

Main Street • Iowa Civil Rights • Iowa Bounty • Medal of Honor • 1897 Crime • Vietnam POW

Spring 2010 • 97

# Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED



# Front Porch

Dear Readers: In this issue, the Front Porch belongs to Iowa historian Tom Morain. Here he shares his thoughts about a remarkable individual who supported the practice of Iowa history and this magazine for over 20 years and became a kindred spirit of mine.

—Ginalie Swaim, editor

Iowa has lost a good friend. Richard, Lord Acton passed away in Cedar Rapids on October 10, 2010, after a long struggle with cancer. Richard fell in love first with Patricia Nassif—a University of Iowa law professor, whom he married in 1988—and then with her home state of Iowa. They spent half the year in London, where he served as a hereditary and life peer in the House of Lords, and the other half in Iowa in their home in Cedar Rapids.

For so many of us, Richard helped us see Iowa through new eyes. He had an almost childlike enthusiasm for exploring new places and meeting new people. Iowa delighted him. He was thrilled to see the Mississippi River for the first time. He loved to go shopping at his local Hy-Vee (“about the size of Alaska”), where the locals loved his British accent and even encouraged him to talk more and not less. He was overwhelmed with the pure Iowa-ness of the State Fair. And the Amanas. And local theaters and mom-and-pop restaurants. And writers’ workshops.

Richard channeled his enthusiasm into significant research on Iowa history. He and Patricia were frequent visitors to the State Historical Society libraries in Iowa City and Des Moines. Together they authored *To Go Free: A Treasury of Iowa’s Legal Heritage*. Intrigued by Iowa’s “Hawkeye” nickname, he buried himself in the archives to produce an article for *The Palimpsest* describing attorney David Rorer’s public relations coup in preempting a less flattering moniker. While many historians have looked at the Ralph case, the first test for the Iowa Supreme



Richard, Lord Acton (left) was fascinated with this state’s history and scoured London’s antique shops for 19th-century views of Iowa. When he came across two rare, hand-colored prints of Sauk leaders, he donated them to the Sac and Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa (the Meskwaki Nation).

In appreciation, tribal historian Johnathan Buffalo (right) presented Acton with a beaded medallion necklace, designed by Meskwaki artist Nadine Big Bear. In the informal ceremony in April 2010 at the State Historical Society, Buffalo spoke eloquently of the strong alliance between the tribe and the British, going back to the 1790s. Acton was both honored and delighted.

Court, Richard’s curiosity led him into Missouri to find documentary evidence about Ralph’s status as a slave. A relentless researcher and a skilled writer, he wrote six articles for *The Palimpsest*, one for *The Annals of Iowa*, and fifteen profiles for the *Iowa Biographical Dictionary*. With the touch of a superb storyteller, he made us proud of what had once seemed commonplace.

He loved us enough to point out our faults. “Why can’t Iowans ever argue seriously? You’re always so accommodating and nice. And it’s boring.” But in the same blunt way, he told us why he liked Iowans and hammered us for being so self-deprecating. Some of those love notes are included in his essay collection, *A Brit Among the Hawkeyes*.

“To see ourselves as others see us.” Richard gave us that gift. Always proud of his own heritage, he embraced us in ours and loved his adopted Hawkeye kinfolk. It was easy to love him in return.

—Tom Morain

PHOTO BY CHARLES SCOTT, SHSI (IOWA CITY)

