

Singer Rose Ettinger • O.M. Oleson & Norwegian Choruses • Bandshells • Meredith Willson

Winter 2001 • \$6

Iowa Heritage

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Front Porch

Dear Readers:

I wish that as you read this issue, you could hear Norwegian melodies, operatic arias, and rousing marches (heavy on the trombones) in the background. Alas, this issue, rich with musical history, requires your imagination to hear the music that our three featured lowans performed. One intriguing aspect is how the concepts of "place" and "home" figure in three main stories. A native of Waterloo, Iowa, sings Italian and German and French in Europe. A Norwegian immigrant promotes Norwegian music in Fort Dodge and the Midwest. A native of Mason City sings Iowa's praises in Hollywood and New York. For them, music is both art and cultural currency in expressing who they are and how they identify themselves in the world. The ephemeral nature of a performance belies music's resilience and constancy as a cultural marker of who we are, where we come from, and how we extend ourselves into the wider world. I hope you enjoy this issue. But first, a few letters from readers about the last issue. Thanks very much for writing.

—The Editor

Letters from Readers

What a great issue to induce fond memories. Either I or a brother attended one rural country school between 1926 and 1942. That was Coe School, or "Hazelbrush School," in LeClaire Township, Scott County. I can relate to nearly all of the rural school incidents and facilities discussed. Of course we had no electricity and that led to Santa's whiskers catching on fire, from tree candles, during one Christmas program.

To my knowledge, Coe School never displayed a brass plate with "Iowa Standard School." In my mind, it never needed to do so. Our teachers were superior. In fact, I credit teachers of Coe and of LeClaire Public High for preparing me to successfully compete with sophomore college students during my training to be an Army Air Corps navigator. My grade school teachers laid the foundations for the three R's and spelling. Even today, I cringe when I see simple words like "led" and "lead" misused in our local paper. And this in the town of University of Missouri Journalism School.

The enjoyment of such recollections prompted this commendation for a great issue. Indeed the rural school and the country church were primary cultural focal points for the youth of Iowa's farming communities for many decades.

Kenneth L. McFate, Columbia, Missouri

I just received *Iowa Heritage* and was surprised to see my picture on the table of contents page with Hawkeye School in Huron Township, Des

Moines County. The date was wrong. That picture was taken in the fall of 1919—not 1918. Huron Consolidated School was being built and wasn't ready yet so students were bused to the various country schools. Center and Hawkeye students are together in this picture. We were able to go to the new school in January right after Christmas vacation. And what an improvement! Inside toilets, drinking fountains, central heat, electric lights run by a Delco plant, gym and grades in different rooms. It was wonderful. By the way, I am the 10-year-old girl standing by the teacher—George Butler. I remember I was disgusted that I didn't get in the same row with my classmates and I look like it. What a wonderful issue on country schools! I could hardly lay it down.

Vivian (Sheridan) Setterberg, Burlington, Iowa

On page 114, upper left hand corner, you will see some school kids from Dover #2 in Eldorado, Iowa. Here are their names. Front row: Jane Vagts. Middle row: Irene Vagts, Alan Grimes, Mary Vagts, Clarion Johnson, Jean Martin, Kenneth Koester, myself. Back row: Richard Pape, ?, Kenneth Grimes, teacher Leona Goeken (from 1952 to 1955). The schoolhouse was a double room; it was big for 16 kids. The schoolhouse is still in Eldorado and has been made into a house. I lived in it when I was first married.

Vernon Oakland (with Leona Goeken Steffens)
Clermont, Iowa

I am so delighted with the fall 2001 *Iowa Heritage* magazine. I attended and also taught in rural schools. Our education was very thorough. The memories are so rewarding. The friendships made have lasted through the years. This will be a cherished issue. Thanks again.

Marjorie Goodman, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Let me congratulate you on the latest issue. It was one of the best I have ever read. I was pleased to see you included some pictures of Page County country schools. I am the curator of the Nodaway Valley Historical Museum here in Clarinda, and for our Sesquicentennial project we placed signs at the site of all former Page County schools. It is nice to take a drive in the country and see a sign every two or so miles. We were awarded the Loren Horton Community History Award for the project that year. Sure made us proud. Keep up the good work.

Betty Ankeny, Clarinda, Iowa

I have read, cover to cover, the Fall 2001 issue. So much of what is written parallels my life history and brought back happy memories of

my early childhood days at West View School, #6 Lincoln Twp., Scott County, Iowa. My two brothers, Walter and Hugo Schnekloth, and I attended this one-room rural school one-half mile from our home and had many of the same experiences as the Horton brothers. My aunt, Miss Hermine Schnekloth, was elected County Superintendent of Schools of Scott County in 1921 and I remember her speaking of Agnes Samuelson, the State Supt. of Schools, during part of this time.

After graduating from Davenport High School in 1937 I attended Iowa State Teacher's College, Cedar Falls (now University of Northern Iowa). After three summer months there I was qualified (?) to become the teacher at West View. I taught for two years and then continued my education at Iowa State College, Ames.

Celia L. Schafer, Davenport, Iowa

I was intrigued by your fall edition on country schoolhouses. I attended country school in South Dakota during the '30s and they were comparable to Iowa's. I had three sisters teach country school and at times they would get "transfers" from other schools. Many of them had some poor teachers and would never catch up. Providentially, I moved from Denver to South Dakota at age eight—had one poor teacher and then for four years had an excellent one.

Robert S. Vanderschaaf, Alton, Iowa

I have a lifetime membership in the State Historical Society of Iowa and I appreciate the special issue on Iowa's rural schools in the 20th century. I was there in the 1920s, and the photo on pages 98-99 looks like the school and out-buildings where I attended in Black Hawk County, which I believe was Big Creek No. 8.

K. L. Kober, Waterloo, Iowa

I applaud the fall 2001 issue—and I was pleased to see the Lancaster School in Keokuk County mentioned on page 133 in the article about the Iowa Standard School Law. The Lancaster School, a two-story building, is maintained by memberships in Lancaster Heritage Inc. and remains furnished as it was when the school closed in 1964.

George W. House, Sigourney, Iowa

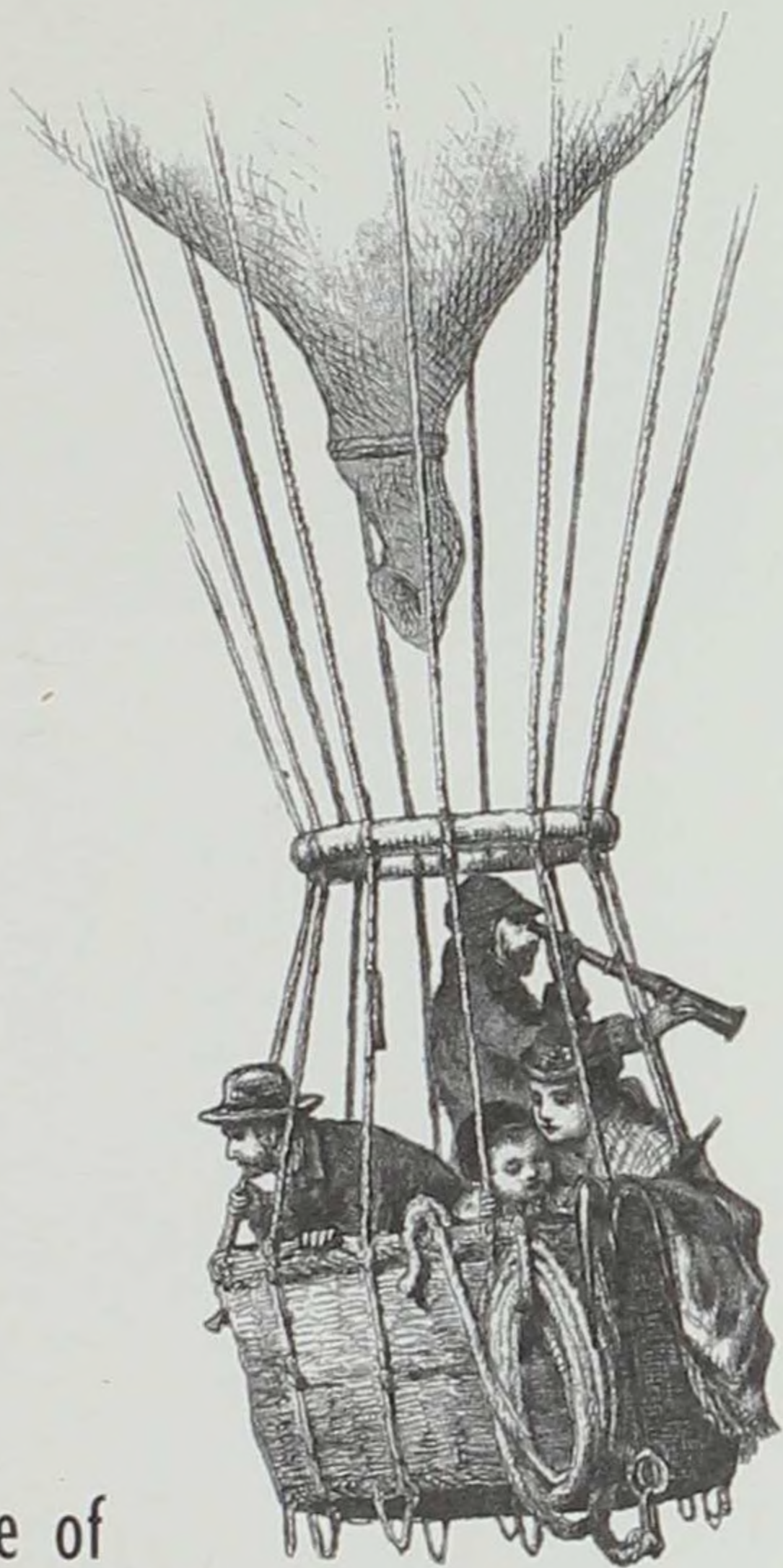
Share your thoughts with the editor and readers here on the "Front Porch" page. Send letters to Ginalie Swaim, editor, *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*, State Historical Society of Iowa, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, IA 52240. Or e-mail at: gswaim@blue.weeg.uiowa.edu. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

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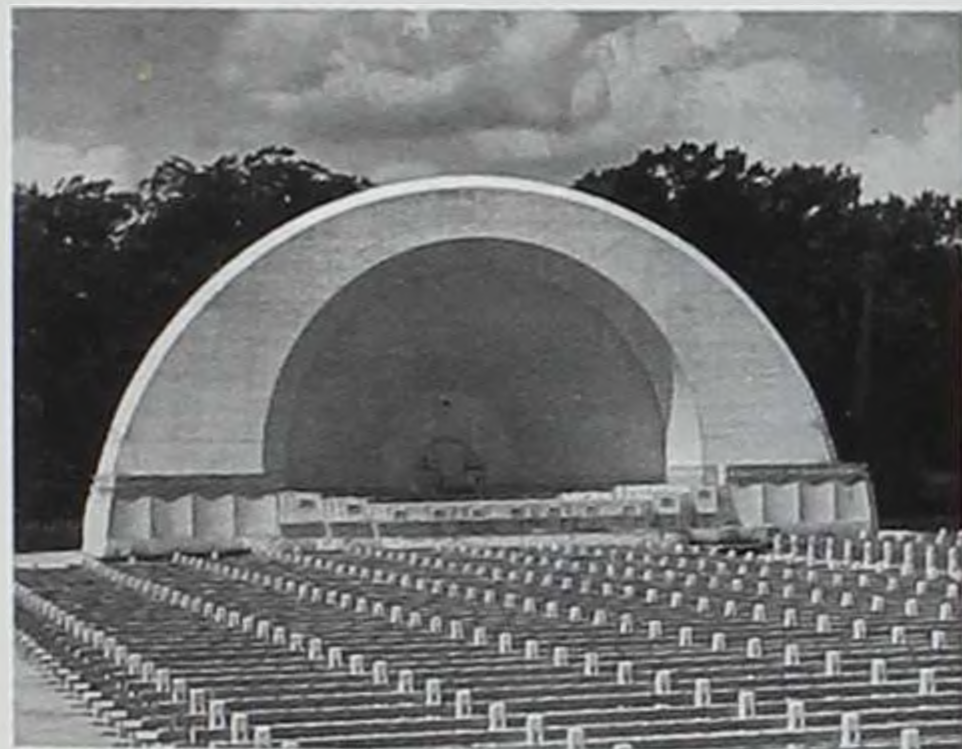
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IOWA WOMEN'S ARCHIVES, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

On the Cover

Under the tutelage of Sarah Hershey Eddy (seated), young Alice Ida Ettinger transformed herself from a Waterloo daughter of middle-class parents to Rose Ettinger, a celebrated European singer in the 1890s. Ettinger is one of three Iowans featured in this issue whose passions for music extended their energies into larger worlds beyond home.

*“The world over here
is so different”*



Alice Ettinger's Musical Career

by M. Alison Kibler

IN 1893, A 16-YEAR-OLD GIRL from Waterloo, Iowa, said farewell to her father at the train station in Cedar Rapids and boarded a train to Chicago to begin voice lessons. Thus began a career in music that took this teenager, Alice Ida Ettinger, to New York, London, Paris, and Berlin, and brought her in contact with the luminaries of the opera world—from Australian diva Nellie Melba to composer Jules Massenet. Convinced of their daughter's talent and work ethic, Blanche and Alonzo Ettinger had arranged for her to get high-quality vocal training in Chicago and then supported her plans to train and tour in Europe. But neither Alice Ettinger nor her parents could have imagined the adventures, accomplishments, and conflicts that lay ahead of the spirited teenager as her train pulled out of Iowa.

Alice Ettinger, later known as Rose Ettinger, was born in Illinois on February 10, 1877, to E. Blanche Ettinger, a singer and music teacher, and Alonzo L. Ettinger, a Civil War veteran and businessman. The family moved to Iowa in 1881 and settled in Waterloo in 1887. Alice Ettinger had two siblings, Victor, born in 1882, and Mabel, born in 1886.

The Waterloo of Alice Ettinger's youth was a growing city. The urban and industrial center of Black Hawk County, Waterloo expanded rapidly after 1870, with sawmills, flour mills, and retail businesses providing jobs and products for the burgeoning population. Alonzo Ettinger's career followed the expansion of the city. First working as a traveling salesman, he later became vice-president of the Black Hawk Coffee and Spice Company, which was founded in 1898 and eventually

shipped its coffee, tea, and spices to Minnesota and the Dakotas.

The completion of a railway line between Waterloo and Des Moines in 1884 increased the commercial fortunes of the city. By the 1890s the city supported a public library and a second opera house. (In 1889, Alice Ettinger, at age twelve, had sung with her mother at the east side opera house as part of a veterans' benefit.)

Blanche Ettinger's occupation as a music teacher and her daughter's career as a professional singer were increasingly common in the second half of the 19th century. Earlier in the century, many believed that music was a particularly feminine gift; a woman's supposedly sensitive, emotional nature was considered to be well suited to delicate musical expression. But a woman's seemingly natural musical affinity was to be used only to uplift her family and beautify her home, not for profit or public display. In the second half of the 19th century, however, women took advantage of new opportunities in music instruction and performance. In 1870 the U.S. Census reported that 60 percent of music teachers were female. Between 1870 and 1910, women's participation in "music and music teaching" increased from 36 percent to 66 percent. The "piano girl"—the dilettante who played primarily to catch a reputable husband or soothe her family members—was now eclipsed by the professional female singer, instrumentalist, teacher, or composer.

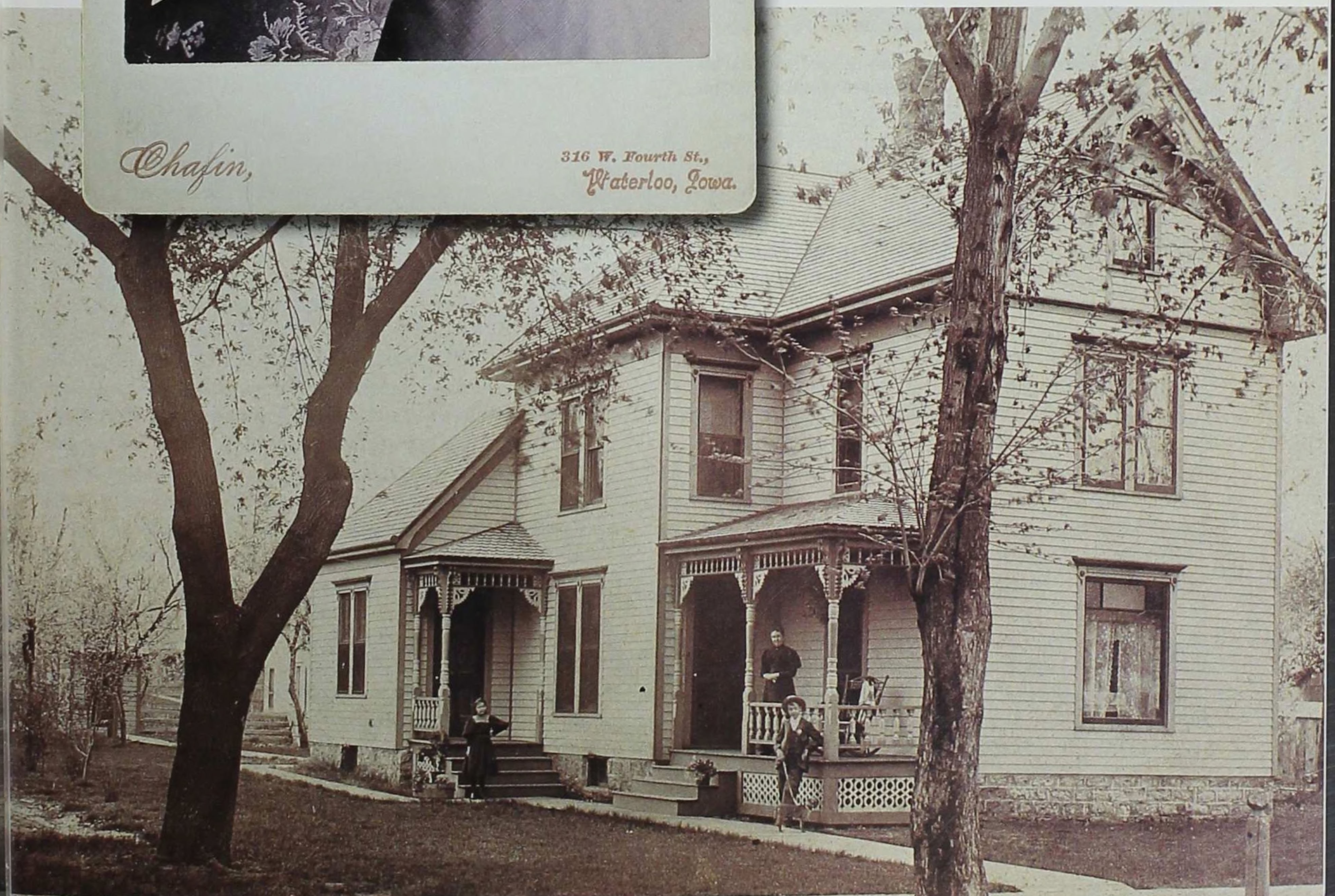
A new group of American singers, most trained in Europe, became successful prima donnas, touring both in the United States and abroad in the second half of



Alice Ida ("Rose") Ettinger left Waterloo, Iowa, in 1893 to study music in Chicago and later in Europe. Frequent letters to her family track her musical training, her performances in major European cities, and her growing confidence and maturity. (The collection of letters and photographs are in the Iowa Women's Archives, at the University of Iowa.) Below: her mother and siblings outside their Waterloo home.

Chafin,

316 W. Fourth St.,
Waterloo, Iowa.





This undated portrait of Ettinger was taken in a Charles City, Iowa, studio probably before she left for training in Chicago.

the 19th century. Early stars Clara Louise Kellogg (1842–1916) and Adelina Patti (1843–1919) paved the way for many other women, including Emma Eames (1865–1952), Lillian Bauvelt (1874–1947), and Mary Garden (1874–1967). Missing from this traditionally recognized list of pioneering American singers is Iowa's Alice Ettinger. Although Ettinger was compared with Adelina Patti when she made her professional debut at the Trocadéro in Paris in 1896, her name is no longer mentioned when historians recall the achievements of prima donnas of this period. A closer look at her career sheds light on the new musical world for women around the turn of the century, and may restore this long-overlooked Iowan to her place in musical history.



ALTHOUGH PRIMA DONNAS of this period were often honored as stars and welcomed in elite circles, doubts persisted about women's physical and moral fitness for musical careers. Even the overwhelmingly

successful Swedish opera singer Jenny Lind had to defend herself against the stigma associated with women on stage. When Lind toured the United States for 18 months beginning in 1850, her manager, P. T. Barnum, tried to avoid the taint of immorality associated with theatrical women by advertising her as the "Swedish Nightingale" and a "musical saint." Later singers also carefully negotiated the issue of feminine propriety in their professional careers. For example, the American singer Clara Louise Kellogg, inspired by hearing one of Lind's concerts, still felt she had to defend her career choice to friends and family. Kellogg recalled that her mother "hated the atmosphere of the stage even though she had wished me to become a singer." Similarly, Alice Ettinger's path would show that a female singer's career could be a source of both pride and intense worry for family members: a woman's talent and fame still balanced precariously with morality and femininity.

By 1889 Ettinger was already regarded as "perhaps the finest little singer" in Waterloo. In 1893 in Chicago, she began her musical training with Sara Hershey Eddy, a singer and teacher who had founded the Hershey School of Musical Art in 1876. The wife of acclaimed organist Clarence Eddy, and the daughter of Benjamin Eddy, a businessman from Muscatine, Iowa, Sara Hershey Eddy helped plan the women's music section for the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. Recognizing that Ettinger was "more than commonly musical," the respected midwestern voice teacher agreed to become her teacher, even though Ettinger's parents could not afford the full fee. Eddy stipulated that the Ettingers would pay what they could. In turn, she required Alice's commitment to a full, systematic course of study (she could not be sure exactly how long it would take for Alice to become an "artist"). Payment of the remaining balance would come from Alice's professional earnings.

The strains of this arrangement were revealed in December 1893 when Sara Hershey Eddy and Blanche and Alonzo Ettinger debated Alice's character and commitment in several tense letters. Ettinger's parents objected to Eddy's accusation that she was not taking her music lessons seriously, that she was apathetic about her studies. "We know she is a conscientious student," Alonzo Ettinger retorted. "Her advancement in music at her age proves it. It is not all talent with Alice." Yet both Eddy and the Ettingers seemed to share the concern that Alice would let her early success go to her head. Alonzo Ettinger emphasized that he and his wife had taught Alice not to "base her talent on her vanity," guarding against the trend of many singers getting "so inflated with a little promise and flattery that the main point is lost sight of." The adults who sought to guide



Ettinger enjoyed a close relationship with teacher and mentor Sara Hershey Eddy (above) and her husband, Clarence, also a musician.

Alice's career thus weighed their investments against an uncertain future: her parents hoped that her family values would help her succeed without becoming spoiled in the competitive world of professional music, and Eddy hoped that her young pupil had the temperament and talent to repay the teacher's financial risks.

From the start, Ettinger's letters home expressed wonder and apprehension about her new urban life. Describing her train ride from Cedar Rapids to Chicago, Ettinger joked that, although she had "not been kidnapped yet!" she had rebuffed the attentions of a young

brakeman who shocked her by sitting down beside her: "I stared at him a minute but it did not disconcert him in the least & altho' I looked out of the window most of the time & gave him rather short answers to his many little inquiries and remarks he kept on talking & indeed sat beside me until we reached Rochelle. . . . He got no satisfaction out of me & I guess he thought me a poor customer for I neither told my name or where I hailed from."

Once settled in Chicago, Rose wrote home about other embarrassing incidents. When she was walking to get her mail two men on the street stared at her and called her "Sweet girl." "If any one else had been near to hear I don't know what I should have done for I felt so ashamed. I did not look at them at all but my face got hot I tell you. Oh my—funny things happen in a city." She was also shocked when her roommate stayed out late, and on one occasion, "didn't come home at all."

During her two years in Chicago, Ettinger steadily expanded her musical and social horizons. She learned new singing techniques during her lessons with Eddy and took pride in mastering her exercises. She conquered stage fright when she sang at a Baptist church in the city, telling her parents that "for the first time in my life I sang without one particle of fear or excitement." And she mingled with other female singers, including Lillian Russell, the beautiful star of musical comedy who was born in Clinton, Iowa, and raised in Chicago, and who, as Ettinger noted excitedly, was boarding nearby.



