it more easily captured the imaginations of its visitors. As a landmark, it possessed an appeal sufficiently broad to evoke strong cultural responses in those who, like cartoonist Miller, came from outside the immediate area.

No longer simply a primitive home defying the elements, the log home had evolved into a historical site, built upon a mixture of preserved fact and cultural myth. Three generations of women—Charlotte, Hortense, and now Julia Heywood Booth (Hortense's daughter and current guardian of the site)—have made a point of staying committed to the factual presentation of early Clay County history. Yet, as is often the case with family histories, they relished the value of a good story. Like

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Abigail Gardner Sharp, they realized that the manner in which their story was presented directly affected the enduring popularity and long-term survival of their log house museum. Through oral history, photographs, memoirs, articles, and speeches they were able to promote the Kirchner log house in such a way that the public has long regarded it as nothing less than, as cartoonist Frank Miller called it, a "Symbol for Americans."

Like most who witnessed the plowing under of the Iowa prairie, Abbie Gardner Sharp and Charlotte Kirchner Butler understood the magnitude of change their generation had laid upon the land. Also like many Americans, they saw this change as a necessary heroic struggle. Their families and others like them had battled the wilderness, weather, and indigenous populations to secure the land for what they perceived as the "advancement of civilization." As this change continued at a frantic pace, as corn replaced the once abundant stands of bluestem, so, too, did new white frame farmhouses replace the humble first homes of the old settlers. As participants in the settlement saga, both Sharp and Butler felt the need to define the struggle as they understood it. Both wrote and spoke frequently about Iowa history, and both preserved their family homes as backdrops for their stories and perspectives.

While conscious of the broad strokes of settlement history, Sharp and Butler were also keenly interested in protecting family legacies. Both were proud that their parents had been among the first whites to establish permanent homes in northwest Iowa. Their acts of preservation ensured the enduring place of their parents and siblings in the annals of history. By sharing their private stories and family artifacts with tourists and visitors, Sharp and Butler could direct the manner in which these things became absorbed into the public memory. By presenting their heritage in a museum context, the two women further endowed that heritage with the aura of authenticity.

Thanks to the early preservation efforts of Abbie Gardner Sharp and Charlotte Kirchner Butler, both log house museums remain today in their original locations, and both are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Abbie Gardner Cabin Historic Site is maintained by the State Historical Society of Iowa, which restored the cabin to its 1856 appearance and built a museum and visitors center next to the cabin. The Kirchner log house is currently owned by Butler's granddaughter, Julia Heywood Booth, and is open to visitors by appointment.

Because of the foresight of Sharp and Butler, we can experience up close the architecture and artifacts related to pioneer life in northwest Iowa. As promoters and

The Kirchner cabin near Peterson, Iowa, photographed on a snowy day in 1991.



PHOTO BY GREG OLSON



PHOTO BY AND COURTESY OF MIKE WHYTE

preservationists, Sharp and Butler left us a rich guide to the past. At the same time, by examining their means of preserving their past, we can learn much about how they viewed themselves and their part in this moment of Iowa history. ❖

The Gardner Cabin today.

The Kirchner log cabin (opposite page) is open to the public by appointment from Memorial Day to Labor Day. For more information regarding the cabin or to arrange a tour, contact Burdette Stier of Peterson Heritage, Inc., at 712-295-6443.

Raised on a century farm in Buena Vista County, Iowa, Greg Olson has fabricated and installed exhibits at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City. He is the former director of the Walters-Boone County Museum in Columbia, Missouri, and currently curates and designs exhibits for the Missouri State Archives.

NOTE ON SOURCES

This article combines two separate works. Each was presented at the Iowa Heritage Expo (Des Moines, 1995, 1996), and a brief version combining the two at the "Women in Preservation Conference" (Tempe, Arizona, 1997). Research for the Butler Cabin portion was supported by a Sesquicentennial grant from the State Historical Society of Iowa and the Iowa Sesquicentennial Commission.

Discussions of frontier and log house iconography appear in Mac E. Berrick, "The Log House as Cultural Symbol," *Material Culture* 18 (1986), 15-16; John R. Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America, 1580-1845* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 180-81; Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 8-22; William H. Truettner, *The West as America: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, 1820-1920* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Press, 1991); and Vivien Green Fryd, *Art and Empire: The Politics of Ethnicity in the United States Capitol, 1815-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992). Iowa sources on early settlement include Frank Luther Mott, *Literature of Pioneer Life in Iowa* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1923); and Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration, *The WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa* (1938; reprint, Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1986), 130-39.

Various accounts of the "Spirit Lake Massacre" and of the captivity of Abigail Gardner have been published over the years. The most popular, of course, is her own *History of the Spirit Lake Massacre*, which was reprinted in at least nine editions and is still available in a facsimile edition from the Dickinson County Historical Society in Spirit Lake. Other versions of the story can be found in Lorenzo Porter Lee's *History of the Spirit Lake Massacre!* (1857, reprinted by the State Historical Society of Iowa in 1971); R. A. Smith's *A History of Dickinson County, Iowa* (Des Moines: Kenyon Publishing, 1902); and Thomas Teakle's *The Spirit Lake Massacre* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1918). A fictional account of the story is found in MacKinlay Kantor's novel *Spirit Lake* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1961).

Richard VanDerBeets's *The Indian Captivity Narrative: An American Genre* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984) is a comprehensive survey of the history of captivity narratives in the United States. A more analytical treatment can be found in June Namias, *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993). See also Roy Harvey Pearce, "The Significance of the Captivity Narrative," *American Literature* 19 (1947): 2-4.

For information about Abigail Gardner Sharp's later years and the beginnings of the Gardner Cabin museum, see Hattie P. Elston's *White Men Follow After* (Iowa City: Athens Press, 1946); and Peggy Schenk Smith's *Arnolds Park at Lake Okoboji* (Aurelia, IA: Sentinel Publishing, 1976). In the revised sixth edition of *The History of the Spirit Lake Massacre*, Sharp discusses the museum's early years in a chapter called "An Epoch of Advancement."

Concerning the Kirchner cabin, the major sources are biographical data and newspaper articles in the Kirchner family papers, held by Julia Heywood Booth (Sioux Falls, South Dakota), and the author's interviews with Booth, 1991-95. See also Drake Hokanson, *Reflecting a Prairie Town: A Year in Peterson* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1994), 111-27; Curt Harnack, "Prelude to Massacre," *The Iowan* 4:3 (March 1956); and Bessie L. Lyon, "Hungry Indians," *The Palimpsest* 9 (Oct. 1928).

John A. Jakle's *The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth-Century North America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985); and John F. Sears's *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1989), are extremely valuable in establishing historical context for small tourist attractions like Gardner Cabin.

Finally, I am greatly indebted to Steven Ohm, the State Historical Society of Iowa's Historic Sites Coordinator, and to Mike Koppert, the Site Manager at Gardner Cabin, for leading me to invaluable resources and for sharing their enthusiasm for this topic. Annotations are held in *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files (SHSI-Iowa City).