## Iowa Heritage Illustrated

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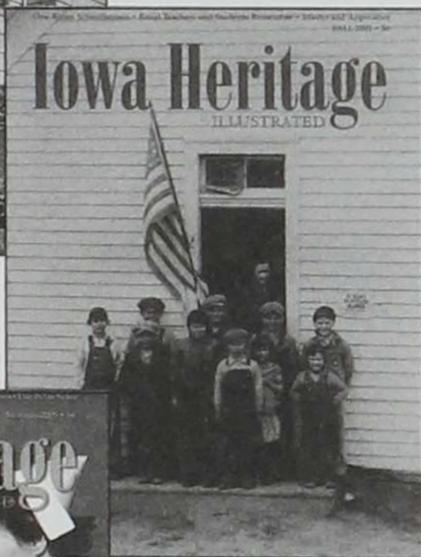
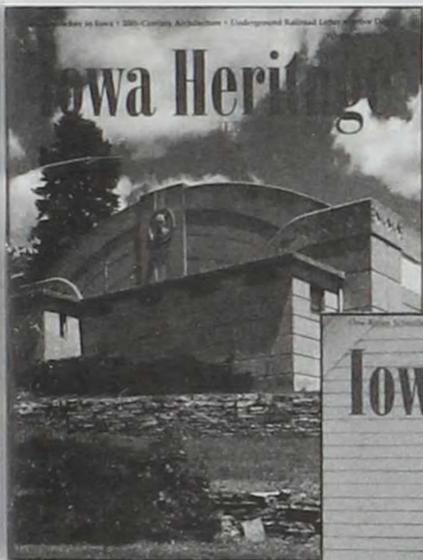
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## STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY of IOWA

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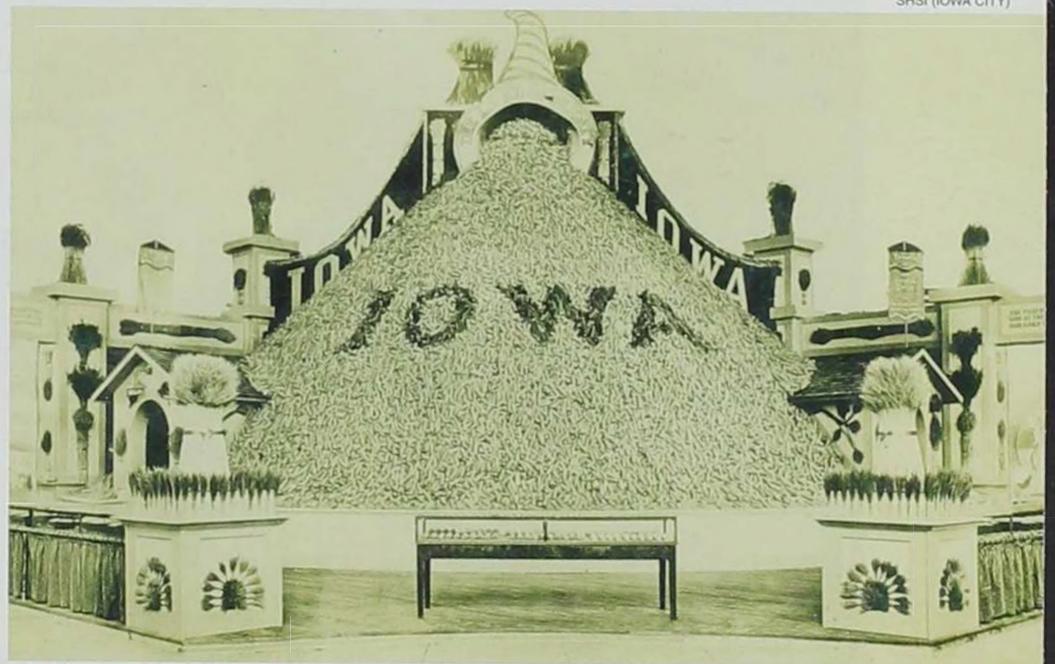
# Heritage

ILLUSTRATED

Volume 91:1 Spring 2010

Editor:

Contributors:  
John Belcher



A cornucopia of Iowa corn (circa 1900)

and the Medal of Honor

First Vietnam POW

Ever

Like a barefoot John Foster  
walks amidst a prolific  
turn of the last century.  
A historical tour of Iowa's  
cabbage, beets, wheat,  
corn.

You're holding  
the best tour guide  
you can find  
for traveling into  
Iowa's past.

# Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED

Rare photos  
and rich history  
in every issue.