IN 1895, ETTINGER REACHED a crossroads in her musical training when Sara Hershey Eddy offered to take her to Europe for further training. When she initially wrote to her parents to propose the European trip, she explained that "Mrs. E. said it was the turning point of my life—I could either be a great artiste or not. . . . You see I'll amt. to something sure." Her parents consented, and Ettinger arrived in London with Sara and Clarence Eddy in July 1895. In Paris Ettinger began to study with Mathilde Marchesi, a famous German mezzo-soprano, who had a reputation for giving vocalists impeccable technical training. Marchesi's pupils were mainly women, including Nellie Melba, Emma Calvé, and Emma Eaves.

Ettinger reveled in her many successes. A few months after she began studying with Marchesi, Ettinger made a significant transition from vocal exercises to the interpretation of songs. Ettinger and her mother both thought it was time to move on. "I quite agree with you," she wrote to her mother in October 1895, "that I have done quite enough of ah-ing and assure you that both Mrs. E. and Marchesi think so too and there is no doubt but that I shall go ahead."

Then, on February 24, 1896, Ettinger made her debut at a recital for 200 guests in Marchesi's home. The youngest of Marchesi's students on the program, she sang scenes from *Lucia* and *Don Pasquale*. Following the successful concert, she was in ecstasy when Eddy gave her a diamond and sapphire ring. After describing the recital and ring in detail to her parents, Ettinger added, "Really, isn't it all like a fairy story, anyway? I sometimes wonder why it all is as it is and what it all means. People say 'lucky girl' and I guess that's it."

Two months later Ettinger performed on the same program as Clarence Eddy at the Trocadéro in Paris. Escorted on stage by Alexandre Guilmant, a respected French organist and composer, Ettinger offered songs from *The Pearl of Brésil* for an audience of 4,000. "When I saw all those 4000 faces," she recalled, "I was so happy I could hardly wait until it was time for me to strike the first note. I never dreamed of being frightened."



DESPITE HER EARLY SUCCESS, Ettinger's own concerns about the morality of female singers surfaced repeatedly in her career. She reasoned that she could become a school mistress or a governess, if she ever found singing too disreputable, and she also told her parents that female vocal students in Paris without enough money are "lost—ruined by the Frenchmen who I can assure you are not afraid of any American or any other creature that is a woman. Frenchmen are beasts and regard every woman as prey." Mary Garden, whose career overlapped Ettinger's, wrote that the "world is so cruel for a woman all alone! . . . One has to have a character of iron [to] stand up against it all and come out in the end as honest and pure as when I went into it!"

Such questions of sexual propriety and power in a woman's singing career were particularly prominent as Ettinger debated whether to focus on the concert stage or grand opera. In literature and art of the 19th century, the prima donna was often portrayed as a voraciously sexual woman who used her voice to seduce others. British author Henry Mayhew used "prima donna" and

"I simply felt lovely"

A Debut in Paris

On May 13, 1896, Ettinger wrote this to her family:

I feel that I must write to you all immediately and tell you that it is over and was the grandest success of my life! The Trocadero was full—fully 4,000 people being present. Mr. Eddy played better than ever and his part of the program was magnificent and was perfectly well executed and properly appreciated by the large and magnificent audience. How he does play and what an artist!

Mr. George Ellsworth Holmes of Chicago sang beautifully & had great success. I must put myself last but am quite willing to do so. My dears, don't think me conceited but I did have such marvellous success—my name will be celebrated in Paris for time to come. My first song with Violin obligato was of a style entirely different from anything I have ever done. Mr. Guilmant led me out—only think of it—you know that alone is an assurance for a singer as Alex. Guilmant is classed among the angels by the French. And when I saw all those 4000 faces I was so happy I could hardly wait until it was time for me to strike the first note. I never dreamed of being frightened. I simply felt lovely. At the end of the long cadenza with violin—which occupied one whole page there was a perfect thunder of applause. And then when I finished I was applauded [—] the echo & was obliged to come back & bow several times.

But the bird song from *The Pearl of Brésil* took the honors of the afternoon. I never heard anything like it—between every verse after every cadenza and in fact at every rest I never heard such applause & such cries of "brava" & etc. Well, it was simply lovely and of course I was recalled several times & everything was magnificent. The instant I got off the stage Guilmant turned to me & took both of my hands in his and said "it was perfect, my child—you have succeeded." & Mr. Eddy was so happy he embraced me on the spot. Baron de la Tombelle a French composer & a friend of Mr. Eddy's was lovely & said it was a marvel. Well, success it certainly was.

The instant it was over Marchesi & her husband & Mrs. Eddy all rushed to the green-room & embraced me & called me a darling & cried & all that. Marchesi & Mrs. Eddy's boxes were next to each other and Auntie [Mrs.

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MM. George HOLMES, Paul VIARDOT, Eugène AIGRE
& Alexandre GUILMANT

PROGRAMME

1. Morceau de Concert en mi mineur. LOUIS THIELE
2. { A In Paradisum. } TH. DUBOIS
 { B Fiat Lux. }
- M. Clarence EDDY.
3. Die heiden Grenadiere WAGNER
 M. George HOLMES.
4. Cinquième Sonate (Op. 80) ALEX. GUILMANT
 (Dédiée à CLARENCE EDDY.)
 I. Allegro appassionato. — II. Adagio. — III. Scherzo. — IV. Recitativo.
 V. Choral et Fugue.
 M. Clarence EDDY.
5. Couplets du Mysoli (*La Perle du Brésil*). FÉLICIEN DAVID
 Avec Flûte obligée.
 M^{lle} Rose ETTINGER. — M. Eugène AIGRE.
6. { A Prélude et Fugue en la mineur J.-S. BACH
 { B Variations de Concert sur le thème : *The Star*
Spangled Banner. DUDLEY BUCK
 M. Clarence EDDY.
7. { A Sehnsucht. OSCAR MEYER
 { B Amore in Gondola A. DE NEVERS
 { C Thy beaming Eyes MAC DOWELL
 { D The Wooing SIEVEKING
 M. George HOLMES.
8. Et Vox angelorum respondet Domino (1^{re} Audition). F. DE LA TOMBELLE
9. Aria de *Il Re Pastore*. MOZART
 Avec Violon obligé.
 M^{lle} Rose ETTINGER. — M. Paul VIARDOT.
10. Fugue de Concert en sol majeur J.-L. KREBS

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Eddy] told me that the minute I had finished the Mysali she got up & started for Marchesi's box and met the latter coming to her box each one to congratulate the other!! So they kissed! About all the Artists in Paris came back to congratulate us and I never was so overwhelmed with compliments in my life. They said I was an angel—they said I had a voice like pearls—that no one knew when it was the flûte & when it was I singing—they said I was a Nilsson,

recently awakened the echos of that quiet place where solitude & darkness reigned. The Trocadéro holds 500 more seats than the Auditorium at Chicago so you see it is not small. I wish you could have heard, but you will hear me probably in the Auditorium before very long.

I must close.
 Your loving daughter
 Rose Ettinger

a Patti & in fact they said all sorts of things. Mrs. Eddy is so pleased. Now if only you could have dropped into that Trocadero & heard you [your?] naughty, little young me for a while maybe I wouldn't have been a happy girl. As it is I am trying to give a graphic account of proceedings. Please keep this letter and all others pertaining to concerts in which I sing, won't you!

I carried a program out with me each time I sang in order to have something to hold and I send it to you for I think it is nice to keep the one I used while I "did the deed." It is crumpled! After it all I went to the Hotel Calais with the Eddy's. We had a big dinner & they all drank champagne to my health & we all did to each other.

So endeth this chapter of my life. I am going to sing at Dr. Middleton's at home next Sunday. How lovely of the Eddy's to give me such an extraordinarily fine opportunity of making my début. I just think Mr. Eddy is a dear to have done it. As we drove home in the moonlight last night—we came by that grand building the Trocadéro & everything was so quiet & peaceful it hardly seemed possible to either Mr. Eddy or to me that we had so



Once in Europe, Ettinger began to sprinkle French phrases throughout her letters to her family, as she does in this message on a photograph sent to her sister, Mabel. "You will certainly think me affected when I get home," she writes to her family in May 1896, "for I cannot say a dozen sentences in English without having French words come in. They are so handy. I cannot talk without them."

"prostitute" interchangeably in his 19th-century writing, and many sexually explicit "memoirs" were falsely touted as the authentic exploits of well-known singers. Male opera impresarios, furthermore, had bad reputations for attempting to trade lucrative engagements for sexual favors. A female singer had to consider her reputation and physical well-being carefully when making this choice, as Ettinger's explanation reveals: "To be a Grand opera singer is simply to give up all kind of life—you have no home, no liberty, no character, (and I know now that good as a woman may be she cannot be virtuous as an opera singer if she expects to make a success.) . . . Marchesi says she would rather see a daughter of hers dead than an opera singer. And at present I would not be strong enough physically for the work."

Ettinger, though, again entertained the idea of a grand opera career when Nellie Melba arranged for her to sing before the French opera composer Jules Massenet (1842–1912) in September 1896. After her performance for him, Ettinger was swept away by his compliments. Massenet told Ettinger her voice was "extremely rare" and her execution was "marvellous," and he encouraged her to pursue roles in *The Barber of Seville* and *La Traviata*. "From such a great man it means so much," Ettinger exclaimed to her parents. "Think what it means—"

Massenet's praise was indeed seductive. Ettinger confided to her parents that as he complimented her, he came so close to her that she "thought he was going to look right down my throat." Then he asked her if she had ever kissed Mme. Melba, and she said, "No, I have never had that pleasure." "I am so sorry," he replied, "I would like very much to do it myself but I don't dare but if you will permit me I will give you a kiss and then you can give to her!" Then Massenet kissed her.

It is difficult to interpret this kiss. Ettinger seems to have found it charming rather than threatening. On Massenet's part, it may have been a combination of professional and sexual advances to young singers; the prolific composer was known to be infatuated with American Sybil Sanderson and later Lucy Arbell, writing roles for both of them.

Overwhelmed by Massenet, Ettinger again expressed a desire for a career in grand opera. She made her opera debut in January 1897 and was offered a contract with an opera company, but she turned down this offer. Instead, she launched a concert tour in the fall with engagements in Leipzig, Berlin, Amsterdam, and other European cities.

Everywhere, the response was tremendous. "The peculiar thing about her voice," wrote Clarence Eddy, "is that it is a pure soprano of great range; it not only runs very high—an octave above high C, with a good tone, but the middle and low tones are remarkably full.



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Organist Clarence Eddy and his wife oversaw Ettinger's training and career and arranged contacts with prominent musicians. In many letters, Ettinger calls the Eddys "Aunt" and "Uncle."

In fact, it is so good that Mme. Marchesi, when she first received her, told her it was the only voice that had ever come to her that was perfectly placed."

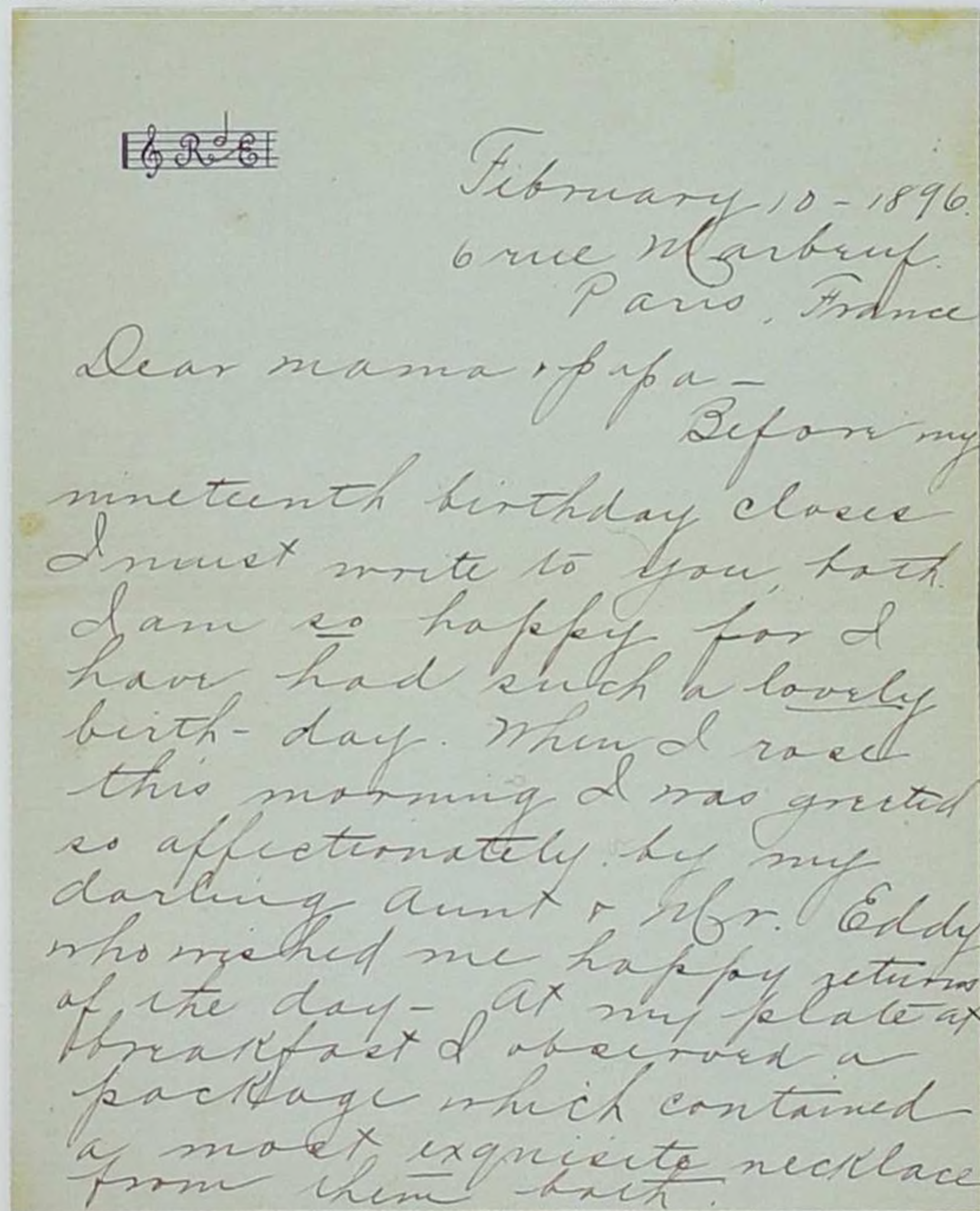


ALONG WITH FACING ACCUSATIONS of immorality, female singers also struggled with the physical demands of pursuing artistic excellence and society's presumption that women were too weak for professional careers. Ettinger conceded to her parents that "it is a hard life . . . [but] to the outsiders . . . who only see you come before them in pretty clothes, sing as if it were a mere pastime, receive flowers and compliments and money it is all very deluding." She reported regularly to her parents about her physical health and described her problems—headaches, colds, tension, and exhaustion. Even when she felt well, she hoped for more strength. "I wish I were stronger," she declared in 1897. "I am perfectly well but I should like the strength of a man."

To her family back in Waterloo, Ettinger bragged of her achievements and activities outside of music; she relished the excitement of her increasingly independent life. She learned how to speak French in 1895, noting that she could become a French teacher if she lost her voice. A few years later she learned to swim, calling this "one more accomplishment to add to my list." In a new riding outfit of bloomers and jacket, she bicycled with friends. Now savvy and sought-after, she relished the attention she received from admiring men, including a tenor and a middle-aged, divorced doctor. Although she did not want to fall in love, she told her parents, "I don't have to keep myself shut up in order to keep my heart. . . . I'm having too pleasant a life to tie myself to anybody just yet."

As she grew more confident on stage, in urban situations, and in European society, she nevertheless reaffirmed her ties to her parents in many ways. She still sought their approval and assured them that her character had not been corrupted by her worldly experiences. Ettinger tried to assuage her parents' concern that she was becoming conceited and perhaps "unfeminine" with her new level of self-confidence. "It is only natural," she wrote defensively in 1896, "that I should take some pride in making for myself a place and in doing my best, and in having success." And, responding to her parents' concerns about her romantic interests, she explained, "Really, I am not at all a flirt nor anything of the kind—*au contraire*—I am decidedly staid and quite too dignified to suit my friends."

Ettinger also expressed some ambivalence about the



Ettinger's letter to her parents in February 1896 bears a musical monogram for "Rose Ettinger"—not Alice Ettinger. "I do so wish you liked to call me Rose," she wrote her parents. "It is such a smart name in every tongue."

great distance she had traveled from her family in Iowa. In October 1895 she congratulated her parents for having helped to close saloons in Iowa (they supported temperance) and then explained to them that "we have wine and cognac on the table all the time—everybody does." To put their minds at ease, she added, "I do not drink it for I don't care particularly about it."



BEGINNING IN 1895, Alice Ida Ettinger began to refer to herself as Rose Ettinger, a stage name that Sara Hershey Eddy encouraged her to adopt because of its cosmopolitan ring and its lyrical sound in French and Italian as well as English. Her parents were reluctant to call her Rose, and for some time Ettinger herself seemed ambivalent about the change. Between 1895 and 1897 she alternated between signing Rose and Alice on her letters home, and she frequently referred to herself as "Alice Rose," perhaps indicating regrets about her new professional European persona. In 1897, however, she



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finally set the record straight in a letter to her parents: "From this time forth I will no more answer to the name of either Alice nor Ida. I have chosen to call myself Rose Ettinger a name which in all foreign tongues is exceedingly distinguished. . . . I take the name as my *nom de plume* and I will not be known as Alice Ettinger any more."

The family tensions surrounding Ettinger's independence erupted most dramatically in November 1898, when she announced her intention to become engaged to Francis Braun, a baritone and the son of English contralto Marie Brema. Anticipating her parents' concerns about her professional future, she told them that she wanted a long engagement because both she and Braun needed to continue developing their singing careers. "[We] do not entertain the least idea of marrying for a long time to come," she wrote to her parents. "Francis is an artist but he has not yet made a public appearance and he has a great deal to accomplish and much work before him. . . . I myself do not wish to marry for several years and he understands this and is quite willing to wait for me. . . . You need not think this is going to interfere with my work because I've worked harder and improved more since I've known Francis than ever before."

Alonzo and Blanche Ettinger may have been surprised by this engagement announcement because, since her debut in 1895, Ettinger had promised her family and the Eddys that she would be prudent and patient in her romantic life. Early in 1898 she had written to her mother, "I know you have always had a horror of my marrying and now here I am . . . without any prospect of a husband. Aren't you glad? I am, & probably I shall live to be a nice old maid."

It may seem odd that a woman in the late 19th century would be pressured by her family *not* to marry, considering that marriage and motherhood were still considered women's natural destiny and ideal social fulfillment. Ettinger was well aware of the traditional roles for women and reflected often on her unconventional path. She assured her parents, for example, that despite her nontraditional life, she would still be devoted to them: "I think you'll have me just as much as if I were like the generality of girls, married to some fellow and having a baby every year or nine months as the case may be & doing house work during spare time. . . . I hope sincerely I won't be the same." I can assure you if there is a possibility of my rising above the ordinary every day affairs & making something beyond what the average girl is of myself I'm going to do it."

Ettinger's engagement did not receive the encouragement and celebration that an ordinary young woman would have expected. Ettinger's mother had earned

money for the family from her music, and she and her husband seemed to have expected their daughter to have an even more lucrative musical career. In this sense, Ettinger was among those male and female artists and musicians who, though they were not working class, expected to and needed to perform for money. A study of 36 European women singers of the 19th century, for example, shows that most continued to work after their marriages. Only four retired from public life when they married (and two of these came out of retirement), and five changed their careers in some way, turning to teaching rather than performing, for example, or to concert work rather than operatic tours. Though Ettinger was perhaps emboldened by the many married women who continued to perform professionally, her parents may have been equally concerned that her marriage would compromise her career in some way. Her professional future, personal happiness, and family loyalty thus clashed again at this crossroads in her life.

Sara Hershey Eddy also opposed the engagement, allegedly telegramming Ettinger that "[I] can do nothing more for you; the fiancée of Braun does not interest me." Ettinger's relationship with Eddy had soured considerably around the time that Ettinger began to mention Braun as a special friend in her letters home. In 1898, ten months prior to the announcement of her engagement, she wrote that Eddy had "made me awfully unhappy many times. I am too independent now for her ever to do so any more."

Now Eddy offered to continue booking Ettinger's engagements only if she would refuse contact with Braun for two years and repay her debt to Eddy in that time. Instead of accepting Eddy's proposal, Ettinger allowed Francis Braun's father to repay Eddy, thus ending her obligations to her longtime mentor.

Ettinger now had to placate her parents, who believed that the rift with Eddy left their daughter in a compromising situation. She lacked a chaperone, and she was perhaps dangerously indebted to this suitor because his father was providing her with financial support. In a draft of a long letter to their daughter the Ettingers wrote, "To us the thought that our daughter may be without the necessary means of support or placed in a position where she may be obliged to accept help from the hands of Col. Braun who so kindly offered is extremely distressing."

"I'm not a child and I know what I'm about," the 22-year-old Ettinger complained. "I wish I could convince papa and you that I am not a dove caught in the snares of a thief and a scoundrel in disguise. After I've been married ten years and have children I expect though to still be asked if I've decided right."

Her parents even suspected that Ettinger was marrying Braun for his money. Ettinger's letters did not completely dispel their suspicions: "If Francis had nothing and no such relations I should love him just the same and be just as contented in his love but it is sweet to have them rich and able and anxious to give you everything."

In Francis Braun, Ettinger seemed to have found romantic love as well as a family that could offer professional development, financial backing, and some encouragement for women's independence. Ettinger, in fact, had hoped for such a match years earlier: "When I get married," she wrote three years prior to her marriage, "it will be because I think it advisable, financially, socially & etc. to some agreeable old fellow with lots of money & a big house who will let me do as I please."

Ettinger would find not only financial security but also an impressive role model in her mother-in-law. Braun's mother was a soprano who had become a member of the Metropolitan Opera Company in 1895. She had continued her career after her marriage to Col. Braun, a successful Liverpool merchant—though she disguised her marital status by performing as "Miss Marie Brema." Brema, the vice-president of the Actresses' Franchise League, was also a well-known supporter of women's political causes.

Although Ettinger had angrily broken away from Eddy and had strongly defended her marriage to her parents, she was also childlike in her search for her parents' approval. A month before her wedding she wrote to them: "Above all I am miserable because you all so disapprove of my getting married! . . . Do not be angry with me please," she begged. As she pleaded for their support, Ettinger began to sign her name as "Alice" again. And although she displayed her stubborn, inde-



Once married to Francis Braun, Rose continued to perform.

pendent spirit many times in her debate with her parents, she also defended her marriage to her parents on quite traditional grounds: "I'll be happy and have somebody to take care of me and who will have a right to look after me." She also expressed some misgivings

♥ **These few excerpts from Alice ("Rose") Ettinger's frequent letters to her family in Waterloo, Iowa, reveal her strong family ties, delight in new experiences, and growing confidence and independence. —The Editor**

[July 20, 1895]

Dear mother—

I have no news to write now for I've just got one letter off but I feel like writing so I'll scribble off a letter. . . .

I think the singing at the Chautauqua must have been exceedingly tame. You could undoubtedly have excelled Miss Carter. When you are strong enough why don't you work it all up again. Don't you find time?

I have a lovely new waist. Dear Mrs. Eddy found it ready made down town and bought it and made me a present of

it. It is some kind of thin summer goods—lavender with a little purple flower in it and is made with smocking. Very pretty and most becoming.

I am very glad to hear that Waterloo has at last decided to indulge in a new Opera House. But I fear I won't be there to open it. However I won't worry for it will probably not be done for several years—if it takes them as long to build it as it has taken them to make up their minds to build it we may not [any] of us ever live to see it completed. . . .

I didn't celebrate at all the 4th. Hadn't a single fire cracker. . . .

No, I don't have any headaches and I'm perfectly well. Have grown very much plumper—my dresses are all getting tight again. My appetite is something astonishing for I assure you I eat 6 regular meals a day.

about her separation from her family, writing that "when I get my children, if ever I have any and I hope I may, they will stay with their ma and pa." A conflicted Ettinger sought the love and protection of Braun as well as of her own parents; she also needed the safety of Braun's affection and his family's financial backing for her to escape from the Eddys' control. The independence she craved was indeed elusive.

