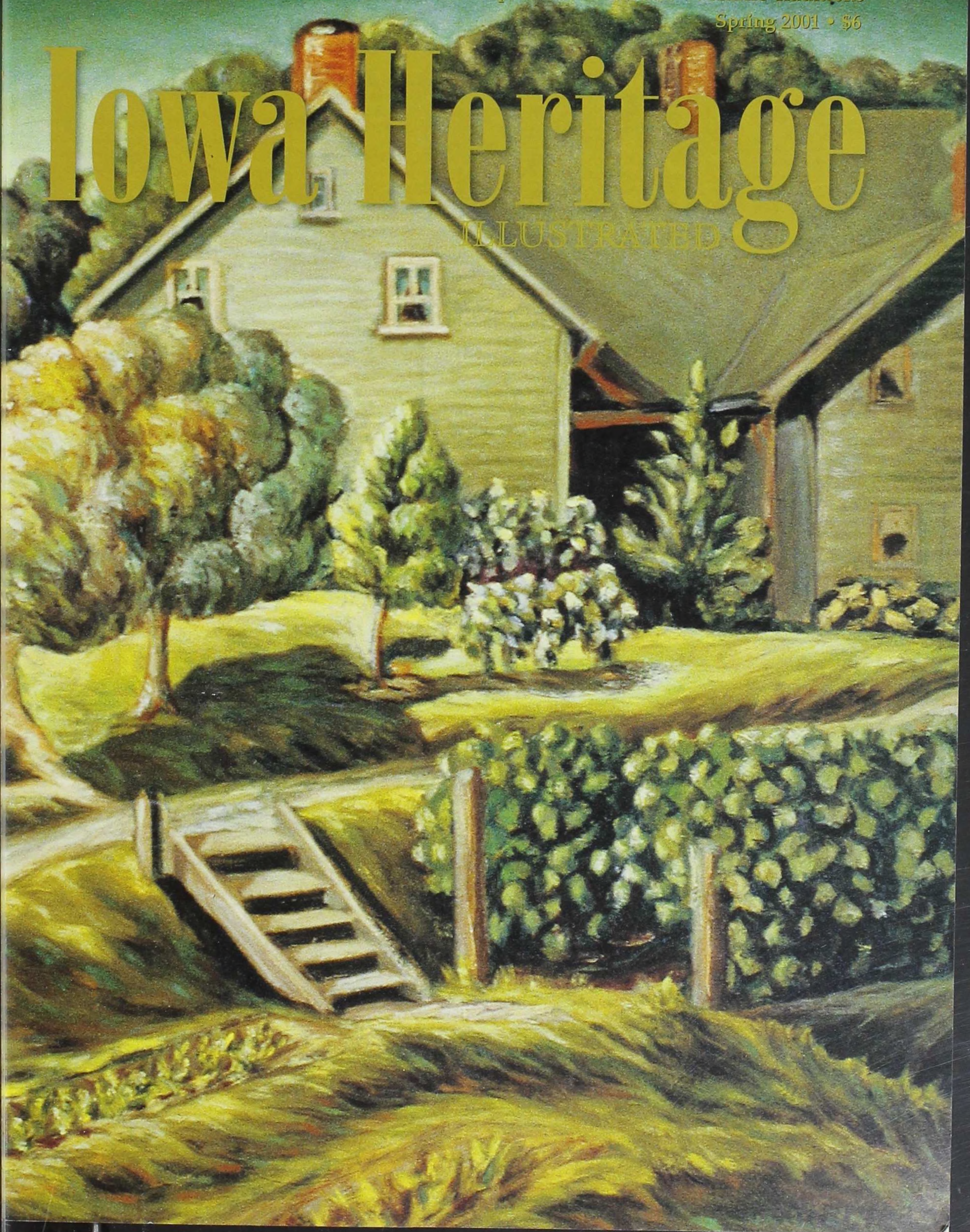


Grant Wood & Carl Flick in Amana • The Brick Capitol in Des Moines • Folklife Traditions

Spring 2001 • \$6

# Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED



# Front Porch

## Dear Readers:

Thanks for all the comments regarding recent issues. I'll step back and let you all have your say.  
—Ginalie Swaim, editor

## Letters from readers

What can a reader say but, "Another great group of articles in your Summer 2000 issue!" They brought back old memories. In your "Front Porch" column I could readily relate to those early Davenport streetcars (and later electric buses), and to the Putnam Museum in Davenport, even though I did not know the family personally. The Christian Petersen article brought memories of my Iowa State days when I was a student (1946-'50) and on the Ag Engineering staff ('51-'56), all while Petersen was an active sculptor. His passion for perfection and creativity has left so much to be appreciated by so many and for so long.

Kenneth L. McFate, Columbia, Missouri

I want to tell you how very much I enjoyed the Summer 2000 issue. Mr. Savage's bird pictures are so beautiful. All the little things he captured, the tiny feather colorations and placements, and the interesting facts of his life, like making his watercolor brushes from the fur of animals he trapped. A totally fascinating person! To think that I'd never heard of the gentleman before, and I read bird periodicals regularly! Thank you for sharing Mr. Savage with me. Keep up the good selections of diverse subjects.

Mary Grace Mayer, Keota, Iowa

It's been a real joy to send the outstanding Summer 2000 issue to family and friends. The Savage article has the best quality of reproduction that I've ever seen, with the editorial layouts making it interesting to read. Having done a lot of watercolors, I'm amazed by the colors and designs Savage used in the creation of so many of his early bird records. The Putnam and Petersen articles also interested me.

Next came the Fall/Winter 2000 "100 Creations of the 20th Century" issue and they were "a few of my favorite things." I do remember most everything in this delightful issue. A huge project very well done.

Barbara Buckley, Iowa City, Iowa

On returning home from holiday visits with children and grandchildren, I was delighted to find the current issue. The theme "A Few of Our Favorite Things" brought back memories

of my childhood through adolescence and beyond. Congratulations on a thoughtful and well organized issue of one of my favorite periodicals. I especially appreciate the afterword by Tom Morain, "Life Without."

I draw your attention to [an error in the section on computers]. Atanasoff in 1936 did indeed develop an analog computer, in collaboration with graduate student Lynn Hannum and physics colleague Glenn Murphy. However, in 1939 Atanasoff and Berry developed an *electronic digital* computer, which was called the prototype Atanasoff Berry Computer.

David T. Nelson, Decorah, Iowa

Congratulations on your fine Collector's Edition! I was particularly disappointed that only Maytag washing machines—not Dexter of Fairfield—were included [in the magazine]. I was surprised that the popcorn industry was not featured, as this was a popular crop in this part of the state. Also sorry no marina or road construction industries were mentioned (big business in Ida County). But, of course, I realize you had to choose. Of special interest to me, too, is the change in retail, especially the growth of Iowa chains. And what of the old Big Four—Swift, Armour, Wilson, Rath (also Morrell), and now IBP. Changes in raising livestock and processing have surely been revolutionary.

Frances Bean, Storm Lake, Iowa

Words can't adequately express the thrill my siblings and I felt on seeing our dad's and nephew's picture [on the steps of Meis Foods] in your 20th-century Collector's Edition [page 103]. As you say, the whole magazine is a keepsake, but to have [their photo] as part of the remembrance of 100 Iowa years was frosting on the cake. Dad wore a shirt and tie—usually askew—to work every day of the 40 years he was in business. The pictures brought back wonderful memories. We Meis children were educated at the Immaculate Conception School across from the Colonial Bread Company on 4th Avenue in Cedar Rapids. Even today, it's easy to remember that heavenly smell of fresh-baked bread filling our nostrils as we tried to concentrate on the Four Rs—reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic, and religion. Thanks for the memories.

Joan Meis Sherwin, Rock Island, Illinois

The review of the late century's innovations was marvelous. Unfortunately, my mind, ever more querulous with advancing age, always

runs to omissions. Such things as airplanes, tractors, and telephones are major, no question. But what I note is that none of these are to be found in every room in our house, while one utterly great 20th-century invention is: Kleenex. Okay, there's no box in the dining room or the cellar, but every other room has one, and some have two.

Fred Crane, Mt. Pleasant, Iowa

In the most recent issue, one of the things that struck us most was the lack of representation of people of color. I know a great deal of time and effort were put into this exhibit, but I just want to share with you what seems to be an exclusion of people of color in *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*.

Dawn Peterson, Des Moines, Iowa

**Editor's reply:** You're right. In searching our collections, we found very, very few 20th-century photographs of Iowans of color using the various "100 things" featured. The Society is eager to increase its historical documentation of Iowa's diversity, and we welcome suggestions of possible donations to the collections. Please note that some of Iowa's late 20th-century immigrant groups are featured in this issue's debut of the "Traditions" department.

Thanks to other readers who brought a few errors to our attention. The Hart-Parr company was located in Charles City, not Mason City (correction from Ralph W. Adams, Waucoma, Iowa). Philo Farnsworth was an Idahoan, not an Iowan (from Judy Austin in Idaho). Development of the modern zipper is credited to Gideon Sundback, not Sundblack (from Margot C. Goode, Evanston, Illinois). One brand of disposable diapers, Chux, was in use at least as early as 1933 (from Philip Hockett, Des Moines). And finally, the McCaughey septuplets were born in 1997.

Copies of the Collector's Edition are still available (\$10 plus \$3 for postage); call 319-335-3916 to order, or buy one at our museum store in Des Moines when you visit *A Few of Our Favorite Things: 100 Creations of the 20th Century*. It's an exhibit not to be missed!

**Share your thoughts with other 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, Iowa 52240. Or e-mail at: gswaim@blue.weeg.uiowa.edu Letters may be edited for length and clarity.**

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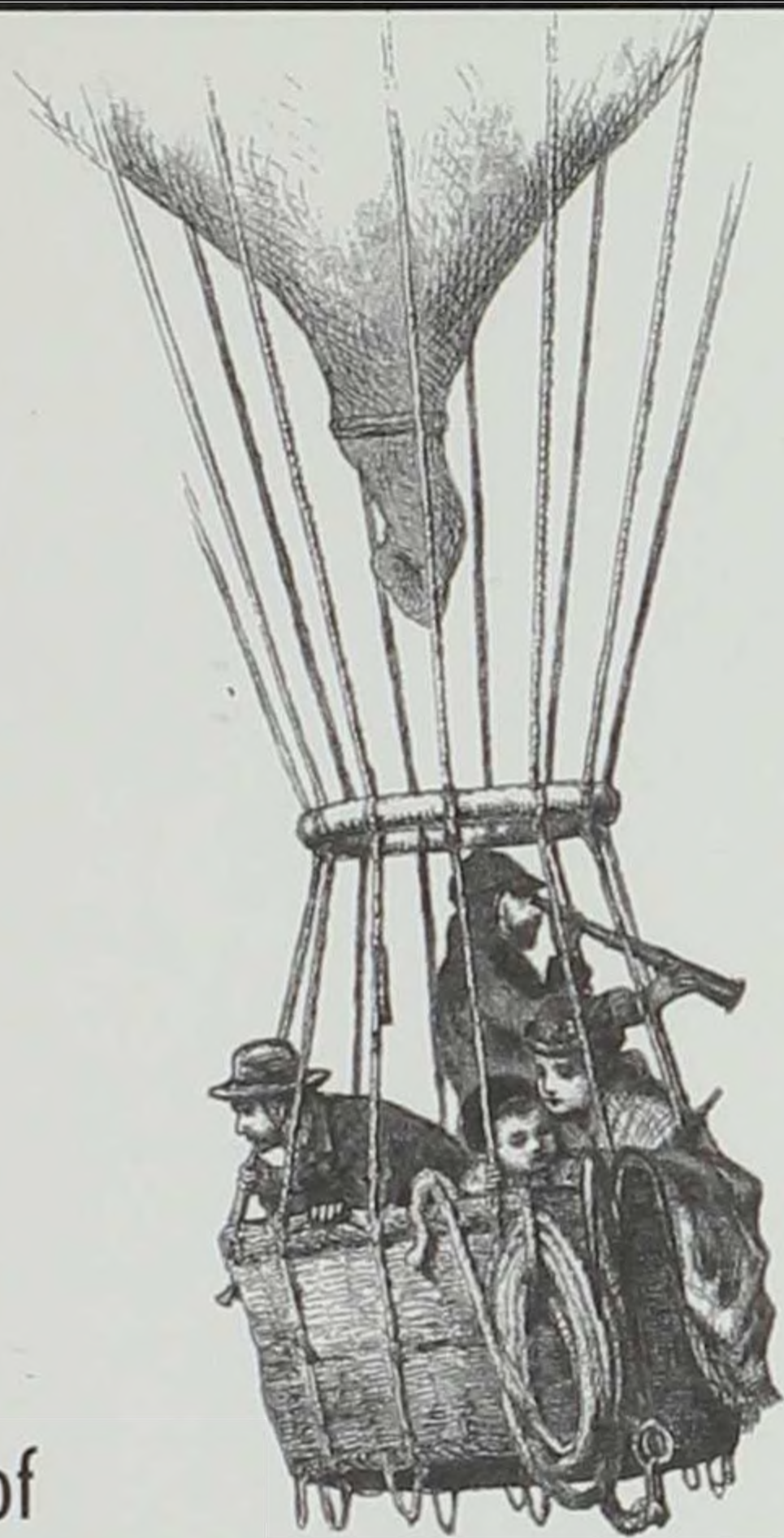
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In 1920, the State Historical Society of Iowa founded one of the nation's first popular history magazines—*The Palimpsest*. The magazine was renamed *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* in 1996, the year of Iowa's 150th anniversary of statehood.

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# Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED

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# Magazine

RATED

Spring 2001, Vol. 82, No. 1

## Carl Flick and Grant Wood: A Lasting Friendship in Amana

2

explores a friendship as well as a vision of Iowa as a place  
ideal for the observant artist.

by Carl Lockett

## The L. Q. Cavanah Statehouse: The Capitol in Des Moines

20

explores how it was called it "an indifferent pile of bricks"  
a place to the State." The quarter-  
century of a building that was Iowa's  
during its growing-up years.

by Carl Lockett



20 Des Moines and the Brick Capitol

Sampling of Iowa traditions  
from sausages to Meswaki powwows—launches  
a new movement in this magazine.

by Carl Saltzman

## Celebrate Traditions at Festival and Institute

48

Coming this June: A multicultural exposition  
for anyone who enjoys food, music, folk arts, and fun.  
Plus, a special institute for educators.

## One in a Million

Sioux City's Colored Cowboys barnstormed  
through Iowa with their softball antics.

by Lori Vermaas

## Cover

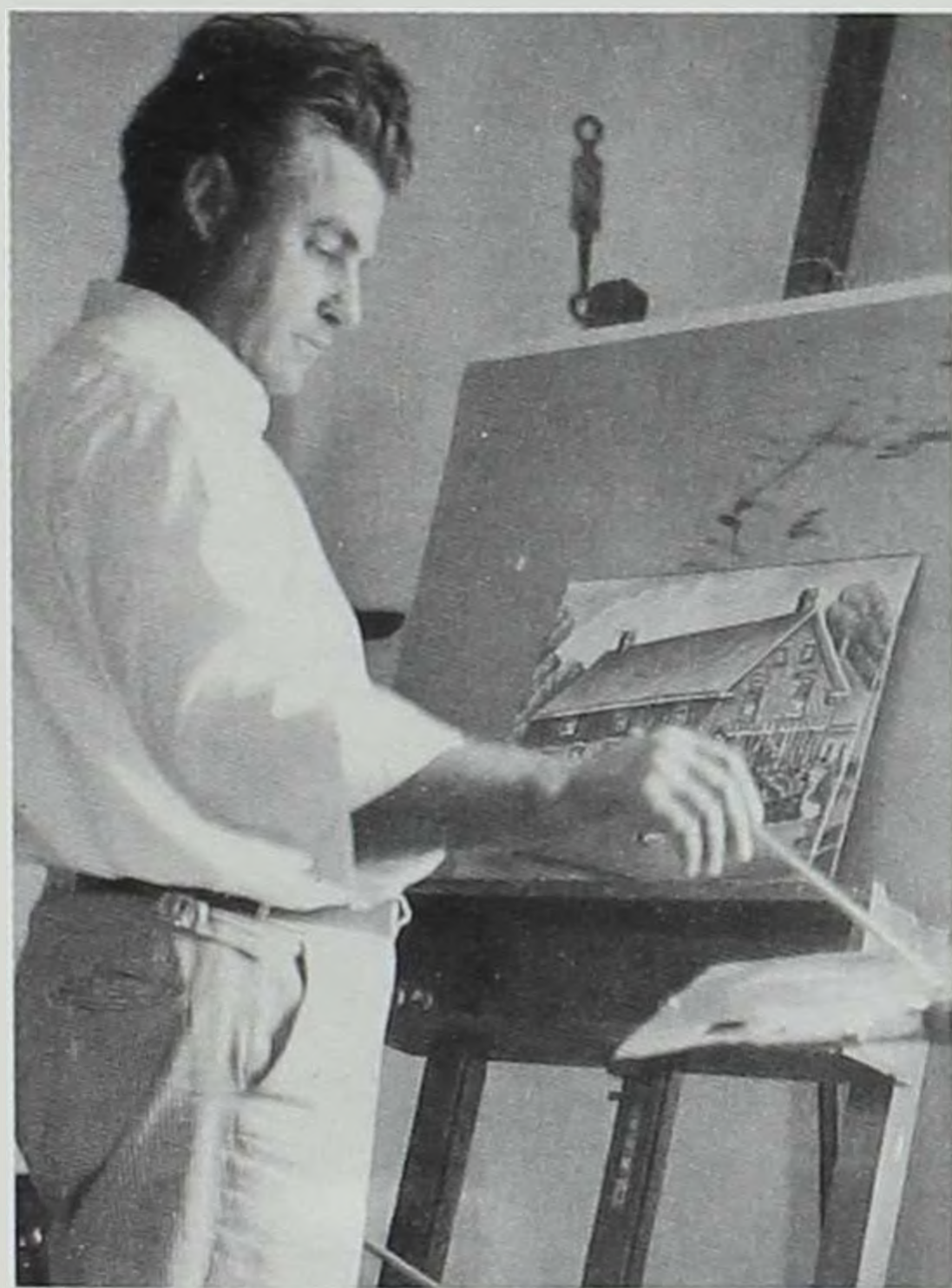
On the cover of Amana, the painting on the cover is one of  
many by Iowa artist Carl Flick. Mentored by  
and inspired by Regionalism, Flick painted  
the 1930s, creating intimate views of the  
places that he called home, and documenting a  
time that would change immeasurably in the  
1930s.

# Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED

Formerly The Palimpsest

Spring 2001, Vol. 82, No. 1



2 Carl Flick paints Amana

## Carl Flick and Grant Wood: A Regionalist Friendship in Amana

2

They shared a friendship as well as a vision of Iowa as a place rich in material for the observant artist.

by Peter Hoehnle

## Iowa's Forgotten Statehouse: The Brick Capitol in Des Moines, 1857-1892

20

Reporters called it "an indifferent pile of bricks" and "a disgrace to the State." The quarter-century saga of a building that was Iowa's statehouse during its growing-up years.

by Philip G. Hockett



20 Des Moines and the Brick Capitol

## Traditions

36

A colorful sampling of Iowa traditions—from Italian sausages to Meswaki powwows—launches a new department in this magazine.

by Rachelle H. Saltzman



36 Teaching traditions

## Celebrate Traditions at Festival and Institute

48

Coming this June: A multicultural exposition for anyone who enjoys food, music, folk arts, and fun. Plus, a special institute for educators.

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Sioux City's Colored Cowboys barnstormed through Iowa with their softball antics.

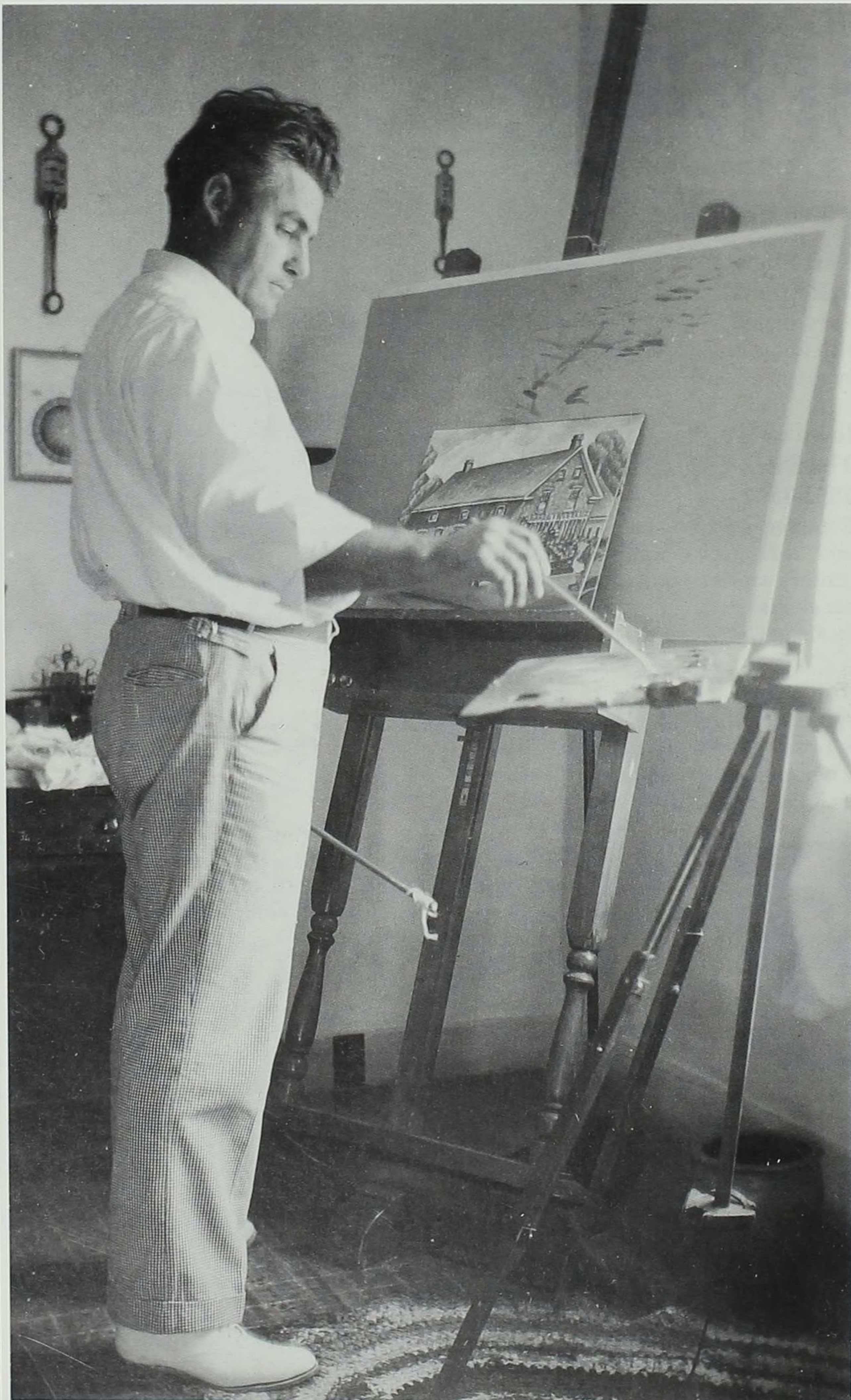
by Lori Vermaas



PRIVATE COLLECTION (COPY PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHARLES SCOTT)

## On the Cover

Titled *Middle Amana*, the painting on the cover is one of many artworks by Iowa artist Carl Flick. Mentored by Grant Wood and inspired by Regionalism, Flick painted prolifically in the 1930s, creating intimate views of the Amana villages that he called home, and documenting a way of life that would change immeasurably in the coming decades.