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ILLUSTRATED

The Magazine of the State Historical Society of Iowa

Spring 2010, 91:1

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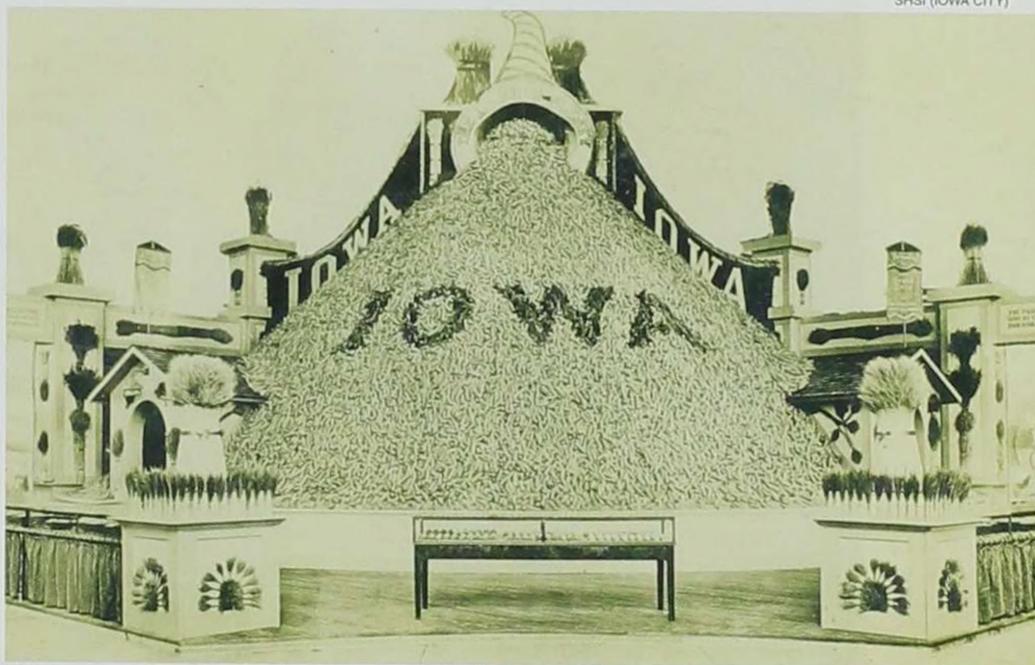
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SHSI (IOWA CITY)

A cornucopia of Iowa corn (circa 1900)



SHSI (IOWA CITY): FOSTER COLLECTION

## On the Cover

*With bonnet in hand and a barefoot John Foster on her back, Glen Foster walks amidst a prolific garden in Iowa Falls at the turn of the last century. In this issue, join us on a historical tour of Iowa's amazing productivity—cabbage, beets, wheat, apples, and, of course, corn.*

# The Main Street I Remember

*Corydon, Iowa*

by William Lee Burton



PHOTO AND NEWSPAPERS, COURTESY VIRGINIA (BURTON) MELROY

William Lee Burton (back left) and friends at Senior Flunk Day, April 1924. The ads ran in the 1924 *C.H.S. Echo*, Corydon's high school paper. Burton was the editor-in-chief.

In many of the smaller county seat towns in Iowa, such as the one where I grew up, "Main Street" was actually a square, with the major business establishments around the four sides of the little park in which stood the county courthouse.

The courthouse in our town was a red brick structure of ornate design, with a clock tower. Inside, its ceilings were high, its windows tall and narrow. Stair banisters were of dark oak, as were the judge's bench and the railing in the courtroom. A distinctive odor always lingered about the place, a mingling of sweeping compound, stale cigar smoke, and human sweat. In this building the inexorable facts of life were centered: here births and deaths were registered, ownership of land recorded, marriages licensed or dissolved, taxes paid, criminals tried and sentenced. Even the clock regulated our lives. One of my earliest memories is of waking in the night and hearing its measured, booming strokes—a comforting, reassuring sound.

The architecture of the business houses fronting the square was as elaborate as that of the courthouse itself. The buildings

were mostly of brick, solidly built but with corbeling and other fancy brickwork which indicated the artistic proficiency of the builders. All were two stories in height, the ground floor occupied by stores, the second by the offices of doctors and lawyers, and by a few (very few) apartments. I considered these downtown living quarters a very superior kind of home. My parents lived in a house, as did almost everybody else in the town, and houses always had, in summer, lawns to mow and gardens to weed, and, in winter, sidewalks to shovel, wood or coal to carry in for cookstoves and base burners. How fortunate those people who could look from their windows upon the town's activities—people going by in buggies and wagons, or perhaps in a new Ford, Reo, Hupmobile, or Pierce-Arrow!