After Ettinger married Braun on December 7, 1899, she continued to perform. In Hamburg in November 1903, she was one of four soloists performing Mozart's C Minor Mass. After her solo, the audience—as well as the orchestra and chorus—broke with convention and interrupted the mass with their ovation for her. Among the many accolades she received in her career following her marriage was a medal of science and art awarded to her in 1905 following a concert in Dessau, Germany. She thus combined a professional career and a seemingly happy marriage—a difficult, but not unprecedented accomplishment for a woman of her class during this period. Ettinger died in May 1909 at age 31 of a cerebral hemorrhage.



AS ETTINGER HAD WORKED to establish her career, she had enjoyed prestigious teachers, acclaimed performances, expensive clothes and jewels, and adventures in the great European capitals. But grueling vocal exercises, exhausting travel, and conflicts with both Eddy and her parents also tested the talented singer. Emerging from the conquests and compromises of her career, she was no longer the Iowa girl who in 1895 was enthralled by yet fearful of Chicago. Nor was she the music

student with a touch of stage fright. Although she realized the great distance of her journey, she still treasured her loyalty to her family, to Iowa, and to the girl she had been: "The world over here is so different and my life is so utterly different from yours in Waterloo that I fear I have changed a great deal and can't see things as I used to do," she wrote regretfully to her parents from Zurich in 1899, "but at heart I'm not different." ❖

The author, M. Alison Kibler, is the author of Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). Her dissertation (University of Iowa, 1994) was "Female Varieties: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy on the Keith Vaudeville Circuit, 1890–1925." She is currently a visiting fellow in the history department at the Australian National University.

NOTE ON SOURCES

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[October 21, 1895]

My new clothes are finished & now I have but to have some white corset covers & skirts & some woolen stockings & the wardrobe is complete.

The underwear I am to have made to order. My new corsets are something blissful. I enclose another little piece of my street dress & also a piece of the silk. The silk is trimmed with kind of a crushed plush which is very beautiful & very fashionable. It is made with a full front & very large full sleeves and a belt & collar of the plush. It is simple but perfectly made & simply ravishing. The other dress is very elegant & I look like quite a stunning French girl. Will send samples to Grandma also.

I am so glad you have such a pretty hat & I hope you will buy a nice cape too for I know you need it. Do you

Between breakfast & lunch I always hunt up Fred—the oldest son—& together we make our way to the larder & together we eat bread and jam. Pickles & etc. disappear mysteriously. And we usually repeat this performance just before we go to bed.

Yes, I do lots of bathing. Never did so much in my life—a hot bath when I go to bed & a cold one when I get up.

I don't feel qualified to write for any newspaper. And as I don't care to have my letters shown around town, I think people will have to come to you for information concerning your chicken—I don't understand why people take such extraordinary interest in me anyway because I am simply doing common ordinary things toward getting on in the world....

Yours as ever
Rose

think you are equal to all the housework? But if you have what you spoke of done by outsiders—like washing, ironing & cleaning it will not be so hard. Only don't get sick again. . . .

[November 1, 1895]

Dear papa & mama,

This is my first letter from my new home. Have been extremely busy of course for I have had packing, moving and settling to do. Your letters of the 12th. & 13th. of Oct. reached me in due time and yesterday the two of the 17th. & 18th. arrived with the enclosed check for which I thank you. I shall enjoy using it but I felt after I asked for it that it was wrong for me to do so as it was not necessary. However—I'm very much obliged.

I moved to Mrs. Eddy's Tuesday and am now quite settled in my new abode. It is a charming place—everything is of the very nicest. I never lived in anything half so beautiful. The salon is beautifully finished & Mr. Eddy has a grand piano there and I have one—not a grand in my room.

My room is large & everything convenient even to private W.C. and toilette room, closets & etc.

I wonder why I have such a lovely time—I can't understand it for it seems so strange and all like a dream. Marchesi called last night and she & Mrs. E. talked me over. I didn't see her but she left a kiss for me which was delivered by Mrs. E. Now I'll tell you what she said. At last we know something definite. I am to study until next June on the Grand Arias. After that one year on roles & Marchesi says that will finish me. And she told Mrs. Eddy that I would be then a "great artiste." So now you know all. . . .

Lovingly your daughter
Alice Rose Ettinger

[November 29, 1895]

Your letter of Nov. 17th is just at hand. Please don't let my progress or course of study worry you. Though I intend in the end to make Grand Opera my profession—I do not at present think anything of that. I am simply studying hard and learning to sing as well as possible & you can rest assured that all will be well for Mr. & Mrs. Eddy & Marchesi & all the best authority on earth & they are doing all in their power for me & I am simply going to work & I know everything will be well in the end. I've come over here to study as long as is necessary and I'm going to do it whether it takes 2 years or 10. Goodness think of the advantages I have! It is simply unheard of—and I don't know of another such case on record. And I think when people say such things as mama wrote in her last letter about "your never having me again and you'll have to give me up to the world & when she does come back she won't be the same" you'd better tell them [it] is none of their affairs. . . .

And if people think I ought to set myself down in

Waterloo & sing at their sociables for the rest of my life when by simply putting out my hand & taking it I can have every thing there is to be had worth having they are grandly mistaken and I haven't much love for people who will talk so. Its all very well for folks who can't do anything to think others should follow their example but I prefer other things. I know you quite agree with me or I wouldn't express myself so freely. And I hope you will all have confidence in me & know that I am going to do my best and so far as any great change taking place in my nature (or whatever they mean) I want you to feel assured that it will not be so although of course people, should they see outward changes (which I devoutly hope they will) will think I'm another person & I don't care. They don't know me & they don't know any of us & it don't matter either.

Mrs. Eddy said when she left Muscatine to come away to study a man said to her, "do you fully realize what you are doing? do you know that this step will change the course of your whole life?" "Yes," said Mrs. Eddy "I do, that's just what I'm going for—I want to change my life and to improve myself & rise to my utmost."

Well, I've written enough for once, on this subject. But I felt it & I had to say what I thought.

4 P.M.

I meant to add more to this & tell you about our Thanksgiving dinner yesterday but I have been so busy I haven't had a chance. And as it is late I must mail it at once. Have spent most of the day at the Dentist's. Am having a lot of work done & am being about Killed. Lovingly Yours Rose

[December 16, 1895]

There was one lady here whom we met at Cedar Rapids 3 years ago—Miss Snyder. She is here studying music & is perfectly charming. Of course I did not remember her at first but I do now. She spoke of you & was very complimentary for she thought you so lovely & thought we were so devoted to each other. After the evening was nearly over she said—"You are simply beautiful & I don't wonder Mr. & Mrs. Eddy are so proud of you & you are the same smart, innocent girl that you were 3 years ago—how do you do it—really you are a wonder Miss Ettinger." Quite an extensive compliment, *n'est ce pas?* . . .

[December 28, 1895]

First I must tell you about the Christmas fun. We had a Christmas tree—or rather Mr. Eddy had it, i.e. he did all the work.

Of course no one was allowed to even get a sight of it and he kept it in his room. Well, he intended to move it into the Dining room, but when he got it finished it was so big it would not go through the doors so we were obliged to have it in his room. Well, if we didn't have fun! At about

9 P.M. Mrs. Eddy and I were invited in & it was a beauty and Mr. Eddy is as grand a success at fixing Xmas trees as if he had had a "Baby" all his life to fix them for. (It always makes me smile to have them call me that but they do—call me Babe very often!)

Well, this tree was loaded with things. (Mrs. E. & I got one of the maids to smuggle our things in too.) Then we sat down close by and investigated. Truly I never got so many things in all my life before at one time! I'll try to tell you all—From Mr. Eddy I got a Calendar. It is in Green Leather & Silver & has the days of the mo. & wk., a thermometer & a clock all combined.

2nd., a diary for 1896 with my name engraved on it. Also another little book bound very prettily.

3rd., a letter opener & paper cutter of very pretty design. And a pretty little box for stamps—it has separate compartments for all kinds of stamps. A beautiful ink-stand—one that I can travel about with the ink in it & it won't spill.

A big box of confectionary, a smart little hand painted plate—a fancy box for little things and a little piano—the back of which is filled with—chocolates!

I believe that's about all. Well, from Mrs. Eddy I rec'd six volumes of Longfellow—beautifully bound. They are really lovely & such nice little books to read out of. And her other two presents were jewelry for she knows I like it. One is a beautiful pin, & very rare. It is a tiny little painting, on porcelain, of two cherubs & flowers. Very little & simply exquisite and is set around (irregularly) with diamonds of a good size. It is a beauty but not so striking as the other gift which are two side-combs for the hair. They are of shell & on the backs are designs of diamonds set in gold! . . .

I gave Mrs. Eddy my photograph set in the most lovely enamel frame I ever saw. Mr. E. selected it & she was charmed with it. And I gave Mr. Eddy a large & very fine book containing views of all the Cathedrals in France. He was much pleased.

Well I must get this ready to mail—Your letters are awfully welcome & I love to get them.

I hope you all had a merry Xmas & got my photo & the cards.

With all the love in the world

Yours Ever

Rose

[January 26, 1896]

This evening I am going with the Eddy's to a dinner at Theodore Dubois' the great French composer. He is a way up man & it is an honor to be invited to his house so I feel somewhat elated. His wife is charming.

I think you must be quite busy with your Church, Social & Domestic work. I hope you are not trying too much. It really seems terrible to me that you do the house work. Can't you get a girl to do that—it seems as if you

ought to get a maid & the money you give her would be made up to you in strength and health. . . .

I think you are all really crazy if you write me such absurd nonsense about my losing my heart. Just because I like society & enjoy admiration is no reason why either I or the admirers should be in love. . . .

[March 22, 1896]

The weather is simply heavenly. Everything is so beautiful; all the trees are leafing out, and the small ones & the shrubs are so beautifully green—and the cherry, apple & peach trees are loaded with blossoms. It is simply exquisite. It is warm like summer & we sit about with the windows all open—*ah, que c'est beau. J'adore le Printemps.*

I hear from my aunt [Mrs. Eddy] that Nice is perfect for of course there everything is perfect and they say it is more like summer than anything else. . . .

Have you ever read Trilby? I have just finished it & think it a sweet story but the ending is so horrible I cannot like it so well as I should if the ending had been less harrowing. I realize that I am very much behind the times reading it now but for some reasons I am glad for I have a much better appreciation of it now that I know Paris & French, than I could possibly have had before.

Yes, when I am unusually excited—as for instance I was when writing up the Marchesi recital—I do occasionally call Mr. Eddy Uncle. Don't think he objects my dear friend, for he doesn't at all. He doesn't mind having me for a relative in the least only as Auntie says & I think it's true—he doesn't like to be called Uncle for he hates to feel that he is old enough to have a niece my age!! So when I want to be real naughty & tease my poor "Uncle" & amuse my dear Aunt beyond anything else—I just say "Uncle" & he usually leaves off what he's doing & chases me out of the room. But just forget it & don't worry for I'm horribly circumspect and the last thing I shall ever do will be to shock my (new) relations. (The old ones are past being shocked—they expect anything under heavens!)

Am so glad you bought that lot. Property is such a good investment in America. . . .

You must have very jolly times all by yourselves. I am very anxious to see you all! Especially at times I get streaks such streaks & then I recover until I get another! But I am happy & I am doing my duty. When the leaves are out & the plums in blossom won't you have some photos of the house. I should like one & I always used to think it looked so pretty as you looked at it from Clausen's corner. . . .

How lovely it will be to have electric lights at home—perfectly fine. I am so glad you like the new photos. . . .

I am as ever

Yours

Rose

Iowa Impromptu

Norwegian Immigrant O. M. Oleson Seeks Music from Bjørnson and Grieg

by Camilla Haugen Cai

Norwegian-born Olaf Martin Oleson is a footnote in the music history of Norway. He is literally the person without a name in the authoritative biography of Norway's most famous composer, Edvard Grieg. However, Oleson is far more than a footnote in Iowa's musical past, in the cultural and business history of Fort Dodge, and in the 19th-century diaspora of Norwegians in America.

Who was this Olaf Martin Oleson? Someone worth knowing, it turns out. He was born in the Stod Parish near Steinkjer in the district of North Trøndelag, June 29, 1849. His father was the farmer-owner (also a teacher) of the family estate called Five or Fieve. Olaf was not the oldest son and therefore did not have inheritance rights (*odelsret*) to the farm, but his father helped direct the future for this bright young man and sent him to the city of Oslo to study gardening and landscaping. Olaf planned to go on to Leipzig, Germany, to the university, presumably to study botany, which was his strongest interest. But his older brother, Ingebrigt Oleson, then living in Fort Dodge, Webster County, Iowa, tempted Olaf with the dream of America. He convinced Olaf that the future lay in America, and in 1870, 21 years old, Olaf sailed for America. It is likely that his brother paid the passage.

America's appeal to Oleson also rang true to other 19th-century Norwegian children raised in large rural families. Many of the children survived to adulthood because there was improved health care and sufficient food, the result of vaccines and more efficient farming methods. Rural Norway, however, could not support the population increase. Whole farm families and extended families of aunts, uncles, cousins, and grand-

parents left for America when parents realized that their little patch of farmland would not support them or their children in the future. Young people faced grim futures if they stayed in Norway. Those who traveled only as far as Norwegian cities found little work. The cities were already overflowing with people who could do unskilled labor. Women might become primary teachers, house maids, or factory workers, but the salaries were tiny and the conditions rough. Marriage might secure their future, but many women could not afford to wait. Some were restless with ambitions of their own; others were desperate to escape the limitations of Norwegian social mores. For young men like Olaf, it was impossible to buy a farm. Usually the path to success lay in getting an education: Olaf had an advantage. His father had given the boy a basic education, and with the further schooling in Oslo, Olaf showed the skills and ability to pursue a university education in Leipzig. Even such an advanced degree, however, would only have prepared Olaf for a modest but comfortable life among Norwegian academics. To an energetic 19-year-old, that future seemed meager reward for study abroad, and he turned away from this comfortable life path, a path totally unavailable to most young Norwegians.

Adventure and opportunity appealed more to Olaf. Who knew to what heights he might rise? The lure of America was strong and its glories were exaggerated by shipping companies' advertising agents. Most persuasive were the letters home to Norway from newly American family members and friends. With such a relative in America to pave the way, it was almost a given that "America fever," as the Norwegians called it, would pull family and community members across the ocean.

Oleson, O. M.

Norsk-Amerikansk 17de Maisang.

Johan Selnes.
Tempo di vivace.

FOR MANDSKOR.

O. M. Oleson.

1. Nor - ges dag! Slik en fest og fol - ke - vrim - mell! Slik en
 2. O - lafs land! Haa-kons, Ha - ralds Kon - ge - ri - ke, Bjørn-sons
 3. Og - saa vi, som har bo - stavn her i vest - en, og - saa

lys - blaa Mai - him - mell! Slik en luft med smeld i smeld hvergang
 Ver - ge - lands til - li - ke. Vik - ing - ret med aand og mot, daadskraft
 vi er med i fest - en. Den er vor, som den er din, kjæ - re

Oleson, O. M.

Come to Iowa.

Con Spirito.

For Mixed Voices.

1. Come to I - o - wa in the cen - tral West, Whe
 2. Work in I - o - wa where the corn grows tall, Whe
 3. Live in I - o - wa, in this fa - vored land, Whe

and the homes are the best. Here the
 turn to gold in the Fall. Here the
 es are ev - er at hand. Here the

realm on the hill, Faith - ful striv - ing the
 green past - ures stray. From the dawn 'til the
 whole - some - ly raised, And the glo - ry of

grand old State, in this good old State,

Published by O. M. Oleson, Fort D



Olaf M. Oleson of Fort Dodge played many roles in his lifetime: Norwegian immigrant, state senator, pharmacist, business owner, banker, town leader—and composer, choral director, and mover and shaker in the world of Norwegian-American men's choruses. In this last role, in 1896, Oleson boldly asked a favor of two international cultural celebrities. The results are revealed in an interesting tale involving witty verse, impromptu creations, and furious snowstorms.



SHSI (IOWA CITY)

Fort Dodge, Iowa, had about 3,000 residents when Olaf M. Oleson arrived in 1870, part of an influx of Norwegian-born immigrants to Webster County. By 1880, only Minnesota and Wisconsin had more Norwegian-born residents than Iowa.

Older brother Ingebrigt had already done the hardest part for the Oleson family. With the goal of finding inexpensive land to till, he had traveled as far west as the railway would take him, to a place on the frontier—Fort Dodge, Iowa—where he could get immediate farm work to keep him alive and where he had the prospect of buying inexpensive land. As luck would have it, Ingebrigt also found other Norwegians in Fort Dodge who counseled him wisely.

Norwegian immigration to America had begun

slowly in earlier decades, but by the 1860s thousands of Norwegian immigrants were coming to America every year. Iowa became a state in 1846, but only a few Norwegian immigrants had come here by then; the 1850 census lists only 330 people of Norwegian stock. A surge of immigrants came to northern and central Iowa in the 1850s and 1860s, many of whom had first settled in Wisconsin or Illinois and were experienced pioneers. By 1870 the census shows more than 25,000 Norwegians in Iowa, and in Webster County the handful of Norwe-



O. M. OLESON, PRESIDENT

T. S. LARSEN, SECY. AND TREAS.

THE OLESON DRUG COMPANY

WHOLESALE AND RETAIL

DRUGGISTS

DRUGS, PAINTS, OILS, GLASS

BOOKS, STATIONERY

ETC, ETC.

FORT DODGE, IOWA,

DEC 6 1921

SHSI (DES MOINES)

Oleson quickly moved from immigrant farm-hand to drugstore owner in Fort Dodge, but Norwegian choral music long nourished his ties to his homeland. The Oleson Building, built in 1894 to house his drugstore, also served as rehearsal space and meeting hall for the Fort Dodge Norwegian men's chorus until 1955.

gians had grown to 403 (307 born in Norway). Olaf Martin Oleson's arrival that year (1870) was one in a rising wave of emigrants from Norway. The number of Norwegian immigrants in the U.S. jumped from 44,000 in 1860, to 114,000 in 1870, to 182,000 in 1880. By that year, Norwegian-born immigrants were the fourth highest ethnic group in Iowa (after German, Irish, and English). Only Minnesota and Wisconsin had more of Norwegian birth.

Oleson revealed bits and pieces of his immigration experience in later life, experiences that were perhaps colored by the passage of time. By the time he got to Chicago, he related, he had only 50 cents left. (We must assume that he also still had his ticket for Fort Dodge.) In Chicago with this last 50 cents he bought a green tie in order to arrive properly attired at his brother's home in Fort Dodge. But Ingebrigt was shocked by the young man's gaudy tie and made him put it away for good: As the story goes, he was not even allowed to wear it among Irishmen in Fort Dodge, a reference to the Irish custom of "the wearing of the green."

The tie episode may be the most colorful story of Oleson's life. He was hard-working, apparently rather quiet, though with a sense of humor (something that would be much needed for his later encounter with two Norwegian cultural giants). He was intelligent and curious about the world, he had wide interests and an active mind, and he showed scientific and scholarly ability. Most of all he had imagination, discipline, and brilliant business instinct.

For two years at North Lizard Creek near Fort Dodge he worked as a farmhand driving a team of oxen. He used to say the oxen learned his Norwegian commands faster than he learned their English. Soon he went to work in a Fort Dodge retail drugstore, which led him to seek further education at the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Graduating with highest honors in 1877, he returned to Fort Dodge, but not without some vital new knowledge beyond pharmacy. At the Philadelphia Centennial of 1876 he had seen his first electric light and telephone, and he understood their enormous potential for both him and his community.

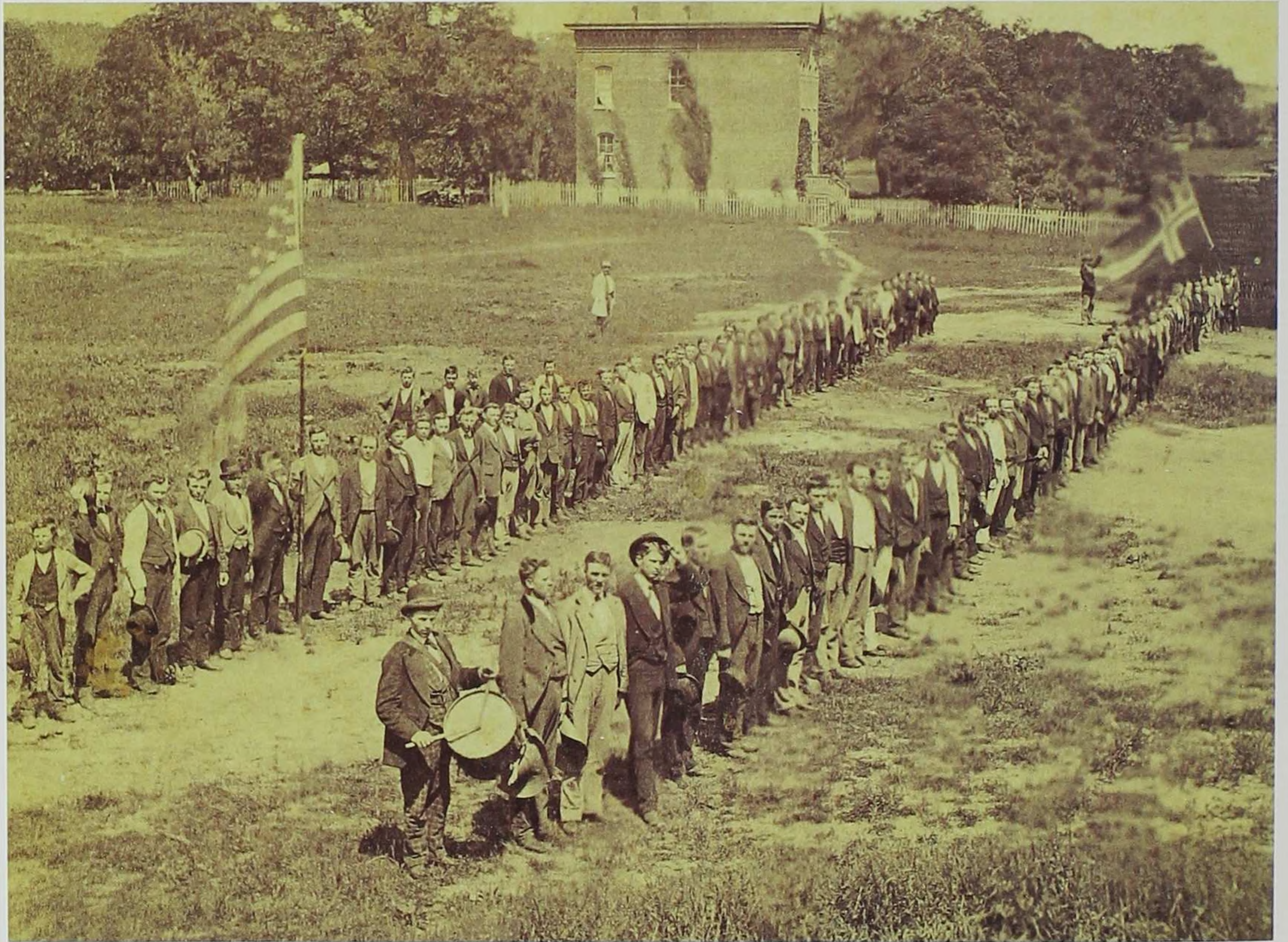
He quickly moved up in the Fort Dodge drugstore business from clerk to partner and then to owner of his own Oleson Drug Company. But Oleson had wider interests; he was a man with vision, and he saw tremendous opportunity to shape the future of the growing city. His observations at the Philadelphia Centennial led him to establish the Fort Dodge Light & Power Company and the Fort Dodge Telephone Company. Putting his business skills to work, he also became president of

the Fort Dodge Hotel Company, which owned the centrally located Wahkonsa Hotel, and soon he held the position of vice president in the Fort Dodge State Bank. He even served briefly in public life, where he acquired the title "The Honorable" for his two years as Democratic state senator (1892-1894).