Stepping back into 1856

The Gardner Cabin today

Imagine constructing a log cabin in the unsettled frontier of northwestern Iowa in the mid-1850s. Then imagine spending a harsh Iowa winter with seven other individuals in that one-room cabin, measuring a mere 17 by 22 feet.

Visiting the Gardner Cabin today invites such reverie. While the cabin survives as a reminder of a tragic frontier event (as the previous articles explain), it also speaks to us as an example of settlers' housing.

Since 1856, the year it was built, the cabin has undergone several changes. In 1862 or '63, a second story was added. In 1891 Abbie Gardner Sharp added a lattice overhang (removed in 1962 by the Iowa

Conservation Commission). When the cabin was transferred to the State Historical Society of Iowa in 1974, architects and archaeologists conducted research and decided to return the cabin to its 1856 appearance, size, and form. Directed by architect William Wagner and State Historical Society staff, master carpenter and craftsman Harold Howell, of Des Moines, worked for a year on the cabin.

Using authentic materials and techniques whenever possible gave Howell plenty of insight about Rowland Gardner, who constructed the cabin for his family. "Building a log cabin is slow work, and there's no way to rush it," Howell told a

reporter. "You notch a log, check to see if it fits, and then notch again. Each log goes up one at a time." Howell worked with seasoned oak logs: "I've gone through two hand axes, and am always sharpening tools.

"Gardner evidently did a real fine job on the original cabin, and I'll guarantee that he had his work cut out for him," Howell noted during the project. "Some paintings of the cabin show its roof to be much higher than it was. The roofs couldn't have been that high, because it's just too hard to lift the logs up there. We used a backhoe when we put them up, and I'm sure that Gardner had no backhoe." —The Editor



Some of the objects related to the "Spirit Lake Massacre" and Indian culture that Abbie Gardner Sharp displayed in her cabin are now exhibited in the site's interpretive center (above). Others are on exhibit at the Dickinson County Museum in nearby Spirit Lake. Also part of the five-acre historic site is the 1895 monument.



The Gardner Cabin is furnished with settlers' artifacts, some gathered by Abbie Gardner Sharp. The cabin served many roles in the Iowa lakes region: as the first settler's home, first church, first schoolhouse—and the first tourist attraction.

Planning a visit to Gardner Cabin? Here's what you need to know.

- Location: On Monument Drive, one block west of Arnolds Park Amusement Park in Arnolds Park, Iowa.
- Hours: Memorial Day weekend through September.
Monday-Friday: noon to 4 pm
Weekends: 9 am-4 pm
- School groups may schedule field trips from April 15 through September.
- On the Web: www.iowahistory.org
Then go to "Historic Sites," and then to "Gardner Cabin." A teachers guide is also accessible at this point.
- To schedule group tours or for more information, contact:

Mike Koppert, Site Manager
Abbie Gardner Cabin
Box 74
Arnolds Park, Iowa 51331
Phone: 712-332-7248

Steven Ohrn
Historic Sites Coordinator
State Historical Society of Iowa
600 E. Locust
Des Moines, Iowa 50319
Phone: 515-281-7650
Steve.Ohrn@dca.state.ia.us

Cultural attractions abound in the scenic lakes region of northwest Iowa. While in the area, enjoy historic Arnolds Park Amusement Park, learn about area history at the Dickinson County Historical Museum, visit the Lakes Art Center, see the Maritime Museum, and cruise the lake on the Queen II replica of the famous 1884 steamship.

Gardner Cabin is owned and operated by the State Historical Society of Iowa and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Abbie Gardner Cabin Revisited

by Sarah A. O'Keefe

For more than a century, the Abbie Gardner Cabin in Arnolds Park has been a popular destination for tourists on vacation and students on field trips. Below, the author revisits the historic site as an adult and recalls her childhood trips to the cabin during an era of lingering stereotypes.

—The Editor

Six years old, in bell-bottoms and braids, I remember rushing ahead of my cousins to get inside the musty cabin, clenching my fingers around the worn gate protecting its antique contents from people like me — people who would jump in the straw-stuffed bed, touch the leather pouches softly, examining. I would peek my head into the loft by standing on the rickety table, imagining *Little House on the Prairie*. I loved the Gardner Cabin's smell—the way its air felt upon my cheeks, soft and moist—just as much as I loved the scent of burning leaves.

I devoured the museum next to the cabin with the same furious fever, listening intently to the stories told by the female curator who cared for the site in the early 1980s. What stuck in my head about “going to Abbie Gardner” was not anything like *Little House*. What was bred into my heart was fear. I learned words like “barbaric,” “savage,” and “heathen.” The “Spirit Lake Massacre” was passed down to schoolchildren as a fable of pioneer bravery, of taming the wild frontier and making it safe for “civilization.” I was first introduced to Native American culture here—as relentless, violent, and predatory. I was told that an evil man, Inkpaduta, had tramped through this region killing innocent families, including the Gardners, to satisfy his inherently vile demeanor and thirst for blood. I walked away at six, seven, and nine, with the sole image in my head of babies being swung by their legs, heads smashed against the trunks of Okoboji's commanding oaks.

What has been forgotten, what has been ignored, subtracted from the textbooks and literature, and mini-

mized, is that white settlers also acted the role of the barbarian—hanging Indian heads on display, stuffing bodies in trees, slaughtering unsuspecting women and children. Whites retold this history as one of “unprovoked savagery” by Indians and of “brave pioneers” who solved “the Indian problem.” Yet settlers were exactly what they accused Inkpaduta and the Wahpekute of being.

Inkpaduta wasn't the “savage monster in human shape fitted only for the darkest corner of Hades,” as Abbie Gardner Sharp described him in her memoir. Inkpaduta was a man with strengths and flaws. Historical sources tell us that traders such as Martin McLeod and Curtis Lamb spoke of his trustworthiness. Professor F. I. Herriott of Drake University called him “a figure of heroic calibre” and “a military genius” in a 1933 speech to the Okoboji Protective Association. Inkpaduta's younger sister, in the words of another writer, said he was a “very humble man who tried to avoid trouble, but that when he was aroused to a fighting spirit he could do things to an extreme.” “Inkpaduta was one of the greatest resistance fighters that the Dakota Nation ever produced,” says Mike Koppert, current interpreter at the Gardner Cabin Historic Site.

Inkpaduta was a person who had been pushed too long and too hard. He held back after the massacre of his family, after the mounting of his brother's head on a white man's home, after the murder of one of his men, and after being sent off to die of starvation in the dead of winter—until in March of 1857 he exploded and “went to war.”

Nearly 15 years after my first trip to the cabin, I drove myself to “Abbie Gardner” for another visit. I still closed my eyes, loving the warm air and its musty scent. I still imagined myself sleeping in the cabin's loft on a windy night and eating cornbread soaked in bacon grease in the morning. I even loved the new curator, who tells a balanced history, saying the

hardest part of his job is battling racism, bigotry, and ignorance.