Sometimes there would be a fire, with the siren wailing like a banshee and everybody running; the butcher tossing aside his apron and cleaver, the drayman tying his horses to the nearest lamp-post, the grocery clerk dropping cans and boxes in his haste to join the other volunteers on the chugging truck. And always small boys like myself, running along behind, panting and breathless with excitement.

**U**ntil the 1930s depression, the town had three banks, impressive-looking structures with much iron grillwork and walls of polished marble—the very picture of stability and strength. Two large clothing stores (we called them “dry goods stores” then) occupied cor-

ners of the square, their windows exhibiting the fashions of the day: men's suits in sober blacks and browns, ladies' dresses of silk moire and dainty cotton, decorated with yards of lace, braid, and flounces. The interiors of the stores were rather dark, and they always smelled of mothballs. The young lady clerks, all trying to look like Gibson girls in their high-necked white blouses, their hair done in elaborate puffs, moved discreetly behind the long counters, measuring out cloth, suggesting patterns and colors. At the conclusion of each sale, one's money traveled in a little basket over humming wires to a dim aerie at the back, where a high priestess of finance sent one's change zipping back with admirable promptness.

The town had one bookstore, run by a Mr. Bowers, whom I remember as a tall, formally dressed man, very grave and reserved, as befitted his calling. The books which he sold (or which perhaps remained on his shelves unsold) were of high moral character: no dime novels or penny-dreadfuls here! Mr. Bowers was superintendent of the Sunday School, and from Saturday night until Monday morning his business remained adamantly closed; he even pulled down the shades of the front window, lest he be accused of exhibiting his wares on the Sabbath.

To my childish eyes, the most attractive places on the square were the movie theatre and the confectionery and ice cream store. The latter I remember rather dimly. It was apparently a bakery, and I was impressed by the fact that the proprietor made his own cones,

**Sunday and Monday**  
**CONSTANCE TALMADGE**  
 in  
 “D U L C Y”

Also a  
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**Sunday and Monday**

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**MRS. FLORA SALLMAN'S**

SEE the latest Ladies Ready-to-wear Hats before you buy.

Men's Straw Hats in all Makes

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South Side of Square

31

Phone

31

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Chicks on  
**MOR KIK**  
For Sale At  
**LUGAR'S DEP'T STORE**

**SCOTT & VAN BENTHUSEN**

First in FRESH and CURED  
MEATS.

Free Delivery!

**C. L. CLARK**

ABSTRACTS

**"JEFF WEST"**

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SHARP TOOLS  
NEXT TO POST OFFICE

Pleasant Surroundings!  
Wholesome Food!  
Snappy Service!

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Paints and Varnishes for all Kinds  
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at RIGHT prices