But there was another man inside this successful business leader. Oleson loved to sing in male quartets and choruses at just the time when such groups were being formed everywhere in America. Immigrants from Scandinavia, Germany, and other northern European areas brought this popular mid-century entertainment form with them. In Europe these urban groups were formed among men of similar class standing and profession. Laborers sang together, students and academics formed their own choruses, craftsmen were a separate group, and merchants formed other groups. The pleasure of joining together with like-minded people to sing, talk trade, gossip, and drink a bit afterwards was a treasured male privilege. Urban women could not take the same step because their primary workplace was in the home. For them to organize independently and to present themselves publicly would have been an embarrassment to society.

In Norway the first choruses formed along the lines of German groups in the 1840s and 1850s. The men in the singing groups usually shared a political stance. Some were involved in the budding labor movement, while others pushed forward the cause of nationalism. Nationalism was especially important to Norway and was in opposition to the more inclusive view called Pan-Scandinavianism—that is, presenting Scandinavian countries as a unit to the rest of the world. Pan-Scandinavianism was the majority viewpoint in Norway in the 1840s through the 1860s, but its citizens remained constantly dissatisfied with Swedish control of their nation. In the next years nationalism won out, through the oratory of writer Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and many others, and it led Norway to the brink of war with Sweden in 1905. Each wave of immigrants brought a new stage of this political struggle with them, and it affected especially the early stages of the singing societies in America.

The earliest Norwegian singing group in America was probably one founded in the late 1850s in Chicago. In the 1860s a group formed in La Crosse, Wisconsin, and a Decorah, Iowa, chorus named Luren followed soon thereafter. These were lively groups of young men in their twenties and thirties. More groups soon formed in other towns and cities with large Scandinavian popu-



Students in Decorah, Iowa, parade with both American and Norwegian flags in this stereograph from about 1876. With a large Norwegian population, Luther College, and a Norwegian-language newspaper, Decorah hosted two male choruses.

lations. Class and profession were much less important than they had been in European groups. These men knew of the large singing festivals in their homeland, but they also learned that other ethnic groups in America had the same tradition, the German *Sängerfesten* in particular, in which many choruses traveled to one place to sing together. In the 1880s a similar collective movement started in eastern cities with large Scandinavian populations—Boston, New York, and Philadelphia—and it spread to midwestern cities and towns—especially Chicago, Minneapolis, and Decorah.

Fort Dodge's Olaf Oleson became one of the important agitators in this large-scale movement. On January 23, 1886, Oleson wrote an article in the Minneapolis newspaper *Budstikken* encouraging midwestern Scandinavian singing groups to join together for larger festivities. "There are many good singers among the Scandinavians . . . but they have as yet had no chance to get

together, and their talents lie buried. Such a Festival will stimulate Scandinavian singing in this country, and that is most necessary, if it is not to die out altogether. This would be a great national loss, since surely no other nation can show such excellent music especially adapted for male chorus as the Scandinavian countries." Oleson indulges in a bit of Pan-Scandinavian pride here because he could count on an audience made up of immigrants who still supported the Norwegian-Swedish Union. They were not particularly interested in or current with Norway's radically changing politics of the 1880s.

Various smaller festivals (*sangerfest*) had been organized in the early 1880s, but Oleson's dream came true in New York City, May 16, 1886, when the United Scandinavian Singers of America was formed. In 1891, under the name Scandinavian Singers' Association, the choruses had a festival in Minneapolis, the furthest west for any such gathering at that time. It awakened strong

interest all over the Midwest, but tensions between Swedes and Norwegians soon split the organization. Personality conflicts among the leaders were the immediate causes, but political tensions in their homelands may have haunted their negotiations. Many Swedes left the organization. In the same year, in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, other midwestern Scandinavians formed a new organization called The Northwestern Scandinavian Singers' Association (*Det Nordvestlige Skandinaviske Sangerforbund*).

Individual choruses invariably chose Norwegian names for their groups, and composer Edvard Grieg's name was a popular one: Grieg Mandskor (men's chorus) in Canton, South Dakota, in Dahlen, North Dakota, and in Fort Dodge, Iowa; Grieg Sangforening (singing society) in Madison and Eau Claire, Wisconsin. Decorah, Iowa, had two male choruses, Luren (named for the medieval musical instrument, the *lur*) and Grieg Mandskor. Edvard Grieg (1843–1907) was Norway's best-known composer with an international reputation. He was trained in Leipzig by German musicians; his style was therefore primarily European romanticism, and his music easily won the hearts of both Europeans and Americans.

Grieg's important place in history comes from his interest in Norwegian peasant music. His pieces that use the rhythms and melodies from this lively folk heritage take on a spirit different from his other pieces. Especially these pieces with their native colors helped to fuel Norway's turbulent events. For the political nationalists he and his music were confirmation that Norway had its own unique culture. That Grieg wrote incidental music for Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's heroic plays *Sigurd Josalfar* (Opus 22) and *Olav Trygvason* (Opus 50)—two heroes from Norway's Viking past when Norwegians were their own masters—suggests his close ties to both Bjørnson and his ideals. Best known, however, are Grieg's two *Peer Gynt Suites* for orchestra, especially the selections "Hall of the Mountain King," "Morning Mood," and "Solveig's Song." His Piano Concerto in A Minor is a favorite competition piece for young pianists. His many songs and character pieces for piano are popular with both amateur and professional musicians. "Land Sighting" (*Landkjenning*), "The Great White Flock" (*Den store hvite flokk*), and "Salute in Song" (*Sangerhilsen*) are still popular selections with Norwegian-American men's choruses today.

In Oleson's career-building years in Fort Dodge,



COURTESY OF VESTERHEIM NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN MUSEUM ARCHIVES (DECORAH, IOWA)

The Grieg Singing Society of Nordness (by Decorah) was one of many men's choruses in the heavily Norwegian Upper Midwest.

after his return from Philadelphia in 1877, he had no time for courting, marriage, or family (he did not marry until 1895). But he did entertain his male friends. In the 1880s his apartment became the gathering place for young Norwegian men who came together primarily to sing for their own amusement, but they also played card and board games and created skits together. In 1891 Oleson pulled these men together into a small singing group (about 16 members) that he named the Grieg Mandskor. Oleson never limited his membership to Norwegians, in spite of growing tensions in those last years before Norway gained independence from Sweden, and he even included members without Scandinavian heritage.

Oleson was 42 years old in 1891 when he founded the Grieg Mandskor, and he remained its director for many years thereafter. His chorus attended all the big festivals: Sioux Falls in 1892; Sioux City, 1894; Omaha, 1896; and Minneapolis, May 17, 1897, for the unveiling of the monument dedicated to the world-famous Norwegian violinist Ole Bull.

It was in 1896 that Olaf Oleson decided to write to Norway's great author Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832–1910). By this time Bjørnson, in his sixties, was one of the best-known citizens of Norway. He had built a career as a writer, director, and orator. (He would win the Nobel Prize in literature in 1903.) In the 1870s he became an agitator for politically liberal views, and with even more inflammatory views, an agitator against the beliefs and power of the Lutheran church. With his brilliant speeches he drove Norwegian politicians and the Norwegian people out of complacency. No longer could they be dutiful subjects of Sweden with unquestioning loyalty to the church and its hierarchy. The church survived Bjørnson's attacks, but not without change. Sweden's hold on Norway, however, would not. The Norwegian parliament pushed out the Swedish government in 1905, and in that moment Bjørnson saw his grand dreams for Norway come true.

What better way, Oleson reasoned, to stimulate Norwegian-American men's singing groups than with a song text specially written for them by Bjørnson and with music freshly composed by Norway's most famous composer, Grieg? A new piece could be a beacon, an anthem for the whole Norwegian men's choral movement in America. And, if successful, there could be further, active, cultural exchange with Norway.

On February 14, 1896, Oleson pulled out a piece of Oleson Drug Company letterhead—advertising its “Drugs, Paints, Oils, Glass, Wall Paper, Books, Statio-

nery, Lamps, Etc.” He wrote (in Norwegian) to Bjørnson requesting a poem and music for his chorus. The language of this letter reveals the great respect Oleson had for Bjørnson:

Mr. Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson:

Thank you for your visit, Bjørnson, the unforgettable! Well, it is really a long time now since you were here and made such a powerful impression on us all!

We have a five-year-old men's singing society here that consists of about 16 members. Its name is the Grieg Men's Chorus. I have been and remain the group's leader, and we are making good progress so that, not only among our countrymen, but also several times among Americans, we have shown what excellent things Norway has both in the area of poetry as well as in the area of music. What we might wish for is just this: Would you have the kindness to write a verse for our society and send it to Edvard Grieg in order for him to set it to music? The reason I write to you is that I do not personally know Grieg although I am certainly “intimate” with his glorious music. I know that it is a great deal to ask you for all this; if it is not convenient for you, do not be afraid to say no—but if only you could see how a few lines from you in the form of a poem would inspire us all, then I could hardly imagine that you would say no to our request.

Hoping that you will find the time and the occasion to write us some lines, I remain with respect,
O. M. Oleson

Then Oleson added:

Forgive this assumed privilege that I take in writing you, but it is truly a heartfelt need that drove me to it: because our singing society is so close to me, and it is trying to do everything it can in order to raise up our [American] nation to that which is noble and good.

You will certainly remember me—I was at the same apothecary then as now—was [the one who agitated] to get you to Fort Dodge—traveled to Albert Lea in Minnesota, as well as to Des Moines, Iowa, in order to hear you [speak]. I will never forget my memories of those experiences as long as I live; they are among the most pleasant that I can recall.

Yours obligingly, O. M. Oleson

Bjørnson took the challenge. On February 28 from Munich, Germany, he replied in a postcard to Oleson, “I will try.” (See opposite page.) On February 29 he dashed off a short letter



Fiery and opinionated Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (above) sent this note to Oleson in Fort Dodge, then sent a hastily written poem (next page) to his friend Edvard Grieg, to be set to music.

and a song text, and with Oleson's letter enclosed, sent these items to his friend, composer Edvard Grieg, then living in Leipzig. Bjørnson's letter was a humorous and deprecating little verse clearly meant for Grieg's eyes only, certainly not Oleson's. This first translation (by scholar William H. Halverson) of the letter captures Bjørnson's literary style and humor.

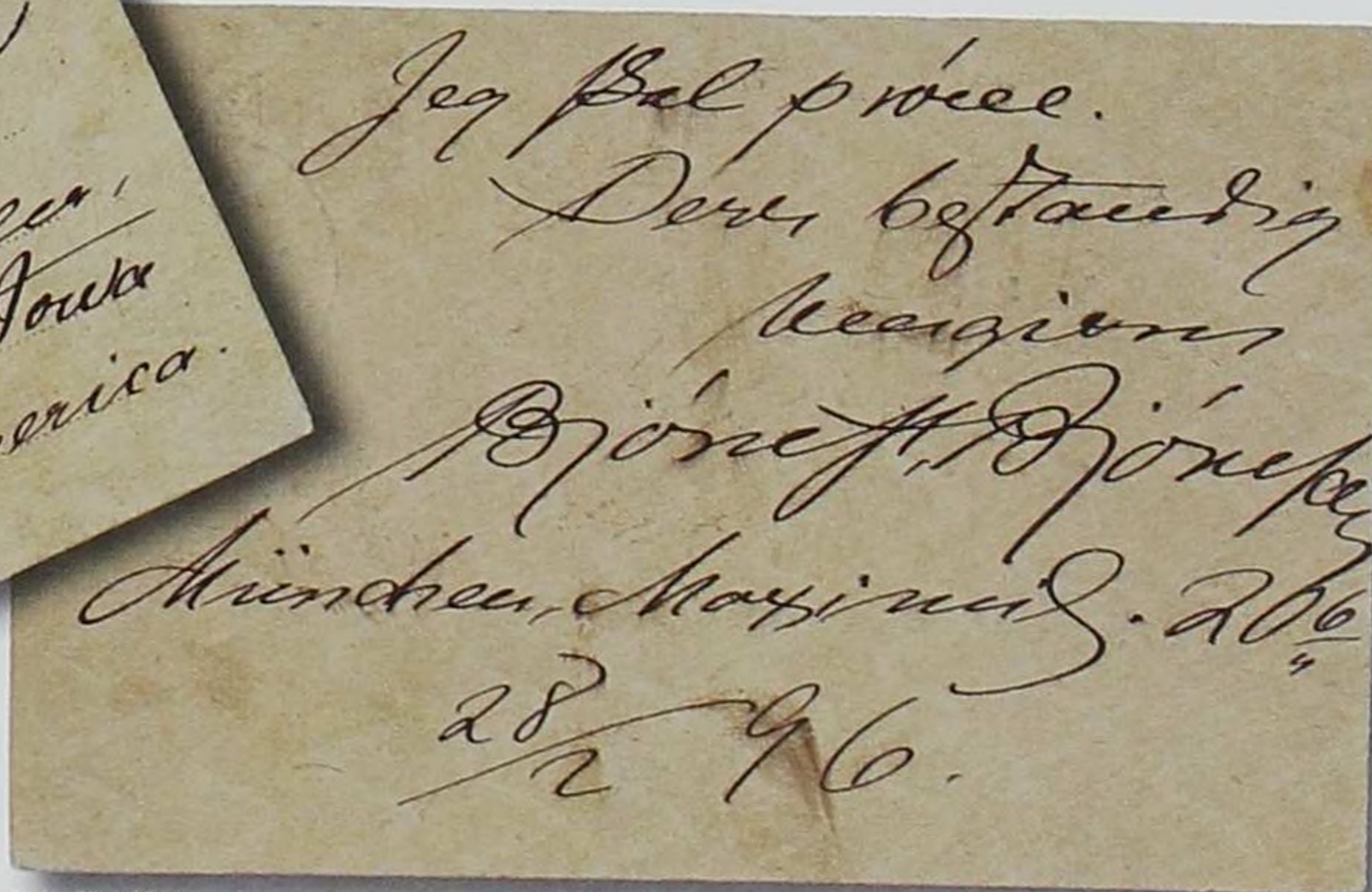
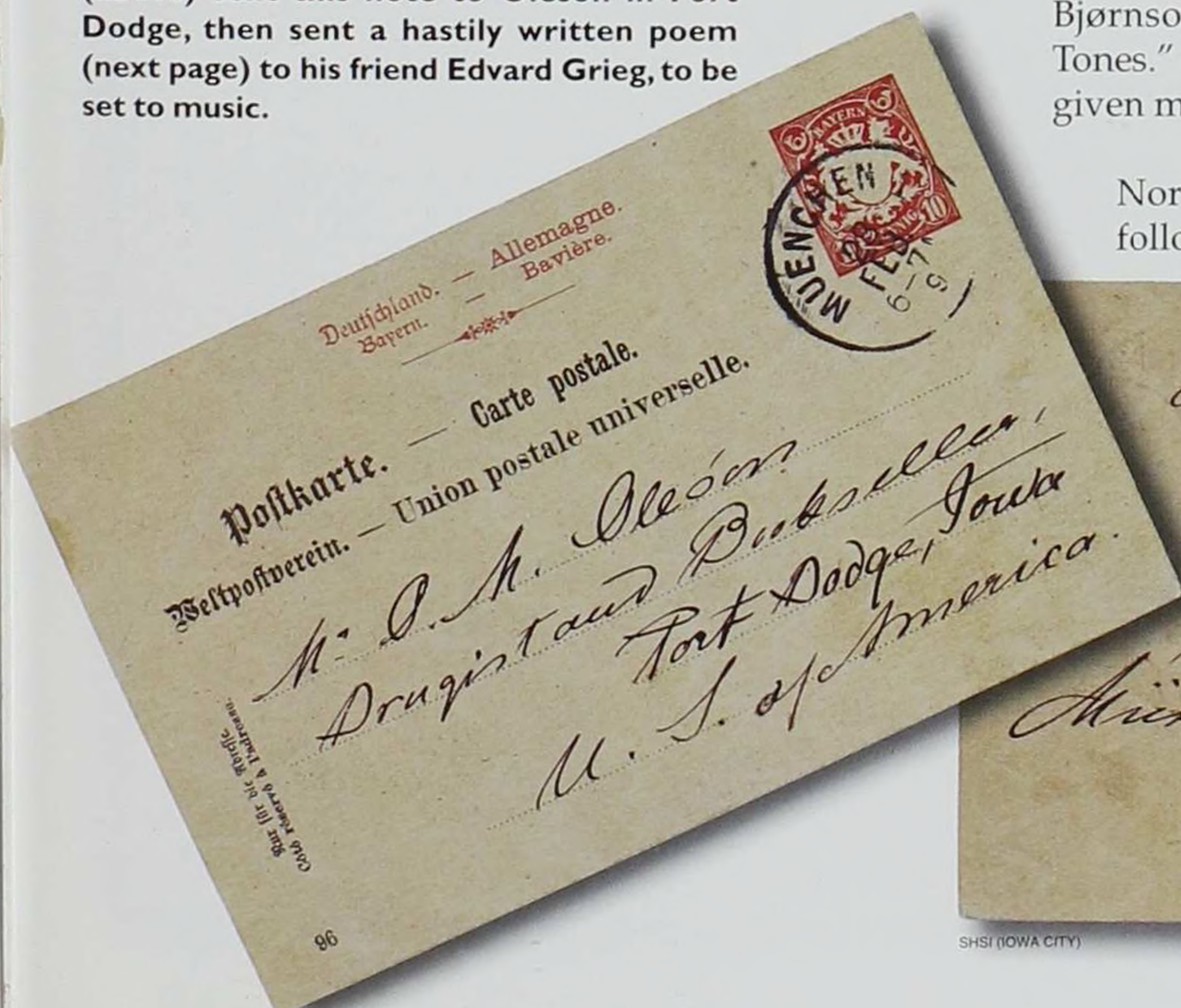
You [Grieg] to honor, you to cherish,
I myself would gladly perish.
Quick as lightning wrote this down,
Which I send—and don't you frown—
With this note. You'll get no rest
Till you send to his address
Music — and some verse as well,
Hi to Nina [Grieg's wife], your sweet belle!

In my literal translation that follows, however, the words are harsher:

In order to honor you [Grieg]
I have let myself be scalped alive,
scribbled this down quick as lightning,
which I send to you with his letter.
You won't have any peace
until you send music
with the poem to his address.
Greet your Nina, the goddess.

Tucked into the envelope along with this note in verse was the frivolous, even lightweight poem that Bjørnson had titled "Norwegian Tones, Norwegian Tones." (See next page.) There are three verses, here also given my literal translation:

Norwegian tones, Norwegian tones
follow us, however far we travel,



SHSI (IOWA CITY)

3
Impromptu
til "Griegs Mandskor"
Fort Dodge, Iowa, U. S. Amerika.

Norske toner, norske toner
følger os hvor langt vi drage,
fljætter os hvad stin tilbage,
spejler minner, kugler vover.

Norske toner, norske toner, —
som av hav den salte luft
som av eng den friske duft
samlet ^{Sangeren} ~~rytmen~~ sig og steg
op av folkets kamp og leg.

Fra den hele tone-skare
sender hilsen hjertelig
nu ved Björnson og ved Grieg.
Giv den ringer, lad den fare!

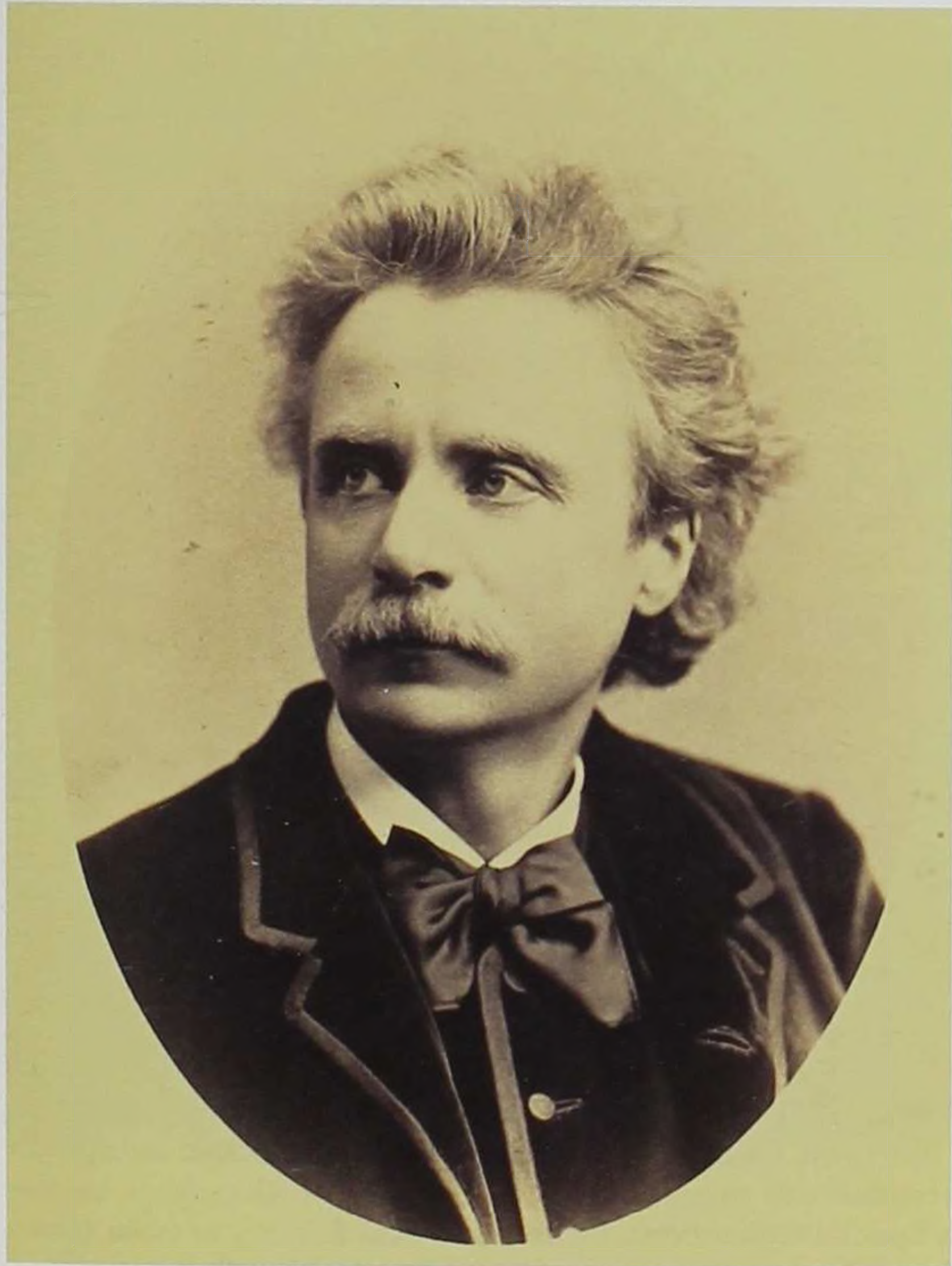
Norske toner, norske toner.
Björnstjerne Björnson

Ja, hjertelig hilsen
4

Björnstjerne Björnson

Minichm 29 96, Maxmids. 20⁶

veest!



Composer Edvard Grieg signed the back of Bjørnson's poem (below) and sent it with his music (next page) to Oleson in Fort Dodge. Then Grieg continued the jest that Bjørnson had begun, firing off a clever, though biting, reply to his friend.