COURTESY PAUL E. KELLENBERGER

# Carl Flick and Grant Wood

## A Regionalist Friendship in Amana

by Peter Hoehnle

**I**n 1929, Carl Flick, a young clerk at the West Amana general store and the father of three, was confined to his house after his face was partially paralyzed by exposure while hunting in the winter. To fill the long hours of his recovery, Flick began to copy the colorful pictures he found on calendars around his home. In the beginning he used his daughter's crayons; then, later, he ordered a set of paints from a catalog and began to experiment in oils.

Meanwhile, a shy, soft-spoken artist in Cedar Rapids was on the verge of developing the regionalist style of painting that would bring him international fame. Grant Wood was little known beyond Cedar Rapids, where he had

**C**arl Flick at his easel in his home in West Amana, photographed July 18, 1937, by Paul E. Kellenberger.

COURTESY THE AUTHOR



**G**rant Wood often set up his easel outdoors to capture Amana scenes on canvas. Here, he paints the William and Susanna Moershel home in Main Amana, October 1927 (photographed by their son-in-law, Peter Stuck). Wood was already well acquainted with the Moershels a year or two before he met Carl Flick.

taught art in local schools and had completed some commissioned portraits, hotel murals, and a memorial stained glass window. Although his art hung in many area homes, few suspected that Grant Wood would win national acclaim when he painted *American Gothic* in 1930.

Wood was probably first introduced to Amana in the late 1920s by one of the many Cedar Rapids residents with friends in its seven small villages. Their old stone, brick, and wood buildings set amidst a profusion of flower and vegetable gardens imparted an Old-World charm sorely lacking in Cedar Rapids in the 1920s. Resi-

dents of Cedar Rapids had long made excursions to the Amana villages to buy Amana-made products and, in some cases, antique family heirlooms. To Carl Flick, of course, these "quaint villages" were home.

Carl Flick and Grant Wood did not meet immediately, although the Cedar Rapids artist often ate at the Amana communal kitchens and frequently set up his easel outside to paint quick, impressionistic, *plein air* oil sketches. In these, Wood celebrated the rich color of Amana sandstone and the lush foliage of Amana gardens. The presence of an artist with an easel was an event in Amana, es-

pecially for young children who curiously observed the friendly man in a fedora from a safe distance. Then a child, Marie Stuck Selzer watched Wood as he painted a sketch of her grandfather's house: "He wanted to wipe his brushes," she later recalled, "and since he had no rag, he just tore off a piece of his undershirt and used that."

Still recovering from facial paralysis, Carl Flick heard about this Cedar Rapids artist painting in the colonies. Anxious for some expert advice, Flick wrote him a letter asking about brushes and paints. In reply, Wood appeared one day on the young man's doorstep.

Wood quickly recognized that Flick had tremendous natural ability and began to take him along on sketching trips in the Amana area, during which the two men sketched side by side.

Thus began first a mentorship and then a friendship between Grant Wood and Carl Flick. Today, in the annals of Iowa art, Wood remains Iowa's best known artist whereas Flick is relatively forgotten. Yet during the 1930s, Flick was a visible and prolific member of the school of Iowa regionalists established by Wood.

**C**arl Flick had always been interested in art, a trait that seems to have been almost hereditary. As a schoolboy his favorite activity was the art instruction held on Saturdays as part of the Amana school curriculum. He also apparently received encouragement in artistic pursuits from his paternal grandfather, a schoolteacher. Flick's

COURTESY THE AUTHOR



**Flick's first attempts at art (like this one, painted in 1928, of mountains and waterfalls) were copied from calendar pictures and commercial illustrations—until Grant Wood encouraged him to look to his own Amana surroundings for subject material. This painting was purchased for \$2.25 as a gift to Linda Graesser of West Amana when she got her own bedroom at the age of 14. Her brother, who worked in the village wagon shop, made a frame for it.**



**This Clayton County landscape, created in the 1930s, is one of the very few paintings that Flick did outside of the Amana area.**

great-grandfather, Johann Georg Flick, had also demonstrated an ability with watercolors, and had produced and illustrated a handwritten volume that was among Carl's treasured possessions.

Nevertheless, Flick was born and raised in the strict communal atmosphere of the pietistic Amana Society, which strongly discouraged its members from indulging in decorative arts that it deemed

“worldly.” Aside from the occasional needle-pointed pillow or bit of handmade lace, Amana artistry was limited to the production of woolens and furniture with designs that, while plain, nevertheless received widespread recognition and interest in the world beyond the community. The strict controls over artistic expression had been lessened in Amana by the late 1920s—about when Grant Wood first visited the villages and Flick began to experiment with paint and brush.

Wood was a generous mentor for Flick. He taught him to turn his back on his subject and view it through a small hand-held mirror, in order to isolate the scene and notice the details. And according to Flick family tradition, Wood built for him a portable easel with iron-tipped legs to stabilize it in

the field. He promoted him to a *Cedar Rapids Gazette* reporter, whose March 1931 story extolled how Wood had discovered this young Amana "colonist painting atrocious poster scenes with brushes dipped in genius." Most importantly, he turned Flick away from copying "atrocious" calen-

dar art and instead opened his eyes to the beauty of his Amana surroundings and the incredible amount of material to be found there. Wood had "pushed aside the vivid copies of gaudy sunsets and Venetian moonlights," the *Gazette* reporter wrote, "to show the young man the wealth of painting

material that lay around him—the corner of the mill, his own back yard, the quaint blue doorways, the picturesque stone homes and the millrace fringed with pickerel weed and willows."

In directing Flick's attention to his native surroundings, Wood was, in a sense, replicating his own

PRIVATE COLLECTION



Flick's eye learned to appreciate the details of his Amana surroundings—here, the blue door on the front porch of the Heine-mann house in Middle Amana (painted in the 1930s). "The homely beauty of the rows of stone houses and other characteristics that belonged to Amana soon will be gone," Flick said in 1935. "I must hurry my work."



transformation in his own approach. Prior to his European travels of the late 1920s, Wood had experimented with a loose, impressionistic style and had mostly overlooked his native landscape. Following his exposure to Northern Renaissance painters, Wood returned to Iowa in 1928, convinced that his own state held fit subjects for an artist to paint. He quickly became an impassioned and vocal champion of what came to be called Regionalism.

Although Flick's work reflects his own distinct personality, he was heavily influenced by Wood. Indeed, he adopted Wood's style as well as his regionalist outlook. In Flick's 1932 self-portrait (page 19), for example, the vivid colors and the rounded trees show the

influence of Wood, who called this painting one of Flick's best. Exhibited in Des Moines, the self-portrait also appeared in a picture section of the April 1932 *Des Moines Register*, along with Wood's own self-portrait.

Wood's attention paid off as Flick's work quickly gained state and national recognition. In 1931, likely at Wood's insistence, Flick entered three paintings in the Iowa State Fair art competition, where, little more than two years after first taking up a brush, he received third place for oils and two honorable mentions. Soon after, his *Amana Harvest*, an unusual still life of a cow's head amid garden vegetables, took first prize for a game picture at the Iowa Artists Club exhibit. Another of his

works, *Amana Interior*, was exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in early 1932. He was one of only two Iowa artists whose work was selected, and the judges ranked him as the fifth most promising artist of the 140 exhibitors. In 1933 several of Flick's works were displayed at the Chicago World's Fair.

Wood also made a point of publicizing and promoting Flick's work in the Cedar Rapids area, and it was probably largely through his efforts that a Flick exhibit was set up in the city's "Little Gallery" in 1932 (where Flick, at Wood's suggestion, periodically attended art classes taught by Adrian Dornbush). Wood also apparently saw to it that Cedar Rapids residents made purchases; by 1932 Flick reported that 40 of his works had been sold. On one occasion, according to Amana tradition, a Cedar Rapids matron was offered a choice of two pictures, one by Wood and the other by his protégé. Since neither painting was signed, she chose the one she thought was the better of the two, which turned out to be Flick's.

Like Wood, Flick preferred to paint on artist panels rather than canvas. He generally sketched a scene on a sheet of plain typing paper or brown wrapping paper before painting, and he sometimes sketched in oil on site, using his collapsible easel. But he did much of his painting at night by lamp-light, in the laundry room of his home, standing before a walnut easel he had made himself. He sometimes used photographs, particularly when working on his projected series of paintings depicting scenes of life in communal Amana. Only two, *Liebesmahl* and *Amana Funeral*, were ever completed. He maintained a meticulous collection of notes on color

COURTESY THOMAS P. JOHNSON



Sometime in the 1930s, Flick painted this scene of the arbor and back porch of the Lower South Amana Hotel for its co-manager, Lizzie Siegel (seen in the kitchen doorway). Flick was a frequent visitor to the hotel, as was Grant Wood. Siegel's son-in-law Ferdinand Ruff once took Wood down to see the wine cellar. His wife, Henrietta, upon learning that a guest had seen what she deemed a disorderly cellar, apologized profusely. Wood, however, laid his hand on her shoulder and made her promise never to clean the cellar because, as the artist said, "the cobwebs and mildew give it atmosphere."



Flick painted *Amana Interior* (1931) entirely by lamplight. In 1932, it was exhibited in a Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts show, at which Flick was one of only two Iowa artists to be included. The view depicts the home of Flick and his wife and their three children (Marie, Elsie Mae, and George). The heating stove and hand-woven carpeting were typical of Amana homes. The wall hanging was a rack that could hold newspapers. Although decorating one's home with pictures was frowned upon in Amana, the wall hanging was allowed because it had a practical application.

mixtures and kept a color wheel handy to aid in his composition.

Throughout Flick's period of greatest artistic activity, he maintained close ties with Grant Wood, whose visits to Amana continued with

some frequency in the early 1930s. Wood typically appeared on Sunday afternoons, usually managing to stay for supper at the Flick home, where he was always served a favorite dish of his—spinach cooked in the Amana way (finely chopped in a cream sauce)—and where he occasionally stayed overnight. Sometimes Wood's friends from

Cedar Rapids, including fellow artists Marvin Cone and Adrian Dornbush, came along for a day of sketching with Flick. Often, Flick's friend, Ferdinand Ruff of South Amana, ferried Flick and Wood to promising locations in his truck. On other occasions, Flick and his family visited Wood in Cedar Rapids in the studio apartment

## CARL FLICK

The work of Carl Flick, representing our own Amana scenery and interiors, should serve to awaken a deeper appreciation of the artistic beauty of our surroundings. Carl sees his subjects in a true Amana way, seriously and sincerely, and paints the way he sees, adding no flourish or grandeur to his work. It is as charming as it is true and understandable.

For those who are interested to the extent of studying further, these paintings may prove a foundation to work on, as they are the very connection between our surroundings and modes of Art. They interpret for us what we all see daily, but only very few of us appreciate in an artistic way. Carl has truly brought out an opportunity for the dormant artistic possibilities in and around us.

We sincerely hope that our humble efforts along this line may be of mutual benefit to all.

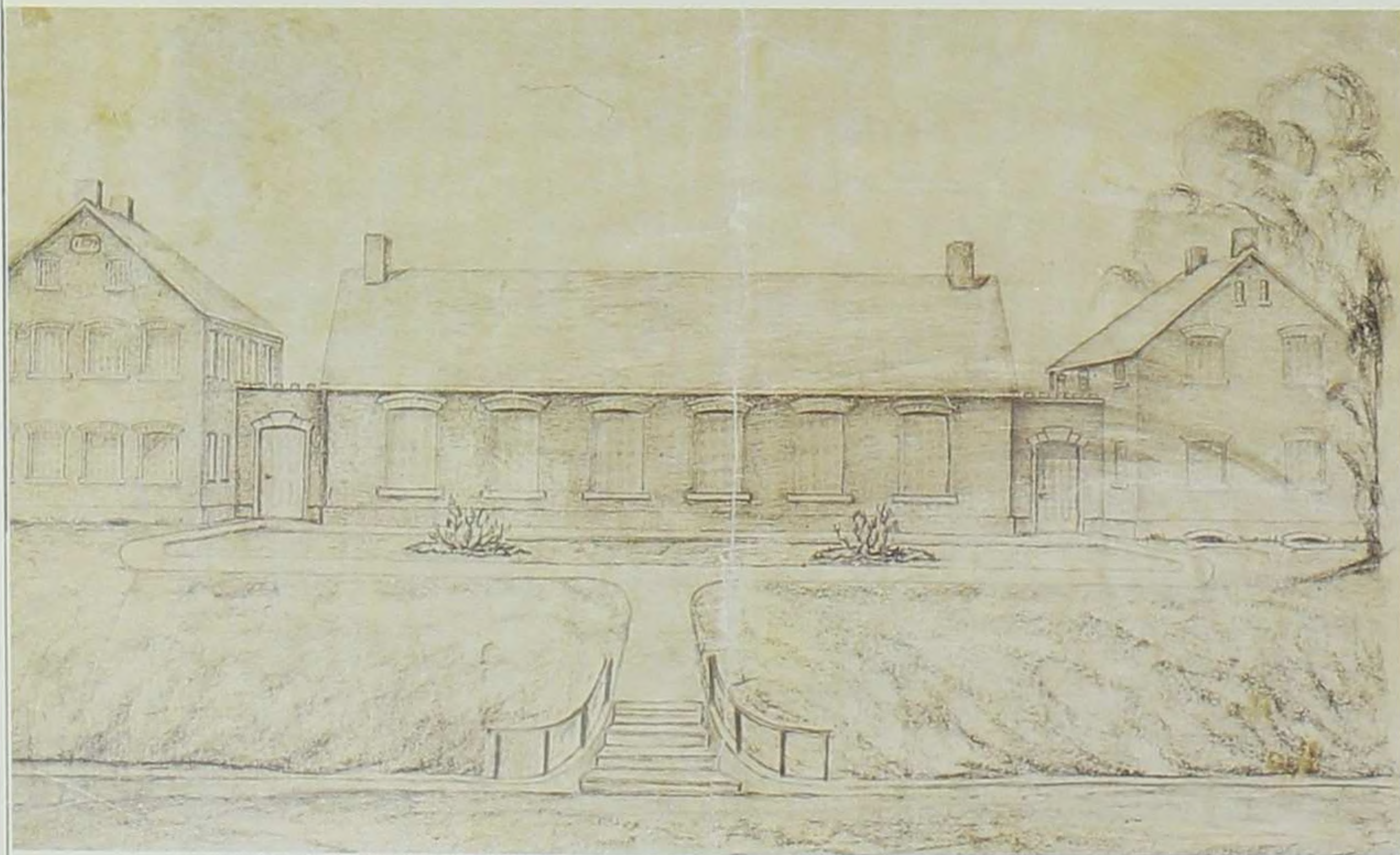
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## TITLES

1. Amana Blue
2. Amana Doorway, No. 1.
3. Amana Interior
4. Mill Stone, No. 1
5. Milk Pails
6. West Amana
7. Landscape
8. Amana Doorway, No. 2
9. Front Porch
10. Blue Door
11. Back Porch
12. Composition
13. Potted Plants
14. Green Door
15. Open Window
16. Millstone, No. 2
17. The Red Geranium
18. Amana Porch
19. Amana Harvest

**Flick** was recognized in his own community with a 1932 exhibit at the Homestead Hotel; the program (above) emphasizes that he paints "in a true Amana way, seriously and sincerely." The list of titles shows his commitment to Amana subjects. While the reorganization of the Amana Society in 1932 opened the way for greater freedom and expression, both Flick and Grant Wood also encouraged local people to take pride in and preserve their traditions.

**Flick** is the likely artist of this sketch (ca. 1935) showing the proposed addition to the newly formed Amana High School, which linked the original village school building (left) with the house where Amana children attended church (right). Flick was closely associated with the school and particularly its superintendent, J. R. Neveln, who made a point of promoting Flick's work at every opportunity.



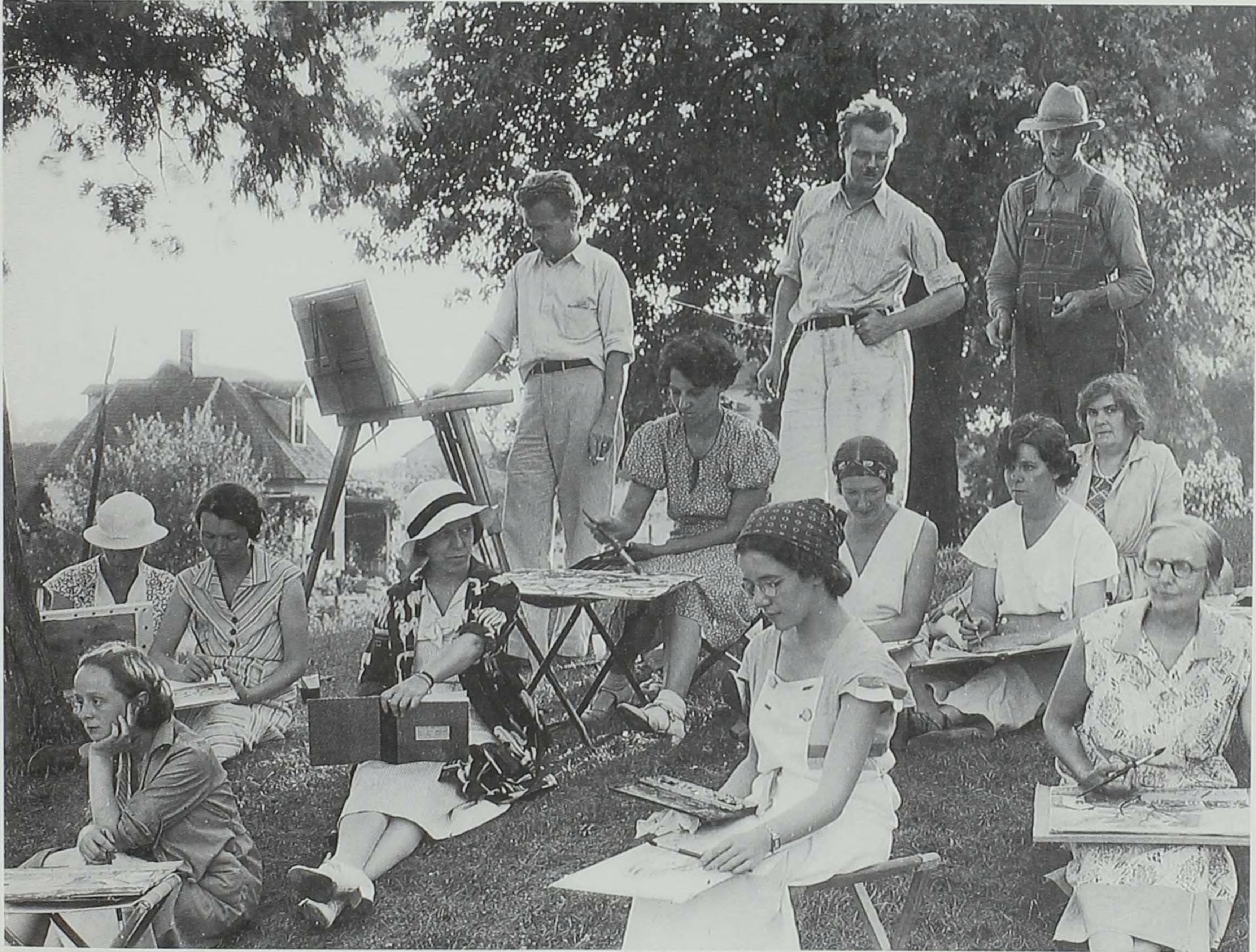
AMANA HERITAGE SOCIETY (AMANA)

he had created over a carriage house behind the Turner Mortuary.

As the Flick-Wood friendship deepened, Wood brought his own family to the Amanas; there, his elderly mother, Hattie, bought goat's milk and enjoyed working in the Flick garden, and his sister, Nan, became an example of refined beauty to the colony women accustomed to braided hair and calico dresses. Wood's Amana friends, mindful of the hard times his family had faced when Wood, his mother, and sister survived on his salary as a teacher in the Cedar Rapids schools, often sent cabbages and jars of canned goods, and, on one occasion, an entire raccoon, home with the artist. This last gift, Wood's sister recalled years later, "helped wonderfully with the meat bill," and no doubt added variety to the family's diet.

The Flick family watched Wood's sudden rise to fame, as the prices for his paintings climbed from a few dollars to several thousand after he painted *American Gothic* in 1930. Flick carefully pasted clippings about Wood in his scrapbook, alongside clippings and letters concerning his own work.

In 1932 the Amanas underwent what is locally referred to as the "Great Change," during which the communal system was abandoned. Flick served on the elected committee that planned the reorganization and, like many Amana people his age, must have felt the thrill of new possibilities promised by this sanctioned release from a strict communal life. For Flick, one of these new opportunities was attending the Stone City Colony and Art School near Anamosa (near Wood's birthplace), which Wood and some friends founded and operated during the summers of 1932 and



Students at the Stone City Colony and Art School concentrate on their work in the summer of 1932, as Iowa artists Marvin Cone (at easel) and Adrian Dornbush (center) oversee their work. Wood helped found the art colony, which flourished for two summers near Anamosa, Iowa. Carl Flick was one of the dozens of art students who attended.

## More Amana artists paint at Stone City

Perhaps influenced by the success of Carl Flick, two other Amana men also took up their brushes in the early 1930s. Like Flick, the two benefited from the generosity of Grant Wood, attended sessions of the Stone City Colony and Art School, and painted scenes of Amana life.

John Eichacker was the postmaster at Homestead (one of the Amana colonies). George Schoenfelder was a carpenter in Main Amana. Both began painting as a hobby shortly after the 1932 "Great Change"—the reorganization of the Amana Society.

Eichacker was also a talented poet, gardener, and violinist. Although he painted mainly in oils, while he was in the military in World War II, he asked his family to send him a watercolor set so that he could continue to paint. The watercolors that he produced during that period were among his best and most promising work.

Tragically, in 1945, he was killed in an airplane crash in the Philippine Islands.

George Schoenfelder, the third of Wood's Stone City students from Amana, continued to produce one or two oil paintings each winter until his death in 1987. Shortly before he died, Schoenfelder was honored at a special ceremony during the Grant Wood Days celebration in Stone City as one of the last survivors of the art colony. During this tribute he presented to the local museum a sketch that Wood had made for him as a farewell gift when Wood left the colony.

Like Flick, both John Eichacker and George Schoenfelder have been the subject of exhibits at the Amana Arts Guild, which was formed in the 1970s—half a century after the Amana Society frowned upon such a worldly activity as painting. —by Peter Hoehnle

## Self Portraits of Iowa Artists Exhibited by Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs



REPRODUCED ON THIS PAGE ARE a few of the self portraits which go on exhibition today at the art gallery of the Des Moines public library. The exhibition will continue through the month of April.  
Above: Arthur A. Dillon and family, Des Moines. He worked with three mirrors to make this study. He is a member of the Iowa Artists Guild.

IOWA'S most distinguished member of the painting fraternity: Grant Wood of Cedar Rapids. His "American Gothic" won him nationwide fame.