Despite this new emphasis on more accurate portrayals of the "Spirit Lake Massacre," the 55-foot granite monument beyond the cabin still stands, timeless. Each of its four sides is engraved. One side tells that the Iowa General Assembly of 1894 sponsored its erection. Another side relates the white man's skeletal story of the incident: "The pioneer settlers named below were massacred by Sioux Indians March 1 to 13, 1857. The barbarous work commenced near this spot and continued to Springfield now Jackson, Minnesota." A third side lists those settlers who died and those who were rescued. The fourth lists the white members of the relief expedition, but omits the names of the three Wahpeton Dakota men who saved Abbie Gardner. The monument stands, perpetuating a superior attitude of white people toward Native American culture, forgetting the names of Abbie's actual rescuers—Beautiful Voice, Iron Hawk, and Little Paul. ❖

The author is a doctoral student in sociology at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, as well as a teaching assistant and managing editor of the Journal of Qualitative Sociology. These excerpts appear here with permission of The Briar Cliff Review (Briar Cliff College, Sioux City, Iowa), which first published the author's "Inkpaduta Revisited" in the Spring 1998 issue. The original essay provides a detailed look at the "Spirit Lake Massacre" and events leading up to it.



Above, seated: Chetanmaza ("Iron Hawk") was one of the three Wahpeton rescuers of Abbie Gardner. He appears in this 1895 image with his cousin Marpiyahdinape (standing). Below: another rescuer, Hotonhowashta ("Beautiful Voice"), who was also named John Otherday.



A delegation of Sisseton-Wahpeton leaders in Washington, D.C., 1858. Standing fourth and fifth from the left are two of Abbie's rescuers: Hotonhowashta ("Beautiful Voice," also known as John Otherday) and Paul Mazakutemani ("Little Paul").



THIS PHOTO AND ABOVE: SHSI (IOWA CITY)



Preserving Memories and Conserving Paintings —The Gardner Canvases—

by Greg Olson

Abigail Gardner Sharp spent her entire adult life searching for an adequate means through which to express, for friends and strangers alike, the horrible memories she carried in her mind—memories based on her experience as the 13-year-old captive of a band of Wahpekute Indians. In 1885, 28 years after her captivity, Sharp published her widely successful *History of the Spirit Lake Massacre*, in which she recounted her memories in the melodramatic language of the popular dime novels of the day. Like these Wild West adventure stories, early editions of Sharp's written memoir included graphic illustrations of some of the story's gory highlights.

Engraved by the book's publisher, Mills and Company of Des Moines—most certainly under Sharp's close supervision—a series of etchings depicted such tragic events as the killing of Sharp's family and the burning of the cabin of her neighbors, the Mattocks.

In the decades before photographic reproductions became technically and financially feasible, publishers of newspapers and books alike relied on the talent and imagination of artists and engravers to visually enhance the often-sensational stories they presented to their audiences. Journals such as *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly* effectively used etchings to bring the battles of the Civil War, the impeachment trial of President Andrew Johnson, and other news stories of the day into the homes of America's growing middle class.

By the early 1890s the brisk sales of Sharp's book

allowed her to purchase her childhood home on the shore of Lake Okoboji and create a museum. Most striking among the curios arranged inside the small cabin were the five large paintings that served as illustrations for the tours she gave to visitors who paid to see the site. According to Mike Koppert, site manager at the Gardner Cabin, four of the five paintings appear to have been painted by Abbie Gardner Sharp, from memory. Rendered in vivid colors, these paintings are enlarged versions of the same grisly scenes depicted in her book that represented her personal recollections of the events she witnessed during and after the massacre.

The artistic expression of personal memory is a phenomenon that is centuries old. Ancient drawings scratched on cave walls and winter counts painted by American Indians on animal hide are recordings of events as recalled by their creators. The genre of memory painting was popular throughout the 19th century, and works of this nature continue to be produced today, often by older people who have little or no formal art training and whose working years are behind them. For some painters, the act of setting down their memories on canvas allows them to look nostalgically at their past. Others see painting as a means to document vanishing lifestyles, occupations, and folkways.

Created some 30 years after the fact, Abigail



Gardner Sharp's paintings of the "Spirit Lake Massacre" do not document an event in history so much as they bear witness to the suffering of a young girl. The images of crimson bloodstains on white snow and angry orange flames engulfing a cabin express Sharp's decades-long struggle with anger, grief, and loss. Like her book, these paintings are her attempt to help others comprehend the losses she survived and the difficulties she endured.

At the same time, these images were important to the success of Sharp's cabin museum. They added credence to her story and helped legitimize her status as a victim. In much the same way as sensational video images of death and destruction help boost television news ratings today, Sharp's paintings also brought paying customers to her museum door. These lurid images offered the curious public a voyeuristic peek at a famously tragic incident and satisfied their desire to vicariously experience tragedy. While Abigail Gardner Sharp claimed that her paintings, like her museum, told the true story of the "Spirit Lake Massacre," they should be viewed as subjective interpretations that have been shaped by decades of memory and by Sharp's need to satisfy the expectations of her audience.

The five paintings, which hung in the Gardner Cabin for decades, deteriorated over time. Dirt and grime accumulated on the surface, and the canvases themselves buckled and bulged. In the early 1990s, the Questers of Iowa, which encourages the study of antiques and fosters preservation and restoration of historical landmarks, funded conservation treatment of the five paintings as a statewide project, with Siouan Chapter #36 and Spirit Lake Chapter #865 making special contributions. Thanks to the Questers' generous support, the conservation and stabilizing treatments were completed; the canvases are cleaned and properly lined, their bulges and draws eliminated. The paintings now hang in the Gardner Cabin Interpretive Center. ❖

Above: The paintings after conservation treatment. From left:

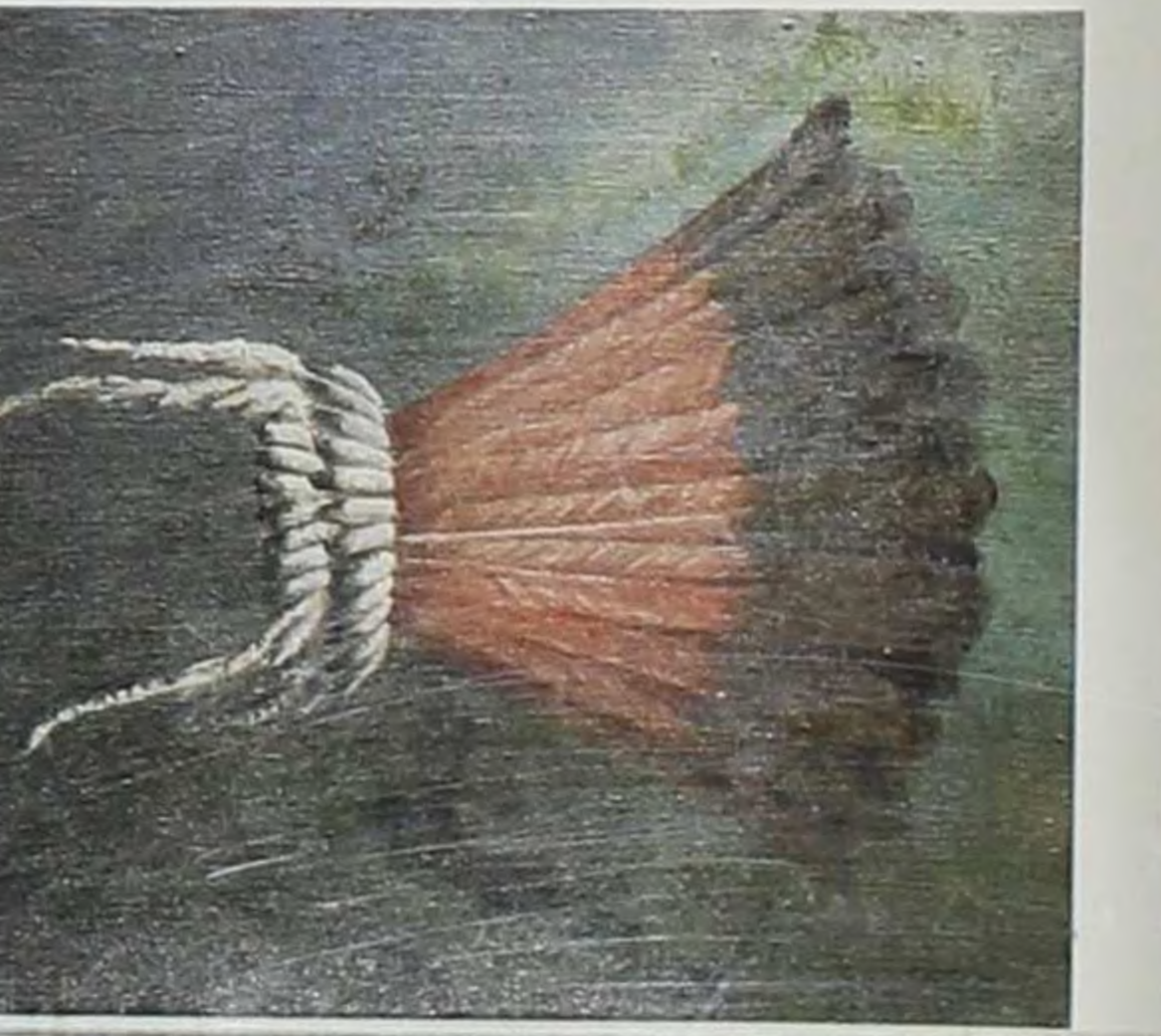
- Abbie is taken hostage and led away from her family's cabin
- "Burning Mattock's Cabin"
- "Sad Fate Of Mrs. Thatcher. Crossing The Big Sioux"
- Negotiations for her surrender. "Council, Jim River, S.D. My Last Night With The Yanktons"
- Yankton "war cap" given to Abbie

BOTH PAGES: SHSI (DES MOINES)



Before conservation treatments, the framing no longer supported the canvases. Below: Joan Gorman and an assistant from Upper Midwest Conservation Associates move one of the paintings. Conservation was funded by Questers of Iowa.





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With Skill & Stories, Fred Stice Carved Iowa's Past



The astounding wood carvings and dolls that filled this small building near Le Grand, Iowa, are now part of the museum collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa. Thanks to the generosity of Mildred and George Heiring, the figures will be preserved and used in the Society's educational programs.

Right: Two of Fred Stice's carved figures play checkers in his "Country Store" diorama.

Opposite page: Silk-head dolls, created by Stice's daughter, Mildred Heiring, in "Park Bench Romance."

Text and photos by Steven Ohrn

From the outside it looked like a typical roadside attraction with a winged totem pole out front. A sign read "Doll Museum and Trading Post." For nearly a year, as I traveled across the state seeking out Iowa folk artists for an exhibit, I drove past this small building but never stopped. The first rule in effective folklore research is to learn to stop the car. Finally, one fall day in 1982, I pulled over.

Two friendly, older women—Mildred Heiring and her mother, Gladys Stice—welcomed me. They were anxious to give me a complete tour. First they led me into a small room containing hundreds of fabulous dolls displayed on shelves behind glass. Mildred was justifiably proud of these dolls, which she had collected over several decades going back to World War II. The silk-head dolls that she had made especially intrigued me.

Then the women took me to the next room. It was completely full of dimly lit dioramas. Most were about two feet high and ranged in width from three to six feet. The dioramas were three-dimensional scenes housed in boxes and peopled with painted wood-carvings five to twelve inches high.

This small museum astounded me. The expressive-



ALL PHOTOS: SHSI (DES MOINES)

Traditions



ness of the woodcarving and painting, and the detail afforded the costumes and their surroundings bowled me over. The two women talked me through a fascinating tour, their narration obviously delivered many times before but still open for interrupting questions. Their stories, together with the dioramas, exemplified everyday social history.

Woodcarving has long been a widespread tradition, and exhibitions of folk art have often included carvings portraying occupations like farming and logging or pastimes like fishing and dancing. In general these carvings are like memory paintings and story quilts, functioning the same as photographs and other mnemonic devices—as aids to remembering

Right: “Barber Shop Harmony.” Stice’s dioramas of traditional social settings like the local barbership primed visitors to share their memories.

Below: Mildred Heiring fashioned “The Immigrant” based on a newspaper photo of a Ukrainian refugee who arrived in Iowa after nine years of wandering following World War II.





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Below: Mildred Heiring fashioned "The Immigrant" based on a newspaper photo of a Ukrainian refugee who arrived in Iowa after nine years of wandering following World War II.



and retelling.