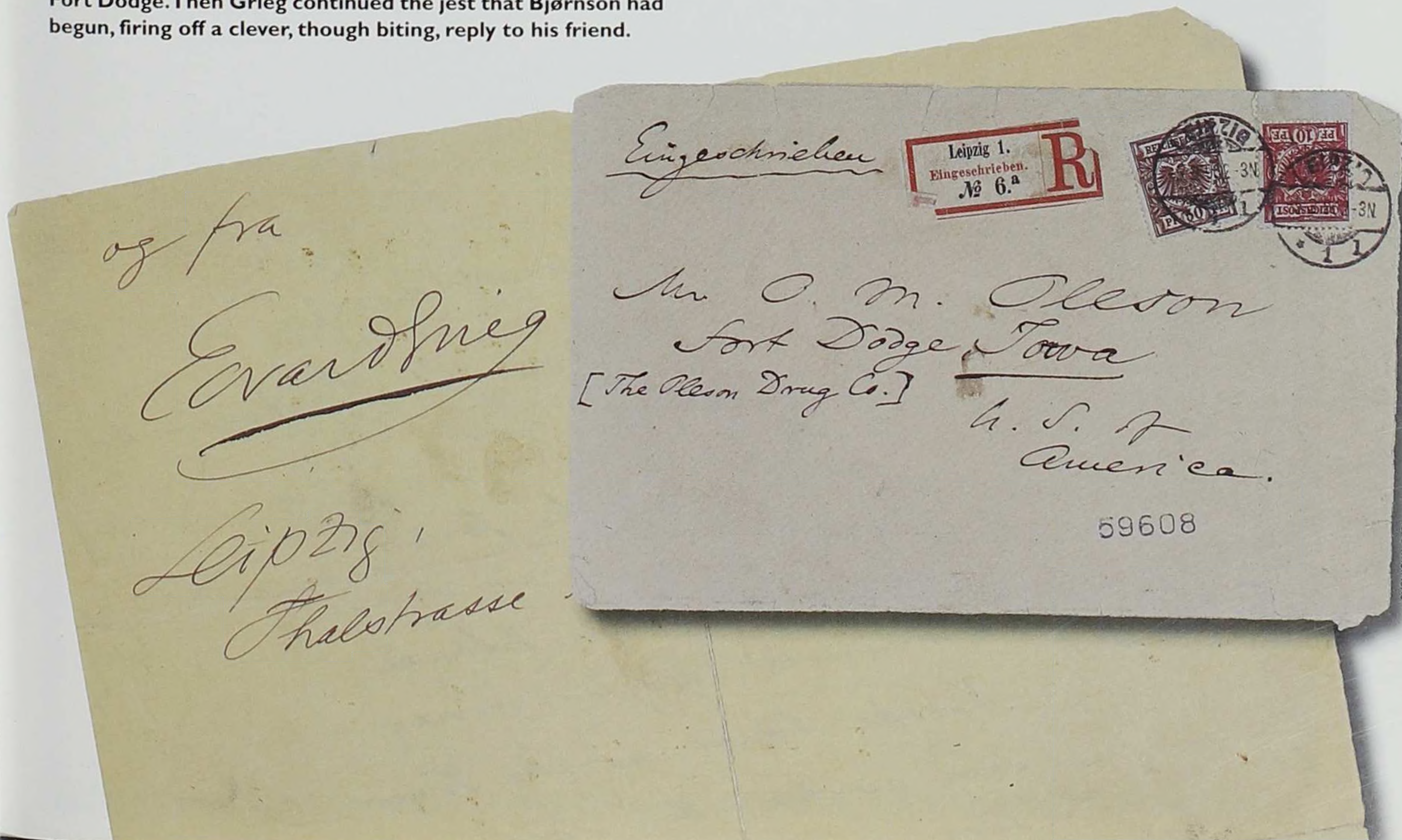
bring us back at every moment,
reflect the memories, conjure hopes.

Norwegian tones, Norwegian tones,
just as from the sea the salt air came,
just as from the meadow, the fresh perfume,
so the song gathered itself and rose up out of the
people's struggle and play.

From the whole collection of tones,
a hearty greeting is now sent
by Bjørnson and by Grieg.
Give it wings, let it travel!

Grieg in Leipzig did as he was commanded by Bjørnson. He wrote music for the poem, titled the little composition "Impromptu," and dated it March 5, 1896. His effort in music unfortunately matched the vacuousness of Bjørnson's text. While the piece is competently constructed, it remains among Grieg's weakest compositions. The music, like the poem, is almost silly, especially in setting the two names "Bjørnson" and "Grieg" to long, sustained tones.

Grieg kept one copy of the music for himself. On March 5, 1896, he sent Oleson the final copy of the music along with Bjørnson's poem manuscript. There was no letter included. Instead, on the back of the poem



Impromptu

Et "Frøys" manuskript
i Fort Dodge, Iowa, U.S.A.

Ord af Bjørnstjerne
Bjørnson
Musik af Grieg.

Allegro moderato

Tenor
Norske Toner, norske Toner, følger os, hvorlaugt vi drage,
Døds
flytter os hvad Stund tilbage, spejter Min-ner, Løgløse To-ner.

cresc. *mf.*

a tempo
Norske Toner, norske Toner, som et Hav den salte Luft,
pp

a tempo
som et Eng den fri-ske Duft samlet Sangen sig og steg op af alle's Kamp og
cresc. *cresc.*

Edvard Grieg's two-page "Impromptu" with text by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. This newly discovered and unpublished autograph manuscript is the public and official version of the piece. Grieg intended this manuscript, which he sent to Oleson, to be the version performed for American audiences. This manuscript is in Special Collections, State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City center). Several articulation and dynamic marks on it differ from those in the autograph manuscript that Grieg retained (now in the Grieg Collection, Bergen Public Library, Bergen, Norway).

Allegro vivace.

Leg. *pp* *f*

Fra den hele Toneskare, fra den hele Toneskare sendes tilbeholdnings,
fra den hele Toneskare sendes tilbeholdnings nu ved Bjørnstjerne og ved Grieg. Giv den
vinger, led den fa-re! Norske Toner! Norske Toner!

tranquillo
Norske To-ner!
pp

Leipzig
5/3/96.

manuscript, Grieg penned in Norwegian, "and from Edvard Grieg, Leipzig, Thalstrasse 10." Apparently he considered that sufficient communication with Oleson.

However, on the same day (March 5) Grieg not only returned Oleson's letter to Bjørnson, but he included his own quite lengthy verse-reply written in the style of Bjørnson's poetic request. Grieg's clever, deprecating verse announced to Bjørnson that he had dutifully accomplished his task. The first translation given here (Halverson's) captures the mood and style of Grieg's verse-reply.

You to honor, you to cherish,
I myself would gladly perish.
I'll respond to your gibberish
with some verse that's—well, cleverish.
I think you are plain tigerish
to demand I deliverish
an "impromptu" so feverish
for Dodge City's Norwegerish.
Clearly, now, my "I" I'll nourish
with the peacock plumes that flourish
'round you since you insisterish
that I do this task nightmarish.
You should know, my friend so bearish,
[bjørn = bear]

your verse has this trait contrarish:
It gives unconventionalarish
zeal that, wholly arbitrarish,
makes me spurn tasks customarish.
Your word, though't be antiquarish,
makes all else quite ancillarish,
sets me hopping coronarish,
lest I fail my friend so rare-ish.
Well, old bear (soon centenarish),
let us not be adversarish;
I will act disciplinarish
(I'm not revolutionarish)
and conclude this verse bugbearish:
You to honor, you to cherish!
[. . .]

My following, more literal translation, however, introduces the bitingly sharp quality of the actual words.

You say "to honor you, to honor you"
I let myself be scalped alive.
Yes, do whatever the hell you want.
The smallest of those things—to make a fool
of me who delivers an "Impromptu"
where you force me to learn
to compose my own name —

On Translation

Translation from one language to another poses difficult problems. Pitted against each other are the needs, first, to convey the basic meaning of the original words, that is, a literal translation, and, second, to bring out the images, character, and subtleties of the original words. A direct word translation rarely covers the total meaning of the original. For example, the Norwegian word *gård* translates to "farm" in English. However, a Norwegian *gård* is usually a small scrap of land, on a steep hillside, with a growing season so short and wet that grain often rotted before harvest. A midwestern farm, in contrast, usually has many acres of land, rich soil, and long, sun-filled summers. Because these images are so different, the translator needs to use more and dif-

ferent words so that American readers can imagine the Norwegian *gård*.

In our Norwegian verse-letter Grieg conveys two attitudes: annoyance with the composing task and humor about the situation he is in. How to present both in readable English? My direct translation of the words conveys Grieg's annoyance. (Norwegian grammar is adjusted to make the translation readable.) In the Norwegian text, Grieg's words that express annoyance also express sarcasm. This comedy within words of annoyance is a literary device that Norwegians find thoroughly clever and devilishly funny. In English those same words of annoyance do not necessarily contain sarcasm. Thus translators expand and use different words to try to capture both concepts.

Grieg's verse-letter is additionally

made funny through the use of rhyming Norwegian words, the same rhyme that Bjørnson had used in his communication. These rhymes are a mix of literary words, half-invented words, and words with amusing distortions that force them to rhyme. In English the same words are not particularly literary or funny, nor do they rhyme. Therefore, translator William H. Halverson chose to distort other English words and to add the amusing "ish" ending-rhyme to suggest Bjørnson's cheerful, but devastating humor.

Combining these complicated details into one readable translation is the translator's perpetual, and almost impossible, challenge. Here, using two translations, we are able to savor to the fullest Grieg's annoyance, sarcasm, and exaggerated rhyming-humor.

—Camilla Haugen Cai

is just to let Iowa's Norwegian honor me.
 Of course I will puff myself up
 with your golden peacock feathers,
 since you, dignified one, demand
 that I shall assist you.
 In addition you must know, dearest,
 that your poetry has that special quality
 to inspire me so fully,
 and to forget myself so completely
 that, caught in your high sphere,
 I do not wish for anything more
 than to renounce everything
 just to create for "Bjørnson."
 Yet, I don't want to risk
 boring the old bear [you Bjørn],
 yes, and especially not irritate him,
 but rather shall cut to the end
 and not identify any more clearly
 what I dare to wave to pretend
 that "I honor you, I honor you."

This was not the tone Grieg used with professional acquaintances. This kind of humor was revealed only to his most intimate friends. To Oleson in Fort Dodge, Grieg had signed only his name. Yet, how different were his earnest responses to requests from others in America—Henry Finck, who was writing a book about Grieg; Robert Johnson, who requested articles on Mozart and Schumann; and composer Edward MacDowell, who asked to dedicate two pieces to Grieg. To these he responded with dignity, respect, and friendliness, and he worked hard to help Finck and Johnson. Why so short, then, with a serious request from a Norwegian-American that came to him through Bjørnson? Why did he not call Bjørnson to task for the poor quality of the poem or write good music even though the poem was weak?

Oleson's name was certainly unfamiliar to Grieg, so there could not have been a personal grudge. Could there have been class issues at stake, with Grieg, from Bergen's bourgeoisie, guessing correctly that Oleson, a farmer's son from North Trøndelag, was of a lesser class? Would the response have been different if the request had come from, for example, the well-known Norwegian-American Carlo A. Sperati, trained in Leipzig as a choral director, professor of music at Luther College, and the son of well-known Norwegian conductor Paulo Sperati in Oslo? Could Grieg have been resentful of emigration and emigrants in general and therefore conveyed contempt with this work? Many who were left behind in Norway covered personal feelings of envy, bitterness, or sadness with public charges

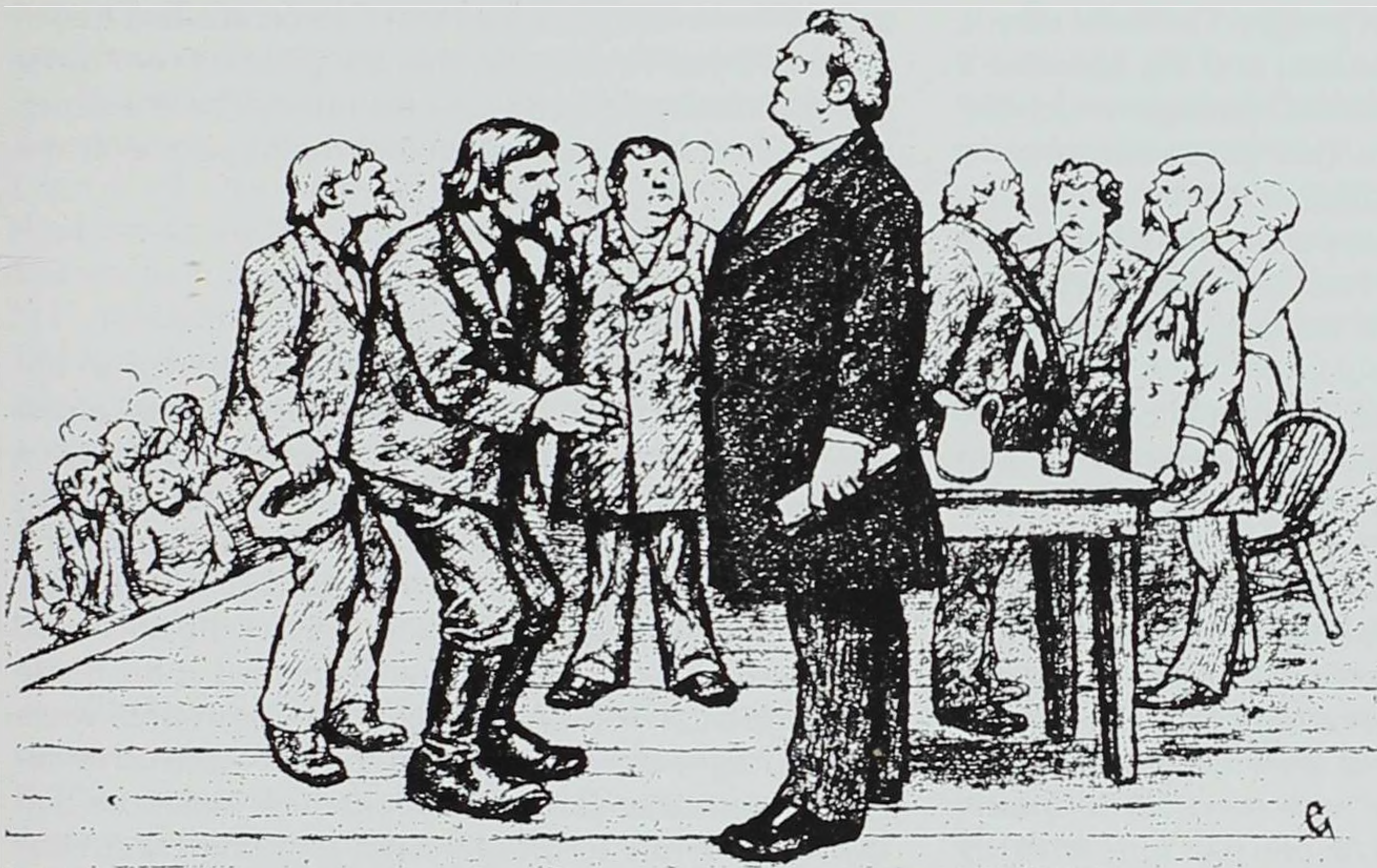
that emigrants were too weak to endure Norway's hardships or were disloyal in leaving when Norway needed their talents and skills.

Grieg's speedy and halfhearted effort at composing the music was probably driven by none of these subtle or complicated reactions. It seems that Grieg was simply caught up in the jaunty mood of Bjørnson's versified request and mocking song text. Though he had Oleson's letter in hand, he did not reflect on the seriousness of his request or the humble wording of the letter. The musical result suggests that more of Grieg's immediate effort went into creating his long verse-reply to Bjørnson than into his musical composition. Rightly enough Grieg called the piece "Impromptu," an "in-the-moment" composition—though not a very good one at that.

The collaboration was, essentially, Bjørnson's caper and Bjørnson's revenge on America. He, unlike Grieg, had good reason to be angry with Norwegian-Americans. The circumstances under which Oleson and Bjørnson had met—"thank you for your visit," writes Oleson politely—came during Bjørnson's disastrous lecture tour of the Norwegian-American Midwest in the winter of 1880/81, when conservative Norwegian-American Lutheran pastors, most of them born in Norway, took aim at Bjørnson's increasingly liberal, heretical views.

Bjørnson's religious convictions had gradually changed from those of his father, who was a stern pastor with issues of sin, self-abnegation, grace, and salvation at the core of his religion. Instead, under the influence of Danish writer and titular bishop Nicolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig, young Bjørnson began to advocate a joyful Christianity with love for people, "happiness in life, and goodness toward others." While the church continued to interpret life as a "vale of tears" with unending suffering, Bjørnson now saw life as reflecting sincerity and humane love. In the 1870s Bjørnson was pulled even further from the official church into the ideals of Marcus Thrane, a Norwegian rationalist who hoped the individual "instead of his belief in the Bible and fairytales . . . will come to a faith in mankind and the progress of society."

Bjørnson's most radical next step was to question the idea of a personal God—a fundamental principle in Lutheranism—as he embraced concepts of rationalism and realism from the Danish philosopher Georg Brandes. In 1877 Bjørnson, so well-known for his inflammatory political writing and oratory, wrote that he rejected the concepts of heaven and hell. The immedi-



On his lecture tour in the Upper Midwest during the brutal winter of 1880/81, Bjørnson spoke in small Norwegian-American settlements and large cities about his radical opposition to the Lutheran church and Swedish control of Norway. Here, he is approached at his lecture in La Crosse.

ILLUSTRATION BY HERBJØRN GAUSTA, FROM JOHS. B. WIST, "DA BJØRNSON KOM TIL LA CROSSE," SYMRA (DECORAH, 1913), PP. 55-68.

ate reaction from the Norwegian clergy was outrage. From the pulpit they hurled their most damning epithets; he was an agnostic and an atheist, harsh words coming so directly from the powerful Norwegian church.

Bjørnson's other causes—for enlightened progress, for freedom and rights for all, and especially for independence from Sweden, were his other passions, and he wanted to visit America to study and learn how America handled progress and freedom. To support his journey he gave lectures (in Norwegian) for the Norwegian-American communities. If anything, the Lutheran pastors in America reacted even more aggressively than their religious counterparts in Norway. Bjørnson was a blasphemer, they said, as they warned their parishioners not to go to any of his lectures. The pastors were relentless and even cruel in their attacks. Bjørnson stubbornly played into their hands by refusing to modify his words. His Norwegian-American tour manager, friend, and supporter, Rasmus Bjørn Anderson of Madison, Wisconsin, pleaded with Bjørnson not to air his freethinking religious ideas and to give only his lecture on Norwegian politics and history. But Bjørnson could not resist temptation, and, when baited, he responded with brilliant, fiery rhetoric. This put him at the center of debate, and many people were excited to attend his lectures.

Nevertheless, the power of the pastors was great. In some places Bjørnson's lectures were poorly attended,

and he felt insulted. On March 19, 1881, from Fort Dodge, Bjørnson angrily wrote home to his wife, Karoline, about his experience two days earlier (March 17) in nearby Forest City: "I am working terribly hard to get through. One day [March 17] I spoke for 4—four—hours, two lectures (after having driven eighteen miles [by oxcart]). The minister had gone out to give a lecture against me at the same time, and then I got so angry that I said I would give them [the lecture on] the prophets free—and managed to borrow a church whose congregation does not believe in the Bible. Full house, close attention. This is a battle to the death."

Worse was the weather. That winter of 1880/81 was the harshest the midwestern immigrants had experienced, and blinding snowstorms stranded Bjørnson time and again in tiny communities, with no income and nothing to do. Bjørnson's letters reveal a very angry man. From Nora Springs, Iowa, he wrote to Anderson on February 4: "I am snowbound in Nora Junction between Albert Lea and Calmar, cannot get to my lecture today in Decorah."

He continued, "I have one book that I have read, but I am 'through'—and I'm bored to death in a house that is built for dogs and not for people, and where of course I will catch cold again."

Still in Nora Springs five days later, he wrote his wife: "This house is not a house, but a tent. The snow blows on my face while I sleep; I have to go to bed fully dressed and wearing a cap. The room we spend the day

in is crowded with all kinds of people. The stove stands in the middle of the floor, red hot; and the door has a crack an inch wide at the bottom, through which the snow blows far in on the floor. Your letters of course do not get here, and no papers either, not even a telegram; so I hope nothing wrong is happening anywhere in the world. You can't walk many feet here without running into a snowdrift; some days we can't see across the street."

From Decorah on March 15, he complained that "the snowstorms have again spoiled two stops for me and now almost the third. I am pursued by endless bad luck."

To his tour manager, Anderson, from Fort Dodge Bjørnson wrote on March 19, "Again a storm! On that account people didn't dare come in," and the same day to Karoline he showed his real despair: "The snowstorms have done me out of at least 2,000 dollars. It is the worst winter old people have seen, for it doesn't ever seem to end. I had to walk one half mile with my baggage to reach my destination. I was sweating as in a Russian bath."

He continued: "Well, I won't come home with much more than 4,000 dollars [about \$70,000 today]! I could weep over this result after such great efforts. Would you believe it, the snowstorms are still going on; either I can't make it or the farmers can't! Last year at this time they were sowing here. I am now speaking nearly every day to small audiences in order to make up a little. Ugh!"

After the mixed reception, poor receipts, angry attacks, miserable weather, and uncomfortable travels, revenge surely was not far from Bjørnson's thoughts at these "end-of-the-earth" midwestern towns. These miserable memories must have flooded his mind 15 years later when he read Oleson's letter, postmarked Fort Dodge, Iowa.

But Bjørnson had the wrong target. Oleson was very much in sympathy with Bjørnson's ideals. He had always been a strong Bjørnson supporter and had gone to hear several of his lectures in other towns. Oleson was also, as he says himself in his 1896 letter, the one who arranged Bjørnson's lectures in Fort Dodge.

Oleson was an astute and discerning man, and in retrospect he probably understood Bjørnson's scorn. Reactions from Fort Dodge to Grieg's composition have not been located; the piece apparently did not appear in the community's Grieg Mandskor repertoire, and it also did not appear in the repertoires of other Norwegian male choruses. Oleson, as a key member of the Northwest Scandinavian Singers' Association, was in a position to advocate performance of "Impromptu" to all the association choruses, but apparently he did not

do so. We can only surmise that Oleson decided his request had been a mistake, that the piece did not merit exposure and put it away. As the rational businessman he was, he must have written the whole episode off as a learning experience.

Grieg, on the other hand, had missed an opportunity to gain the support of an enterprising American who perhaps could have helped him get royalties from the sale of his music in the United States. Grieg, who feared traveling by sea and never visited America, discovered that, though his music sold well there, the U.S. did not honor the international copyright law developed at the Berne Convention of 1886. As a result, American publishers earned huge sums on his music and gave him no royalties. Grieg was so concerned about these violations that in 1900 he wrote to Lyman Gage, a prominent American banker and politician, to ask for help. Oleson, with his midwestern banking connections, might have been another expert ally for Grieg in forcing publishing companies to pay royalties. While the results of the Gage request are unknown, it is very likely Oleson would have been eager to take active measures on Grieg's behalf.

In addition, Oleson, as one of the founders of the Norwegian singing movement, had both the financial resources and personal connections to see to the publishing and disseminating of Grieg's music to a large population of eager choral singers. Although Grieg, of course, did well enough without such support, it remains his path not taken. Norwegian-American male choruses, who repeatedly performed Grieg's "Land Sighting" and "The Great White Flock," would have jumped at the chance to sing pieces composed specifically for them by Norway's most famous composer. Grieg missed this opportunity, and he also turned down the chance to conduct in Chicago at the World's Fair in 1893. Again, in 1903, he refused the offer to conduct in Philadelphia for the opening of the grand new department store Wanamakers. His fear of sailing, his crippling asthma, and even his casual treatment of Oleson all kept him from expanding his devoted American audience.

The irony of this tale is that Grieg and Oleson would have met in Chicago had Grieg chosen to accept the invitation to conduct at the 1893 World's Fair. The Northwest Scandinavian Singers' Association choruses sang at this event, and Oleson, who attended as treasurer of that group's steering committee, would most certainly have been among those to host the illustrious Grieg.

Perhaps, if they had met in 1893, Oleson would have written directly to Grieg in 1896, rather than to Bjørnson.

In 1905, Oleson and his Grieg Mandskor hosted *Amerikakoret*—the Norwegian Royal University Male Chorus of Oslo with 45 singers directed by Olaus Andreas Grøndahl—on its first visit to Fort Dodge. Oleson then accompanied the group to Washington, D.C., for their historic performance at the White House. On *Amerikakoret's* return to Norway on July 3, the Oslo newspaper *Morgenbladet* reported, "With Norwegian songs and Norwegian melodies they have sung the old country into the hearts of the Norwegian Americans—they have awakened their longing and beautified their memories. Out of these moods will grow a firm conviction to support Norway in council and action if necessary."

The tour had indeed been a carefully planned political strategy to increase support for Norway among the Norwegian-American diaspora at a critical moment. Although the Norwegians had their own constitution, drafted and accepted already in 1814, they had not been independent since 1397. Sweden, who annexed Norway in 1814, controlled the Norwegian government, monitored Norwegians, and withheld diplomatic power on the international stage. On June 7, 1905, while Oslo's chorus was in America, Norway proclaimed its independence from Swedish rule. Not only had war with Sweden been averted, but the Swedish government, through a series of crisis decisions, was in the process of granting Norway its independence. Bjørnson, of course, had been a leader in the drive for independence.