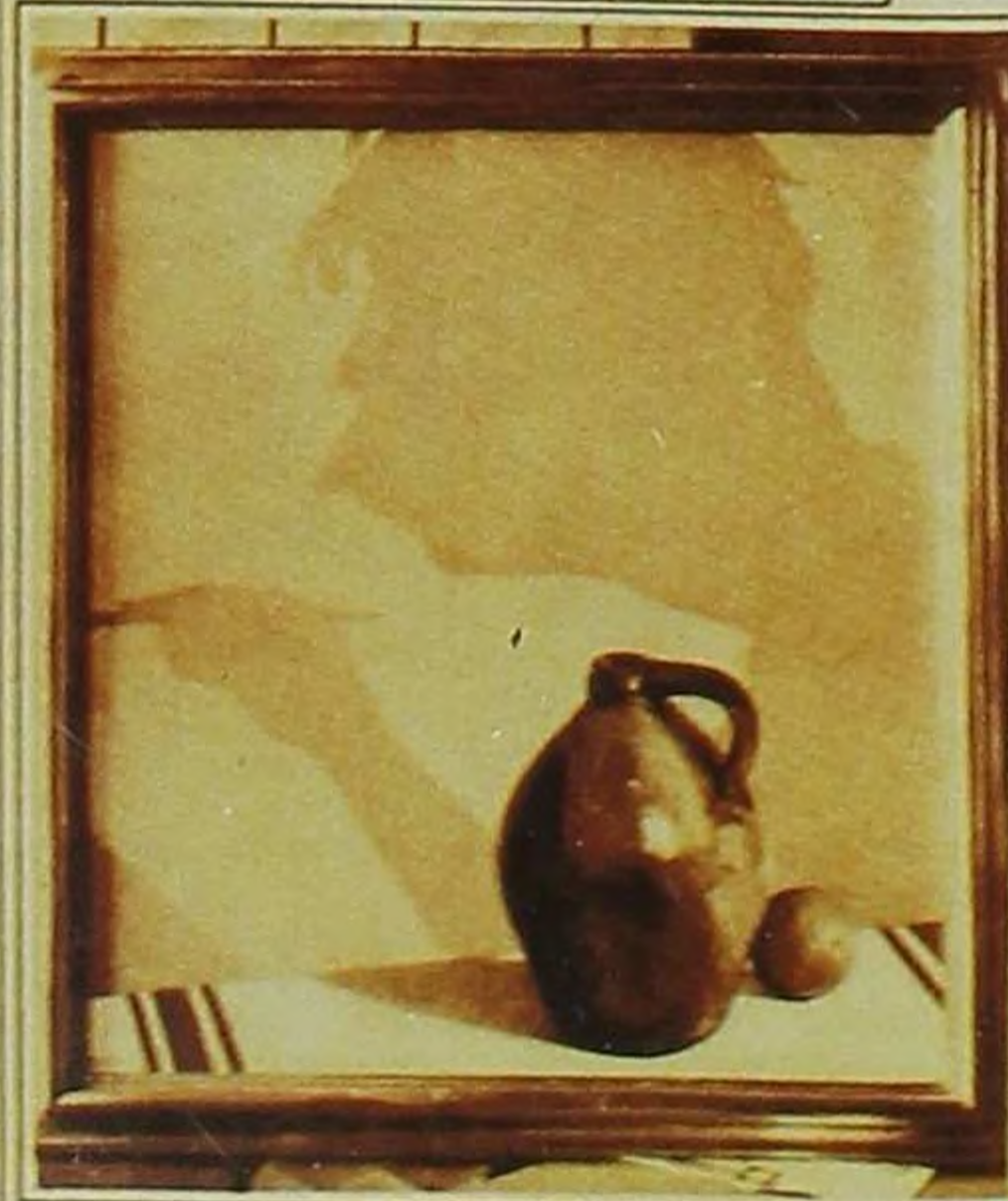


LOUISE Grant McEwen, Des Moines. She is a member of the Iowa Artists Club.



CAEL FLICK OF AMANA, member of Iowa Artists Club. He exhibited at the Pennsylvania academy this year.

WILLIAM HENNING OF CEDAR RAPIDS.



MAEVIN COONE OF CEDAR RAPIDS effects an interesting allusion in his self portrait. Mr. Coone has exhibited in Chicago and elsewhere and is best known for his still life paintings.



NAMA LATHE, instructor of art at Cornell college, Mt. Vernon.



BYRON BEN BOYD OF DES MOINES, president of the Iowa Artists Club. Mr. Boyd has exhibited throughout the country.

Self-portraits of Flick, Wood, and six other Iowa artists were showcased in 1932, in a special exhibit in Des Moines and in the *Des Moines Register*. Flick's self-portrait, with an Amana background, bears a striking resemblance to Wood's well-known portrait of his mother, *Woman with Plants* (1929).



Intrigued by the back porch of the Heinemann house in Middle Amana, Flick painted this typical Amana scene, circa 1939.

1933. Dozens of students studied with Wood, Marvin Cone, and other prominent local artists. The entire Flick family, including Carl's sister Elsie and her husband, made the 40-mile trip with him to Stone City to spend time with their old friend Grant Wood.

The opportunity to study at Stone City must have been both exhilarating and bittersweet to Flick, who once confided to a reporter,

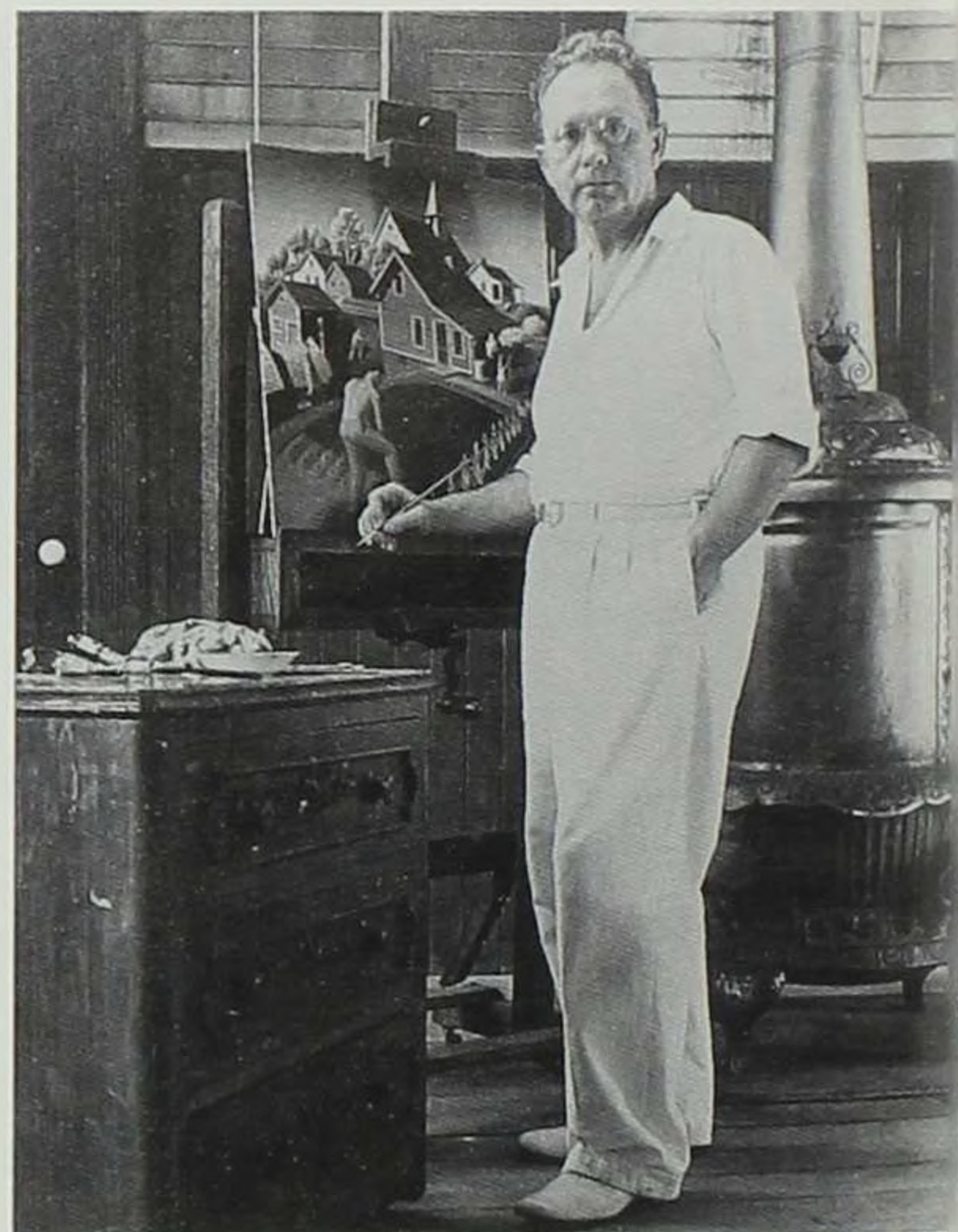
"When I think of what I might have accomplished by early training I sometimes feel a little sad."

In 1932, Wood made a special trip to Amana to speak at the opening of an exhibit of Flick's paintings at the Homestead Hotel. He used the occasion to

urge his listeners, mostly Amana residents, not to alter the charming character of their villages even though the "Great Change" from the communal system would give them the opportunity to modernize their homes. He extolled the beauty of the Amana environment, and he took the time to give his audience an object lesson on the elements of a painting, using as his example a picture of a large



BOTH PHOTOS: SHSI (IOWA CITY)



In the summer of 1941, Wood found peace and privacy in his "Kare No More Studio," an old railroad depot that had been moved to a farm by Clear Lake. Here, Flick visited him, and here, Wood painted *Spring in Town* (on easel above).

white draft horse on a wall calendar in the hotel dining room. Looked upon as an authority in artistic matters by Amana residents, Wood was also asked to judge an exhibit of locally made rugs at the Homestead Hotel in 1933. As a former metal worker and sometime interior designer, he had long appreciated the artisanship of the furniture made in the local cabinet shops and of the many antiques that graced Amana homes.

During the late 1920s, in fact, when Wood was designing and decorating homes in the Cedar Rapids area in partnership with a friend, contractor Bruce McKay, he often helped his clients buy furniture from Amana residents. And in years to come, for his own home in Iowa City, he hung kerosene lamps purchased in Amana in his dining room, had chairs made to his design at the Amana

furniture shops, and asked local women to make two Amana comforters. Wood not only appreciated the Amana environment and the crafts it produced, but he urged local residents to appreciate these things as well, and to preserve them. By buying craft items in Amana, Wood was supporting the artisans while at the same time drawing attention to their work.

In 1934, Wood accepted a teaching position at the University of Iowa. His teaching duties, growing celebrity, and regionalist proselytizing kept him busy and cut him off from Amana and his friend and protégé Carl Flick. Wood's marriage in 1935 to Sara Maxon, a former actress and operetta singer with a well-known

aversion to many of Wood's friends, may also have led to a decline in contact between the two artists.

Then in 1941, beset by problems at the university and following his divorce, Wood retreated to a studio in a converted depot in Clear Lake, Iowa. Here he hoped to concentrate solely on his painting. He did so in relative quiet, because very few people knew where he was, and even fewer were welcome to visit.

One person, however, whom Wood invited to Clear Lake was Carl Flick. He would come bearing jars of canned goods from Amana for Wood, who had always enjoyed the cooking of Carl's wife, Marie. What the two old friends talked about in those visits is unrecorded. What neither of them knew was that Wood was already suffering from the inoperable liver cancer that would end his life.

Flick was commissioned to paint this picture (right) of the Moser house in Main Amana in late 1957 as a Christmas gift. It is one of his last dated works. Before reorganization, the sandstone home had been a kitchen house, cooled in the summer by trellises of grape vines.

One of Flick's last paintings is this 1957 depiction (below) of two buildings in High Amana—the brick schoolhouse, built in 1871, and the wooden washhouse and woodshed, topped by a belltower. In communal days, the schoolmaster and family lived on the school's second floor. The village bell had first functioned in High Amana to signal the start and end of the communal workday and the midday meal, and to rally help in case of fire. On Sunday mornings, villagers used the 8 a.m. ringing to synchronize watches and clocks. After reorganization, the bell called students to school and villagers to church.



ABOVE: COURTESY HENRY AND NOLA MOSER

BELOW: COURTESY THOMAS P. JOHNSON



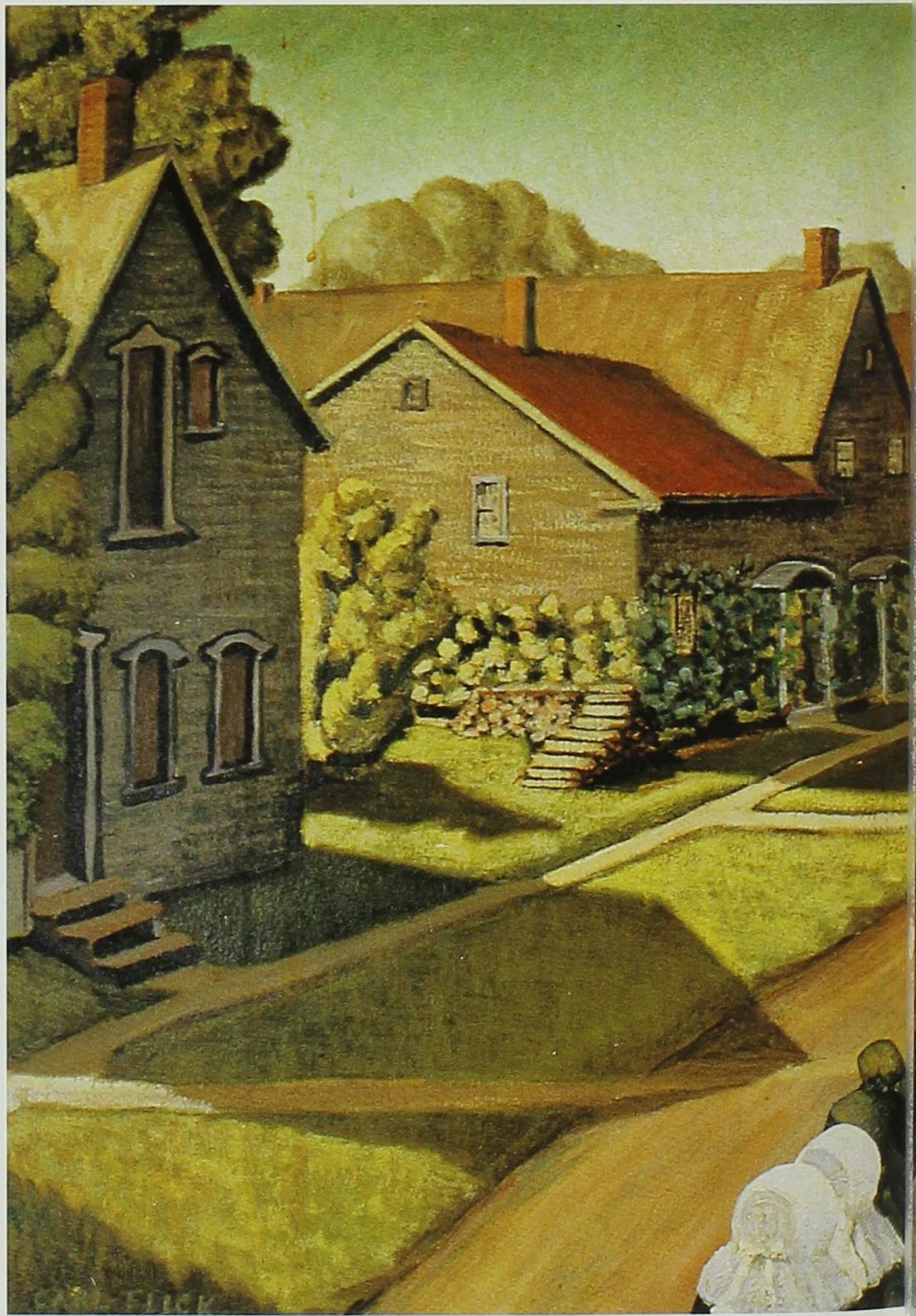


During that last summer, before he was diagnosed with cancer, Wood painted *Spring in the Country* and *Spring in Town*, his last major pieces. He visited Amana at least once (during the late summer of 1941) before his death in Iowa City on February 12, 1942—just two hours before his fifty-first birthday. Carl Flick, with his wife and daughter, attended the small funeral in the chapel of Turner Mortuary in Cedar Rapids, later commenting to his sister on how few people had attended.

Flick continued to paint for a few years until cataract surgery and illness forced him to temporarily lay aside his brushes. By the summer of 1954, however, he had resumed painting. The work of this later period, while continuing to draw on earlier influences, also showed a new concentration on less intense colors. These later pictures have a distinctive quality all their own, which may be attributable to Flick's declining eyesight or, perhaps, a conscious attempt to alter his style.

Flick painted several pictures in the late 1950s, including a particularly striking view of the Amana Meat Market. In 1954 he was photographed at his easel for an article in *The Iowan* magazine, which, aside from a final exhibit at the local high school in 1967, was the last recognition accorded this Amana regionalist in his lifetime. During visits to the homes of individuals who owned earlier examples of his work, he often asked permission to rework them. Generally, this involved retouching the colors that Flick thought

AMANA HERITAGE SOCIETY (AMANA)



had faded through the years.

As the years passed, the hallway of Flick's home gradually filled with his paintings. Although he sold or gave away the early landscapes he had copied from calendars, he never sold his major works or prize-winning paintings.

In 1966 he retired from his position at Amana Refrigeration, where he had been employed since the mid-1930s. He had always vowed that he would paint more when he retired, but his eye troubles precluded much work. By the 1960s, Flick had given up

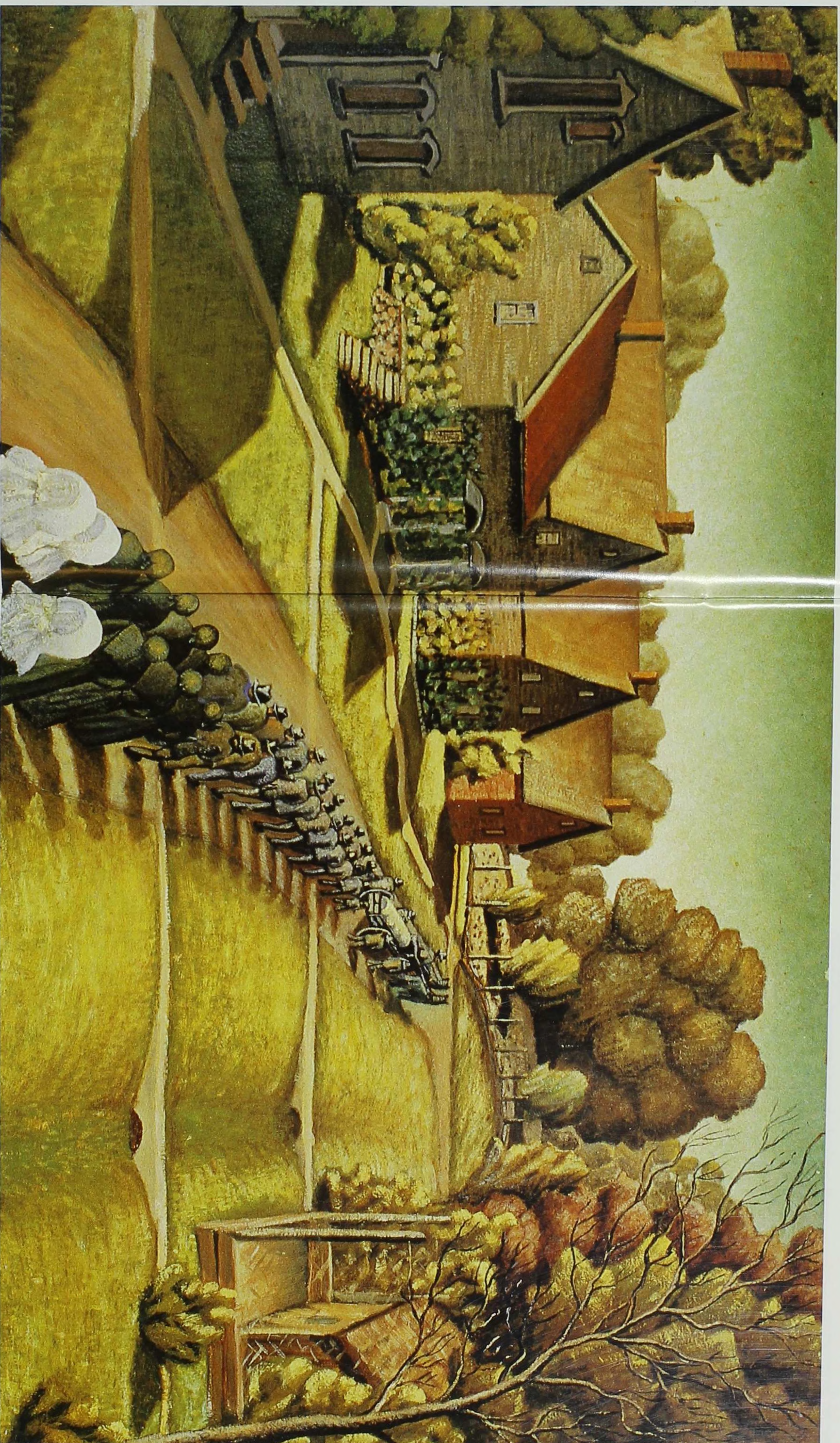


Probably the best known of Flick's works, *Amana Funeral* (1935?) was one of a proposed series in which Flick wanted to capture scenes of "old Amana" that he felt would pass from view. (In this instance, Flick was correct: the last Amana funeral using a horse-drawn wagon and followed by the villagers occurred in 1951.) This particular procession is set in East Amana. The hearse is followed by the pallbearers, then the male members of the community, and finally the women. A white pall covers the casket, and the men and women are dressed in the traditional black church garb. University of Iowa researcher Richard H. Roberts commented in the 1930s on Flick's paintings in the series: "These paintings and many others like them will preserve as no verbal description or interpretation could, or even the art of the photographer could, the old scenes of life in the colonies that have passed or are rapidly giving way to the new material and social culture of the colonies." The painting received an honorable mention at the Iowa Artists Show at Cornell College in 1938, and it was included in the Iowa section of the National Exhibition of American Art in New York that summer. Later, it was part of a traveling exhibit.