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Relining and Altering  
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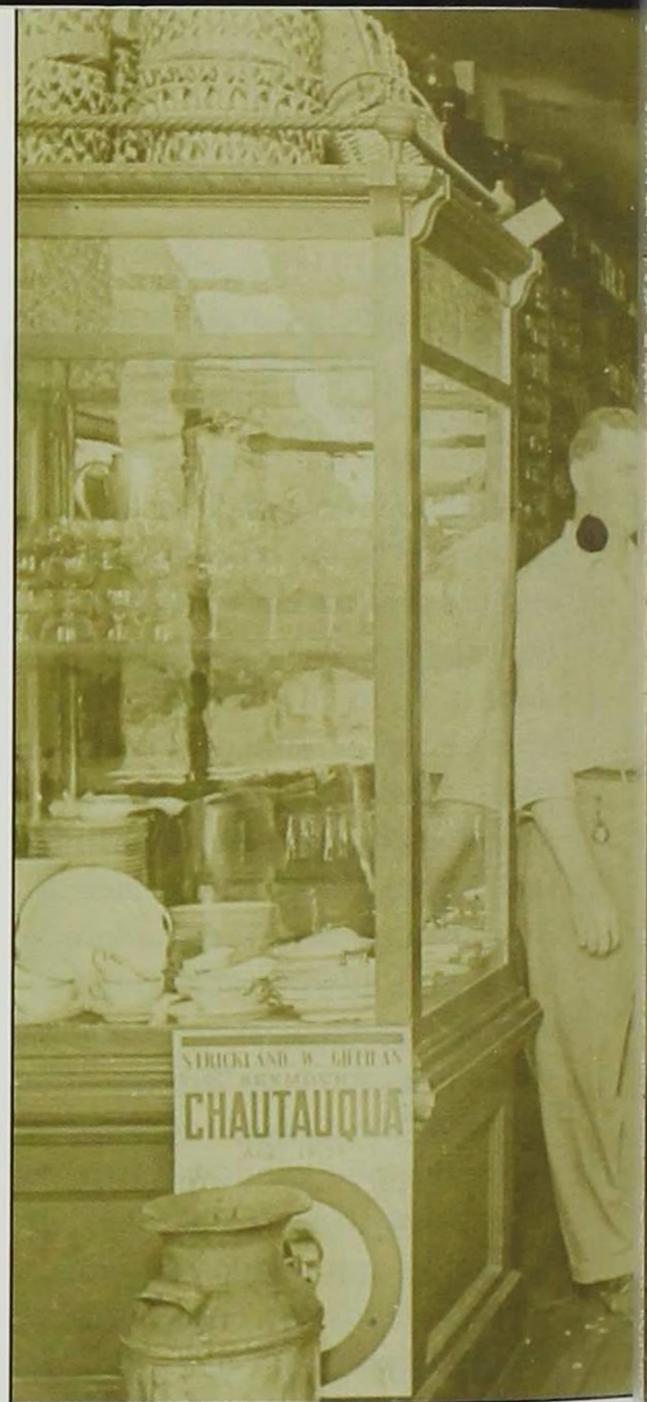
The Corydon Cleaners and Repairers

**SEABURN'S SHOP**

The place to get a good Hair Cut,  
and Shave. Ladies' Hair bob  
in all Styles

using a thin, sweetened dough which was baked and then rolled into a conical shape. Cooled and filled with homemade vanilla ice cream (there was no other flavor in those days), the result was like food for the gods; no other gustatory experience in my life has ever quite equaled that one.

**B**ut it was the Gem Theatre (a converted store building) to which I was most attracted. The Opera House, built in the 1890s at considerable expense, usually stood empty except for "home talent" productions or an occasional road company: *East Lynne*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, or *Ten Nights in a Barroom*. The movies were a novelty then; makeshift theatres, called Nickelodeons because the admission was five cents, had sprung up all over the country, and people were flocking to them, enthralled by those jerky little shadows that actually moved. What if the folding chairs were uncomfortable, the long waits between reels boring and tiresome? What if the pictures that were shown had unconvincing plots and exaggerated acting? I went to the movies as often as my parents would let me, and if I didn't have the price of admission I peddled handbills, or swept the theatre after school, to pay for my ticket. A whole galaxy of new "stars" passed in review before my fascinated and uncritical eyes: Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, Mabel Norman, Hazel Dawn, Fatty Arbuckle, Charlie Chaplin, William S. Hart, Lillian and Dorothy Gish. I spent one whole winter with *The Perils of*



*Pauline*, merely existing in a fever of cliff-hung suspense, from one Tuesday night to the next.

The Gem was managed during one season by a Mr. Reizenstein, a fuzzy-haired little man who had come to Iowa from somewhere in the East, and who, a year later, drifted away as unobtrusively as he had come. He took tickets at the door before the show began, then scampered down the aisle to play the tinkly old piano, furnishing a musical accompaniment to the silent film. Though Mr. Reizenstein was always polite and deferential toward everybody, there was a certain reserve in his manner, as if he found the rest of us a bit crude and naive—no doubt we were. I wonder who he was, and how he came to choose our town?



SHS (IOWA CITY)

Brooms hang from the ceiling, doughnuts and dishes fill the glass cases, and canned goods line the shelves in Corydon's grocery store, April 1924. Note the Chautauqua poster on the far left and the barefoot girl in the back.