Oleson worked all his life to develop his musical skills. Though never formally trained, he had considerable musical talent. He remained an amateur choral director and a group singer, yet he tried his hand at composing a few works. "In Flanders Fields" for men's chorus (on an English World War I text by John McCrae of Scotland) was taken up by other groups around the country and became reasonably well known. Oleson's "Norwegian-American Seventeenth-of-May Song" (*Norsk-amerikansk 17de maisang*) for men's chorus celebrated the signing of the Norwegian constitution on May 17, 1814. Oleson's other songs were also patriotic; "We are from Iowa" is a unison song, and "My Country 'Tis of Thee" for men's chorus has a new tune by Oleson. He published these four songs in Fort Dodge. "Come to Iowa" for mixed choir was also published in Fort Dodge in 1922 and "O Sagaland" in 1923.

By 1910 the Northwest Singers' Association had 32 choirs, and the Fort Dodge Grieg Mandskor had never missed a *sangerfest*. Over the years, after the formal dinners at the big *sangerfests*, American social dancing became part of the evening's entertainment. Norwegian folk dancing, if it occurred at all, was performed exclusively by exhibition dancing groups. Rural folk dance had traveled to America with its Norwegian stigma attached, as dancing at unruly, drunken, lower-class events. The second and third generations in America wanted little to do with this part of the Norwegian heritage.

In the 1920s and '30s, the choruses enthusiastically adapted the new American custom of weekend picnics at parks and other natural settings—a result of the growing mobility that the automobile brought. Wives and families formed active support groups. There were games for the children, food for everyone, and a concert by the men—in all, a full day at the park with family friends.

To this day, the umbrella organization, now called the Norwegian Singers' Association of America, and its magazine, *Sanger-hilsen*, founded in 1910, still thrive. There are now fewer of these lively singing groups for men, and the members tend to be older, but because groups admit any man who wants to sing and will sound out Norwegian syllables for the old Norwegian songs, the movement is still going strong. To appeal to modern tastes the choruses also sing new American songs: Broadway tunes, popular songs, and American folk melodies, each arranged for men's voices, usually with piano accompaniment. Women and families still

SHSI (DES MOINES)



Among Oleson's philanthropic gestures towards Fort Dodge was a large tract of park land. An avid botanist, he grew hundreds of kinds of iris and wrote *A Flora of Webster County, Iowa*.

form active support groups, and choral concerts continue as family events.

Oleson served as treasurer for the Norwegian Singers' Association of America for 25 years, and in 1925 became lifetime honorary president. Only in 1924 did he actually miss an American *sangerfest*, when, at age 75, he was on his second visit to Norway. There, he was honored by King Håkon VII with the St. Olaf's Medal for helping found Norwegian singing societies in America. Oleson attended his last *sangerfest* in 1940. He was 90 years old. His Grieg Male Chorus had become one of the leading musical organizations in Fort Dodge, and it continued long after his death in 1944, just short of his 95th birthday.

Through hard work, intelligence, and honesty of reputation, Olaf M. Oleson had joined the new Norwegian-American upper class as an educated, respected, and well-established individual. His position was earned and not the result of family name or background, as it might have been in Norway. At Oleson's death in 1944, there were many kind words, including these in the local newspaper: "He will not be forgotten in the community where he was such a moving spirit for good. . . . not alone because of the generous gifts of money, distributed with such a lavish and liberal hand, but also for his kindly personality and simple acts of friendly consideration that have no material rating." Oleson's

generosity went beyond philanthropy and kindness. His cultural and musical gifts were the truest and the most unusual ones. He helped bring the Norwegian tradition of men singing together to the Midwest and specifically to Fort Dodge. Then he worked hard to make the custom grow and evolve in new Norwegian communities of America. But his imagination took him one step further. By appealing directly to two of Norway's greatest champions of their culture—Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and Edvard Grieg—Olaf Oleson took a first step toward building an ongoing collaboration between Norwegian and Norwegian-American cultures. As the grand marshal of the Norwegian Singers' Association explained at the 50th celebration for Oleson's Grieg Male Chorus in 1941: "[The chorus] provides companionship, education, it is a practical lesson in democracy for no matter how prominent or how lowly the individual members they are all brothers in the chorus. . . . It teaches you harmony not alone in music but in your life outside."

If only Grieg and Bjørnson had understood. These singing groups in America embodied the new Norwegian ideals of enlightened progress and freedom with equal standing. Lost was an opportunity for cultural exchange that would have enriched them all. ❖

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NOTE ON SOURCES

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During research for this article, five new documents have been found. The previously unknown autograph manuscript that was sent to Oleson of Grieg's "Impromptu" (CW152, now EG175) is the most important. The second is Bjørnson's autograph poem manuscript; and third, the envelope that held the poem sheet and music sheet. These documents are in the Special Collections, State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City), as is the fourth new source, the previously unpublished original postcard from Bjørnson to Oleson. I thank SHSI Special Collections for use of these sources. The fifth new source is Oleson's original letter to Bjørnson in the Bjørnson Papers, Manuscript Collection, National Library, Oslo, Norway; thanks to Sigbjørn Grindheim for supplying a copy.

Sources on Oleson and Fort Dodge include: William Sayles Doan, *A Book of Days*, 2d ed. (Fort Dodge: The Messenger and Ogden Newspapers, 1992); "An Iowa Philanthropist," *Des Moines Sunday Register* (June 25, 1939), pp. 1, 3; *Sangerfest* programs (Webster County Historical Society archives); and articles in the *Fort Dodge Messenger and Chronicle*. I thank Roger Natte for his generous help in locating and providing copies of these newspaper sources. Oleson's article in the *Minneapolis Budstikken* (Jan. 23, 1886) appears in the Gunnar J. Malmin Papers, Norwegian American Historical Association, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN. I thank the staff for their generous help.

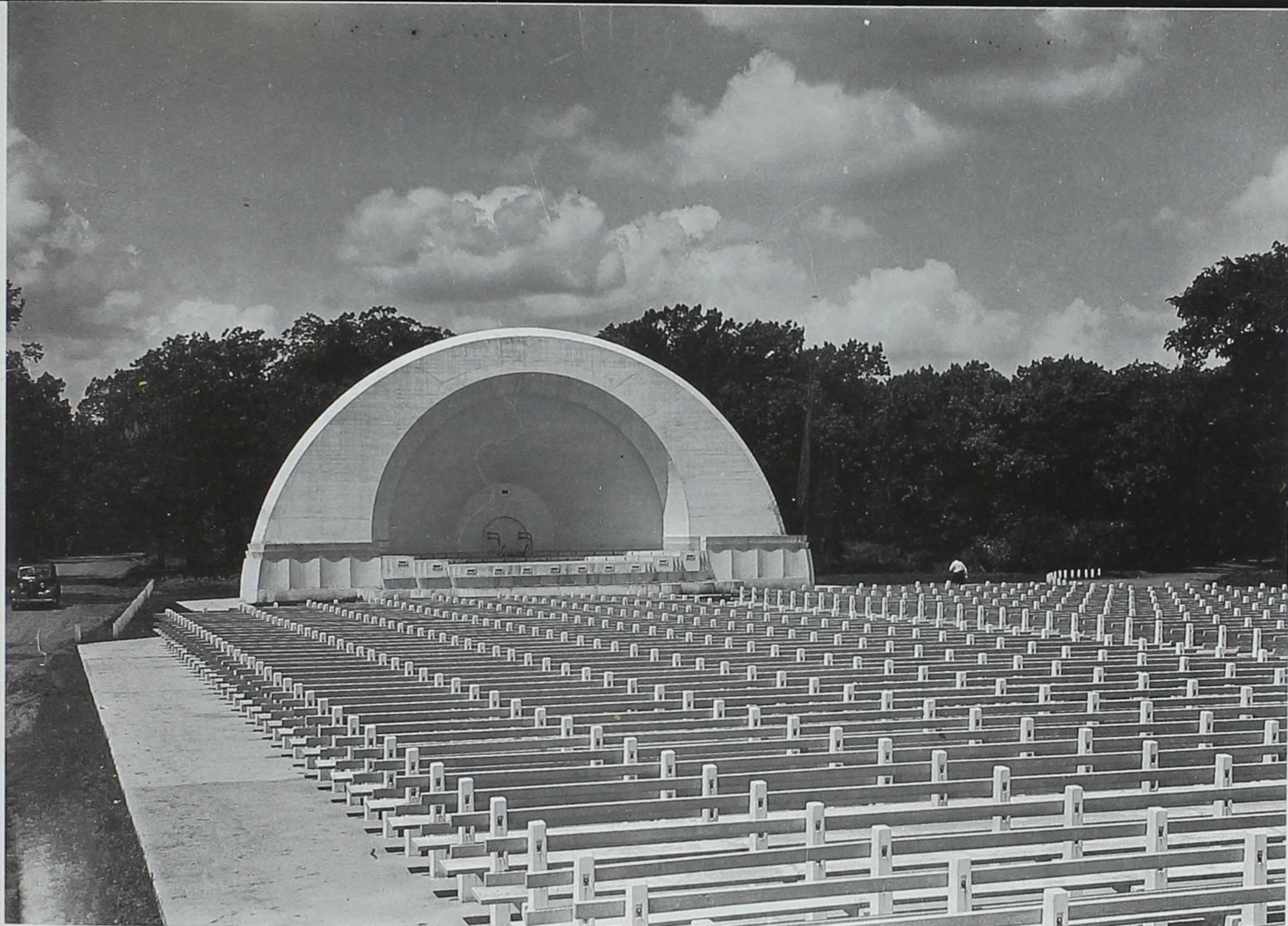
Sources on Edvard Grieg include: Finn Benestad and Dag Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg: mennesket og kunstneren* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1980), 1st ed., p. 296; (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1990), 2nd ed., p. 352; Benestad and Schjelderup-Ebbe, *Edvard Grieg: The Man and the Artist*, trans. William H. Halverson and Leland B. Sateren (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), p. 347; Edvard Grieg, *Brev i utvalg 1862-1907*, ed. Finn Benestad, 2 vols. (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1998), I:73-74; footnote 101, 2:8-24. For William H. Halverson's translation of Bjørnson's letter to Grieg, and Grieg's reply, see *Edvard Grieg, Letters to*

Colleagues and Friends, ed. Finn Benestad, trans. William H. Halverson (Columbus, Ohio: Peer Gynt Press, 2000), pp. 130-131 and footnote 61. The original Norwegian for Bjørnson's poem "Norwegian Tones" is in Edvard Grieg, *Complete Works*, vol. 17, ed. Dan Fog (Frankfurt: C. F. Peters, 1985), my translation in this article. Grieg's autograph manuscript of "Impromptu" (CW152, now EG175) that he kept for himself is in the Grieg Collection, Bergen Public Library, Bergen, Norway. It was first published in *Grieg's Complete Works*, 17:84-85. Its editor, Dan Fog, is in error when he states (p. 163) that a facsimile of Grieg's music autograph appeared in the newspaper *Bergens tidende* (Nov. 24, 1959). Only an incomplete facsimile of Grieg's March 5, 1896, verse letter to Bjørnson was published there. Its transcription there is also incomplete.

For Norwegian immigration, see Odd S. Lovoll, *A Century of Urban Life: The Norwegians in Chicago before 1930* (Champaign, IL: Norwegian-American Historical Association with University of Illinois Press, 1988); and Carlton C. Qualey, *Norwegian Settlement in the United States* (Northfield, MN: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1938).

For Bjørnson's tour of America, see Eva Lund Haugen and Einar Haugen, trans. and eds., *Land of the Free: Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's America Letters, 1880-1881* (Northfield, MN: Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1978). Bjørnson was a household name for most Norwegian-Americans, either from their years in Norway or from hearing Norwegian-American pastors preach against him. There could have been no better advertising for Bjørnson's midwestern tour. The dollar figures, the disappointing \$2000 and the expected \$4000, would be about \$35,000 and \$70,000, respectively, for a winter midwestern lecture tour. (I thank Ginalie Swaim for this comparison.) The larger number resembles what a reasonably well-known lecturer touring college campuses can earn today. Anderson had estimated that Bjørnson would make about \$100 net for approximately 35 lectures. In spite of Bjørnson's bitter complaints from Fort Dodge, he ended up with about what Anderson had projected. Bjørnson hoped for even more because, though he had always earned well from his writings and lectures, he was, as always, seriously in debt. He had even put his beloved country estate, Aulestad, up for sale in 1880.

Complete annotations to this article, as well as the original Norwegian, are in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files (State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City).



BOTH PHOTOS: SHS (IOWA CITY)

Olaf M. Oleson's 1944 obituary in the Fort Dodge newspaper noted that "in 1938 a very unusual and really wonderful event took place here at the dedicatory ceremony at the band shell [above] in Oleson park, Mr. Oleson directed the Grieg Mandskor, which he organized, in a song, which he composed, in a park, which he donated to the city." Photographed here in 1939 by the WPA, the bandshell was designed by Iowa architect Henry L. Kamphoefner and is currently the focus of a local restoration project.

Iowa Architect of Acoustics Designed Fort Dodge & Sioux City Bandshells

The Karl King Bandshell (*above*) in Fort Dodge's Oleson Park commemorates two of its musical citizens. Olaf M. Oleson (*see previous article*), who donated 64 acres for the park in 1905, was a mover and shaker in Norwegian men's choral singing on local and national levels. Karl King was a nationally recognized bandmaster, composer, and conductor. But this 1930s concrete bandshell also symbolizes significant changes in architecture and musical performance.

Bandshells like the one above were major departures from the small,

gazebo-like bandstands constructed in hundreds of American towns and cities after the Civil War. Although local bands were a staple of community life, bandstand styles varied enormously. Some were round, some square, some octagonal. Some were classical; others, rustic; many, heavy with millwork. Open on all sides so

the music could reach the listeners seated on surrounding benches or grass, the bandstand often occupied a convenient and central spot in a community—in a town square or park. Such bandstands could accommodate the 20 or so



BAND STAND, RIVERSIDE PARK, SIOUX CITY, IOWA. 190-

musicians that made up the typical town band. Such a bandstand admittedly did not provide the best acoustics, but its "centerpiece" position on the late 19th-century town square signaled culture and civilization to both townspeople and visitors and bespoke the strong social role of the community band.

Even before the turn of the century, however, landscape architects were preferring placement of bandstands in more natural settings, by water and amid greenery. (In the years ahead, the distracting noise of automobiles around town-square bandstands would reinforce this argument.) After 1900, small, local bands were losing audiences to phonographs, radio, and jazz—as well as to the nationally touring bands that required more space, better acoustics, and a more formalized relationship to the audience. The gazebo-like bandstand form gradually gave way to the large bandshell, which directed the sound outward in one direction—some more successfully than others—towards an audience seated in rows. By the 1920s, older bandstands were falling into disrepair and disuse, and larger communities had hired architects to build shells.

Although economic hard times scotched many community plans for bandshells, some were nevertheless built under 1930s New Deal programs. In this state, two were designed by Iowa architect Henry Kamphoefner, born in Des Moines in 1907 and educated at Morningside College in Sioux City. With architecture degrees from the University of Illinois and Columbia, Kamphoefner practiced in Sioux City during the 1930s and then left the state and shifted to teaching and administration—but not before he had designed the Grandview Music Pavilion in Sioux City (*above right*), and the Oleson Park Music Pavilion in Fort Dodge (*previous page*). Both were public works projects, and both were "created with the then most up-to-date methods of working in reinforced concrete," according to archi-

tectural historian Martha H. Bowers in a 1979 paper. "The two bandshells are variations on a single theme," she writes. "Both are essentially conic sections with concave inner surfaces, set on irregularly-shaped, deep platforms, and are wholly of reinforced concrete construction. The shells serve as covering over the performers and as collectors and reflectors of sound. The platforms on which they rest extend at the rear to form dressing rooms and storage spaces. . . . The bandshell at Sioux City is in a natural amphitheater, while the Fort Dodge shell is set on a relatively flat area of ground.

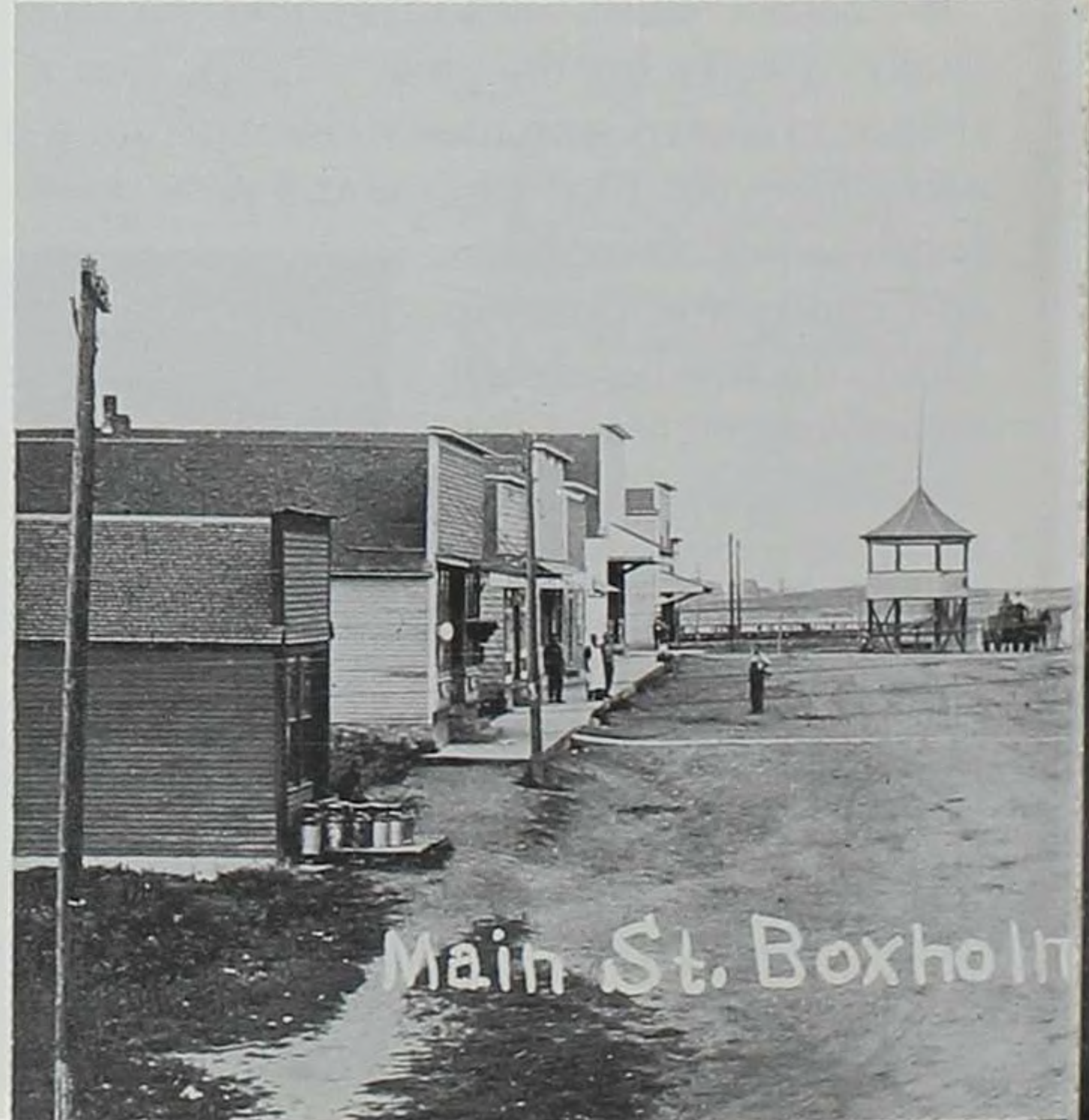
"In both bandshells, the architect kept decorative elements to a minimum," Bowers commented. "The form of each structure is a forthright articulation of its function, which is to reflect sound as evenly and as far as possible."

Bowers notes that "acoustical forms held Kamphoefner's interest even after he left Iowa." In 1945 in *Progressive Architecture* magazine, Kamphoefner criticized American bandshells built earlier in the century: "Many of the early sound shells were designed without even an elementary consideration for the simplest fundamentals of sound reflection. The ellipsoid shape was often used. That form reflected all sound from the stage to certain focal points in the audience areas, where a bedlam of raucous noise was heard. At certain points the drum might be emphasized, and at others, diminished. At other points the violin might not be heard at all."

Placement also concerned Kamphoefner, and he used a small bandshell in Ackley, Iowa, to exemplify "the typical ostentation of the small town in placing the shell where it can be seen by every tourist and traveling salesman who passes through the village." Echoing earlier landscape architects, he preferred bandshell placement in "a quiet portion of an isolated public park, away from the noise and confusion of the town, where



ALL PHOTOS: SHS (IOWA CITY)



Designed by Kamphoefner and built during the Depression, the Sioux City Grandview Park bandshell became a reality thanks to federal and state emergency relief programs and local funds. As the town newspaper acknowledged, this bandshell, "beautiful in its simplicity and powerful in its utility" evolved from "inspiration, hope, courage, artistry, pride, enthusiasm, ambition, labor, management and of course, the necessary funds."



the music could be heard unaccompanied by the screech of automobile brakes and the blast of auto horns. At such a site the audience could be more easily screened by tree masses and heavy planting. The site should be a 'deaf' one where the volume of music can range from great power to the most delicate pianissimo. The site at Ackley causes a bouncing of sound, a constant echo and re-echo from near-by buildings back and forth to other buildings."

Sioux City unveiled its bandshell in a week of public performances in late May 1935. The *Sioux City Journal* described "the white band shell studding a cup shaped greensward" as "nature's loveliness accentuated by man's creation." When the band of the local Monahan American Legion post (which had labored to make the bandshell a reality) opened the dedication, the audience of 5,000 had immediate evidence that the acoustics were just right. "Every note was heard in its true tone," the *Journal* noted, "the shell reflecting the music accurately and powerfully over and beyond the crest of the cup shaped bowl." Later in the week, the performance of

Mendelssohn's oratorio *Elijah*, "seldom performed out of doors," the *Journal* added, "was another tribute to the exceptional acoustics of the music pavilion. Solo as well as choral selections were audible even above the highest tiers of seats in the amphitheater."

Today Kamphoefner's bandshells in Fort Dodge and Sioux City are local landmarks. And both continue to project the spirited sounds of summer band concerts and other performances outward to audiences who appreciate the pleasures of live music under Iowa skies.

—by Ginalie Swaim, editor

NOTE ON SOURCES

Major sources were Martha H. Bowers, "Four Buildings by Henry Kamphoefner" (unpublished paper, 1979, in files of State Historic Preservation Office, State Historical Society of Iowa); Henry L. Kamphoefner, "The Acoustics of Music Shells," *Progressive Architecture* (Sept. 1945), 93-97; Margaret Hindle Hazen and Robert M. Hazen, *The Music Men: An Illustrated History of Brass Bands in America, 1800-1920* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Press, 1987); and S. Frederick Starr, ed., *The Oberlin Book of Bandstands* (Washington, DC: Preservation Press, 1987). See also Scott Sorensen and B. Paul Chicoine, *Sioux City: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk, VA: Donning, 1982); John Schmidt, *A Historical Profile of Sioux City* (Sioux City: Sioux City Stationery Co., 1969); and the *Sioux City Journal*, May 25-30, 1935. Thanks to Roger Natte (Webster County Historical Society, Fort Dodge) for more information.



In the 19th and early 20th century, small bandstands like these were often centrally located in town parks or squares. From left: bandstands in Polk City, Boxholm, and Calmar, Iowa.

musicians that made up the typical town band. Such a bandstand admittedly did not provide the best acoustics, but its "centerpiece" position on the late 19th-century town square signaled culture and civilization to both townspeople and visitors and bespoke the strong social role of the community band.

Even before the turn of the century, however, landscape architects were preferring placement of bandstands in more natural settings, by water and amid greenery. (In the years ahead, the distracting noise of automobiles around town-square bandstands would reinforce this argument.) After 1900, small, local bands were losing audiences to phonographs, radio, and jazz—as well as to the nationally touring bands that required more space, better acoustics, and a more formalized relationship to the audience. The gazebo-like bandstand form gradually gave way to the large bandshell, which directed the sound outward in one direction—some more successfully than others—towards an audience seated in rows. By the 1920s, older bandstands were falling into disrepair and disuse, and larger communities had hired architects to build shells.