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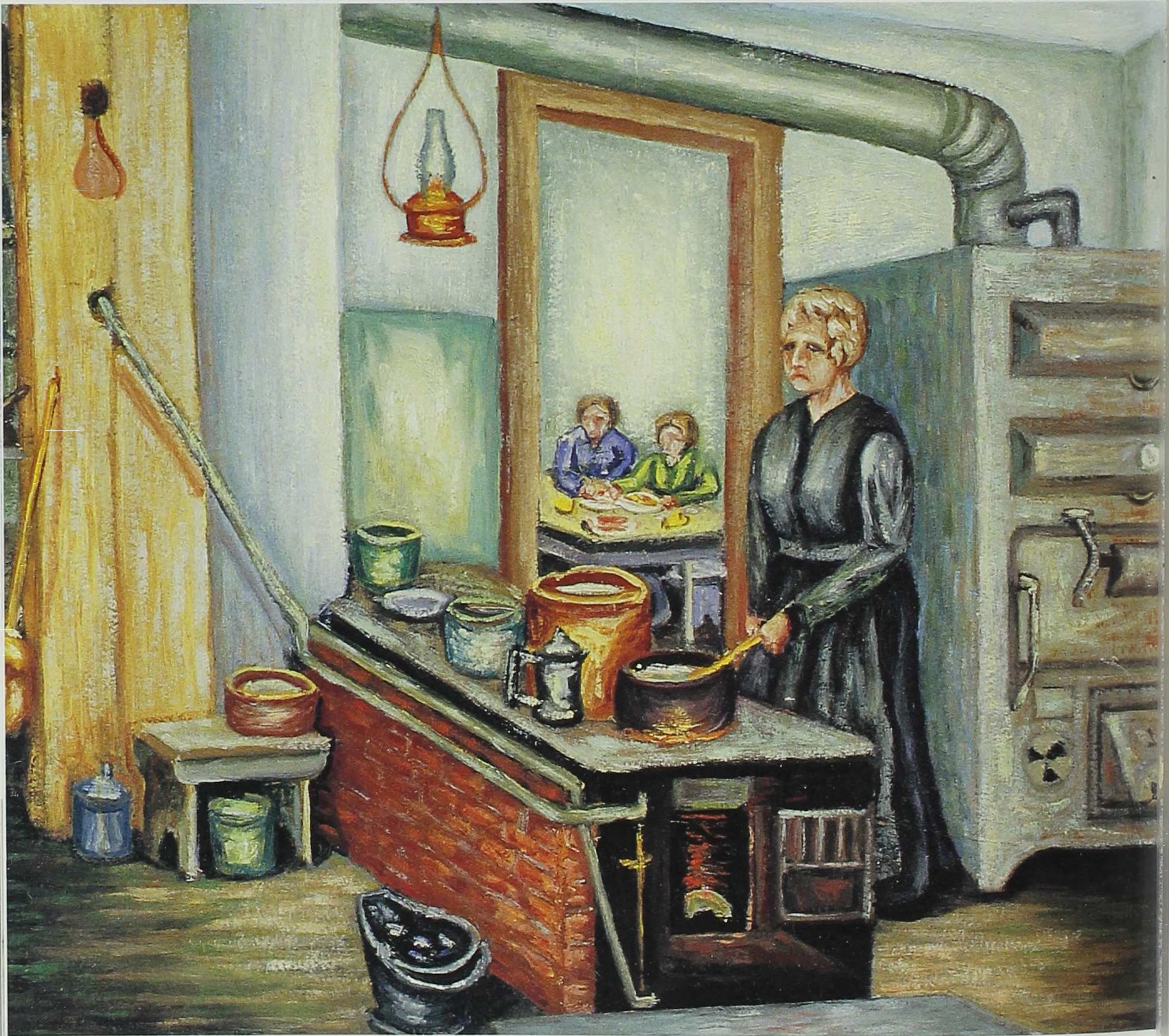
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This is one of the very few paintings in which Flick included a human figure. Given the sorrowful expression on the woman's face, Flick intended this painting to mark the closing of the communal kitchens on April 11, 1932, and to record a vanishing tradition. This kitchen house was one of 53 in the Amanas, each run by a kitchen boss and operated by Amana women, some as young as age 14 (after eighth-grade graduation). Here the five daily meals for the villagers were prepared and eaten (although by the time of the reorganization, most were taking food home and eating it there). Pies and cakes were baked in the large oven on the right; bread was baked elsewhere, in the communal bakeries. A kerosene lamp lights the kitchen. Pipes from the outside bring air into the coal-burning stove. The woman at the stove is Elsie Flick Zuber, the artist's sister, and the scene is probably the Miller kitchen house in West Amana, where she worked at the time of reorganization. Although she is wearing the more traditional dark clothing (unlike the women in the dining room), her hair is worn in a shorter, more fashionable style. Titled *The Last Supper in Amana* (1933?), the painting is based on a photograph that survives in Flick's papers.

COURTESY THE AUTHOR

painting for good, although his easel and equipment remained in place at his home until the death of his wife, Marie, in 1995.

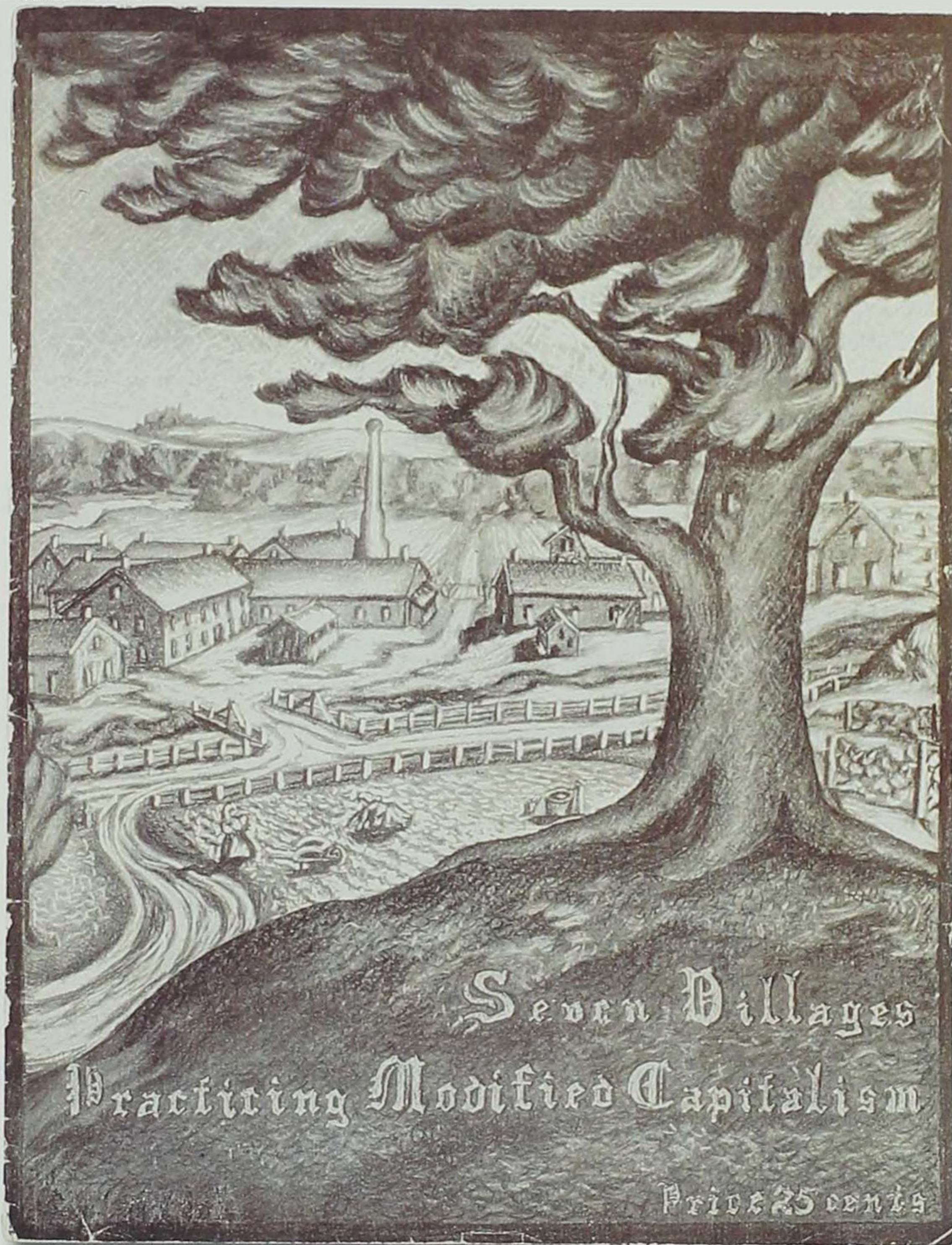
Flick's talents were not all connected with painting. In later years he continued his lifelong interest in the outdoors, particularly fishing, and he spent hours tying flies that he packaged and sold through the West Amana Store and Armstrong's Department Store in Cedar Rapids. He also helped maintain the enormous vegetable garden that still covered the south-facing hill behind his home, and that had once so fascinated Grant Wood.

Flick died on September 16, 1976, having lived almost his entire 72 years in the same West Amana house. At his funeral, his artwork, the defining aspect of his life, was mentioned, but only as a distant glow of a meteor that had long ago passed from sight.

In the years following his death two major exhibitions of his works were mounted locally by the Amana Arts Guild in 1986 and the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art in 1997.

Significantly, at the Cedar Rapids museum, the small, temporary exhibit of Flick's work opened into the museum's massive display of works by Grant Wood.

In a 1932 letter that Flick wrote in reply to a reporter's questions about his life, and which was frequently reprinted in subsequent stories on him, he had said, "I give full credit to Mr. Grant Wood for all I have accomplished so far because it was through his influence and his continued interest in my efforts that I have accomplished a certain



Flick's stylized depiction of the Middle Amana Woolen Mill illustrated the Amana Society's first major tourist publication, printed in 1936. Inside the booklet, the credit reads: "The charcoal drawing on the cover of this folder, interpreting Amana atmosphere, was drawn by Carl Flick of West Amana, a member of the Society."

amount of success." If one examines Flick's early calendar pictures, which are essentially copies of illustrations, and then compares them with his work of only a year later, the obvious and beneficial influence of Wood is clearly evident. Within three years under Wood's influence, Flick progressed from copying calendar pictures with a child's crayons to exhibit-

ing and receiving state and national notice.

Despite the influence of Wood, a proficient portraitist, Flick avoided painting portraits or including human figures in his work, with the notable exception of his self-portrait. He was most comfortable with landscapes and structures. Far from beginning architectural renderings, however,

his paintings show careful composition and attention to light and detail. He seldom depicted a complete building; instead he generally focused on an interesting feature such as a porch, doorway, or potted plant. Aside from a few sketches done in Clayton County in the 1930s, and a few miscellaneous sketches from his Stone City period, Carl Flick's subject matter was almost entirely "Amana" in its scope. As a true regionalist, he looked in his backyard for subject matter, and found it.

In a rather circumspect way, Grant Wood's regionalist fascination with Amana and his visits to the area received official commemoration in 1996, when the Iowa Sesquicentennial stamp featured a portion of the painting *Young Corn*. Wood had completed *Young Corn* in 1931 as a memorial to Linnie Schloeman, a teacher in Cedar Rapids who had grown up north of High Amana. He did the initial sketches while standing in the Lenox Cemetery where she is buried. The painting

depicts rolling Iowa hills. In the foreground, a field of young corn plants represents the children whose lives the schoolteacher had nourished. North of High Amana, the field and hills still strike many today as an ordinary Iowa scene. It took an artist to see its beauty and meaning.

Another hill, two miles from the Iowa River, affords a panoramic view of West Amana. Carl Flick selected this vantage point—with its view of the village he loved and that had shaped his art and

AMANA ARTS GUILD, ON PERMANENT LOAN FROM ALEX AND JOANN MEYER



This striking view closely resembles the land features of the Clayton County landscape on page 4. Flick produced several versions of this scene. The painting, with its less intense colors, is a prime example of his later style and dates to the 1950s.



PRIVATE COLLECTION; PHOTOGRAPHED BY GORDON KELLENBERGER

**Flick's self-portrait (1932?) uses his home village of West Amana as background. The building with the tower was the meat market. The composition places the subject in the foreground of a landscape that holds personal meaning to the artist, similar to Flemish paintings that had attracted Grant Wood's attention in his trips to Europe.**

life—as the background for his self-portrait. There was something in the soil of Iowa, in its hills and its communities, from which these two regionalist painters drew their inspiration. Here they found subject, voice, and friendship. ❖

*The author is a Ph.D. candidate in the agricultural history and rural studies program at Iowa State University. His article "Community in Transition: Amana's Great Change, 1931–1933" appeared in the Winter 2001 Annals of Iowa.*

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

The author gathered much of the information in this article from interviews and conversations with the following Amana residents: Marie Flick Fritsche, Louise Hergert, Irma Hess, Emilie Zuber Hoppe, Helen Haldy Kippenhan, Elizabeth Parvin, Johanna Kippenhan Reihmann, Henrietta Moershel Ruff, Henry Ruff, Ruth Herman Schmieder, Arthur Selzer, Marie Selzer, Elsie Flick Zuber, and Janet Zuber. Thanks also to Gordon Kellenberger.

The Flick family papers, in the family's possession, were also extremely useful; copies of some of those materials are held at the Amana Heritage Society (Main Amana). Also useful was Richard H. Roberts, "Report to Benjamin F. Shambaugh upon field research in the Amana Colonies, 1934-35, 1935-36" (Special Collections, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City). Newspapers that covered Flick, Wood, and other Amana artists include the *Amana Society Bulletin*, *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, *Des Moines Register*, *Marengo Pioneer-Republican*, and *Posaune* (the Amana High School newspaper in the 1930s).

Secondary sources consulted were: Hazel Brown, *Grant Wood and Marvin Cone: Artists of an Era* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1972); Wanda M. Corn, *Grant Wood: The Regionalist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Federal Writers' Project, *Iowa: A Guide to the Hawkeye State* (New York: Viking, 1938), reprinted as *The WPA Guide to 1930s Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1986); Nan Wood Graham, *My Brother, Grant Wood* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1992); and Marjorie Wightman, "The Straight and Simple Line," *The Iowan* (June-July 1954).

Annotations to the original manuscript are held in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files at the State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City).

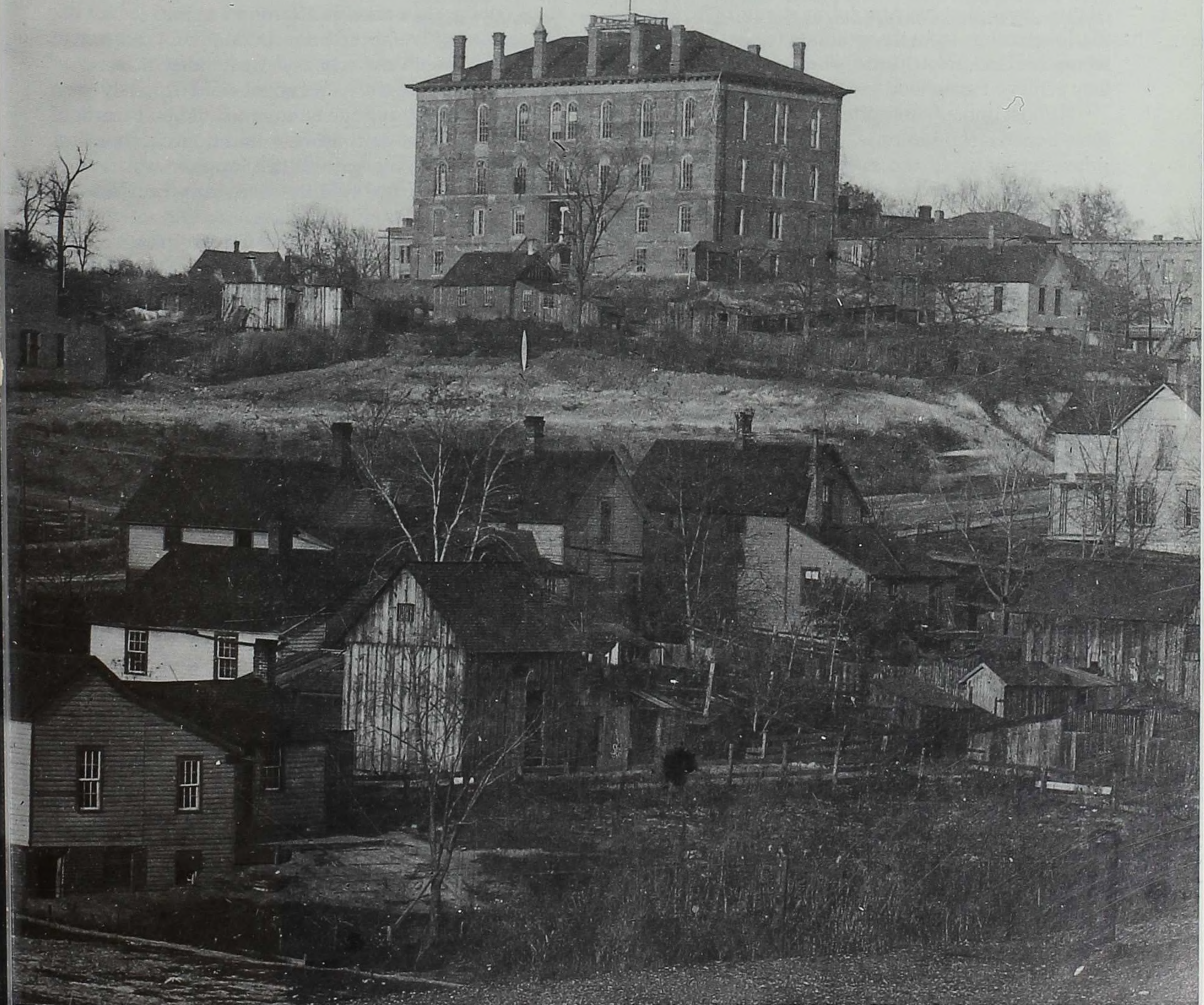




# Iowa's Forgotten Statehouse

## *The Brick Capitol in Des Moines, 1857-1892*

*by Philip G. Hockett*

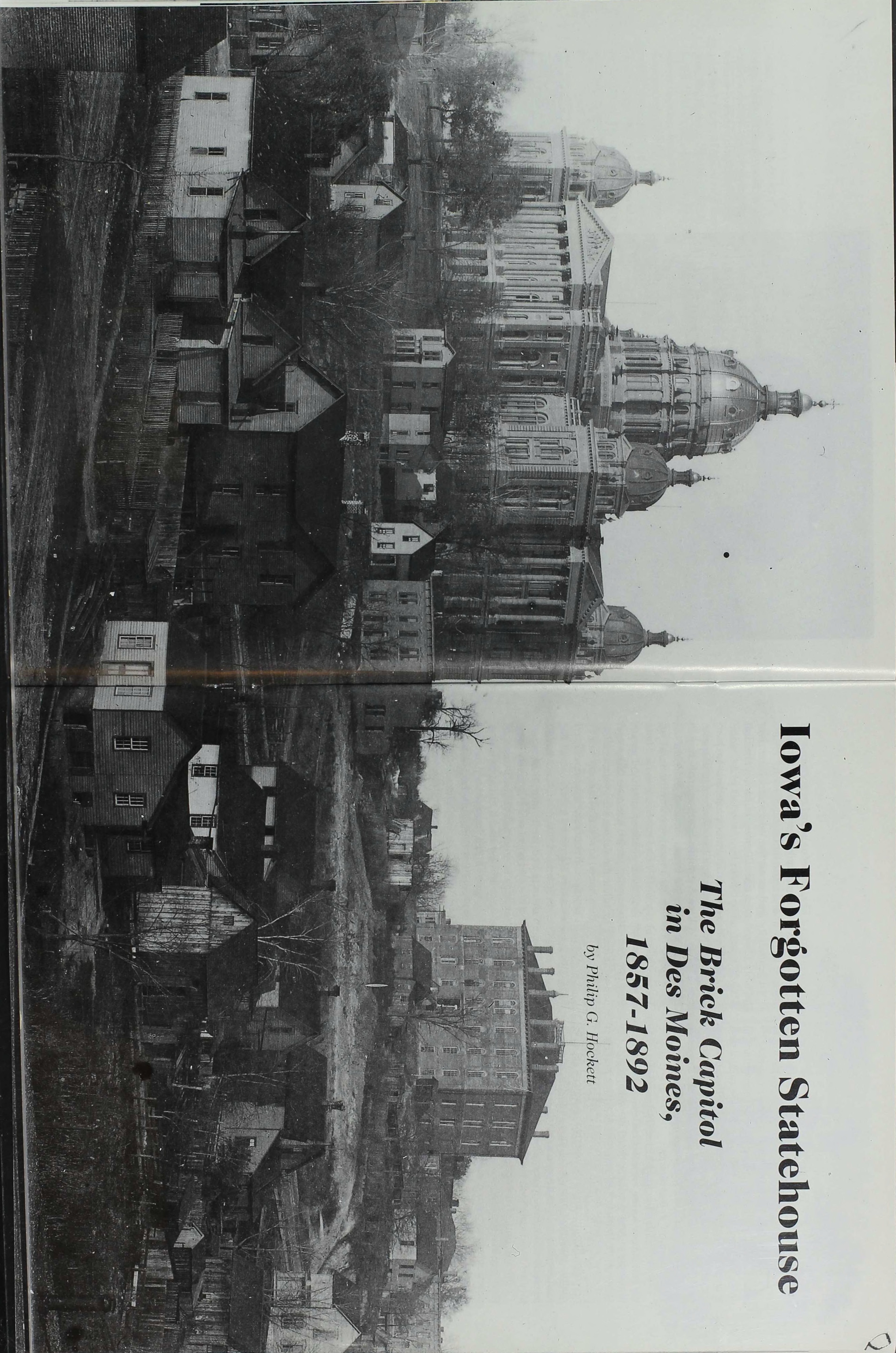


# Iowa's Forgotten Statehouse

*The Brick Capitol  
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**1857-1892**

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**A**t the foot of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument south of the capitol building in Des Moines, a tiny stone plaque marks the historic location of the most obscure public building of any importance in Iowa, the brick structure that served as the capitol for a quarter of a century, from 1858 to 1884. Although it was the seat of state government for 15 years longer than the "Old Capitol" in Iowa City, it is safe to say that most people living in Iowa today have never heard of the "Brick Capitol" in Des Moines.

Yet its foothold in Iowa history is firm. It served as the statehouse during critical decades in 19th-century Iowa—as settlers gradually filled the state, regiments marched off to the Civil War, and railroads branched across the prairie. Within the Brick Capitol's halls, the newborn Republican Party asserted its power, and legislators wrangled over prohibition, suffrage, and railroad regulation. Iowa's population tripled during those formative decades, a process begun when Iowa Territory achieved statehood in 1846.

Almost immediately after Iowa had become a state, there began a series of messy, sometimes comedic disputes over moving the capital from Iowa City to another location. Factions developed, petitions sprang up, and squabbles erupted. Commissions were named and dissolved, legislative bills were introduced and tabled. As the years after 1846 went by, the question of the capital's next locale grew more urgent but little closer to an answer until, in the mid-1850s, the settlement of Fort Des Moines, in Polk County, began to emerge as a favorite (over Pella and Oskaloosa). Still a young town, and south of the geographical center of the state, Fort Des Moines had little to recommend it except its location at the juncture of two major waterways. But in January 1855, a bill to make it the state capital passed an impatient legislature and became law. What remained were the exasperating problems of implementing it.

Governor James Grimes acted quickly to begin the process, but legal problems involving publication of notices delayed site selection for months. In April 1856 Grimes met with his appointed commission, instructing them to travel to Des Moines to decide on an exact spot for the new building. A quarrel over which side of the Des Moines River would be home to the structure had arisen out of a legislative stipulation that the new capitol was only temporary and must be built and maintained at no cost to the state. This had the effect of trans-

forming it into a kind of promotional opportunity for town-lot speculators and making a bitter open-market issue of its site and construction.

Community leaders on the west side of the river lavishly offered to donate 20 acres of land valued at \$100,000, with an option to buy "at a fair price" additional land with a speculative value projected at a quarter million. On the east side, a consortium of local speculators led by Willson Alexander Scott were offering to donate ten acres; Scott's terms included charging the state a lease of one dollar a year to occupy the building. He and his group probably had mixed motives. There is no doubt that they were public-spirited and generous, but they also counted on the presence of a statehouse building to inflate the value of the surrounding lots, which they then hoped to sell at a huge profit.

On April 21, Grimes's commissioners announced their choice—a level rise of ground a mile east of the Des Moines River, on the land donated by Scott. Bad feelings between the east and west sides of the river had seethed for months and now boiled furiously over. The west-siders' outrage later generated an investigation of charges of graft, bribery, and fraud in the selection of the site. Although the prolonged investigation proved nothing, the hostilities engendered survived in various forms for decades.

Despite outrage and investigation, nothing stopped Willson Alexander Scott's plans for the capitol. Early mention of progress appears in a letter written by his sister Lucinda, who visited Scott in May 1856 and wrote to their father in Illinois, "Alex requests me to say that he has just received from the governor specifications of the kind of a house he wants built and he [Alex] is going out now to make arrangements to have it commenced immediately." Since at the time the building of a new residence for Governor Grimes was neither necessary nor under discussion, the "house" she referred to was probably the new statehouse.

Indeed, sometime before the middle of May, Scott and his associates had made contact with an architect, and on May 16 the *Burlington Gazette* reported having seen drawings and detailed specifications of "the new (temporary) capitol building to be erected at Demoine City," commenting that they "reflected great credit upon the skill, taste and judgment" of the designer. Three weeks later the *Burlington Daily Hawk-Eye & Telegraph* noted the architect's arrival in Fort Des Moines "to superintend" the construction of the building. The same drawings mentioned in the *Gazette* had now been placed on display in "the drug store of Dr. Shaw, in Exchange block, Walnut st." in Des Moines, where the designer had drawn more praise as "an excellent artist" whose

**Previous page: Modest in scale and splendor compared to Iowa's statehouse, the temporary "Brick Capitol" lies to its southwest in this circa 1890 photograph.**

SHSI (IOWA CITY)

"new work would add to his already well-established reputation as an architect." Both Burlington newspapers identified him only as "Basset, of Burlington," but he was almost certainly Amos G. Bassett.