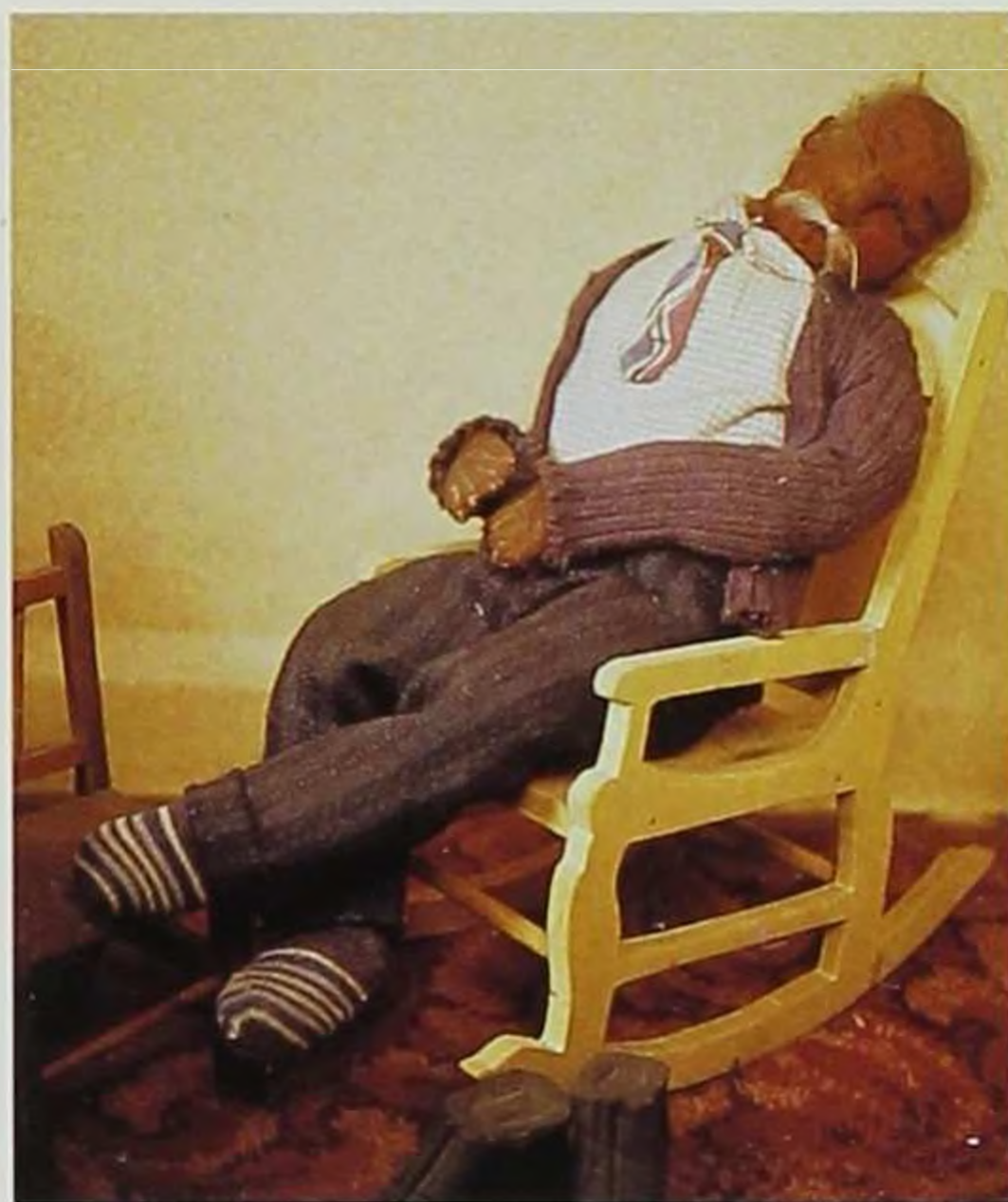
Three generations had been involved with this central Iowa roadside enterprise, which had evolved gradually over the years. Fred Stice and his daughter, Mildred Heiring, were the primary art-

ists: they made the objects, tailored the costumes, assembled the dioramas, and served as tour guides. Gladys Stice (Fred's second wife) was also a tour guide. (She and Mildred, in fact, had given me my first tour on that day in 1982.) Mildred's son, George Heiring, helped with background painting of the dioramas.

Fred Stice worked in various jobs—on the railroad, in clothing stores, a restaurant, and a novelty store—but in his spare time he enjoyed carving. About the time of World War II, Mildred, then in her thirties, started collecting and making dolls. Eventually, a close collaboration grew between father and daughter. As Fred developed his carving talents, he scrounged wood from wherever he could find it, using basswood, apple, and pine. Both were skilled tailors. "Dad liked to sew really almost as well as he liked to carve," Mildred commented.

What was at first merely a hobby rapidly became all-consuming. "First I would make something and run over and show him, and then he would make something and show me," she recalled in a 1995 interview with Iowa Arts Council intern Dorothy Dvorachek. "He kept them under the bed, and [the collection] kept growing and growing."

The carvings cried out to be displayed. "Decisions about how to display the figures led to the first assemblages of figures into scenes,"



Dvorachek explained. "Fred not only made use of more than carving and tailoring skills, but he also brought in an element of collage, as he used carpet fragments from his mother's house or old magazine clippings to make his old-time scenes authentic."

Outside Montour, Iowa, Fred and Mildred set up some of the carvings in a small gift shop they dubbed the Trading Post. "Serendipity ordered the placement of the scenes," Dvorachek noted, and "when they moved [to Le Grand] in 1954, the happenstance order was maintained and glass cases added to the scenes." Situated on the Lincoln Highway (Highway 30), and renamed the Doll Museum and Trading Post, to acknowledge Mildred's collection of dolls, the enterprise attracted thousands of curious passersby for more than three decades. Many tourists stopped on their way to the annual powwow at the nearby Meskwaki Settlement outside Tama.

What delighted the visitors were more than 50 scenes, ranging from everyday social and work traditions of the past (like ice skating and blacksmithing) to biblical themes (Flight into Egypt, Last Supper, Christ before Pontius Pilate), from popular Americana (minstrels, cowboys and Indians, covered wagons) to historical figures and events (Abraham Lincoln, Will Rogers, Iwo Jima, President Kennedy's funeral) and transportation themes (the history of the wheel, horse-drawn sleighs, the railroad). As Mildred explained, "We just never ran out of ideas."

Many of the dioramas conveyed Stice's memory



Three figures from Stice's "Quilting Bee" diorama: a rocking-chair napper (top of page), an intense quilter, and a pipe-smoker.



One of Stice's first projects was "Threshing Scene" (above), completed in the 1930s. "I think the threshing machine is one of my favorites because we used to thresh," his wife, Gladys, remembered. "My mother would wonder, will they get through today or will we have them [the threshing crew] tomorrow? It was hot and hard work but everybody worked together and it didn't seem hard like today to do those things. We're spoiled now. It was a big day because they had lots of food and everybody worked together, which was good." At right: "Marines on Mt. Suribachi, Iwo Jima, Feb. 23, 1945."

of rural and small-town life in Iowa at the turn of the century. He carved his recollections of life as he had lived it, emphasizing the good times when people gathered together to thresh and quilt, square dance, and play games. He created familiar settings for his carvings: a parlor, a kitchen, a country store, or a barbershop. Older visitors to the Le Grand museum also recognized aspects of their own lives in earlier times. And as Gladys Stice watched her husband and Mildred create the scenes, she was often moved by the power of the scenes to bring forth memories. "I