I wasn't much aware of ethnic backgrounds at that time. There were several families in town whose ancestry was Scandinavian, and one or two households of Irish Catholics, who were regarded with a certain amount of curiosity. Germans outnumbered all other racial groups; they were without exception industrious, hard-working people and good citizens—though later, during World War I, some of the schoolboys (myself included) joined in shouting taunts at the old German blacksmith, whose shop, we were convinced, harbored some deep and devious mischief.

The Main Street of my youth

has long since vanished. Television has killed the small theatres; supermarkets have replaced most neighborhood grocery stores. Only the statue of the Civil War soldier, leaning on his musket atop his marble column in the courthouse park, remains the same—perhaps dreaming, as I do, of the past that is no more. ❖

*This sketch of Corydon, Iowa, was first submitted by William Lee Burton to a 1976 writing competition sponsored by the Iowa Council on Aging and later revised slightly and self-published. The original essay is in Special Collections, State Historical Society (Iowa City).*

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Successor to Dr. Silvernail. Special  
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PHONES: Office 329; Residence 90.

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:-: AT THE AUDITORIUM :-:

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MILTON SILLS

—in—

"THE FORGOTTEN LAW"

and

AN AESOPS

SUNDAY and MONDAY

LIONEL BARRYMORE

and

ALMA RUBEN

—in—

"ENEMIES OF WOMEN."

—Also—

A Comedy and a News Reel

1874

1924

WE WERE your Grandfather's,  
your Father's and Wish to  
be Your BANKERS

WAYNE COUNTY STATE  
BANK

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**WAYNE COUNTY STATE**



BOTH PHOTOS: EDWARD AND MINNE ALLEN PAPERS, RS 1314/51, UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES, IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

## *Edward and Minne Allen* *Iowa Citizens, World Citizens*

*by Karen Lawson and Tanya Zanish-Belcher*

**E**dward and Minne Allen were citizens of the world who made their home in Iowa. They dedicated their long and active lives to education, community service, and social justice. They met in Berlin in a time of violence and lived out their lives in Ames working for peace.

Edward Switzer Allen was born in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1887. He attended a Quaker school in

Baltimore and later joined the Religious Society of Friends. At Harvard he received his A.B., A.M., and Ph.D. His specialty was geometry, the kind useful in mathematical physics, especially in relativity theory. He first taught mathematics at Dartmouth College and Brown University.

Minne (pronounced *Min-na*) Müller-Liebenwalde was born in Sondershausen, Germany, in 1887. Early

on, she demonstrated her concerns for social welfare. In Berlin, she worked with children of working-class families in poor neighborhoods, interpreted for Jane Addams and other visiting social reformers, and studied childhood education and social work at the University of Berlin, where she was one of the few women students. In the summer of 1914 she met Edward Allen. He was visiting his cousin who was also one of Minne's university professors and had told her in advance, "He is a mathematician, but he is interested in everything."

Minne and Edward discovered they had many mutual interests. As Edward wrote years later, "Our common devotion to the ideals of equality, freedom, and peace became clear during those months."

In late summer two events changed their lives. They were engaged to be married, and World War I began. Just days before Germany declared war on Russia, Minne wrote, "War! It is a terrible sounding word and yet holds a whole people in its grip. It was very quiet this morning; then the newspaper extras fluttered down like snowflakes; a common feeling shuddered through everyone."

In the fall Edward returned to the United States to teach mathematics at Brown. The next summer, he returned to Germany, and he and Minne were married. Accepting an instructorship at the University of Michigan, he brought his German bride to Ann Arbor, where he taught for four years.

**T**he transitions from Germany to America, from the cosmopolitan city of Berlin to the college town of Ann Arbor were difficult for Minne. In dozens of letters to her beloved mother in Germany between 1914 and 1920, she recorded the frustrations of adapting to a new culture—she could find no farmers' markets, rye or black bread, or cleaning supplies as effective as those in Germany. And she wrote her mother about the emotional difficulties, the loneliness and "anguishing homesickness." She felt as if she was living five "separate lives"—with Edward, her mother, "dear ones in Germany," her fatherland, and the people and conditions in Ann Arbor. In November 1915 she wrote to her mother: "I think I will bravely stay here one more year." Her great hope was to return to Germany with Edward. "You know that I feel myself as a German confined and alone here and confess with glowing pride and gratitude to German customs and to being German."