Our knowledge of A. G. Bassett, assumed to be the Brick Capitol's architect, is fragmentary. Born in New York in 1818, he would have been in his late thirties when given the commission for the new capitol. He was in practice in Burlington in the 1850s, first on his own and then as a partner in the firm of Bassett, Dunham and Frazee (see box below).

The process by which Bassett was selected to design the Brick Capitol is likewise unknown. In the mid-1850s, fewer than 30 architects practiced in Iowa (four of them in Des Moines). Not surprisingly the profession was concentrated in the eastern third of the state, particularly in Davenport. "Architect" was not as clearly defined a word then as it has been since about 1900. In 1856 these early professionals were often primarily engineers or contractors. They did not routinely share plan drawings with their clients unless asked and they sometimes worked without any, relying instead on pattern books and builders' manuals. Their training was generally informal, perhaps only a short apprenticeship in the building trades. But as time went on, the term "ar-



"Crowning the hill on the East of our city, and visible for miles around, stands the new capitol building for the State of Iowa," reported a Des Moines newspaper in March 1857. "It is an elegant and spacious edifice, and the first object which strikes the eye of the stranger when he approaches the city." Within only a few years, the capitol's dome was removed. This illustration of the statehouse in H. B. Turrill's *Historical Reminiscences of the City of Des Moines* (1857) may have derived from Bassett's drawings. The finished structure lacked some of the details of this illustration. For example, above, the elegant segmented arches over the doorways match those on the ground-floor windows, and the ornamental quoins that bracket the corners of the building extend even to the ground floor.

chitect" expanded to include individuals skilled mainly as designers and not always broadly knowledgeable about construction techniques.

Regardless of detailed specifications or drawings, the task of actually building the statehouse was complicated by its surroundings. The Des Moines and Raccoon Rivers flooded often and disastrously. Their lowlands, on which the divided town had come into being, became a fetid cottonwood swamp where hogs ran in whichever streets remained above water. Even with no

Little is known about Amos G. Bassett, the assumed architect of the Brick Capitol in Des Moines. A beloved 19th-century landmark in Burlington, the "Marion Hall" of 1852



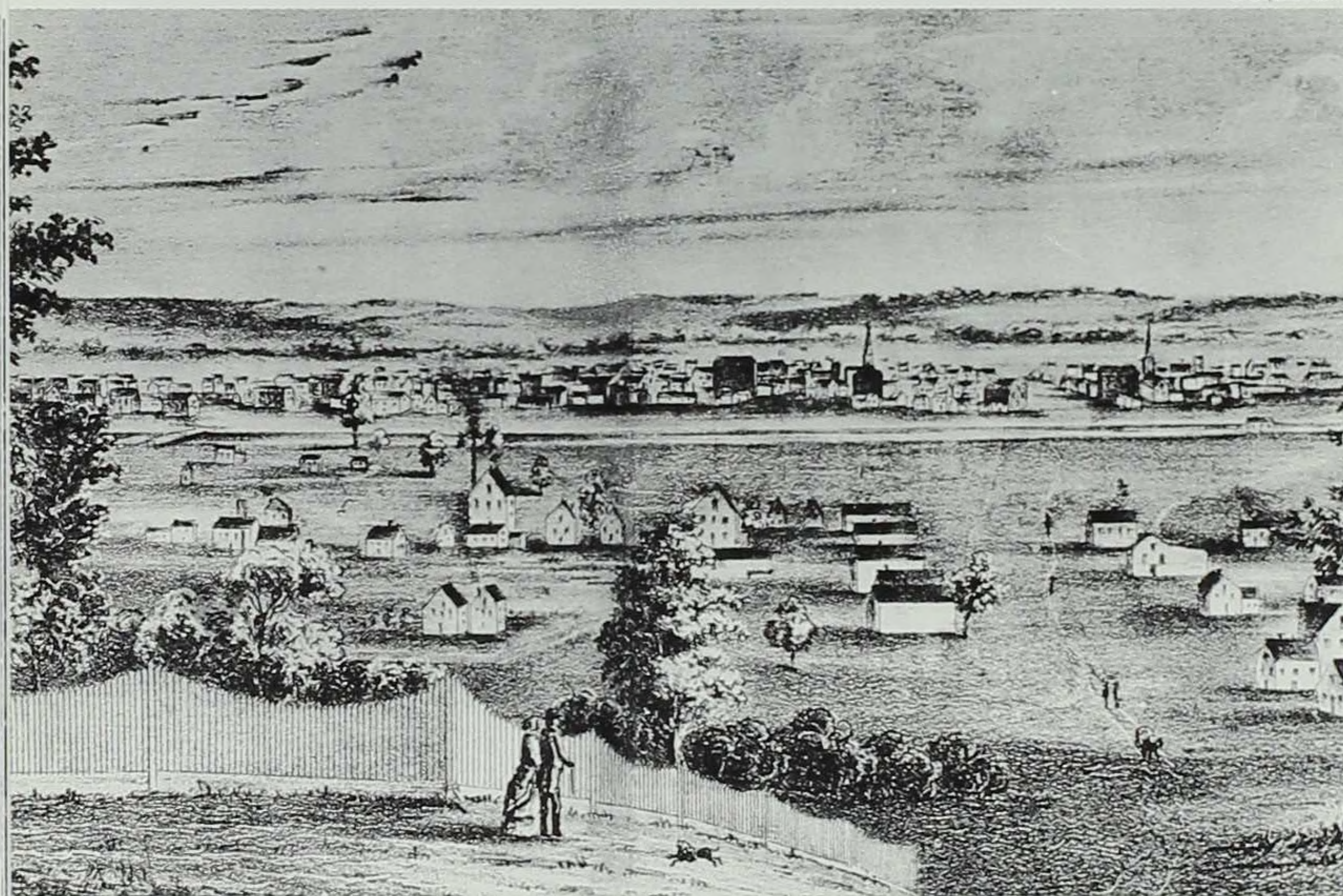
SHSI (IOWA CITY): SOUVENIR OF BURLINGTON, IOWA, 1891

(below), is attributed to him. At various times it served as a civic auditorium, a city hall, and an all-purpose public building. Marion Hall endured into the 1920s as a local landmark.

Bassett also designed the second of four Fremont County courthouses in Sidney, a turreted "Elizabethan" structure completed in 1860. Contemporary sources referred to it as "the best building in Sidney" and "the most attractive feature of the town." By some accounts it was an edifice too imposing for Sidney; building cost overruns led to a lawsuit between Bassett and Fremont County. Bassett won, but three years later the building was severely damaged in an explosion rumored to have been engi-

neered by residents of nearby Hamburg, which had been campaigning to become the county seat. Fire destroyed the building in 1888.

After completing the Sidney courthouse in 1860, Bassett "furnished the design" for a new "Methodist Protestant" church across the Missouri in Nebraska City, Nebraska. In 1863 he was described by a local paper as "Architect and Builder of the Sidney Court House and other of the best buildings in the West." It has not been established whether any of his work is extant. He moved to western Iowa in the late 1850s but the details of his later career and the date of his death are unknown. —by Philip G. Hockett



**Des Moines in 1857 (the year "Fort" was dropped from its name and the city was incorporated). That year an immigrant guide promised that the town of 5,000 was "destined speedily to become a rich and populous city" thanks to its "energetic and public-spirited business men." Others with less boosterism called it a "shabby" little town subject to "mud embargoes."**

flooding, a downpour could transform the place into a wasteland of mud. Much of Willson Alexander Scott's extensive property lay safely above the flood plain but near an ancient forest of oaks and hickories. Bobcats and an occasional mountain lion still haunted the timber, and wild turkeys foraged for acorns. Wild strawberries and red lilies dotted the grasses. It was in this beautiful but formidable setting that work now began on the second state capitol of Iowa.

Although Fort Des Moines faced explosive growth between 1850 and 1860 (its population increased sevenfold), like all frontier towns it had only a primitive infrastructure. Reaching it over land was a grinding struggle on horseback or by stage, and the only other means of access was by flatboats or steamers on the river (the railroad would not reach the area until 1866). Transporting quantities of heavy material overland was difficult, so the builders of the new capitol were largely dependent on whatever was available locally. As it happened, they were not badly supplied, by local merchants or by Scott. Although most of Scott's holdings were in real estate (a dangerously volatile commodity in the 1850s), he also appears to have owned a sawmill, a coal mine, a quarry, a brickyard, a blacksmith shop, teams for hauling, and a quantity of dressed hardwood from the forested areas of his property—all useful resources

for someone about to build a statehouse.

A rough but functional chain of command deriving from Scott's resources and personnel came into existence in response to the needs of the moment. Scott's deputy at the sawmill, M. H. King, took the builders' daily orders and relayed them to John Slatten. Noted for his "thorough knowledge of western timber," Slatten was in charge of cutting and dressing the wood for the structure's post-and-beam framing. Most of the carpenter work and joinery was entrusted to John Bryan, described later as "one of the finest mechanics the city [had] ever known." He was assisted by William Lowry. Two kilns fired bricks less than a block from the construction site. One kiln may have been Scott's; the other probably belonged to either William Harris or S. A. Robertson (both supplied at least part of the brick). Although Scott is

named in several sources as the Brick Capitol's "contractor," he shared much of this responsibility with John Hyde. On September 19, 1856, a John Haskins (or Huskins) was appointed "foreman on the work" and remained in that position until September 1, 1857, when the structure was nearly complete.

What role this arrangement left for architect A. G. Bassett is unknown. It is possible that his involvement had ended by the time Haskins took over, and that his concept of the building was not being realized to his own satisfaction. Because Bassett's drawings and plans of the Brick Capitol have been lost, it is hard to be sure how accurately the finished structure reflected his concept. His name seems to drop from even the earliest accounts by the summer of 1856.

Construction of the statehouse stretched through the autumn and into the winter. By October the masonry was finished and interior work could begin in whatever protection the walls offered against cold and wind; the winter of 1856/57 was severe and can only have slowed the builders' progress. In any case, Governor Grimes was forced to abandon his hope that the new capitol would be ready for the 1857 legislative session.

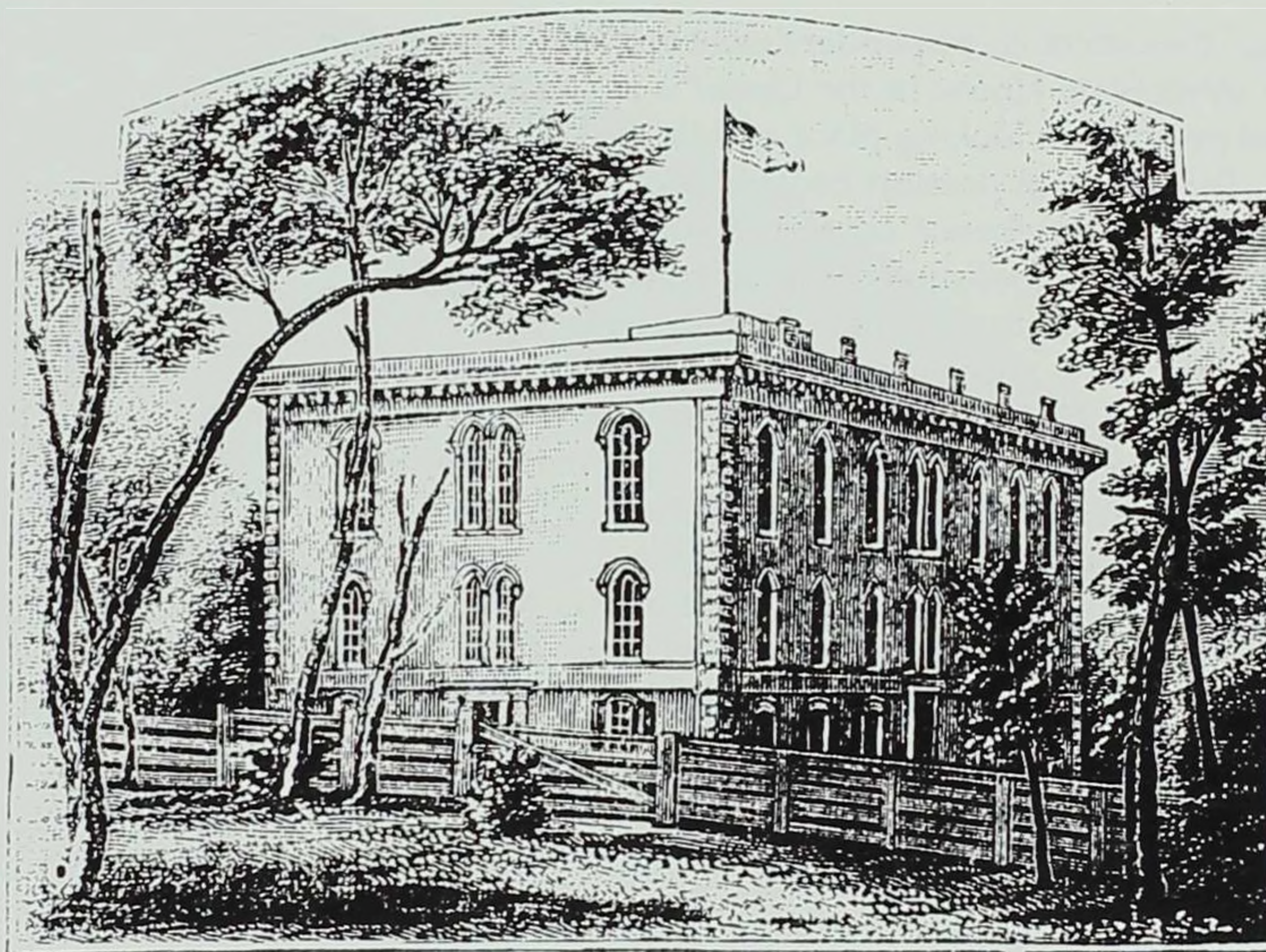
There was an additional problem. Even though by now the emergence of a capitol building in Des Moines could not be ignored, the issue of its location clung stub-

bornly to life, and disquieted muttering about it was audible from Iowa City, still the seat of state government. As late as January 12, 1857, a bill was introduced to repeal the 1855 law designating Des Moines as the capital (it was tabled the next day.) Shortly afterwards, "diagrams" of the new statehouse surfaced in Iowa City, and on about January 21—perhaps in response to the hostile bill—they were displayed to the lawmakers by a Dr. Davis, who pronounced the Brick Capitol a "fine-looking building" and "a better house than the one now occupied."

This can only have irritated many of the legislators. There was a feeling that the rush to erect a temporary capitol was undignified and that there was no reason the gem-like little neoclassical building that had served as the territorial and state capitol for 16 years in Iowa City should not continue in use until a permanent one was ready in Des Moines. (Besides, no one in Iowa City at the time could envision the spectacular gains from the consolatory trade-off of 1847 designating Iowa City as the future site of a state university.)

Although its location was still a live issue seven months into the Brick Capitol's construction, its progress resisted all disapproval. In March 1857, John Haskins provided a Des Moines newspaper with a detailed description of the building's interior. Probably more a recitation of the measurements from A. G. Bassett's plans than an indicator of its actual stage of completion, Haskins's description may have been intended to portray the statehouse as far enough along to discourage any further agitation against Des Moines.

By July 4, 1857, although eight months behind Governor Grimes's projected date, the Brick Capitol was regarded as essentially finished, and it served as the site of a patriotic rally at which the builders' assistant, William Lowry, ran the flag up over its dome. In October, the governor traveled from Iowa City to Des Moines to inspect the structure, and on the 19th he pronounced it completed and ready for the 1858 legislative session. There was nothing more its opponents could do. On November 25, Iowa City's *Weekly State Reporter* fired a



This idyllic rendering of the Brick Capitol shows the loss of the dome and the addition of chimneys and a fence, as compared to the drawing on page 23. To mark the end of the first legislative session held in the new building, in 1858, and to thank Des Moines citizens for their warm welcome, lawmakers arranged a "grand ball and festival" in the statehouse. As B. F. Gue recalled, "Desks and carpets were removed from the floor of the house, fine music provided, and an elaborate feast spread in the supreme court room. The gay festivities were kept up until near morning."

last volley: "Thus winds up the scheme of fraud, bribery and corruption; and the elegant structure reared in this city for the use of the state . . . must be exchanged for an indifferent pile of brick farther west, until the Legislature shall see fit to burden the people with the uncalled for expense of building another State House."

Whatever else it was, however, the new capitol was not merely an "indifferent pile of brick." Although unpretentious, the structure that awaited the governor's inspection was a modestly attractive edifice of three stories, 100 feet from end to end and almost 85 feet from its foundation to the tip of its dome. The seams of its tin roof glinted in the sunlight, and dashes of white stone trim accented the fresh brick's autumnal color. Its discreet Italianate detailing elevated it to something like stylishness, and a correspondent for the *Burlington Gazette* reported that the senate and house chambers were "fitted up with taste and elegance, and more conveniently arranged than those of the former State House."

With a few settlers' rough dwellings nearby, the Brick Capitol was an unpretentious, democratic temple, open to anyone and tolerant of any neighbor. "Scattering timber lies immediately back of and about the build-

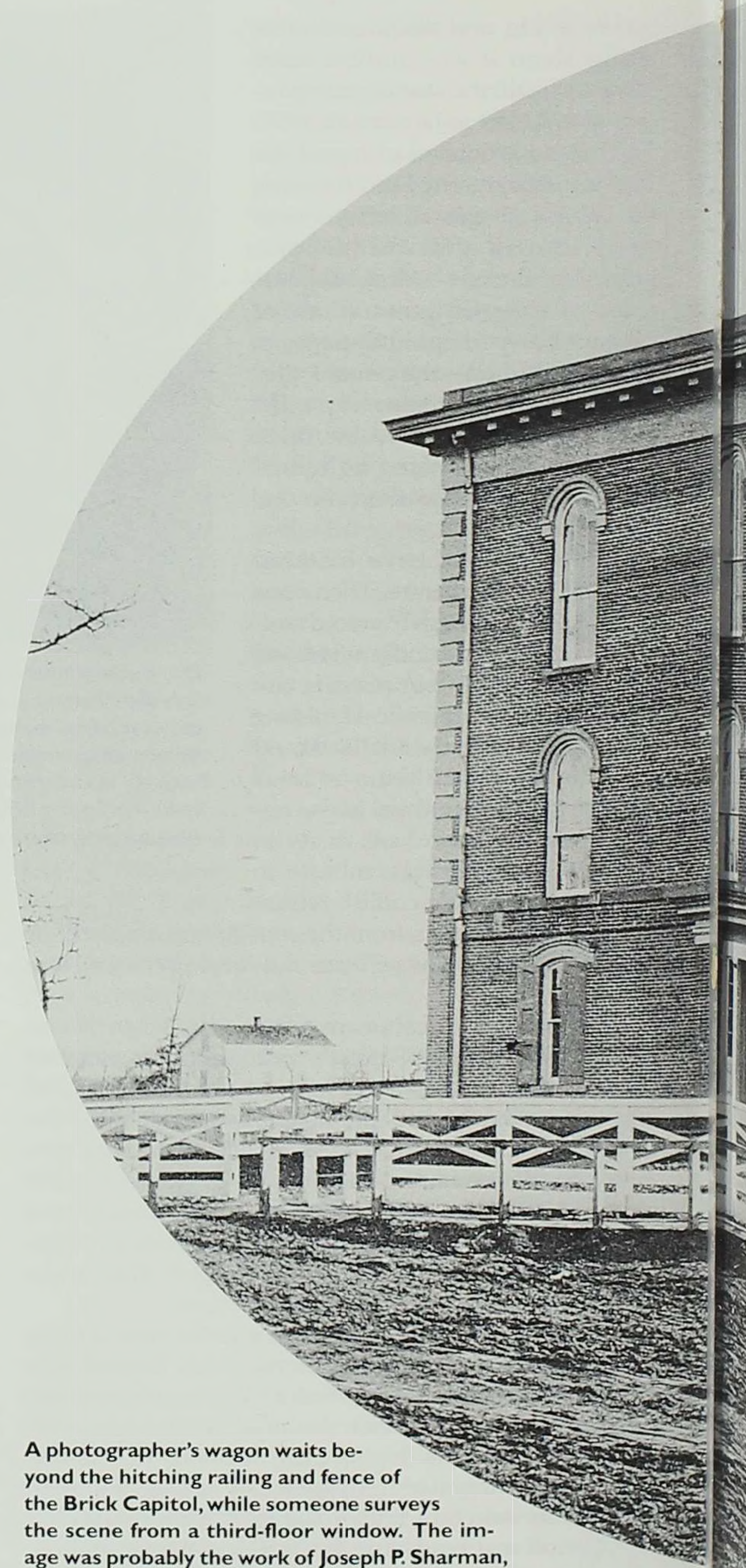
ing," the *Gazette* correspondent went on, "and I presume no other State House in the Union is as 'back woods' and primitive a looking place as this."

In spite of, or possibly because of, its "back woods" aspect, the statehouse conferred some badly needed glory on the unpolished community, whose new identity it reassuringly confirmed. Its rough-gem aspect was what people would remember about it. Forty years later Benjamin F. Gue, a pioneer legislator and former lieutenant governor, recalled the new capitol in the context of its wild setting: "The streets leading to it were . . . simply wagon tracks made through a long stretch of low, swampy river bottom, and up a steep ungraded hill, where the yellow clay soil rolled up on the wheels of the vehicles which tried to fathom the depths of the mud, like the prairie sod from a huge breaking plow. One long straggling walk of native lumber boards, warped and slippery, could be seen strung out lonesome and wabbling in the direction of the new brick capitol."