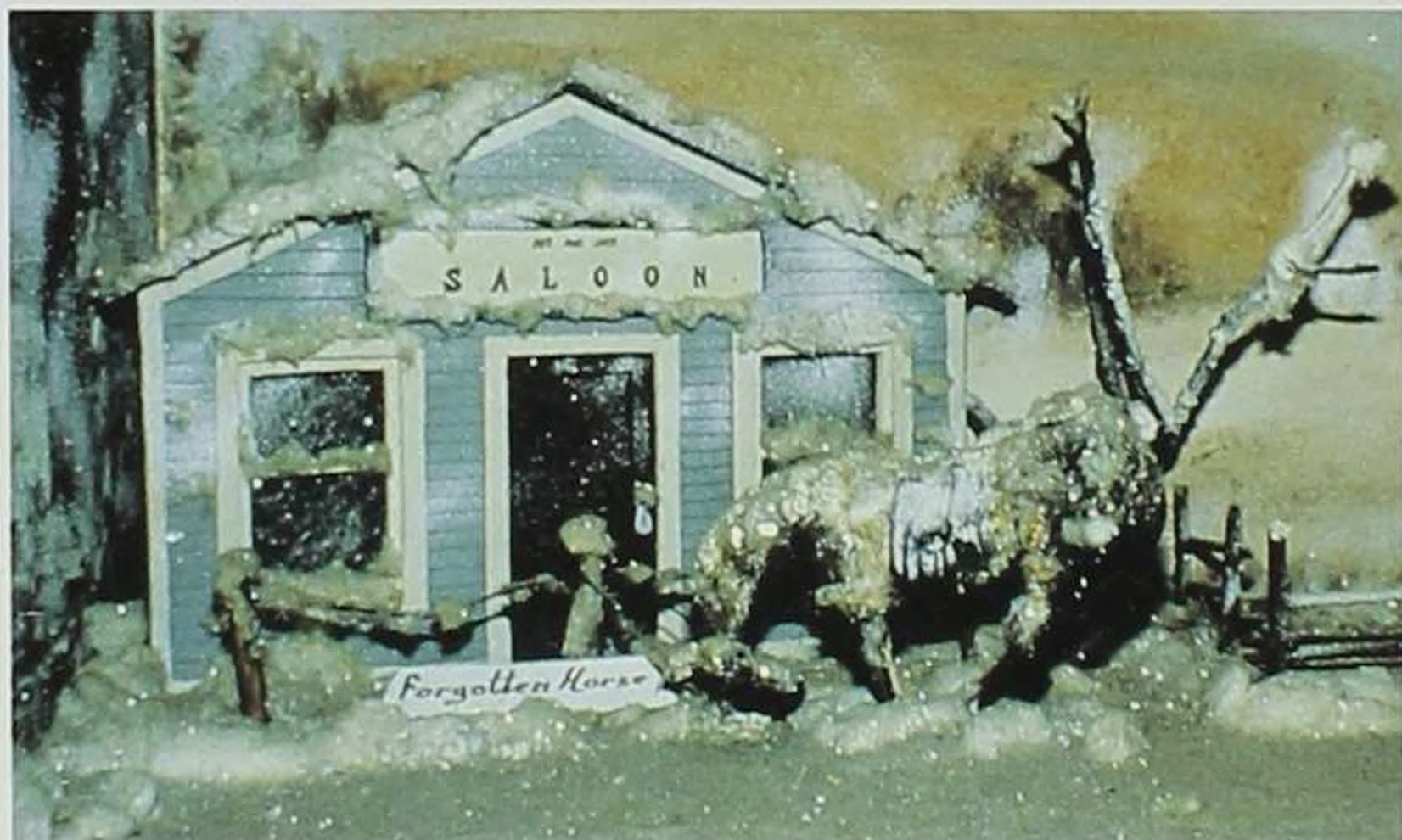


used to love to go to the blacksmith shop when I was a kid," she said, recalling the subject of one diorama. "If you lived through this time you'd remember all these things. They seem so vivid to you. I'm old, and this is the way it was when I was young."

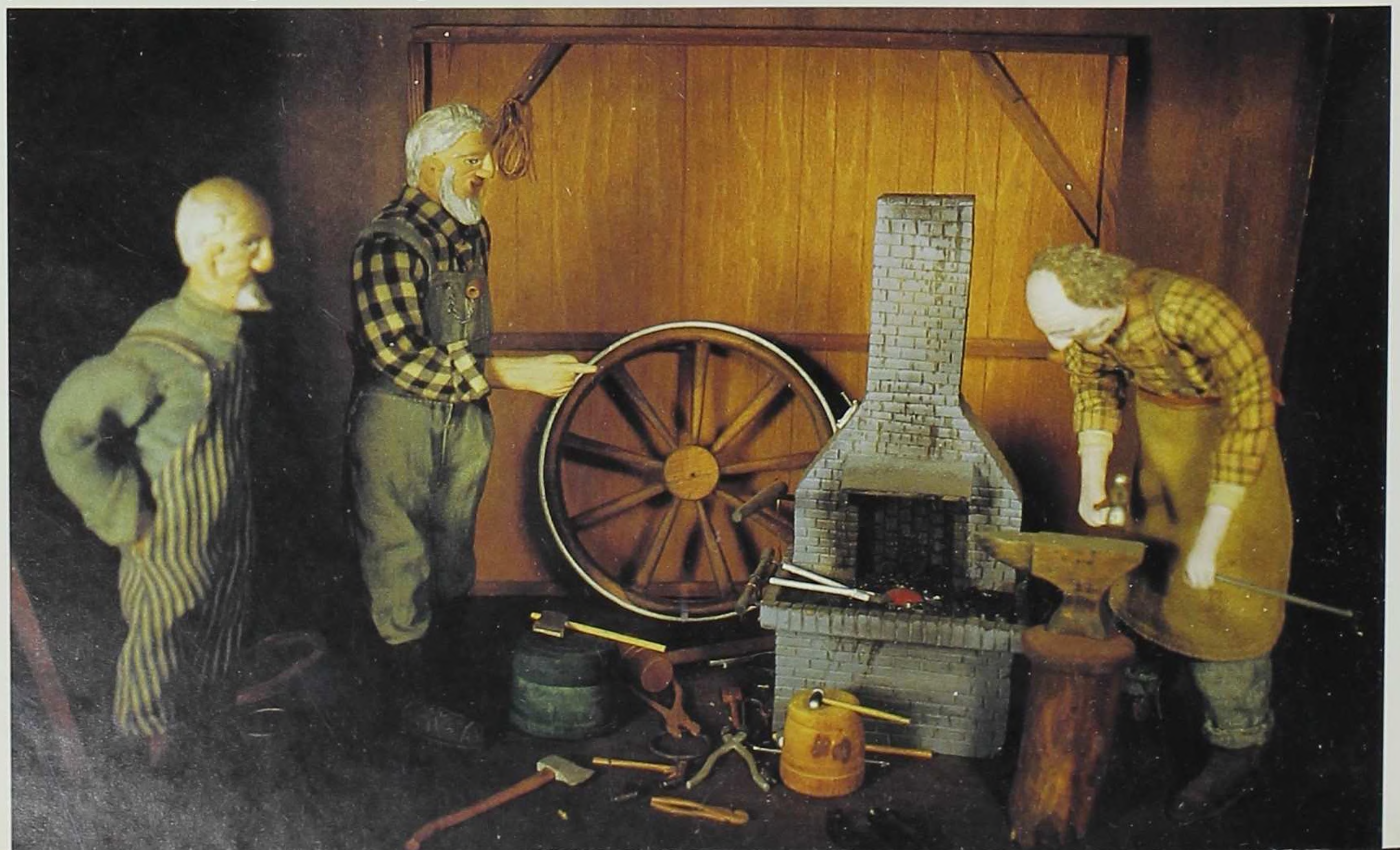
Fred was a great storyteller, according to family members. George Heiring remembers his grandfather as a showman who "loved to have people come through [the museum]. The carvings were almost a device to have people he could talk to and interact with." Mildred commented, "Dad called [the collection] 'The Good Old Days,' . . . what he was trying to convey was the past, and it was a method of just recording the past."