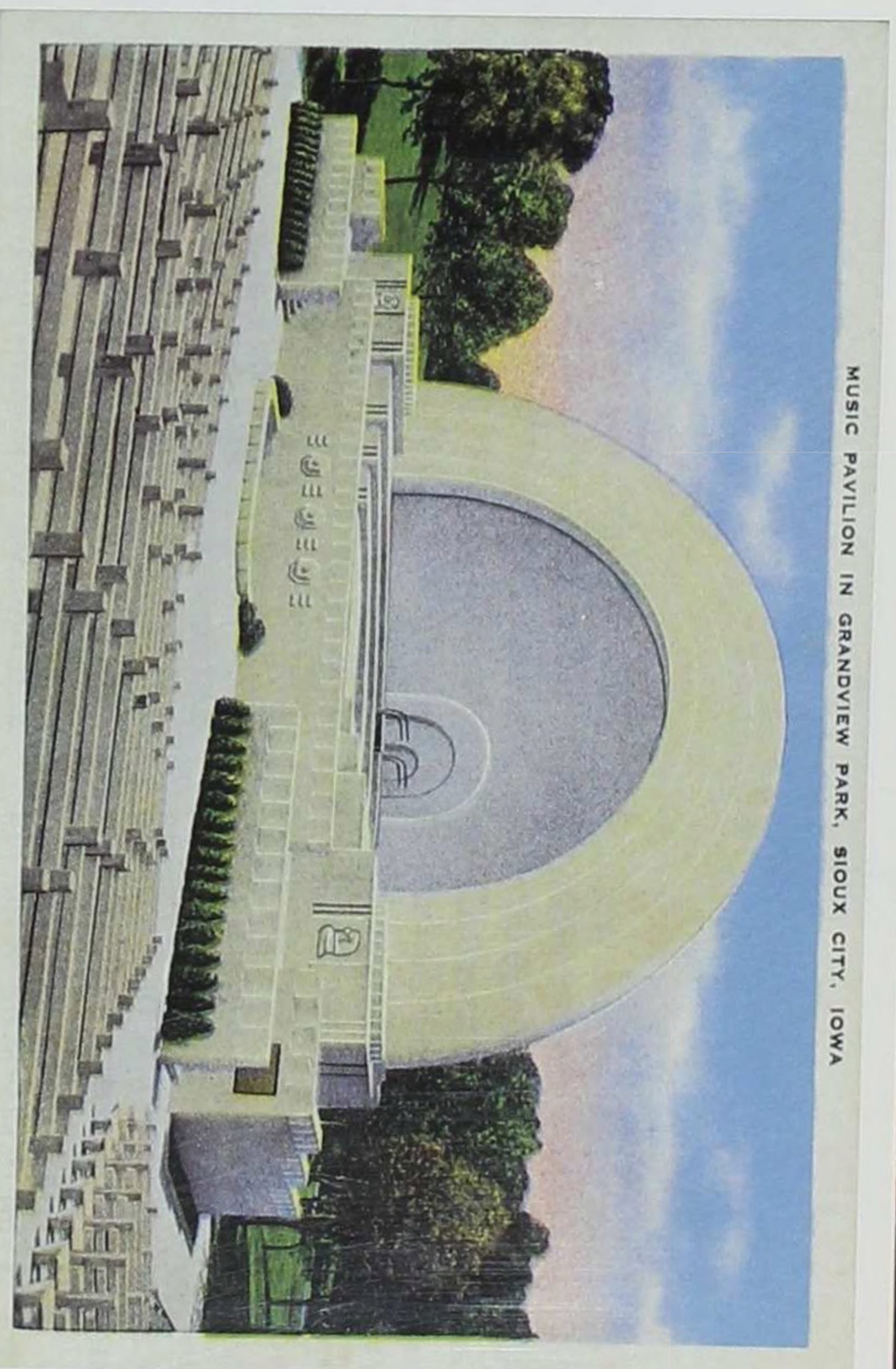
Although economic hard times scotched many community plans for bandshells, some were nevertheless built under 1930s New Deal programs. In this state, two were designed by Iowa architect Henry Kamphoefner, born in Des Moines in 1907 and educated at Morningside College in Sioux City. With architecture degrees from the University of Illinois and Columbia, Kamphoefner practiced in Sioux City during the 1930s and then left the state and shifted to teaching and administration—but not before he had designed the Grandview Music Pavilion in Sioux City (*above right*), and the Oleson Park Music Pavilion in Fort Dodge (*previous page*). Both were public works projects, and both were "created with the then most up-to-date methods of working in reinforced concrete," according to archi-

tectural historian Martha H. Bowers in a 1979 paper: "The two bandshells are variations on a single theme," she writes. "Both are essentially conic sections with concave inner surfaces, set on irregularly-shaped, deep platforms, and are wholly of reinforced concrete construction. The shells serve as covering over the performers and as collectors and reflectors of sound. The platforms on which they rest extend at the rear to form dressing rooms and storage spaces. . . . The bandshell at Sioux City is in a natural amphitheater, while the Fort Dodge shell is set on a relatively flat area of ground. "In both bandshells, the architect kept decorative elements to a minimum," Bowers commented. "The form of each structure is a forthright articulation of its function, which is to reflect sound as evenly and as far as possible."

Bowers notes that "acoustical forms held Kamphoefner's interest even after he left Iowa." In 1945 in *Progressive Architecture* magazine, Kamphoefner criticized American bandshells built earlier in the century: "Many of the early sound shells were designed without even an elementary consideration for the simplest fundamentals of sound reflection. The ellipsoid shape was often used. That form reflected all sound from the stage to certain focal points in the audience areas, where a bedlam of raucous noise was heard. At certain points the drum might be emphasized, and at others, diminished. At other points the violin might not be heard at all."

Placement also concerned Kamphoefner, and he used a small bandshell in Ackley, Iowa, to exemplify "the typical ostentation of the small town in placing the shell where it can be seen by every tourist and traveling salesman who passes through the village." Echoing earlier landscape architects, he preferred bandshell placement in "a quiet portion of an isolated public park, away from the noise and confusion of the town, where

Designed by Kamphoefner and built during the Depression, the Sioux City Grandview Park bandshell became a reality thanks to federal and state emergency relief programs and local funds. As the town newspaper acknowledged, this bandshell, "beautiful in its simplicity and powerful in its utility" evolved from "inspiration, hope, courage, artistry, pride, enthusiasm, ambition, labor, management and of course, the necessary funds."



MUSIC PAVILION IN GRANDVIEW PARK, SIOUX CITY, IOWA

the music could be heard unaccompanied by the screech of automobile brakes and the blast of auto horns. At such a site the audience could be more easily screened by tree masses and heavy planting. The site should be a 'deaf' one where the volume of music can range from great power to the most delicate pianissimo. The site at Ackley causes a bouncing of sound, a constant echo and re-echo from near-by buildings back and forth to other buildings."

Sioux City unveiled its bandshell in a week of public performances in late May 1935. The *Sioux City Journal* described "the white band shell studding a cup shaped greensward" as "nature's loveliness accentuated by man's creation." When the band of the local Monahan American Legion post (which had labored to make the bandshell a reality) opened the dedication, the audience of 5,000 had immediate evidence that the acoustics were just right: "Every note was heard in its true tone," the *Journal* noted, "the shell reflecting the music accurately and powerfully over and beyond the crest of the cup shaped bowl." Later in the week, the performance of

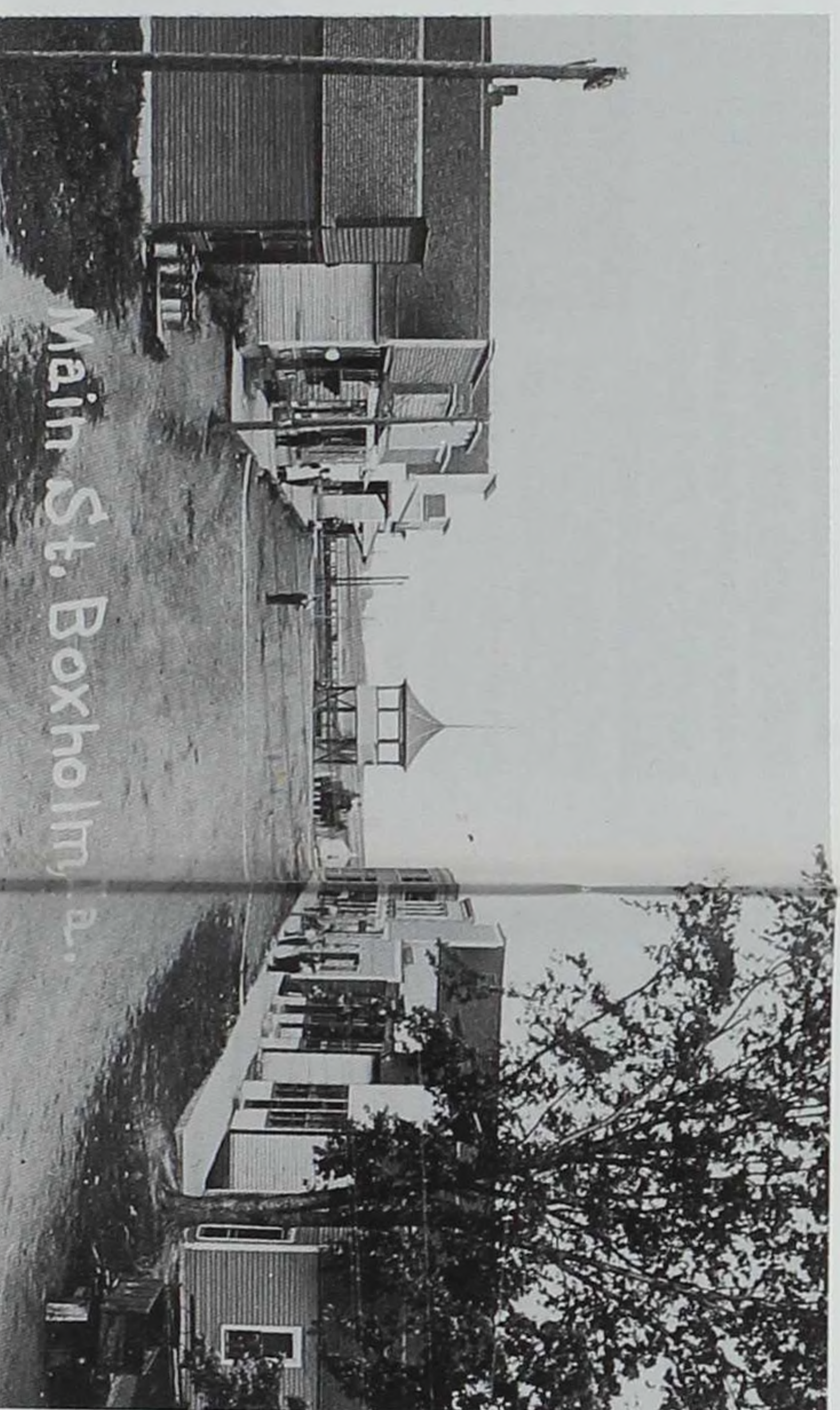
Mendelssohn's oratorio *Elijah*, "seldom performed out of doors," the *Journal* added, "was another tribute to the exceptional acoustics of the music pavilion. Solo as well as choral selections were audible even above the highest tiers of seats in the amphitheater."

Today Kamphoefner's bandshells in Fort Dodge and Sioux City are local landmarks. And both continue to project the spirited sounds of summer band concerts and other performances outward to audiences who appreciate the pleasures of live music under Iowa skies.

—by Ginnalite Swain, editor

NOTE ON SOURCES
Major sources were Martha H. Bowers, "Four Buildings by Henry Kamphoefner" (unpublished paper, 1979, in files of State Historical Preservation Office, State Historical Society of Iowa); Henry L. Kamphoefner, "The Acoustics of Music Shells," *Progressive Architecture* (Sept. 1945), 93-97; Margaret Hindle Hazen and Robert M. Hazen, *The Music Men: An Illustrated History of Brass Bands in America, 1800-1920* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Press, 1987); and S. Frederick Starr, ed., *The Oberlin Book of Bandstands* (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1987). See also Scott Sorenson and B. Paul Chicone, *Sioux City: A Pictorial History* (Norfolk, Va.: Denning, 1982); John Schmidt, *A Historical Profile of Sioux City* (Sioux City: Sioux City Stationery Co., 1969); and the *Sioux City Journal*, May 25-30, 1935. Thanks to Roger Nattie (Webster County Historical Society, Fort Dodge) for more information.

ALL PHOTOS: SHS (IOWA CITY)



In the 19th and early 20th century, small bandstands like these were often centrally located in town parks or squares. From left: bandstands in Polk City, Boxholm, and Calmar, Iowa.

Reading the Past

Olaf Martin Oleson (subject of the previous profile in this issue) immigrated to Fort Dodge, Iowa, in 1870 from Norway and quickly established himself as a successful business leader in the community. At the same time, he worked tirelessly to promote a native-language singing group in his community and similar groups across the country. Such stories are the stuff of history.

Because all Iowans have immigrated to this state from other places—yes, even the Meskwakis of Tama County—immigration has long been a popular topic for historians of all types, as well as for readers of history. How did immigrants adapt to their new surroundings? What traditions did they bring with them from their points of emigration, how long did those traditions survive, and how did they change?

For a long time, historians focused on the process of assimilation—the integration of immigrants into the dominant, prevailing culture of their new home. The “melting pot” metaphor for assimilation has persisted in the popular imagination long after professional historians proposed other more apt metaphors, such as the patchwork quilt or mosaic, which emphasize the piecing together of separate, distinctive elements into a pluralistic whole rather than a “melting down” of those elements into a homogenous, undistinguished mass. Historians now repeatedly call attention to the remarkable persistence of Old World traditions and to the ways the host culture adapted to immigrants as well as the ways immigrants adapted to it. Although many of those recent studies focus on immigrants to the nation’s urban centers, one of the

best studies focuses on the rural Midwest and draws much of its evidence from Iowa’s German and Scandinavian immigrant communities: Jon Gjerde’s *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830–1917* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

Gjerde’s themes are timely ones at a time when Iowa politicians worry about new immigrants who seem slow to adopt their host culture’s language and values. *The Minds of the West* opens by noting that in the mid-19th century some native-born Americans in the East worried that “foreign minds” with little or no appreciation for American traditions, institutions, and religious and political values would come to dominate in the Middle West, threatening the future of the United States if they were not quickly amalgamated.

Who were these dangerous foreigners? They were immigrants from northern Europe, including, among others, the Norwegian immigrants who settled around Decorah and across Iowa’s northern counties, the Swedish immigrants in Page, Montgomery, and Webster Counties, the Danish immigrants in Audubon County, and the more numerous German immigrants scattered across the state and the region. In these relatively isolated, culturally defined enclaves, Old World values shaped institutions—family, church, and community—and relationships within them. Especially in these communities, but even when they settled in more mixed communities, immigrants persisted in using their native languages and celebrating native traditions for decades—in some places even for generations. They founded native-language newspapers and musical groups and

established separate schools and churches where they taught their children and worshiped in their native language until—in a part of Iowa history that few would point to with pride—harassment and public pressure (official and unofficial) forced them to give up such practices during World War I.

The immigrants’ loyalty to their adopted nation was built largely on the freedom it offered them to retain the values they brought with them to their new home. “Indeed,” Gjerde argues in *The Minds of the West*, “a political environment that permitted immigrants to maintain their religious beliefs and converse in their home language worked to augment loyalties to the nation.” At the same time, allegiance to the nation that offered the freedom to recreate religious and cultural traditions often came into conflict with the hierarchical and authoritarian religious and family structures that those ethnic communities recreated. It is the resulting “interactions, tensions, and conflicts” that are the main focus of *The Minds of the West*, as Gjerde traces them in the context of churches, families, and political participation.

The tensions were particularly acute when American individualism and freedoms encountered the demands and structures of immigrants’ religious beliefs and institutions. Religious leaders often insisted, for example, that religious freedom meant the freedom to establish religious schools alongside their churches to preserve their religious traditions. Many of their parishioners, however, used their freedom to send their children to public schools, even when it meant that

JON GJERDE

The
ETHNOCULTURAL EVOLUTION
Minds
IN THE RURAL MIDDLE WEST
of the
1830-1917
West



The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830-1917, by Jon Gjerde. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997, xiii, 426 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, index. \$39.95 cloth.

the children's ties to traditional religion were weakened under the pressures of the public school environment.

Families faced other pressures to assimilate. For example, native-born neighbors tended to ridicule German families who flouted "Yankee" gender relationships by having women work in the fields along with their husbands and fathers. In three chapters in the middle of the book, Gjerde contrasts relationships within native, "Yankee" families with those in immigrant families. He found that even when European immigrants adopted local farming methods and housing and clothing styles, they retained a distinctive pattern of long-term family relationships for a century or more. "The ambition of the European farmer, epitomized by the German farmer . . . was 'to see his sons on reaching manhood established with their families on farms clustered about his own.' The American

father, on the other hand, made no such effort on behalf of his offspring, for 'to be a self made man was his ideal.' Each new generation would create its place in society just as its predecessor had done." As a result, European immigrant farm families were more likely to keep farms in the family and even extend them over time.

Immigrants' participation in politics presents a similarly mixed picture. Even as immigrants adapted to pressures from their local communities and national culture, they invented ethnic identities that they shared as an interest group with people in the broader society. In his final chapter, Gjerde shows how ethnic identities coalesced in voting and arguing about three significant issues in 19th-century midwestern politics: public schooling, temperance, and woman suffrage. Despite ethnic associations with certain stances on all of these issues, ethnic groups sharply divided within themselves over each issue.

In every case Gjerde sensitively balances the forces of assimilation and ethnic preservation. It's not that immigrants did not adapt to American culture; it's just that it was a complicated process. Over time, a series of complex and dynamic (not just one-way) cultural negotiations integrated immigrants into their host culture. "In the end," Gjerde concludes, the "interactions, tensions, and conflicts" within ethnic communities as well as between those communities and the larger culture "exemplify the genius of an American tradition that used freedoms of belief to amalgamate its heterogeneous citizenry into a pluralistic whole."

Politically sensitive readers will note that it was "freedoms of belief," not coercion, that led to "a pluralistic whole," not a oneness of mind. And readers with even a basic knowledge of Iowa history and culture will note that the ethnic enclaves that so worried some observers in the 19th century have become an integral and valuable part of Iowa's cultural and economic landscape; today, ethnic celebrations and ethnic theme towns are important to heritage tourism in Iowa as well as across the nation.

The Minds of the West is a big, important—and demanding—book that deals with big, important ideas and issues. Sometimes those ideas can seem abstract and daunting when Gjerde introduces them—as they must in the way I have summarized them here—but his narratives give life to those ideas by showing how they played out in the lives of real communities and individuals. He tells, for example, of the "aging immigrant" who observed that he had "nothing against the English language, I use it myself every day. But if we don't teach our children Norwegian, what will they do when they get to heaven?"

The Minds of the West is a book that should be read by immigrants, descendants of immigrants, and those who care about how we continue to respond to new immigrants in our midst. ❖

In this new department—"Reading the Past"—Marvin Bergman introduces selected books of pertinence and interest to general readers keen on Iowa and its past. Bergman is the editor of The Annals of Iowa, published by the State Historical Society of Iowa.

"I keep coming back because I love Iowa. I owe Iowa. I love Iowa people. I have memories of Iowa that will never be erased."

—Meredith Willson



For Release: January 31

Meredith Willson, composer, conductor, radio and television star, and author, who has now added to his long list of achievements a novel entitled "Who Did What to Fedalia?" Scheduled for publication by Doubleday on February 7, the novel tells the story of a young Iowa girl who came to the Big City to make a career as a singer and what she learned about the differences between Fort Madison, Iowa and New York, New York. Like his heroine, Meredith Willson is a native-born Iowan. He is currently heard on Tallulah Bankhead's "Big Show" and "The Meredith Willson Music Room," and seen on the TV panel, "The Name's the Same." He is the author of one previous book, "And There I Stood With My Piccolo," which was an account of some of the more humorous aspects of his life.

Credit: NBC Photo

Meredith Willson

Iowa's "Music Man" & "Ambassador to All the World"

by John E. Miller

What American is not familiar with Meredith Willson, author of the 1957 smash hit Broadway musical, *The Music Man*? In it, actor Robert Preston, in the role of the rascally but charming Professor Harold Hill, delighted audiences as a fiendishly clever con artist whose ability to sell band instruments and uniforms to gullible parents had as its only purpose the lining of his own pockets.

Most people understand that the fictional River City, where the play was set in the year 1912, was inspired by the author's own hometown of Mason City, Iowa, where he would have been ten years old at the time. But few people probably realize that even before writing this nostalgic nosegay to his hometown, Willson had been for many years not only the town's biggest booster

but also the promotion king of the entire state. Iowa probably never had a more vocal or effective spokesperson than this piccolo player from Mason City. Everywhere he traveled, Meredith Willson carried memories of his hometown along with him.

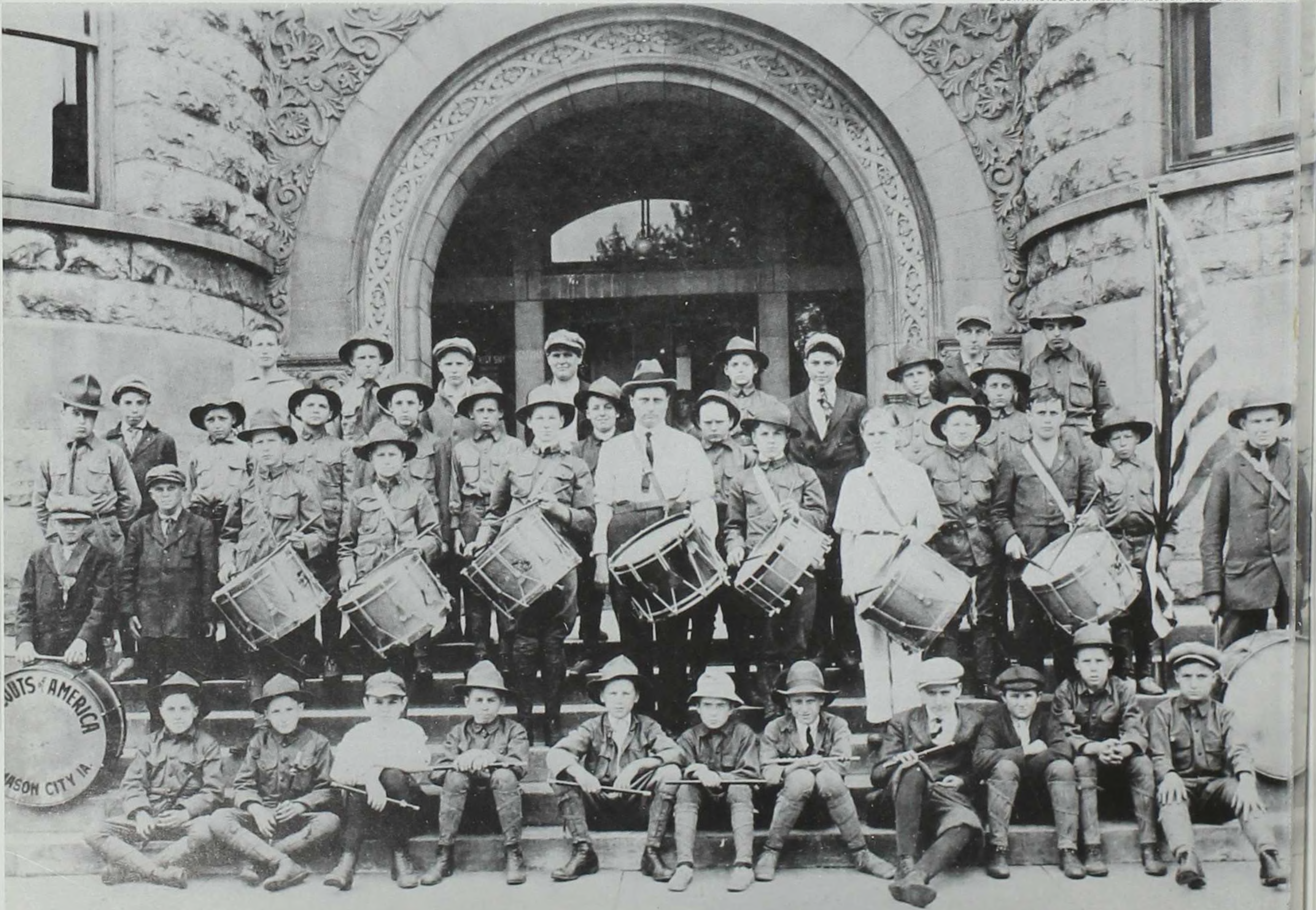
That he became Iowa's most enthusiastic cheerleader might seem a bit ironic, considering his rapid getaway after graduating from Mason City High School in 1919. The six-foot, well-scrubbed musical prodigy (he played the piano, banjo, mandolin, and ukulele as well as the flute and piccolo, sang in the school's choir and glee club, and even did a bit of conducting during summer recesses) headed straight for New York, where he enrolled in the Damrosch Institute of Musical Art (later renamed the Julliard School of Music). He also married

Right: Meredith Willson (center) and his brother, Cedric, practice piano under the watchful eye of their mother, Rosalie Willson.