With the building completed, it was necessary only to transport the fixtures of government from Iowa City to Des Moines. The onset of bad weather and 120 miles of roadless prairie between the two capitols subjected the movers to an ordeal lasting several days. Within a few miles of the Brick Capitol the heaviest of four safes had to be abandoned, and it stayed there until a deep cold snap hardened the ground enough to bear its weight. The safe was the state treasurer's and held most of the money earmarked for salaries. Eventually it was dragged into town on a sled pulled by ten yoke of oxen. By the time the legislature convened in mid-January, the weather had undergone a complete change, and the Brick Capitol began its official life in conditions described as "ideally clear and almost abnormally warm . . . 'like an Indian summer dropped into the lap of winter.' "

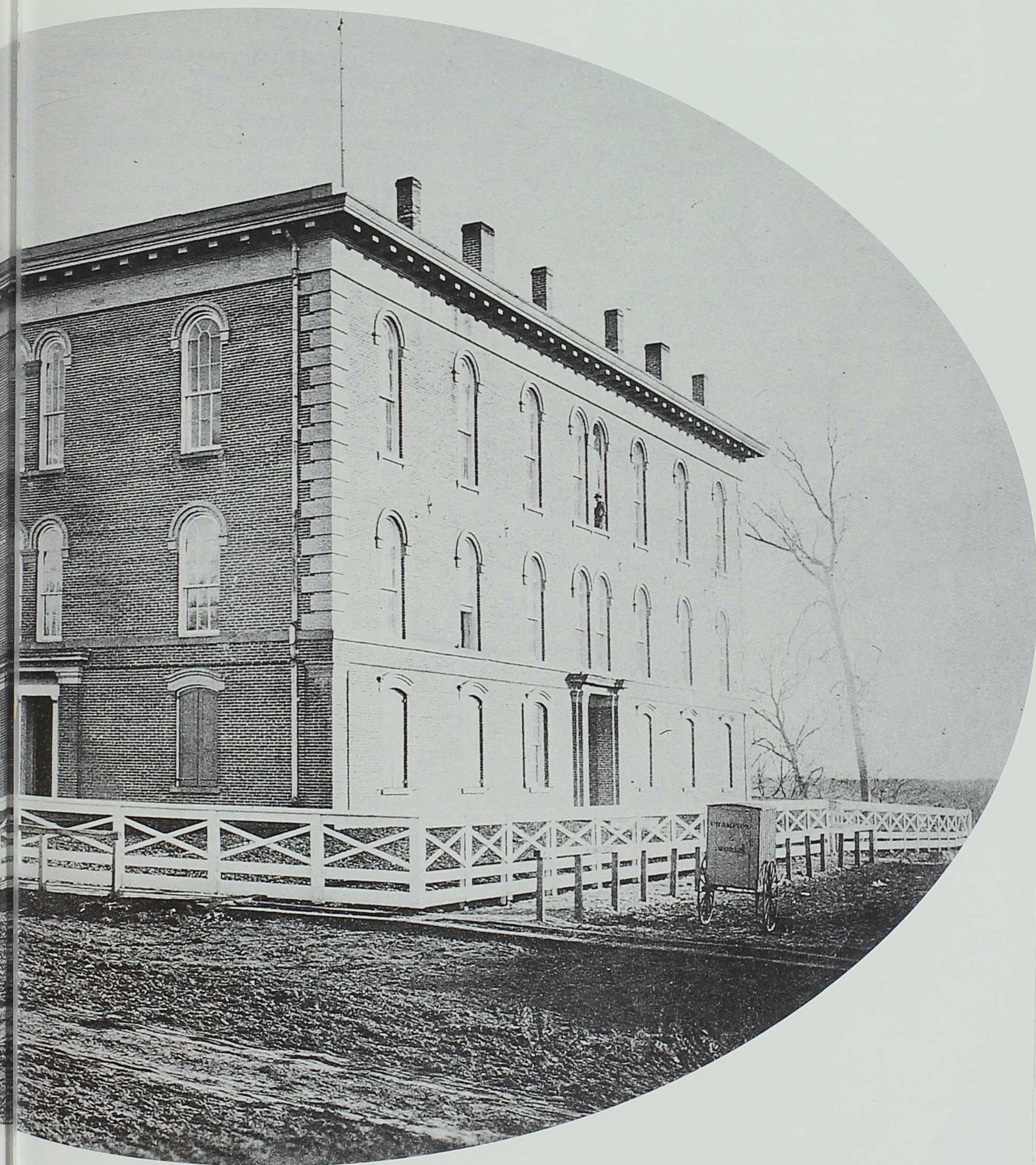
**T**he sparse literature on the Brick Capitol often refers to its style as "Ionic." A Burlington correspondent, in fact, stated that it had been built "after the Ionic, or rather 'composite,' style of architecture." As used in the mid-19th century, "Ionic" could signify either the style of the crowning capital of a column or else a certain kind of overall appearance characterized by a prevailing simplicity, often with plain frontal masses set off by pilasters. Little specifically "Ionic" detailing appears in the extant images of the Brick Capitol exterior, though more may have been utilized on the inside; lacking photographs of its interior, we cannot be sure.

The exterior does show, however, Italianate detail-



A photographer's wagon waits beyond the hitching railing and fence of the Brick Capitol, while someone surveys the scene from a third-floor window. The image was probably the work of Joseph P. Sharman, who photographed other east-side Des Moines structures in 1867.

SHSI (DES MOINES)





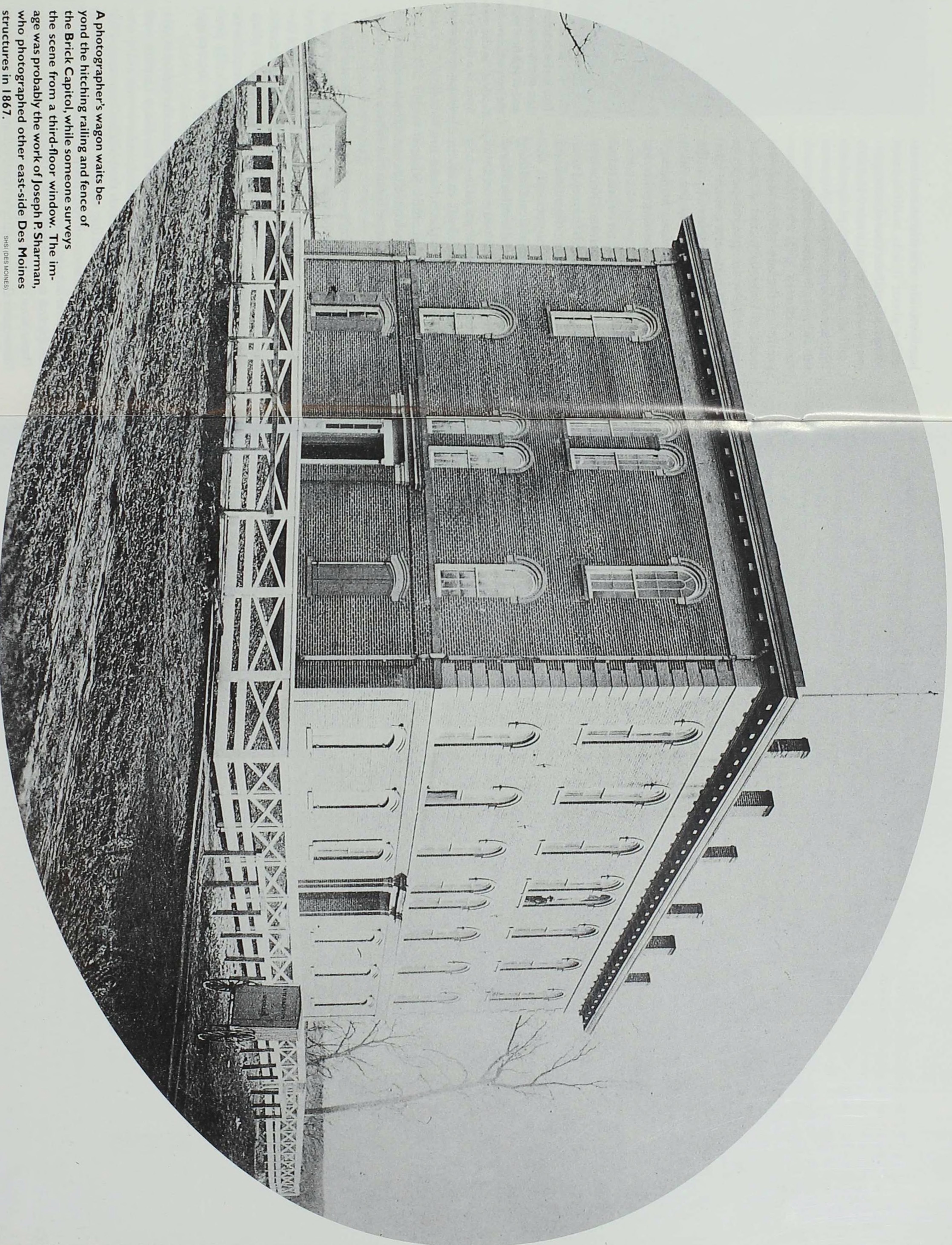
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SHORMAN (DES MOINES)

ing. By 1857 the Italianate style was nearing the crest of its long-lasting American popularity. Based on the asymmetrical layout of farmhouses seen by English travelers in the Italian countryside in the late 1780s, it had made its way to America in about 1837. It caught on quickly and was used in a wide variety of building types, especially private homes, into the 1870s. Besides irregular floor plans and eccentric placement of towers, the Italianate style was above all characterized by certain features of ornamentation—round-headed windows, roof brackets, and the accentuation of corners with ornamental quoins of light-colored stone. (Fine examples of Italianate architecture survive in Iowa; in fact, the “Old Main” building on the Iowa Wesleyan College campus in Mt. Pleasant is particularly close in concept and detailing to the Brick Capitol.) These ornamental elements were also applied to other architectural styles or to no particular style. This floating vocabulary of Italianate adornment filled many architects’ immediate needs for fashionable ways to trim plain buildings. The Brick Capitol was such a structure, essentially a modest brick box beneath its Italianate frosting. It neither resembled the grand-operatic edifice that succeeded it in 1884 nor owed anything to John Rague’s earlier capitol built in Iowa City.

Perhaps accidentally, the Brick Capitol looked to a time before Iowa had even formed a part of the Louisiana Purchase, when America’s colonial statehouses were not always required to fill symbolic roles and often were basically meeting halls usable for a variety of public functions besides lawmaking. Built to serve only as a temporary statehouse, the Brick Capitol in a sense represented a survival of this tradition and was frequently the site of rallies, religious gatherings, school exercises, and other public events. It may have been this link to a bygone era, among other things, that drove the *Daily State Register* to ridicule the structure as an “antediluvian pile” in 1871, when it had been standing only 14 years.

**T**he Brick Capitol grew old quickly. The first intense flush of civic pride in it faded as plans for a permanent capitol began taking tentative shape. As early as 1861, a note in the Des Moines city directory dismissed the Brick Capitol as “an edifice entirely unworthy of the dignified name it bears.” It had probably been within the previous year or two that it suffered the embarrassment of losing its dome, which had caused the structure’s walls to crack. It was a crucial loss because this modest tower, although mostly ornamental,

had at least identified the building as a capitol. Without the dome, the unassuming Brick Capitol could be, and was, mistaken for a schoolhouse or a hotel.

The legal status of the Brick Capitol was a troublesome question as well. Officially, it still belonged to Willson Alexander Scott and his group, but it had become a burden to them. They had relied on community support to underwrite some of their expenses in building it, but in the wake of the fraud investigation, those on the west side of the river retaliated by withholding any share of the money for construction. Remaining sources of funding had dried up in a financial panic that swept the country in late 1857, just as the capitol was nearing completion.

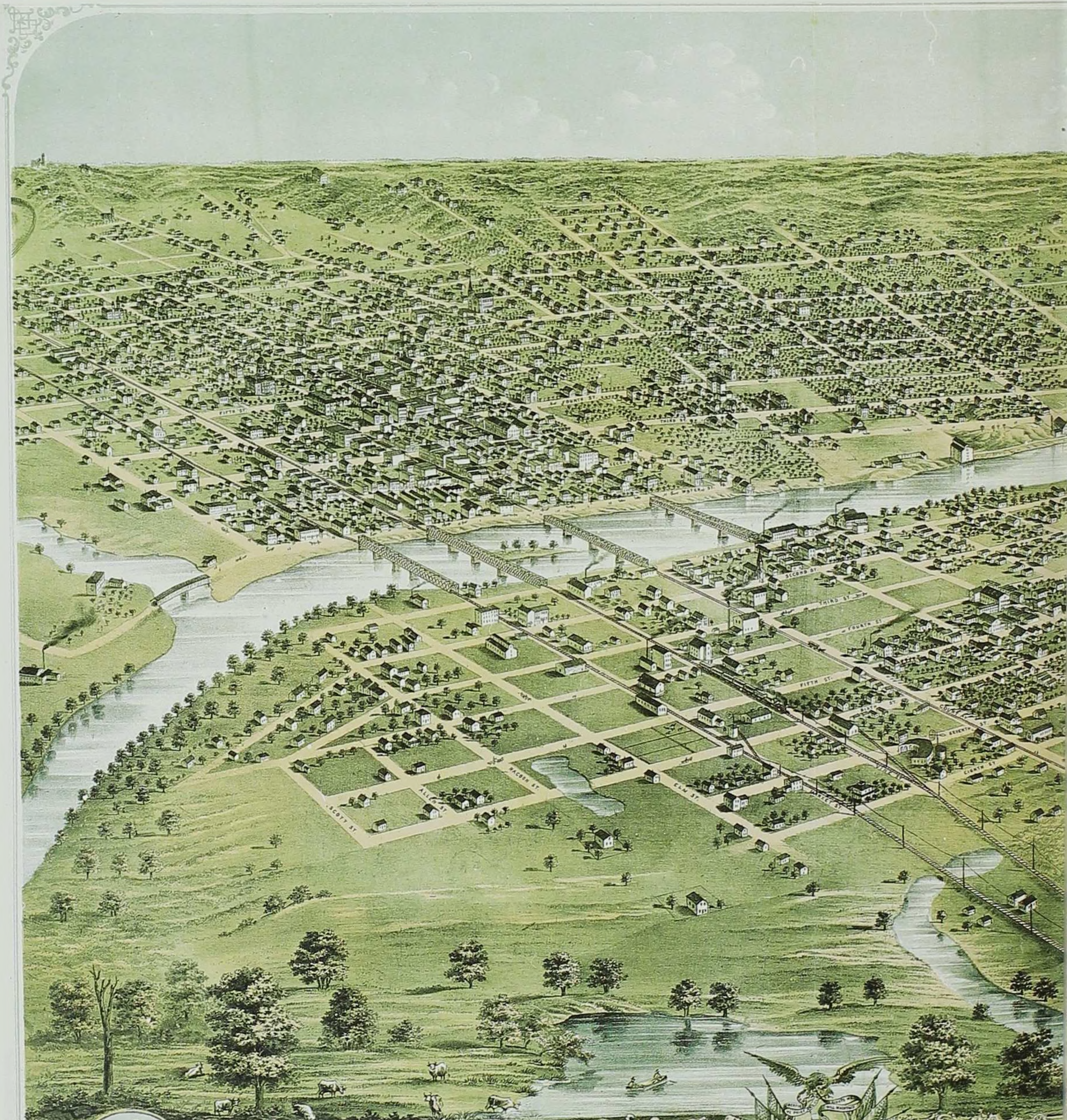
To see the project through, Scott had been allowed to borrow money from the state school fund, at ten percent, but his ability to repay the loan was dwindling steadily. Ruined by the expense of completing the building and by the collapse of land values in the aftermath of the panic, he tried to cover his losses by traveling to Pike’s Peak to prospect for gold, but he died on the journey in 1859. By then the state had already been paying for maintenance of and modifications to the Brick Capitol, and Scott’s death made it clear that the building must soon revert to public ownership. But despite a strong recommendation by Governor Ralph P. Lowe in 1860, four more years went by before the transfer actually occurred. In the meantime the Brick Capitol was stalled in a limbo between private owners who no longer wanted it and a state government hesitating to take it over.

Meanwhile, its structural integrity had proven to be poor (perhaps much unskilled labor had been utilized in its construction). After cracks had appeared and the dome had been taken down, iron stabilizing rods were run through the building from east to west. In his annual message in 1868, Governor William M. Stone drew attention to the unsafe condition of the building and the necessity of fixing it. Even though the Brick Capitol had always been intended as a temporary statehouse, the laying of the permanent capitol’s cornerstone was still three years away, and the brick structure would have to house state government for at least ten more years. By this time, however, the legislators needed no encouragement, because no one knew what the building would do next. In January 1868, large chunks of plaster had fallen on the heads of the Railroad Committee,

**A crowd, several in top hats, spills onto the steps of the Brick Capitol. Although undated, the photograph was taken sometime after the 1868 renovation, when the building acquired a new foundation and a new ground floor.**

SHSI (IOWA CITY)





PUBLIC SCHOOL

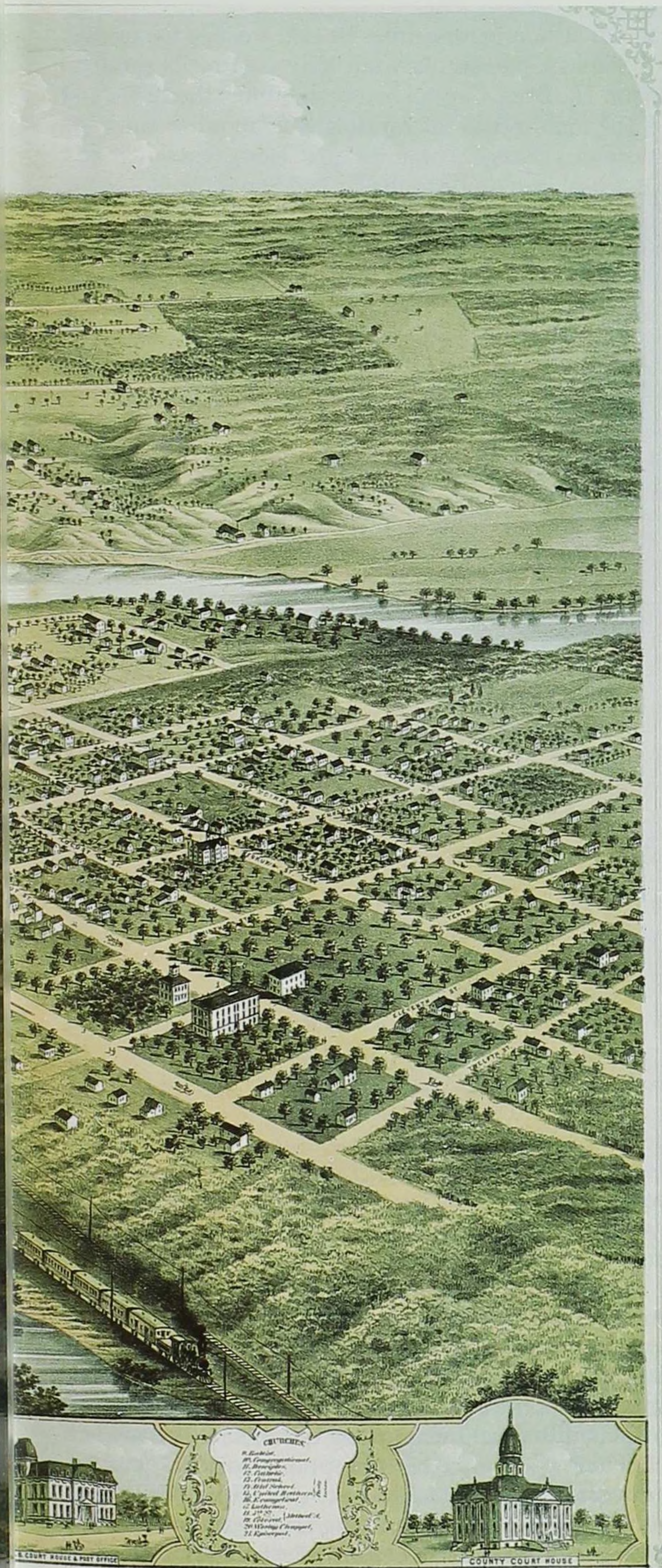
- PICTURE KEY**
1. Capitol
  2. U.S. Court House
  3. Grand Hotel
  4. Public School
  5. Iowa State Fair
  6. Hotel & Restaurant
  7. State Department
  8. U.S. Post Office
  9. Episcopal Church
  10. Mercantile Building



STATE CAPITOL

BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE CITY OF  
**DES MOINES**  
 THE CAPITAL 1868 OF IOWA.

SHSI (IOWA CITY); ORIGINAL AT LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



“burying them in a rubbish of mortar and lime,” the newspapers reported, and injuring at least one senator.

Major renovation began late that summer. S. A. Robertson, ten years earlier a supplier of brick for the building and now running an important contracting company, supervised a comprehensive operation that involved regrading the lots; replacing the tin roof with shingles; constructing a fireproof vault; and completing “various and sundry repairs of said building necessary to put it in good presentable shape.” The most impressive feat of the project—it must have drawn crowds of amazed spectators—was the raising of the entire structure on joists while a fourth story was constructed beneath it. This allowed replacement of the original foundation, which had been built of porous local stone and by 1868 had completely rotted from moisture. Early in December the *Des Moines Register* reported the work done.

**A**n additional step in the renovation was the execution the next summer of elaborate painted frescoes as interior ornamentation, as described in the *Register*: “The frescoing of the Senate Chamber and the House of Representatives was completed yesterday [July 15, 1869], and presents a decidedly beautiful and artistic appearance. The Senate Chamber is finished off with a beautiful center-piece in the ceiling, surrounded with an ornamental circle and panel work. Over the President’s desk, and over the entrance, are two large eagles, with wings wide-spread, and are very life-like sketches of the king bird. The walls are frescoed with large panels and columns, but one thing that mars their beauty is the dingy hat-racks that cross the column work, that had ought to find a place somewhere else.”

The reporter continued, “The Hall of the House of Representatives is finished off in a different and more imposing style. The walls have heavy Corinthian columns with heavy base, capital and architrave. The ceiling is ornamented and divided up into neat and showy panel work, the center having a circular ornament in stucco, and from which will hang a fine chandelier. Four allegorical representations of Art, History, Agriculture and Commerce, in an oval shape have been executed in a masterly manner. That of History, which also represents Justice, appears immediately over the Speaker’s

**Des Moines in 1868.** The Brick Capitol is the large building directly above the locomotive, in the lower right. The large square to its north would be the site of the new statehouse.



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Desk; Agriculture in the West, Art in the East, and Commerce in the North. All of these representations are fine, and in keeping with the general execution of the work."

Proud of the artisanship, the *Register* concluded that "best of all, the work is from the hand of one of our own artists—Mr. [Martin] Hayken—and it speaks volumes for his skill and taste as an artist. That Iowa men should do the work for Iowa is one of the articles of our belief, simply because they can do the work as well, whether it be of the commonest or the most intricate, as the workmen of any other State, and it is but right and just that they should have every item of it."

Although the 1868 renovation was a conscientious effort by the state to make the Brick Capitol habitable and solid, the visual effect was unfortunate. The addition of a fourth story made it thick-waisted and dumpy, turning it at last into the "indifferent pile of brick" jeered at by the Iowa City papers ten years earlier. Almost nothing now remained of the architect's concept of the building. The city's extensive regrading of surrounding streets had exacerbated the problem. As the *Register* commented, "The streets around the Capitol are being cut down in such a manner as to leave the building humped up in prominence like a big toad on a little tusssock."

For the legislators there was a critical problem far worse than any violation of stylistic integrity. Despite the thorough renovation, alarming structural shocks went on plaguing the capitol. In 1873 one of its upper floors sagged deeply beneath a crowd of people. Although it did not collapse, gubernatorial inaugurations were apparently moved elsewhere after that. In April of that year, falling plaster again rained down on lawmakers, turning them into what newspaper accounts called "expert dodgers." During a blizzard in early December 1876, the structure rocked on its foundations. The tremor, the papers reported, was "plainly felt by all occupants." In March 1880 workers again braced up weak spots in the old statehouse, although, as the papers joked, nothing was done "about bracing up members of the Legislature."

**T**he first cornerstone of the new capitol was laid on November 23, 1871. As construction proceeded over the next 13 years, local journalists went out of their way to characterize the Brick Capitol as quaint and superannuated, referring to it variously as a "rattle trap," "an old rookery," and "a disgrace to the State." Although less than two decades old, the brick statehouse was now considered an antiquated hovel as the spec-

tacular structure four times its size arose to the north.

Newspaper taunts were only part of its predicament. The Brick Capitol had been built in the 1850s, just as the architecture of capitols was about to undergo enormous change. The addition of elongated wings and a colossal iron dome to the United States Capitol in the 1850s and early 1860s raised the bar on monumental architecture. States now wanted to copy its splendor and grandeur, and their growing governments desperately needed more space. The nation was coming into its own, and statehouse architecture could symbolize that "nationhood" as well as the U.S. Capitol did.

Always intended only as a temporary statehouse, the Brick Capitol had never been called on to meet such artistic and symbolic standards, but its innocence of them did not spare it years of invidious comparisons, and it ended its days as a mere object lesson in the vicissitudes of architecture. It was not that it lacked any symbolic value. Rather, the difference was that the new capitol's symbolic value was abstract and prefabricated while the brick building's was intimate and concrete, and had been earned.