Gladys Stice recalled that her husband "liked to whittle even when he was young—he was always whittling something. He had a workshop in our basement. He practically lived there. Even to the very last days of his life, he was down there doing things." Mildred called her father an observant and contented man, who could spend hours watching a cicada come out of its shell. "He never wanted to be any place than where he was. He never wanted anything more than what he had." Fred died in 1977 at the age of 93.

In 1988 it became apparent that the family could



Top: Square dancers and four musicians fill the "Swing yer Pardner" scene. **Above:** Stice's cold winter scene outside a saloon, titled "Forgotten Horse," was modeled after a well-known painting. Family members recalled Stice's love of horses, and the number of horses he carved bears that out. **Below:** "The Blacksmith Shop." Stice's scene shows this small-town institution as a place for both working and socializing.





"Woodcarver at Work." Stice's self-portrait includes tiny tools, an ox yoke, and an alarm clock.

"To some people the thought of carving may seem a little silly, but it takes a lot of hard work. I was always interested in history and this is one way to preserve it. The scenes are interesting for the children who haven't seen them and the older folks who remember them."

— Fred Stice

no longer care for the museum, and they began to seek alternatives to dismantling the collection and disposing of it piecemeal. In 1995, they donated the entire collection—53 scenes comprising more than 1,200 pieces (people, animals, wagons, furniture, tools, and so forth)—to the State Historical Society of Iowa. The artifacts are now being prepared for exhibition at the Society's museum and historic sites.

Using scraps of wood and remnants of fabric, with an eye for detail and a deft hand, Fred Stice and Mildred Heiring gave form to their memories of the "good old days." In doing so, they employed common folk skills—wood carving and doll-making—to illuminate rural and small-town traditions of an earlier Iowa. ❖

Steven Ohrn is the Historic Sites Coordinator for the State Historical Society of Iowa. From 1982 to 1987 he was State Folklorist.



"Farmers at the Lincoln Memorial."

NOTE ON SOURCES

This brief look at the Fred Stice Collection in the State Historical Society of Iowa relied upon the following sources: Dorothy Dvorachek, "Le Grand 'Good Old Days'" (unpublished manuscript, 1998, produced during internship with Iowa Arts Council); George Heiring, "Catalog of Collection" (unpublished manuscript, 1995); Gail Heiring's videotaped interviews with Mildred Heiring and Gladys Stice; Shawn Conrad, "Noted Le Grand Doll Museum is Breaking Up," *Marshalltown Times Republican*, Nov. 10, 1988; Gene Raffensperger, "A Display of Generosity and Woodcarvings," *Des Moines Register* (1988?); Donna Walker, "When a hobby becomes art..." *Marshalltimes* (April 1997). For more on folk arts, see the following chapters in Steven Ohrn, ed., *Passing Time and Traditions: Contemporary Iowa Folk Artists* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, for the Iowa Arts Council, 1984); Dorothy Schwieder, "A Cultural Mosaic: The Settling of Iowa," and Steven Ohrn, "From Field and Grove: Caricatures and Miniatures," "As I Remember: Visual Histories and Narratives," and "Faith into Stone: Grottoes and Monuments."



The 1960 Hog Lift to Japan



How Iowa & Yamanashi Became Sister States

by Ginalie Swaim

A farmer's home in Yamanashi, Japan in the 1950s was considerably different than its equivalent on an Iowa farm.

Below: Another Yamanashi farmhouse, destroyed by typhoons. The story of Iowa's 1960 relief effort unfolds through photographs and clippings in scrapbooks kept by Iowan Richard S. Thomas.

I AM NOT a world traveler. Count Victoria and Key West, Halifax and L.A. as the distant reaches of my modest travel career.

But in October 1999 I found myself seated on a tatami mat in the home of a Japanese family, surrounded by laughter, new friends,

and intriguing foods with wonderful colors and textures.

Given my non-nomadic nature, it's unlikely that I ever would have been part of an Iowa Sister State delegation to Yamanashi, Japan, if it hadn't been for a typhoon, a Des Moines Air Force officer, and a plane full of hogs.

In the autumn of 1959—while I was still an Iowa farm kid chasing hogs, in fact—typhoons ravaged Yamanashi, the prefecture (or state) west of Tokyo. As a third grader, I probably hadn't studied Japan yet, but another Iowan knew the country well.

M/Sgt. Richard Thomas, of Des Moines, had been stationed with the U.S. Air Force in Japan. He had visited Yamanashi, dramatically rimmed by mountains (including Mt. Fuji), and with vegetable gardens and rice paddies tucked into every available space. And he had gotten to know several people there. Hearing that typhoons had damaged one of his favorite areas of Japan spurred him to action.



ALL BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOS FROM RICHARD THOMAS'S SCRAPBOOKS, COURTESY YOSHIKO SWIFT



M/Sgt. Richard S. Thomas (in cap) was the "go-between for Iowa-Yamanashi and Des Moines-Kofu sister affiliations," according to the photo caption in a scrapbook kept by Thomas. Here he poses in front of the Air Force plane that carried the hogs. With him (from left) are Japanese dignitaries Juji Kasai (former National Diet member), Seiichi Natori (Speaker of Yamanashi Prefectural Assembly), Ryogo Matsuura (Economic Director of Yamanashi Government), and Mayor Keijiro Takano of Kofu.

What Thomas and other Iowans soon set into motion was a series of endeavors that would build a bridge of friendship and cooperation between Iowa and far-distant Yamanashi.

IN JANUARY 1960 at the Des Moines Airport, a gift of 36 breeding hogs awaited departure for Japan in a U.S. Air Force C-130 specially fitted out with aluminum hog pens. Lt. Col. Oscar Tebbetts of Des Moines headed the airplane's all-Iowa crew.

The 28 gilts and 8 boars (Poland-China, Landrace, and Minnesota No. 1 and No. 2) were accompanied

by farmers Roscoe Marsden (of Ames) and Albert Miller (Ogden), who would stay for two months to teach Japanese farmers how to raise hogs on corn. The hope was that the gift of the hogs would assist Yamanashi in the wake of the typhoon damage and also help modernize Japanese agriculture. As Marsden said, "We're going to have to learn to live with people on the face of this earth. Foreign affairs in this day of modern transportation have become local affairs."

Walter Goepfinger (Boone), president of the National Corn Growers Association, had spearheaded the project. Sixty thousand bushels of corn were also headed to

Japan, along with the hope that Japan would become a market for Iowa's surplus corn.