Below: Willson poses with his piccolo (fourth from right, front row) with Mason City's Boy Scout band, about 1916.



BOTH PHOTOS: COURTESY OF MASON CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY



his high school sweetheart, Elizabeth "Peggy" Wilson (with one L).

Willson's meteoric rise in the musical world included three years as principal flutist in John Philip Sousa's touring band and five more years playing in the New York Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of the famed Arturo Toscanini and others. By 1928, he was guest conducting the Seattle Symphony, and during the 1930s, while sometimes wielding the baton for the Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles symphony orchestras, he took over as musical director of NBC Radio's western division.

During the thirties and forties, his radio programs involved him with performers from Frank Morgan and Fanny Brice to George Burns and Gracie Allen. Meanwhile, he completed two symphonies of his own, premiered by the San Francisco Symphony orchestra in 1936 and 1940. In Hollywood, he teamed up with Charlie Chaplin to do the score for *The Great Dictator* and composed the music for the movie version of Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes*. During World War II, the U.S. Army assigned him to the Armed Forces Radio Service.

It all added up to quite an impressive résumé for the small-town Iowan who had left home at his first opportunity. All the while, however, Willson couldn't get Mason City out of his mind. He returned home frequently to visit family and renew friendships with old acquaintances. Memories of his boyhood continually flooded his consciousness, and radio programs in which he failed to mention his old hometown were few.

In his 1948 autobiography, *And There I Stood With My Piccolo*, Willson referred to himself as "a small-town kid." Always genial, considerate, and unpretentious, he had a way of easily sliding conversations around to the subject of his boyhood in Mason City. Attitudes, values, and lessons that he had learned there—at home, on the streets, in school, at Sunday school, and in the band—stuck with him the rest of his life, and he wanted other people to know about them.



During World War II, Willson provided music for the Armed Forces Radio Service, based in Hollywood. He signed this portrait: "Iowa—it's a Beautiful name!"

Many of the positive memories of his boyhood found their way into a song he wrote about his native state in 1944. "Iowa" was sung on the radio and recorded on disk by Bing Crosby, and two years later the state of Iowa adopted it as its centennial song:

I-o-wa, it's a beautiful name
When you say it like we say it back home.
It's the robin in the willows,
It's the postmaster's friendly hello.
I-o-wa, it's a beautiful name
You'll remember it wherever you roam;
It's the sumac in September,
It's the squeak of your shoes in the snow.



Sheet music of Willson's "Iowa" is autographed by Willson and singer Bing Crosby, who addressed it: "To a grand state."

It's the Sunday School and the old river bend;
 Songs on the porch after dark;
 It's the corner store and a penny to spend,
 You and your girl in the park.
 It's the picnic ground and the whippoorwill's call,
 Acorns and the dew on the lawn;
 It's the County fair and the Oddfellows Hall,
 Meeting the circus at dawn.
 I-o-wa, it's a beautiful name
 When you say it like we say it back home,
 It's a promise for tomorrow
 And a mem'ry of long, long ago.
 I-o-wa, what a beautiful name
 When you say it like we say it back home.

"Iowa" was the first of many musical presents Willson wrote over the years to his old home state. In 1948 he was back in Mason City for the North Iowa Band Festival with his new wife, Rini. (Divorced, he had just married the former Ralina Zarova, a French-Russian opera singer.) Impulse prompted him to write a new piece, "The Iowa Indian Song." Its lyrics, he informed an enthusiastic hometown audience, were inspired by his boasting about his native state to the new Mrs. Willson, who was visiting there for the first time. The words this time were less lyrical, but more playful, than those of his previous effort:

Knee high by the Fourth of July in Iowa!
 Aye I Ky-yi-choo-oh, Iowa, Iowa!
 Belt high by the fi'th of July in Iowa!
 Aye I Ki-yi-choo-oh Iowa, Iowa!
 Just throw the golden seed down
 Right down on Iowa ground
 Before it ever gets there
 That seed will grow in midair
 Sky high by the sixth of July in Iowa!
 Aye I Ky-yi-choo-oh, Iowa, Iowa!
 Back there where I was born in Iowa.
 That's what we call tall corn in Iowa
 Aye I Ky-yi-choo-oh, Iowa, Iowa.
 Aye I Ky-yi-choo-oh, Iowa, Iowa

Sentiments and songs such as these earned Willson his reputation as "Iowa's Super Salesman," and a "one-man Mason City Chamber of Commerce." Calling Willson "Mr. Iowa Ambassador to all the world," Iowa journalist Don Ross wrote in 1953 that "not only over the airways, but in hundreds of personal appearances, this Iowan has boosted his native soil." Ross continued: "In the days before World War II, I well recall how the British sent salesmen all over the world to sell the idea that British-made goods are tops. . . . Iowans have long had a similar salesman in Meredith Willson. He delights in telling the world about Iowa farms, Iowa factories, Iowa leaders, Iowa businessmen and all other things Iowan."

"Meredith Willson and Iowa are synonymous," Ross summed up. "He's made us known for something in addition to our tall corn, blustery winters and humid summers. Even if our state hired him on a full time basis to go out and sell Iowa, I doubt that he could do a more effective job of bringing credit to that state."

In his "tall corn" imagery, Willson gave substance to his reputation as something of a cornball himself. He did not mind being identified as a romantic and a sentimentalist. But some Iowans were ambivalent about the

way outsiders identified them with corn and corniness. In October 1950, when *Cedar Rapids Gazette* music columnist Les Zacheis reviewed an album of college songs, he reported that Iowa's "Corn Song," dating from earlier decades, was included. "Putting it bluntly," he wrote, "the university and its fine football teams deserve a better rouser than the rickety-tickey tune that fate wished on them. This may have been hot stuff in the days of the silver cornet band but it's strictly from hunger today." The former band man looked to Meredith Willson to "turn out a spirited, swingy state song fit for a university some day."

Not long after, Willson obliged, unveiling his new "Iowa Fight Song" with full musical accompaniment on *The Big Show*, the NBC radio variety program for which he was musical director. The State University of Iowa adopted the song in 1950, and Willson's lyrics of "Fight! Fight! Fight! For Iowa" still ring out at its athletic events.

With the growing popularity of the new medium of television, *The Big Show* remained on the air for only a few years. With its demise, Willson's career in radio was reduced to a daily program on which he played and commented on classical music. His stint on *The Big Show* was memorable primarily for the theme song that he wrote for its star, Tallulah Bankhead, "May the Good Lord Bless and Keep You," which had been his mother's parting words each week as her Sunday school students left to go home.

Willson, now approaching his fifties, was rethinking the direction of his career. One evening in 1949 (so one version of the story goes), as he was sitting around with friends in New York, regaling them as he often did with long-remembered stories from his childhood, composer Frank Loesser jumped to his feet. "What an idea!" Loesser exclaimed. "Why don't you write a musical about it?" The highly successful composer, known for his work on *Guys and Dolls* and for songs like "Baby, It's Cold Outside" and "On a Slow Boat to China," wasn't the first to broach the idea, but it was he who got Willson seriously thinking about it. Another eight years would pass before *The Music Man* opened on Broadway, with 30 or 40 rewrites along the way. In the end, it turned out to be the Iowan's ultimate musical bouquet to his home state and his hometown.

In the meantime, however, workaholic Willson kept busy on a variety of other projects (he would write more than 300 songs in his lifetime). Upon their request, he wrote new fight songs for Mason City High School and Iowa State College. And for Mason City's centennial, held in conjunction with the North Iowa Band Festival, Willson returned as a guest of honor. Besides directing

the Mason City Municipal Band in concert and selecting the centennial queen from ten finalists, the musical celebrity unveiled a new centennial march that he had written especially for the occasion.

All of these efforts paled, however, in comparison to his musical. *The Music Man* opened on Broadway in December 1957 to virtually unanimous praise from reviewers and to overwhelming public applause. For Willson, his roseate snapshot of a 1912 vintage Iowa town was obviously a labor of love. Despite his references to Iowans' stubbornness, gullibility, and propensity to gossip, the play cast a generally luminous glow over the small-town milieu that Willson recalled from his boyhood.

"I've thought and puzzled over why Iowa sticks with me," commented the first-time playwright, whose feat was all the more amazing for his having written the music, the lyrics, and the book—tasks usually divided up among three or more people. "I can still hear the back screen door closing. I can see the grass in our back yard. I can hear the sound of the cold air register at the entrance of the First Congregational Church as we kids ran across it with snow on our shoes."

Many details from his memory got worked into the play, but *The Music Man* that premiered in 1957 was not so much a realistic description of Mason City in 1912. (The town by that time had become a major commercial and industrial center; between 1910 and 1926 it was Iowa's fastest growing city.) Instead, *The Music Man* evoked a mythic, idealized hometown unlike the urbanized, industrialized U.S. of the 1950s.

Broadway, however, dealt more in the coin of myth than of reality, and *The Music Man* made its mark as one of the most successful musicals ever to light its marquees. Sweeping the major awards for 1957 (a year that also saw *West Side Story* premiere), it took its place along with *My Fair Lady* (1956) and *The Sound of Music* (1959) as one of the greatest stage hits of the fifties and, indeed, of all time.

The Music Man played to standing-room-only audiences. Produced and directed by Morton Da Costa, during its first three years the play grossed more than \$21 million from 4.5 million theater-goers, and racked up another \$6 million in album and sheet music sales. On opening night, a phenomenon never seen before on Broadway occurred when the entire audience jumped to its feet and spontaneously started clapping rhythmically with the rousing finale of "Seventy-Six Trombones." It happened over and over again, every night thereafter. *The Music Man* ran for 1,375 performances.

Meredith Willson, in staying so closely in tune with the sentiments of his childhood, also remained in touch with the emotions of his audiences. Many industry insiders had warned that his story was too old-fashioned and unsophisticated for the new Broadway audience. Moss Hart had turned down an invitation to direct it, believing it to be "too full of corn."

But Willson defended his romantic instincts and sentimentalism against the gibes of sophisticates and cynics. "I think it is idiotic to be afraid of being vilified for writing sentiment," he told a reporter. "Why should a man be afraid to write, with sentiment, about the small town in Iowa in which he grew up?"

Why indeed? Nor did the Iowa music man end his role as booster for his hometown and state after he began reaping his awards and paychecks for *The Music Man*. He kept returning home to Mason City—in 1958, to strut down Main Street at the North Iowa Band Festival; in 1960, to donate \$50,000 for a new wing of the Congregational church, named after his mother; in 1962, for the movie premiere of *The Music Man*; in 1968, for his 50th class reunion; and still more times after that.

His home state, realizing what a public relations treasure Willson was, persuaded him, with very little cajoling, to participate in two of its promotions for a better, faster-growing Iowa. In 1960, he made a recording for the Iowa Development Commission for distribution to industrial firms inquiring about locating new facilities in the state. Reminiscing about his Iowa boyhood and technological advances that followed, Willson played and sang parts of two of his well-known songs—"Iowa, It's a Beautiful Name" and "Iowa Stubborn."

Ten years later, the Iowa Development Commission enlisted him again, this time to assist with its new campaign, under the slogan of "Iowa—A Place to Grow." A new symbol, in the shape of a four-leaf clover, was unveiled, and Willson contributed a song, titled to match the slogan. The second of its two verses went:

I-o-wa—what a place to live and grow in
Life there is just like you think it ought to be
I-o-wa—you can always count on friends there

I-o-wa Great place!
I-o-wa Grow place!
I-o-wa Where the air smells fresh as spring-time
I-o-wa We ought to know
Yes-sir! I-o-wa I-o-wa
Where a man can live and love and grow.

Willson visits Mason City and leads a parade in June 1958, less than a year after *The Music Man* opened on Broadway.



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Meredith Willson, in staying so closely in tune with the sentiments of his childhood, also remained in touch with the emotions of his audiences. Many industry insiders had warned that his story was too old-fashioned and unsophisticated for the new Broadway audience. Moss Hart had turned down an invitation to direct it, believing it to be "too full of corn."

But Willson defended his romantic instincts and sentimentalism against the gibes of sophisticates and cynics. "I think it is idiotic to be afraid of being vilified for writing sentiment," he told a reporter. "Why should a man be afraid to write, with sentiment, about the small town in Iowa in which he grew up?"

Why indeed? Nor did the Iowa music man end his role as booster for his hometown and state after he began reaping his awards and paychecks for *The Music Man*. He kept returning home to Mason City—in 1958, to strut down Main Street at the North Iowa Band Festival; in 1960, to donate \$50,000 for a new wing of the Congregational church, named after his mother; in 1962, for the movie premiere of *The Music Man*; in 1968, for his 50th class reunion; and still more times after that.

His home state, realizing what a public relations treasure Willson was, persuaded him, with very little cajoling, to participate in two of its promotions for a better, faster-growing Iowa. In 1960, he made a recording for the Iowa Development Commission for distribution to industrial firms inquiring about locating new facilities in the state. Reminiscing about his Iowa boyhood and technological advances that followed, Willson played and sang parts of two of his well-known songs—"Iowa, It's a Beautiful Name" and "Iowa Stubborn."

Ten years later, the Iowa Development Commission enlisted him again, this time to assist with its new campaign, under the slogan of "Iowa—A Place to Grow." A new symbol, in the shape of a four-leaf clover, was unveiled, and Willson contributed a song, titled to match the slogan. The second of its two verses went:

I-o-wa—what a place to live and grow in
Life there is just like you think it ought to be
I-o-wa—you can always count on friends there

I-o-wa Great place!
I-o-wa Grow place!
I-o-wa Where the air smells fresh as spring-time
I-o-wa We ought to know
Yes-sir! I-o-wa I-o-wa
Where a man can live and love and grow.

Willson visits Mason City and leads a parade in June 1958, less than a year after *The Music Man* opened on Broadway.



COURTESY OF MASON CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY

GREAT CHALLENGING EVENT

The greatest publicity event in the corporate history of Mason City and one of its most colorful spectacles will occur on Tuesday, June 19, 1962, when top flight marching bands from all over the nation converge on the city for the Music Man Marching Band Competition Festival. The day will culminate with a press preview of Warner Brothers MUSIC MAN movie and will bring to the city Meredith and Rini Willson, many stars of the picture, and many of the nation's best known figures in press, radio and TV to cover the occasion.

BANDS COMING FOR TRIPS, GLORY, PRIZES

Many of the bands applying take regular trips, several have been in the inaugurations in Washington or the Tournament of Roses parades, many have won honors in local and state competition and service club and veterans parades. Five bands will be chosen from the morning parade and these will compete for position in a special stadium show in the afternoon. These bands will receive prizes offered by the Richards Music company valued at nearly \$15,000 and the top band will perform at the night show and be immediately taken on a nationwide trip by Warner Brothers.

HUGE TREE FROM LITTLE ACORN !

This colorful event grew from a suggestion by the chamber of commerce to the Willsons, duly passed on to Warner Brothers, that a premiere of the movie might well be shown in Mason City and possibly in connection with the annual North Iowa Band Festival. The idea had appeal and Warner Brothers sent its public relations man Bob Quinn to Mason City on two trips, on the last of which he proposed the press preview and the nation-wide marching band contest. The Warners were joined in the proposals by the Richards Music company of Elkhart, Ind., who had furnished band instruments for the movie and would offer valuable prizes. Forty-five representative men and women attending the board and Festival committee accepted the

THE MUSIC MAN COMES TO MASON CITY



Robert Preston, Shirley Jones are Top Stars in Movie Version

THIRTY-FOUR OUT OF STATE BANDS COMING

One hundred and 21 bands from thirty-four states had formally applied to represent their states in the Music Man Marching Festival when entries closed on Nov. 20. That means that thirty-four out-of-state bands will march in the huge parade in Mason City on June 19, because every application stated that the band was prepared to come, if chosen, and was signed by a school administrator, as well as the band director, and told how they would raise the money for the trip. Many already had that detail well in hand.

When came the task of selecting the bands the many states with more than one application. The applications were accompanied by elaborate scrap books, records, movies and telegrams of recommendation.

AND NINETY FROM IOWA AND MINNESOTA

The Music Man Marching Band competition is, of course, the frosting on the cake of the 24th North Iowa Band Festival and the usual around 90 high school bands from North Central and Southern Minnesota will be here for the day. Each band will, as usual, have its candidate for queen of the Festival, or Miss North Iowa, and there will be numerous outstanding floats, including 10 or 12 representing scenes from the Music Man.

The Iowa and Minnesota bands will be hosts for the day and will not compete for the prizes offered. Numerous additional requests from the two states have been regrettably refused, unless vacancies occur in those which have been coming the past 3 years.

IT WILL TAKE SOME DOING !

The Music Man Marching Band competition event, combined with the 24th North Iowa Band Festival, is a several-way challenge to Mason City. It will be a challenge to house 3000 out-of-state visitors for two nights lodging and two breakfasts in private homes of the city. It will be a challenge to arrange the giant parade of bands, queens and floats and the other events of the day with the attendant problems of traffic and transportation. It will be a challenge to feed those out-of-state guests, to provide entertainment for the few dull moments when they won't be very busy... a challenge to properly entertain perhaps 125 screen stars and representatives of press, radio and TV.

AND ALSO SOME MONEY !

And it will be a great challenge to raise the \$35,000 budget which it will take to do these things, at least four times the normal \$9,000 budget for a North Iowa Band Festival. But this will be matched against at least A QUARTER OF A MILLION DOLLARS which will be spent by Warners, Richards and the 34 bands which will travel to Mason City. Already TEN THOUSAND has been spent by them on publicity and printing, \$15,000 is offered in prizes and visiting bands have travel budgets from ONE THOUSAND up to TEN THOUSAND EACH.

AND TREMENDOUS POSSIBLE VALUES !

The values of the Festival cannot be measured in dollars and cents, the committee points out... even though all of the local budget will be spent right in this community. There is the inspiration which comes to the boys and girls of North Central Iowa and Southern Minnesota in seeing and participating in the Festival—5000 of them, plus thousands of friends and parents from the very heart of the Mason City trade territory. Mason City has already become nationally known through the persistent good will of the WILLSONS and industrial representative of Mason City on promotional trips have found doors opened more quickly and a basic friendly conversation more quickly established. Let Mason City do ITS BEST on JUNE 19, 1962, and it will be a household word in thousands of places in America—and it will also have the satisfaction of a wonderful time had by all and a tremendous community celebration WELL DONE.

THE MASON CITY GLOBE-GAZETTE
 PUBLISHING & RECORDING COMPANY
 PUBLISHED: JUNE 15, 1962

AMERICA!! WELCOME!!

to the 24th Annual
NORTH IOWA BAND FESTIVAL
 in Mason City, Iowa

JUNE 18-19 1962 and **THE MUSIC MAN**

Marching Band Competition

In 1962, Mason City's annual North Iowa Band Festival included a movie debut of *The Music Man*. With Meredith Willson came Hollywood celebrities Arthur Godfrey, Hedda Hopper, Shirley Jones, Robert Preston, and Ron Howard.

After *The Music Man* elevated him to fame, Willson was called upon by two U.S. presidents to plug their programs. In 1962, he wrote the "Chicken Fat" song to encourage the public to exercise, as part of President John Kennedy's fitness program. Then, during the 1973-1974 recession, he wrote a song named "WIN!" to promote President Gerald Ford's campaign to "Whip Inflation Now":

Win! Win! Win!
 We'll win together,
 Win together, That's the true American way, today.
 Who needs inflation? Not this nation.
 Who's going to pass it by?
 You are, and so am I.
 Win together.
 Lose? Never!
 If you can win,
 So can I.

The WIN program went nowhere, but Willson, at least, had done his bit for it.

Despite his years in New York and Hollywood,



SISI (DES MOINES)

At a 1963 Minnesota-Iowa football game, Willson directs the "Iowa Fight Song," which he wrote for the university in 1950.

Meredith Willson always remained an Iowan and a small-town boy at heart. On being urged to leave town to save himself, Harold Hill, Willson's fictional "music man," told little Winthrop Paroo, "I can't go, Winthrop. . . . For the first time in my life I got my foot caught in the door." Meredith Willson, Iowa's music man, had left Iowa after high school, but he could never let go of it. His mind and his memories got caught in the door of Iowa and his old hometown. He wrote them into one of America's best-loved musicals, and he sang their praises to anyone who would listen. Willson was truly Iowa's "ambassador to all the world." ❖

John E. Miller is professor of history at South Dakota State University. His work on Meredith Willson is part of a book-length project on small-town midwesterners.

NOTE ON SOURCES

The Meredith Willson Collection in the Mason City Public Library comprises clippings from the *Mason City Globe-Gazette*, photographs, and other material on Willson. Lyrics to his Iowa songs also often appeared in the *Globe-Gazette*. More biographical material on Willson and musical theater can be found in *American National Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); *Current Biography* (1958); David Ewen, *American Songwriters* (NY: H.W. Wilson Co., 1987); David Ewen, *Complete Book of the American Musical Theater* (NY: Henry Holt and Co., 1958); Ken Bloom, *Broadway: An Encyclopedic Guide to the History, People and Places of Times Square* (NY: Facts on File, 1991); Gerald Martin Bordman, *American Musical Theater: A Chronicle*, 2d ed. (NY: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Stanley Green, *The World of Musical Comedy* (NY: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1968). See also: "Pied Piper of Broadway," *Time* (July 21, 1958), 42-46; and "A Happy Oom-Pah on Broadway," *Life* (Jan. 20, 1958), 103-8.

The newest biographical treatment of Willson is John C. Skipper, *Meredith Willson: The Unsinkable Music Man* (Mason City: Savas Publishing Co., 2000). Willson's own books include his autobiographical *And There I Stood With My Piccolo* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1948); *Who Did What to Fedalia?* (NY: Doubleday, 1952); *Eggs I Have Laid* (NY: Holt, 1955); and "But He Doesn't Know the Territory" (NY: Putnam, 1959).

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

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Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED



The Keosauqua War Time Glee Club, who sang for their soldiers, reunited in 1892 for this photograph. Standing, from left: Solon Nourse, Hattie McArthur Walker, Mary Rowley Tower [?], Lucy Moore Disbrow, Emmeline Hartzell Norwood, Laura Gebhardt Rowley, Lena Lea Bleakmore, and John C. Craig. Organist: Mary St. John (Davis). Absent: O. S. Willey.

One in a Million

Gathered for a reunion in 1892, nine members of the Keosauqua War Time Glee Club posed for this photograph, one of the millions of items in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa. During the Civil War, the glee club sang for concerts and rallies in southeastern Iowa, rousing support and raising funds for Iowa soldiers headed off to battle. Longing to return home, soldier John Burton reportedly said that he "wished the glee club would come and sing him out of war as they had sung him into it."

A "wartime glee club" was not an oxymoron, for the word glee

comes from the Anglo-Saxon *glegg* for "music." In 18th-century England, the glee originated as a piece of unaccompanied vocal music of three or more parts, generally for men. A handful of English composers excelled at the form, and in London, a long-standing gentleman's society named "The Glee Club" operated from 1783 to 1857.

By the mid-19th century, glee clubs had established themselves in America, involving both men and women and various types of vocal music. Founded in 1861, the Keosauqua War Time Glee Club

first performed at a Bloomfield church that year. The group was organized by Solon Nourse (*far left*), a professor of music and a Keosauqua farm owner in his early forties in 1861. Another member, Lucy Moore Disbrow (*fourth from left*), was just 15. Besides singing, the club served an even less gleeful wartime function for soldiers: they gathered together to scrape lint from cloth (this would be used to pack wounds) and to make bandages.

—The Editor