The difference in the sizes of the two capitols was plain enough, but there were subtler differences, too. When illuminated by the sun, architecture is sometimes transformed, and a building's status as an idea emerges in the play between highlight and shadow. The new capitol's medallions and colonnades, its gilding and balconies and statuary friezes, gave it riches to offer the sun, while the Brick Capitol, with its plainspoken flat surfaces and minimal ornamentation, met the light bluntly and without mystery or ceremony.

Throughout the 1870s the Brick Capitol was seen as such an embarrassment that it was often omitted from maps and atlases even while it continued functioning as the statehouse. The worst of these omissions was probably from the important *Andreas' Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa* of 1875; a magnificent illustration of the new capitol graced its title page, as if it were an accomplished fact. At the time the new capitol was little more than a vast excavated hole. For all intents and purposes the Brick Capitol had become invisible.

As a land speculator and promoter, Willson Alexander Scott had been confident that imposing private dwellings would rise in the shadow of the Brick Capitol. Instead, it had drawn up to itself a coverlet of small, balloon-frame wooden houses. Along with apartment buildings and, at one time, a church, they crowded almost to its doors. The concept of a parklike campus surrounding the capitol had not existed in 1856 but arrived with the present building and was implemented in steps over the next 75 years; the last of the ramshackle



SHSI (IOWA CITY)

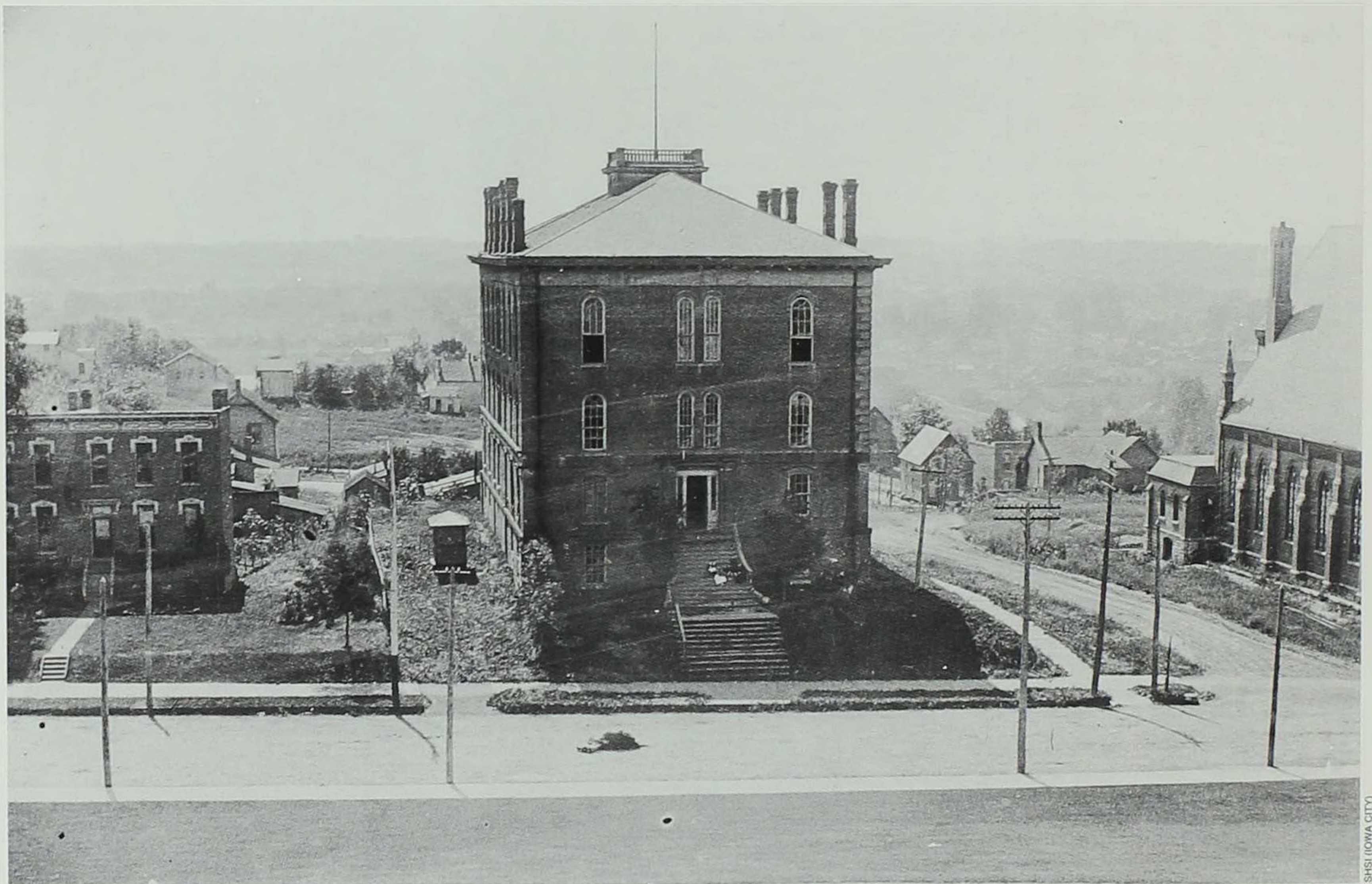
The Brick Capitol and a handful of frame houses and sheds are a stark contrast to the splendor of the new statehouse in this stereograph titled "Building the new capitol—Iowa South Front." Though barely visible here, scaffolding still circles its dome.

private residences in sight of the Brick Capitol were torn down only in the 1960s or later. Their disappearance completed a process in which a democratic temple was replaced by a Temple of Democracy.

As the functions of government transferred to the new capitol in stages between 1884 and 1886, the Brick Capitol emptied out. The state was still occasionally approached by groups wanting to hold meetings or conduct Sunday schools in it, but the old, tolerant days were

gone and official attitudes had grown cautious about the public use of such buildings. Refusals of these requests were made on the grounds that it was "not deemed expedient to let rooms . . . to private parties." In 1888 state officials were authorized to sell it. Forty-two bids came in, but all of them (including the highest, \$5,905 from a Daniel Ford) were rejected without explanation. After that it stood vacant. It seems strange that it was not simply torn down in the 1880s, but al-





Passersby rest on the shaded north steps of the Brick Capitol, 1023 East Walnut—by now abandoned and missing panes of glass. The photo probably dates to between 1886 and 1892.

though it was a ruin and an eyesore no one dared suggest its demolition. In 1886 an anonymous writer in Des Moines's *Register* had noted that although an "unsightly object," the structure survived because of "the memory of the good . . . done to Iowa within its venerable walls."

COURTESY THE AUTHOR



Fire in September 1892 gutted the Brick Capitol and left ruins.

The abandonment of the Brick Capitol was not total. As the elements gradually reclaimed it, it went on offering cover to anyone or anything. Bats and owls roosted in it; children played on the staircases and in the untenanted rooms; and the homeless, day and night, drifted in and out. Often they came to use the toilets but no one bothered to drain the privy vaults or fill them in; eventually the odor became unbearable and in May 1889, after numerous complaints, the city of Des Moines ordered the state to clean up the mess within ten days.

It may have been one of the old building's temporary occupants who started a fire in it on the afternoon of September 1, 1892. The blaze spread quickly, leaving nothing standing but the outer walls. The rich, native hardwood trim and paneling were ashes, and so were Hayken's elaborate frescoes.

After salvaging and demolition of the ruins, a now-obscure chapter of Iowa history all but closed completely. Within a few years, a long-awaited monument to Iowans who had fought in the Civil War was erected on the spot where the Brick Capitol had stood. (The site had been specified by the legislature in April of 1892.)

Nothing remained of the Brick Capitol except a scattering of documents and fewer than a dozen photographs.

Occasionally over the years, memories of the building would briefly reilluminate; sometimes it was during the sessions of the Pioneer Lawmakers' Association, which met yearly, with shrinking membership, until the late 1940s. In March 1941 one of these early lawmakers, John A. Storey, remembered the Brick Capitol, "especially by its seats and desks," as being like "the little old country schoolhouse" he had attended before the Civil War.

**F**or all its modesty, the building nevertheless had clearly represented an architect's vision and an important period in Iowa statehood. Exactly why it disappeared into complete obscurity, habitually treated by historians as an empty parenthesis in the annals of two better-known capitols, is unknown, and many questions surrounding it will probably never be answered.

The record is clear, however, on what was accomplished within the building. Indeed, the Brick Capitol had witnessed the enactment of legislation whose effects last to this day. Some was relatively minor, like an 1860 initiative encouraging organization of fire companies, but legislators in 1868 passed a proposed constitutional amendment (later ratified by voters) granting African American males the right to vote, and twelve years later, the right to hold public office. The Code of 1873 promulgated establishment of several public institutions including the mental hospital at Independence and the schools for the blind at Vinton and the deaf at Council Bluffs.

As a seat of government, the Brick Capitol had played its part as Iowa matured. In 1887, Daniel O. Finch, a leader in state politics for decades, took a moment to reflect on the "temporary" statehouse that had served the state for a quarter of a century. "Around it will always linger memories that the more stately edifice can never hold," Finch remarked. "That humble pile on the hill typified too many trials, too many privations, too much of the consecration of our lives in the building of a nation, not to be glorified." ❖

*Philip G. Hockett's article "Exposing Iowa's True Colors: Early Color Photography" appeared in the Spring 1997 issue. He is currently at work on a study of early color photographs of Iowa City and the University of Iowa. Research for this article stretched over ten years and was the source for his drawing (right) of what he believes the Brick Capitol looked like in about May 1858, with its dome still intact and before the addition of the fourth story.*

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

The author thanks the Mike Leeper family for moral support and valuable help with early research; Sharon Avery (State Historical Society of Iowa) for interest and encouragement; Walter Farwell for information on A. G. Bassett in Fremont County; Mary Bennett and Matt Schaefer (State Historical Society of Iowa); and especially John Zeller, for his 19th-century newspaper references.

Contemporary sources include Des Moines, Burlington, and Iowa City newspapers; H. B. Turrill, *Historical Reminiscences of the City of Des Moines* . . . (Des Moines: Redhead & Dawson, 1857); *Report of the Special Committee appointed by the House of Representatives . . . to investigate alleged frauds in the location of the Capitol* (Des Moines: State Printer, 1858); and Des Moines city directories for 1861 and 1866/67.

For the 1880s and 1890s, see the minutes of the State Executive Council meetings for 1882, 1888, 1889 in the State Archives (Des Moines); B. F. Gue, "The Seventh General Assembly," *Proceedings of the Pioneer Lawmakers' Association of Iowa, Reunion of 1898 . . . Sixth Biennial Session* (Des Moines: State Printer, 1898), pp. 86-98; and S. J. Loughran, "The Old Capitol," *Daily Iowa Capital* (Sept. 2, 1892, p. 1, col. 6). See also Kenneth E. Colton, "Iowa Pioneer Lawmakers' Association," *Annals of Iowa* 22 (April 1941), p. 612.

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Annotations to the original manuscript are held in *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files (State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City).



COURTESY THE AUTHOR



▲ Folklife traditions include the foods we make. Here, Ly Pham, of the Quad Cities, demonstrates the proper way to make Vietnamese spring rolls.

# Traditions

by *Rachelle H. Saltzman*

**W**e all have folklife—the traditions that make us who we are in our communities. Think broadly when you think of folklife traditions, because they include everything from children's jump rope rhymes to family stories, from fish tales to sales pitches, from recipes to superstitions, from polka music to wood carving, from birthday customs to office jokes. A group's folklife reflects that group's aesthetic or way of looking at the world.

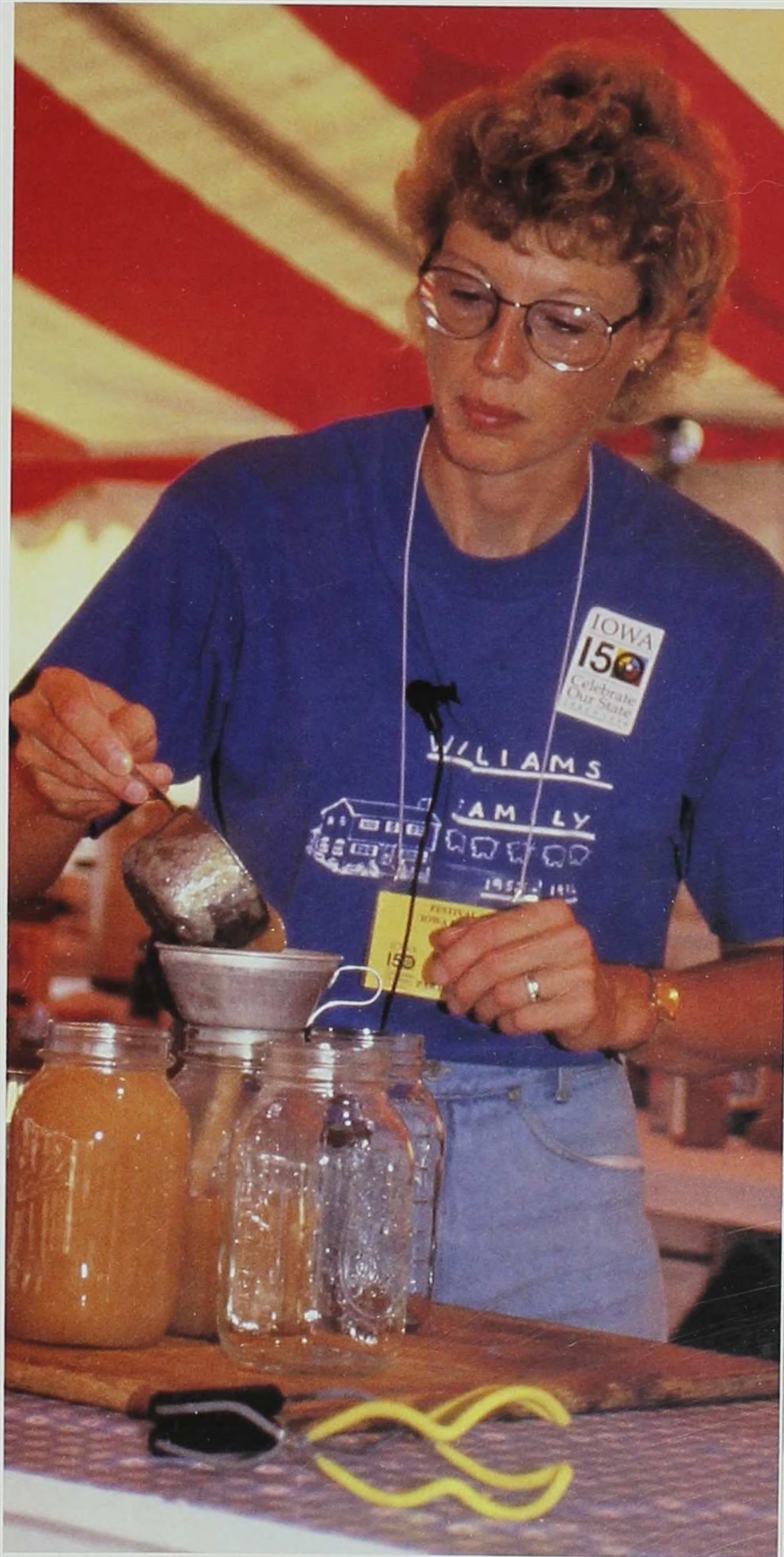
Folklife or traditional culture is the everyday knowledge and skills that we pass from one to another, through imitation or word-of-mouth, rather than through formal training. Folklife includes the foods we cook for a family gathering, the way we organize help for a neighborhood disaster, and how we celebrate our town's basketball victory. In other words, folklife traditions give us, and the communities we belong to, a sense of identity.

Those communities often are geographic—a

neighborhood, town, or region. But they might also be defined by religion, or by occupation or avocation (for example, a "community" of teachers or farmers, factory workers or quilters). Family and relatives may be thought of as a community, even if they are spread across a nation or a globe. One of the most common definitions of community and bases of folklife tradition is ethnicity.

Before the 20th century, American Indian, European American, African American, and Latin American groups and individuals, as well as Americans from the eastern states, all sought refuge in the region that became known as Iowa. They brought their foods, music, dance, song, rituals, spiritual beliefs, occupations, architecture, stories, jokes, and more. Individuals within these groups continued to produce their folklife, often in the face of considerable change and even disruption of everyday life.

But because folklife is a living process, traditions



▲ Canning foods every summer continues as a tradition among many Iowa families. Here, Donna Williams, of Villisca, fills canning jars with her homemade applesauce.



IOWA ARTS COUNCIL; PHOTO BY RACHELLE H. SALTZMAN

evolve. Changes in language and available materials affect our traditions. Technology alters our way of life, and newcomers join our communities. American Indians in the 19th century, for example, traded beading techniques and patterns with other Indians and European settlers. African American quilters adapted their ways of creating quilts to conform to more symmetrical Anglo-American styles. In the upper Midwest, Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish musicians played together, blending their techniques and tunes to create what is now known as Scandinavian Old Time music. Turn-of-the-century Dutch tulip festivals in Orange City and Pella, once held primarily as a way to remind children of their heritage, have evolved into tourist attractions for visitors. Another example of Americanization is the phenomenon of Cinco de Mayo celebrations, which commemorate Mexico's 1862 victory over Napoleon's French army. For Latinos, the day is considerably less important than September 16, Independence Day for Mexico and many Central and South American countries. Nonetheless, the catchiness of the name and an age-old European tradition of May holidays to celebrate agricultural fertility have made Cinco de Mayo a much more popular date for community and school festivals.

As yet more new groups arrived in Iowa throughout the 20th century, ethnic, occupational, religious, and family traditions continued to change. Iowa's recent history of refugee resettlement began in 1975, when Governor Robert Ray signed a contract with the U.S. State Department agreeing to take responsibility for the resettlement of 1,200 Tai Dam refugees from Southeast Asia. Since then, refugees have come to Iowa from at least 17 countries, with the largest numbers from Vietnam, Laos, Bosnia, and the Sudan. According to the 2000 census, 1.3 percent of Iowans are of Asian heritage, and 2.8 percent are of Latino background.

Yet the folklife traditions of these newcomers

IOWA ARTS COUNCIL: PHOTO BY STEVE OHRN



▲ This basket of traditional Czech Easter eggs was created by artist Marjorie Nejd of Cedar Rapids.

◀ Ornamental wrought-iron worker Dominic Rizzuti, of Des Moines, displays his artisanship. Rizzuti first learned blacksmithing as a teen in Italy. When he immigrated to Des Moines, he worked first with Italian iron artisans and then started his own business.



▲ Shanawi Aum Nassar of Cedar Rapids proudly displays a platter of Iraqi flatbread. Local Iraqis often gather at her home for dinner and festivities and consult her for advice on traditional practices.

have already begun to change to meet present-day circumstances. For example, just about every Southeast Asian New Year's celebration features a fashion show, which involves a parade of beautiful outfits, often displayed by mother-daughter pairs. Such events were unnecessary in the original country because this clothing was a part of everyday life; no one needed reminding of how women and girls traditionally dressed. Special foods, once considered everyday fare, are now reserved for holidays and other occasions because they are time-consuming and expensive to prepare in a new land.

Today, our state is witness to a host of old and new traditions that enrich our culture—from Meskwaki drumming, finger weaving, and powwows to Norwegian hardanger embroidery, fiddling, and lutefisk; from African American soul food, blues, and preaching styles to Danish *rødka*, Old Time music, and folk dancing; from Nuer hairbraiding and drumming to Tai Dam and Lao weaving and bowls of *phó*; from Amish quilts and Amana wines to Bosnian *cilim*, Somali *sambusas*, and Mexican *quinceañera* celebrations.

Watch this new department—"Traditions"—in *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* for more close-up looks at Iowa's rich folklife and traditions in transition. Until then, enjoy the colorful celebration of Iowa traditions on the following pages, followed by a special announcement of an upcoming festival.

*This issue's "Traditions" writer is Rachelle H. Saltzman, Folklife Coordinator for the Iowa Arts Council in the Department of Cultural Affairs.*



IOWA ARTS COUNCIL

IOWA ARTS COUNCIL; PHOTO BY ERIN ROTH



▲ **Mary Scavo prepares traditional Italian sausage for her family's business and restaurant in Des Moines, a city with a sizable Italian-American population.**

◀ **A corn festival sign offers a hearty "willkommen" to visitors of Gladbrook, a Tama County community where many of the early residents spoke only German.**



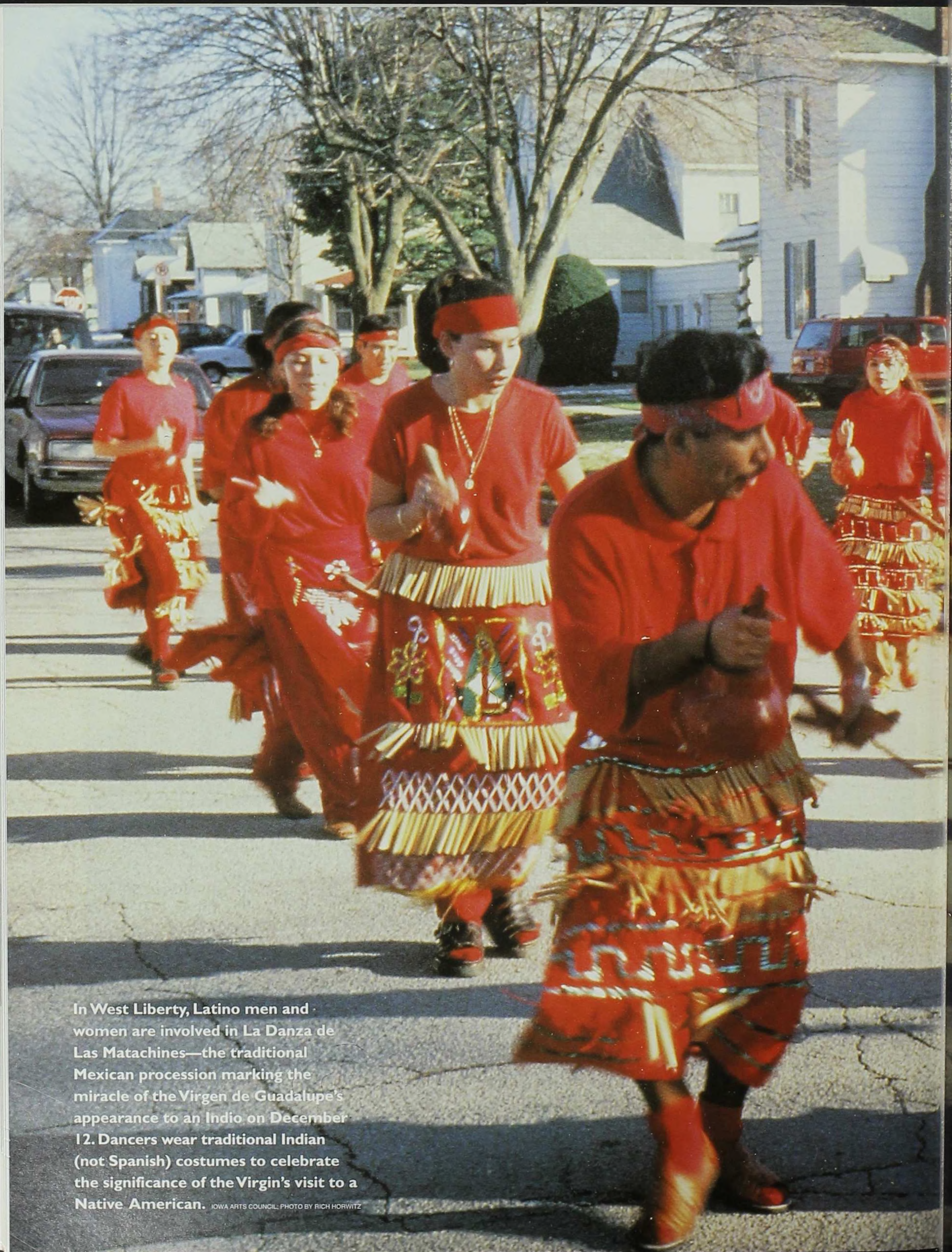


▲ Arnhild Hildesland, of Ames, demonstrates traditional Norwegian knitting. Tradition bearers like Hildesland are the keepers of folklife, through their skills, memory, and willingness to teach others.