All but one of the 36 hogs weathered the 40-hour trip (one died in Guam). Betty Hockett, of Osceola, with her husband, Lloyd, and sons, was among many families of U.S. servicemen stationed in Japan. Hockett and others greeted the plane in Tokyo. Scratching one of the hogs on the back, she said, "Can you smell Iowa on me?"

M/Sgt. Thomas also associated hogs with Iowa. Described by reporters as "a rawboned Iowan with a love for Japan," Thomas said, "Everyone in Iowa knows hogs. They'd be run out if they didn't."



Above: Welcomed by onlookers and international flags, the Iowa hogs arrive at the breeding station in Kofu. Below: The first shipload of corn arrives in March 1960.



After a two-week quarantine, the hogs were transported to the Sumiyoshi Breeding Station in Kofu, where they were met by Governor Hisashi Amano. Kofu, the capital of Yamanashi, and Des Moines had already begun a Sister Cities relationship under President Eisenhower's People-to-People program, first launched in the mid-1950s.

"This is a warm hand of friendship extended across the sea," said Hideo Tokoro, Japan's agricultural attaché to the U.S. "It is the spirit of the people-to-people program expressed in the most realistic as well as the most sublime of terms.

"Like these hogs you have presented, the seed of friendship you have planted will increase itself, producing generations of blue ribbon friends and goodwill of the purest strain."

This "warm hand of friendship"



Yamanashi Governor Hisashi Amano gives a hearty pat to an Iowa hog, as dignitaries, workers, and photographers look on.

would continue to stretch across the Pacific in the years to come. That March, the Yamanashi prefectural government passed a resolution making Iowa its sister state, and Iowa followed suit later that year. The next spring, Governor Hisashi Amano visited Iowa to celebrate the relationship, and in June 1962, Yamanashi sent a gift to Iowa—also of considerable weight but of far more melodious sound than three dozen hogs. The gift was a bronze temple bell (weighing a ton and measuring four feet high) and a bellhouse (fabricated in Japan and shipped in 39 boxes for assembly here). A site south of the capitol was chosen for this “bell of friendship,” as reporters called it.

It soon became a popular backdrop for photographing Japanese visitors to Iowa. And there were many—for these gifts of hogs and corn, bell and bellhouse, as well as the rapidly developing Sister State relationship, brought on a steady stream of Japanese visitors to Iowa, and Iowans to Japan.

ONE OF THOSE VISITORS was Iowa governor Harold Hughes in the mid-1960s. “After we landed in Tokyo, I left the other governors for the two-hour train trip to Kofu,” he wrote in his autobiography. “Arriving at the station, I found myself amid a sea of little children waving American and Japanese flags. Some

five thousand people were there for a tumultuous welcome.

“I toured the farms, including the hog barns which are enhanced with fresh flowers in vases every day. ‘For the benefit of the hogs,’ said my Japanese guide. When he pointed to thousands of swine and said, ‘From Iowa,’ I remembered the Japanese friendship bell recently installed on our Statehouse grounds and thought how some twenty-odd years before we were deadly enemies. I glanced at my guide and estimated him to be my age. If I had been sent to the South Pacific, we could have killed each other.”

The flow of people between Iowa and Yamanashi has grown steadily over the years. Most re-

cently, Governor Tom Vilsack and First Lady Christie Vilsack were guests in Yamanashi last year, as part of the 40-year celebration of "sisterhood," and this August, Governor Ken Amano and a Yamanashi delegation visited Iowa during the week of the State Fair.

Scores of people, ranging from students to dignitaries, have crossed this bridge of friendship between Yamanashi and Iowa, to share children's artwork and quilts, to discuss issues like aging and agriculture, and to tackle RAGBRAI and Mt. Fuji. As the Japanese attaché had predicted, gestures of great generosity in 1960 and 1962 have produced for Iowa and Yamanashi "generations of blue ribbon friends and goodwill of the purest strain." ❖

Ginalie Swaim is editor of Iowa Heritage Illustrated. She takes pride in her ability to use chopsticks but is still "all thumbs" at origami.



BOTH PHOTOS BY JOHN ZELLER (2001)

In 1962, Yamanashi sent Iowa an enormous bronze bell and bellhouse, as thanks for the 35 breeding hogs and 60,000 bushels of corn that Iowa sent the prefecture after devastating typhoons. Below: The elaborately ornamented "bell of friendship" and bellhouse were installed south of the capitol, here visible in the distance.



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Iowa Heritage Illustrated

One in a Million

During the first half of the 20th century, Iowa creameries packaged butter in colorful waxed cardboard boxes like these, now housed in the State Historical Society of Iowa. The advertising copy for one of them, Swea City Co-operative Creamery (third row, right), promotes butter as "the most healthful product that modern methods and creamery appliances can produce." Such an assertion acknowledges the crucial role that improved agricultural technologies have played in Iowa's creamery history.

Before creameries, eastern butter brokers habitually disparaged the quality of homemade butter produced in interior states like Iowa. Women's hand-churn production methods, along with inefficient packing and lack of refrigeration, dramatically damaged butter's delicate flavor and color, creating a sometimes pallid, rancid, salty, or bland-tasting product often referred to as "Iowa Grease." But in 1876 Delaware County's Spring Branch Creamery won a prize for best butter at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition. Such unprecedented national recognition, coupled with technological developments, like the De Laval cream separator and railroad expansion, triggered a demand for Iowa butter from formerly reluctant East Coast markets.

With nearly 700 creameries operating by 1900, the Hawkeye

State easily accounted for one-tenth of the nation's butter, each creamery producing an average of 94,000 pounds of butter yearly in 1900 (22,000 pounds above the national average). Ninety-one percent of the butter produced during this period went to urban markets, like Chicago, New Orleans, Seattle, and especially New York City.

Many turn-of-the-century creameries were located in very small towns and underwent constant reorganization. Half of those in Iowa were or soon became cooperatives, owned and operated by local farmers. Among the earliest was the award-winning Spring Branch in the 1870s, but one of the most enduring was the Brooklyn Co-operative Creamery Association, which marketed Grassland Brand Butter (see box above). Originally established in the late 19th century under another name, the newly christened

Brooklyn Co-operative produced nearly a train carload of butter every two weeks in 1928, its first year as a cooperative.

Although creameries clearly dominated the state's butter production by the early 20th century, the box illustrations do not reveal a creamery's mechanized operations. Instead they present arcadian scenes of orderly farms, clean air, healthy cows, and wholesome food—domestic settings that belie the streamlined reality of 20th-century butter making. The text only occasionally alludes to technological advances. No longer labored over by farm women at their churns, Iowa butter had securely become by the mid-20th century something produced away from the family farm. By the 1960s, centralization had phased out the small creameries as well, even Brooklyn's.

—Lori Vermaas
Editorial Intern



Most of these boxes date from the 1920s and '30s (except for Pride O'Langworthy, c. 1950). The boxes are on display in the Society's museum exhibit on the 20th century.