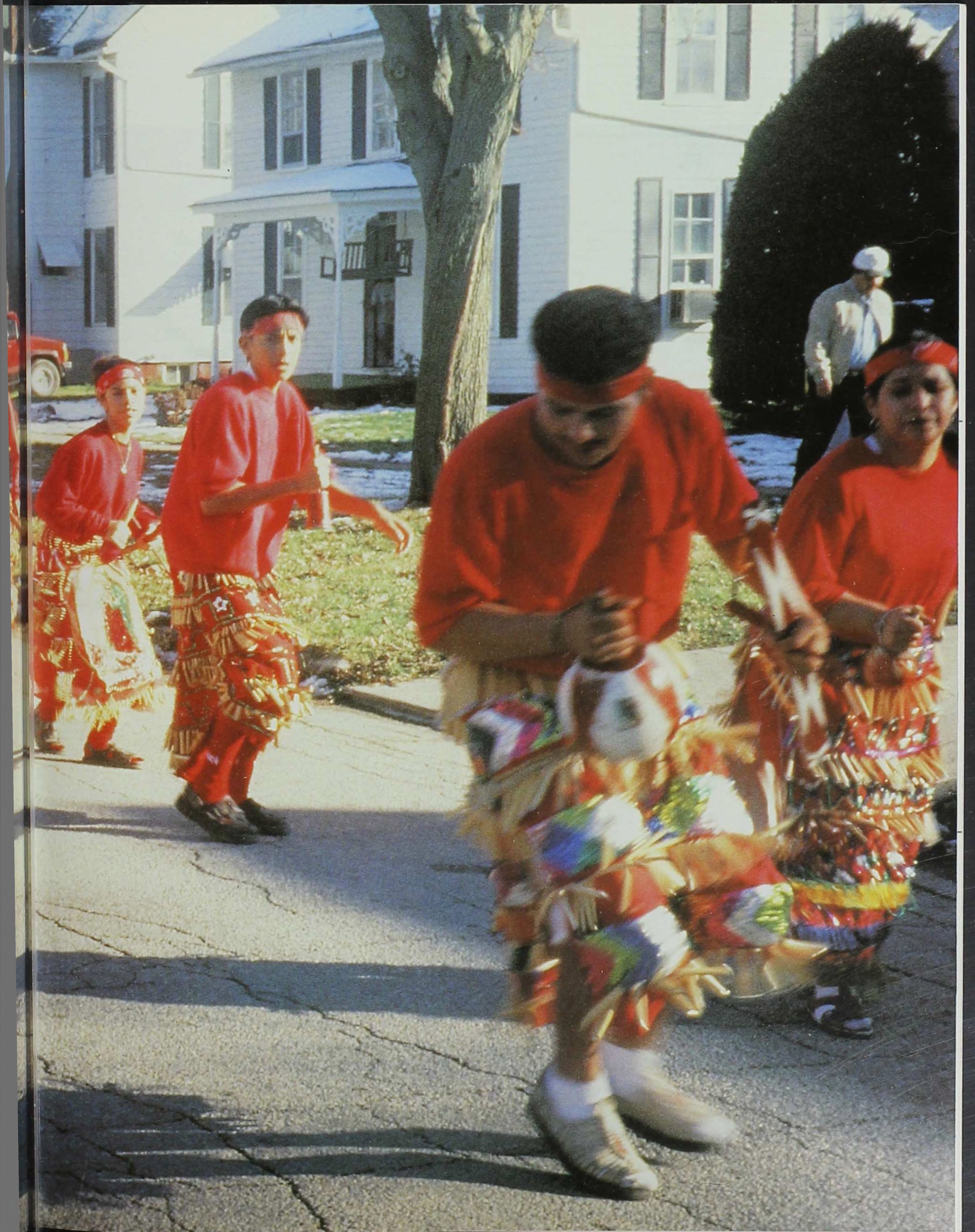
IOWA ARTS COUNCIL: PHOTO BY RACHELLE H. SALTZMAN



▲ Lee Vong Her and Jennifer Her work on their second pieces of *paj ntaub* (Hmong story cloths) after six weeks of lessons from master artist Shoua Her of Oskaloosa.



In West Liberty, Latino men and women are involved in La Danza de Las Matachines—the traditional Mexican procession marking the miracle of the Virgen de Guadalupe's appearance to an Indio on December 12. Dancers wear traditional Indian (not Spanish) costumes to celebrate the significance of the Virgin's visit to a Native American. IOWA ARTS COUNCIL; PHOTO BY RICH HORWITZ





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IOWA ARTS COUNCIL, PHOTO BY RACHELLE H. SALTZMAN

▲ Meskwaki dancers of all ages celebrate community and share their traditions with the public at the annual Meskwaki Powwow at the Meskwaki Settlement near Tama.



IOWA ARTS COUNCIL, PHOTO BY KAREN HEJEC



IOWA ARTS COUNCIL, PHOTO BY RACHELLE H. SALTZMAN

▲ Sulejman Dolic, of Waterloo, plays an intricately hand-carved flute. A native of Bosnia, Dolic honed his woodworking skills during his stay in a Croatian refugee camp.

▲ Gospel singers at Mt. Olive Baptist Church in Sioux City rehearse for Sunday services. Interestingly, their church building was once a Jewish synagogue and retains many features of its former congregants' culture.

► Immerse yourself in Iowa's traditions at upcoming festivals and institutes this June. Turn the page for information on how to participate.

IOWA ARTS COUNCIL; PHOTO BY RACHELLE H. SALTZMAN

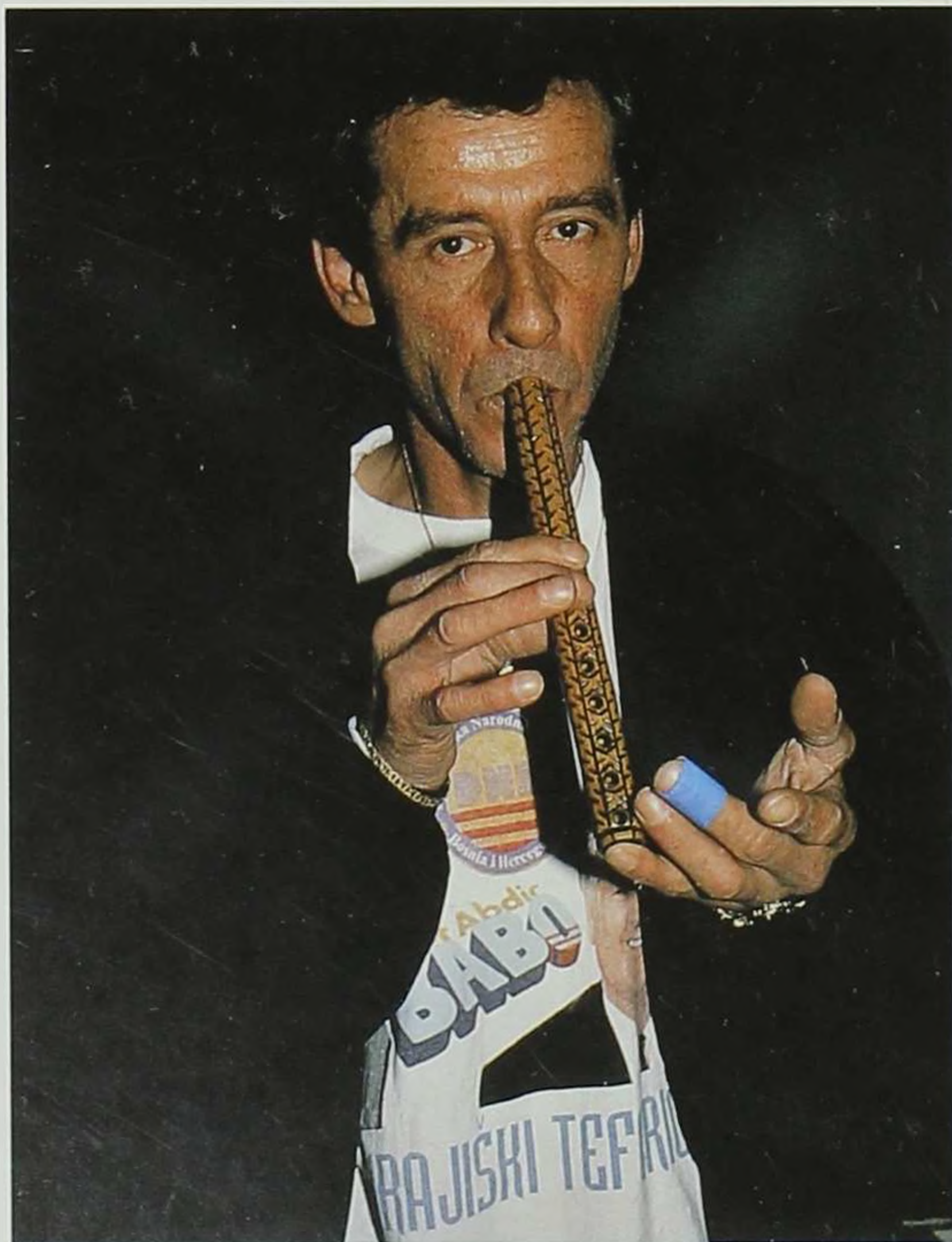


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IOWA ARTS COUNCIL; PHOTO BY RACHELLE H. SALTZMAN



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IOWA ARTS COUNCIL; PHOTO BY KAREN HEEGE



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# Celebrate Traditions at Festival & Institute

For a hearty helping of Iowa's cultural heritage, don't miss the Festival of Iowa Folklife, June 15-17, in Waterloo, Iowa. Folk artists from Iowa's refugee and immigrant communities, as well as many of those from the Sesquicentennial Festival of Iowa Folklife, will share traditional music, dance, food, crafts, stories, and more.

Festival visitors will be treated to free performances by Bosnian dancers, Nuer drummers, Lao dancers, Iraqi *oud* players, Mexican guitarists, blues bands, African American gospel quartets and choirs, Old Time bands, folklorico dancers, Scandinavian musicians, and mariachi bands. Traditional craft demonstrators will include Indian *mehndi* artists, Mexican paper flower and piñata makers, Tai Dam silversmiths, Hmong *paj ntaub* artists, Lao weavers, quilters, Bosnian crocheters and *cilim* weavers, and Nuer beadworkers and hairbraiders.

- Teachers, librarians, and museum educators will be interested in the annual Iowa Folklife and Prairie Voices Institute (June 14-16), a special opportunity for an in-depth learning experience. The festival is the institute's field school.

- Ready for more music? Headlining this tri-annual multi-

cultural festival will be artists from "Global Sounds, Heartland Beats," a touring project of Arts Midwest and seven states of the region. Listen to the flying fingers of Irish accordianist Paddy O'Brien and Chulrua from Minneapolis, the fast-paced Croatian *tamburitzas* of Vatra from Milwaukee, and the hard-driving Detroit blues harmonica of Little Sonny Willis. Also showcased will be the romantic



Young festival-goers practice their own arts while listening to musicians at the Sesquicentennial Festival of Iowa Folklife in 1996.



IOWA ARTS COUNCIL: PHOTO BY KENN SHRAEDER

At the 1996 Festival of Iowa Folklife, Amana tinsmith Bill Metz uses traditional hand tools and presses to bend sheets of tin into pails, candle holders, and whistles. A retired metalworker, Metz follows traditional Amana forms.

*canciones* of Des Moines's Las Guitarras de Mexico, and soulful blues and jazz of Iowa City's Kevin Burt and the Instigators.

- Hungry? Visit the sales booths and demonstrations of food from Mexico, Guatemala, Colombia, Vietnam, Laos, Bosnia, Somalia, Iraq, and the Sudan as well as Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian, German, Amana, Jewish, Danish, Italian, and African American foods.

- Eager to shop? Count on browsing a wide variety of crafts from Iowa traditional artists, tapes, CDs, books, t-shirts, and Iowa tourism items.

The Grout Museum and the Waterloo Center for the Arts will open two exhibits as companion pieces to the festival. *Patterns of Culture* and *Celebrating Traditions: Ethnic Arts in Iowa* explore how Iowa's textile traditions and holiday celebrations have changed over time and as a result of contact among different culture groups in our state.

The festival is produced by the Iowa Folklife Program of the Iowa Arts Council (Department of Cultural Affairs), in collaboration with local organizations. The Iowa Folklife Program documents, preserves, and promotes the traditional culture of all of our state's residents through its programs and services. Its purpose is to reaffirm folk art's value to its bearers and their communities as well as to other Iowans, to identify traditions that can provide income for folk artists, and to introduce those traditions to Iowa students to foster understanding of the transitions all new Americans must undergo.

For more on programs and services, and for festival and institute details, contact the Iowa Arts Council at the State Historical Building, 600 East Locust, Des Moines, Iowa 50319. Phone Riki Saltzman, 515-242-6195; or Karen Heege, 515-281-6911. [www.culturalaffairs.org/iac/folklife/2001/festivalandinstitutes.htm](http://www.culturalaffairs.org/iac/folklife/2001/festivalandinstitutes.htm)

—by Rachele H. Saltzman  
Folklife Coordinator, Iowa Arts Council

The Festival of Iowa Folklife is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Iowa Arts Council, the Department of Cultural Affairs, Waterloo Center for the Arts, Grout Museum District, City of Waterloo, Main Street Waterloo, and the African-American Historical and Cultural Museum.

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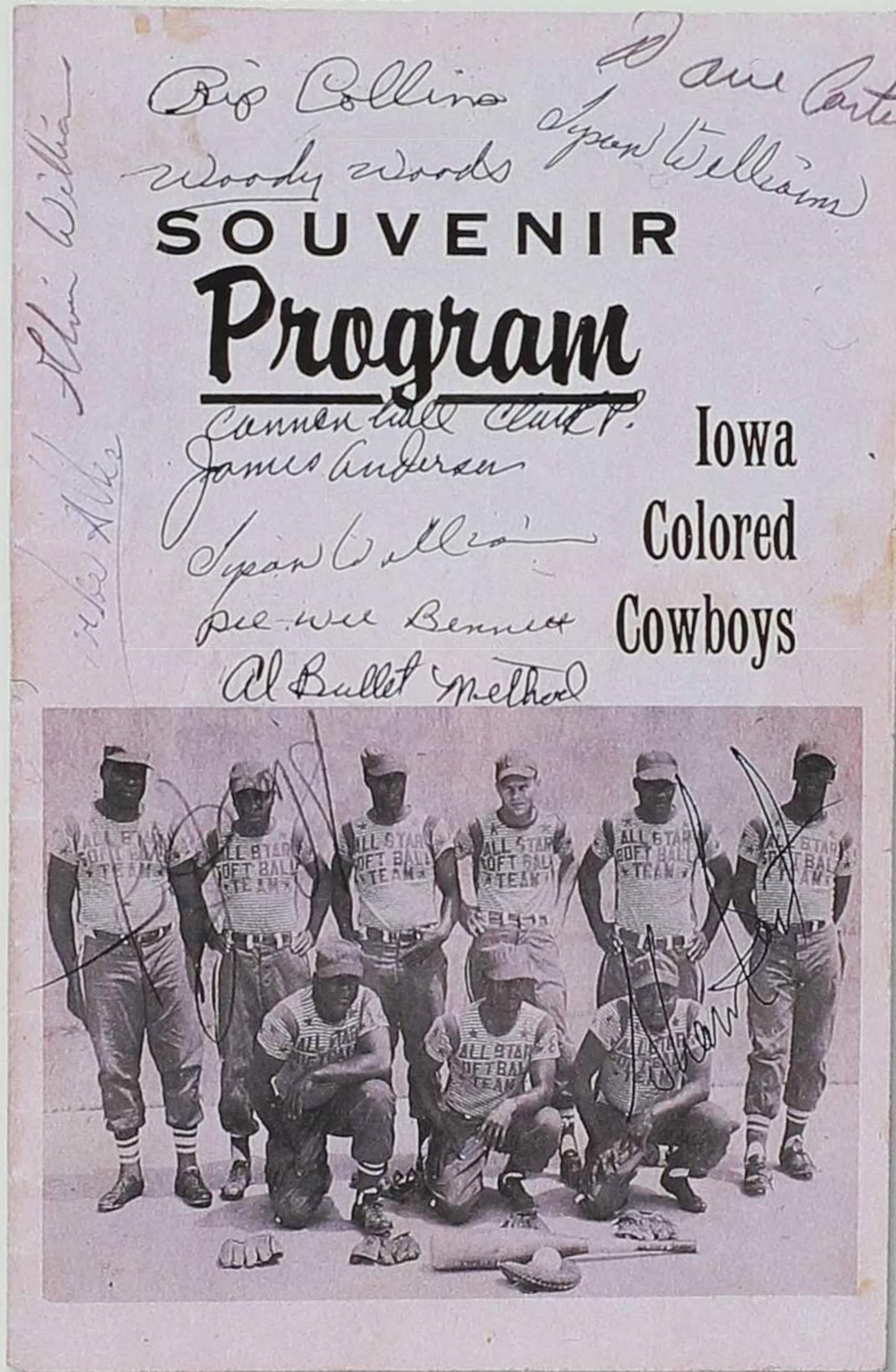
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# One in a Million

On any given summer night in the early 1960s, hundreds, sometimes over a thousand Iowans watched the Iowa Colored Cowboys play softball. These were jocular exhibitions, composed of older players, aimed to amuse a general audience rather than impress baseball lovers. An almost all-black team, the Cowboys are commemorated in this cover photograph on a 1960 game program (right). Recently acquired by the State Historical Society of Iowa, the program documents not only African Americans' participation in Iowa ballplaying, but also how integral barnstorming was to baseball's development as the national pastime.

As Negro League historian Donn Rogosin has pointed out, barnstorming showcased professional baseball to a rural white public "starved" for the game. Supplemented by Negro League players and local teams, these lucrative, often interracial, traveling events involved both competition and entertainment, similar to the promotional atmosphere of a Harlem Globetrotters performance. Because of the late-19th-century ban on blacks from the major leagues, such a "baseball minstrel circuit" enabled black players to participate in the game's emergence as the nation's most popular organized team sport in the early 20th century, while it also enhanced the push for the major league's desegregation.

These exhibitions often included fast-pitch softball. While all-white Iowa teams dominated the sport throughout the state, black teams did compete, though perhaps only in these comic troupes. Originally named the Sioux City Iowa Negro Ghosts in



The only autograph that can be matched to one of the players pictured here is for Rip Collins, top row, first on left, the team's traveling secretary and business manager, who also played third base and outfield. The rest of the players who signed the program remain unidentified.

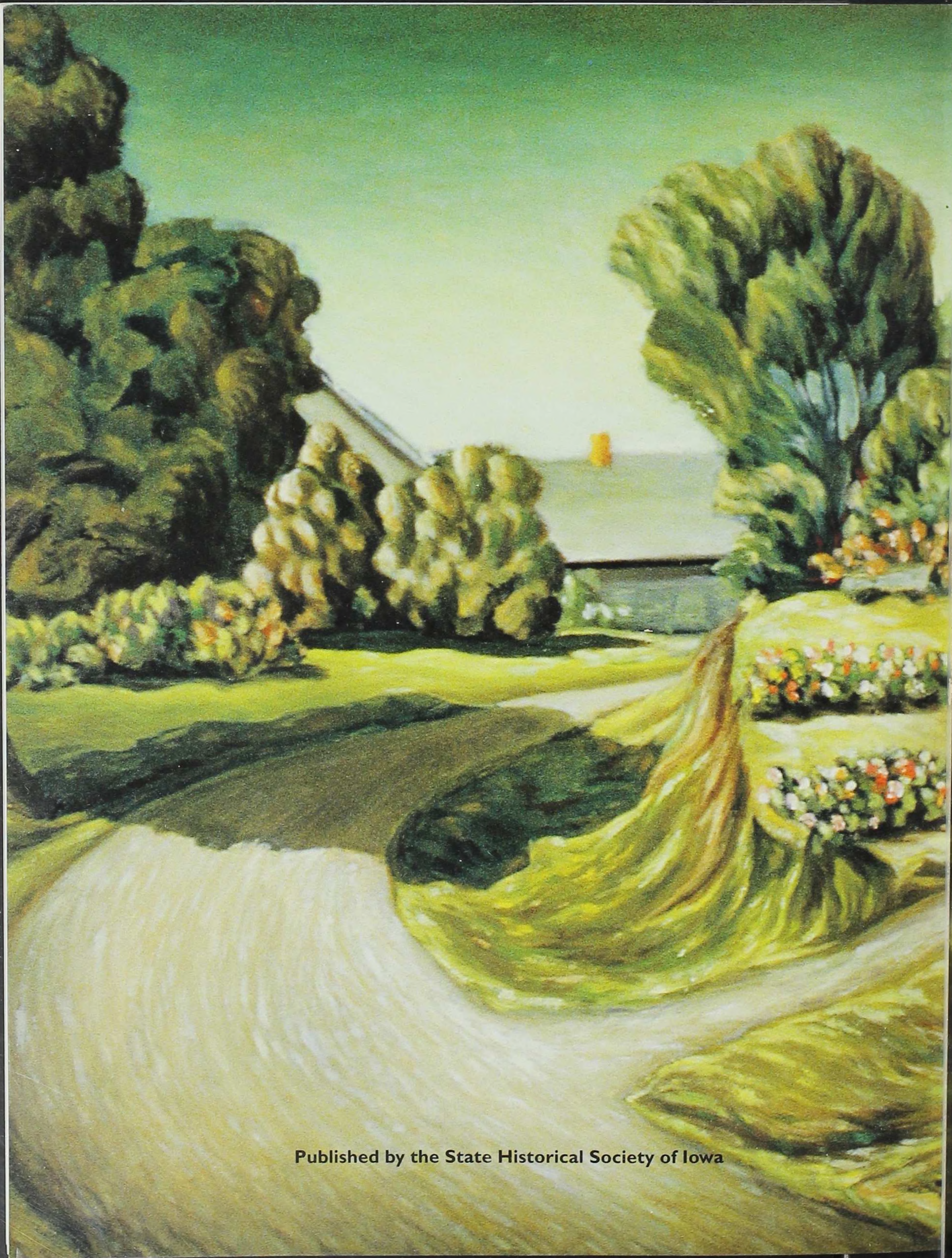
1933, the team, pictured here, reorganized in 1960. Rechristened the Sioux City Iowa Colored Cowboys, the traveling softball team—billed as "a Ball Circus, America's greatest summer sports show" by General Manager Henry Fisher—comprised gifted ballplayers who embraced their role as entertainers. Red Strickland (*top row, middle*), perhaps the Cowboys' only white player, was one of their top hurlers. But he also played to the crowd, noted one of the program's writers, enthralled spectators "with an assortment of between the legs, behind the back" pitches. According to another program account, Marland "Showboat" Buckner (*not pictured*), a great defensive first basemen and "more than adequate with the

bat," was notorious for his "side-splitting" antics, including wisecracks, bat spinning, and embarrassing the umpire.

Sometime during a game, their opponents would rest while the Cowboys separated into two teams for an inning of fun. They played shadow ball, where players mimicked the game's live action without a ball in play, and slow-motion ball, a prolonged performance of the third out.

By the 1960s, the color line had dissolved, leaving exhibitions like these as an outlet for senior ballplayers. Although it is not clear when the Colored Cowboys folded, the photograph and program conjure up much about baseball's grassroots appeal.

—by Lori Vermaas, Editorial Intern



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