The perils of wartime travel prevented Minne from visiting Germany until 1927. Longing for the war's

end, she wrote in 1917, "Just now we are passing one of the largest radio transmitters. The motionless wires high in the heavens tell a lot, while we underneath them hear nothing. But sometime they will send to the whole world the news of peace. The world will cry for joy that they have been rescued from this eternal misery."

Gradually, Minne came to accept being an American citizen and taking on an active role in public life. A great turning point was in 1917 when she and Edward were invited to visit Jane Addams at Hull House in Chicago. There Minne felt the "wonderful spirit of simplicity, goodness, and heart's warmth." As her son wrote decades later, "Jane Addams invited them to Chicago in response to a proposal by Minne to work toward enabling leading educators and other intellectuals on both sides of the war to reach out to one another. No other event during the war cheered Minne more than this meeting with Jane Addams. And even though Minne's proposal did not succeed despite many months of intense effort during 1917, it awakened in Minne a growing sense of the importance of assuming a publicly visible role."

Her letters to her mother began to reveal a greater awareness of social ills: she decries the lynching of an African American in Omaha and the Palmer Raids on radicals in several cities. She applies her intellect to new projects: "And now I have to write about 150 letters for the collection of money and clothing for poor German children. . . . Then Siegmund-Schultze wants a critical review and help with his collection of American documents relating to peace." (Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze's work led to the international, interfaith Fellowship of Reconciliation peace movement.)

Yet her responsibilities to her children (Julius, born in 1916; Rosemarie, 1917; and Hermann, 1919) overrode other goals: "The educated woman with very little income who has to do all the menial work herself has to make the biggest sacrifice: giving up all creative participation in public affairs if she wants to be fair to her little children."

**E**dward was experiencing his own conflicts while teaching at the University of Michigan during the war years. He had signed a pacifist petition and refused to purchase war bonds or stamps. For this, he was deemed disloyal at the University of Michigan, was refused a salary increase, and his contract was extended for only one more year. According to Edward, at a formal hearing the university president told him that "[my] restoration to equal

standing might take place . . . if [I] would promise to support every future war of the United States in all ways—even those not demanded by law.”

Assisted by the chair of his department, Professor Alexander Ziwet, the Allens moved to Morgantown, West Virginia. Edward taught at the University of West Virginia for two years, 1919–1920. “During our two years at Morgantown I showed little active concern for freedom or equality,” Edward later stated. But near the end of that period he wrote to the editor of the *Old Dominion* in response to an invitation in the newspaper to join the Ku Klux Klan. He sent a copy of the letter to Roger Baldwin, who co-founded the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in 1920. Looking back decades later, Edward observed that “this, then, was my preparation for that growing interest and involvement in Iowa’s civil liberties which followed my coming to this state in 1921.”

That year Edward was invited by the newly appointed chair of the mathematics department of Iowa State College to serve as an associate professor. His main areas of teaching and research concerned algebraic geometry, applications of mathematics to chemistry, enumeration, and probability. He was promoted to professor of mathematics in 1943 and served as such until 1985. In the 1960s he was also a visiting professor at Iowa’s Grinnell and Wartburg colleges and at Cottey College in Missouri.

In 1929 at Iowa State, Minne completed her M.S. thesis, “An Historical and Sociological Study of a Rural Town in Central Iowa.” An intellectual exercise, the study also reveals her heart-felt appreciation of the everyday life of ordinary people. In it she wrote: “Much of my knowledge of the early history of Cambridge and the surrounding country I owe to conversations with ‘old timers,’ men and women who never tired of sharing with me their recollections and experiences of pioneer days.” She regaled the reader with tidbits from times gone by: “Violet dinners were followed by strawberry parties . . . baskets and pails full of the delicious fruit and cakes and cream on the table . . . taffy pulls and corn suppers with popcorn balls, mush and milk, cornbread, fried mush and chains of colored popcorn. Sleigh riding and skating brought the young people together for hours of happy and healthy recreation in parties of many couples, who would end the afternoon gathering around the fireplace of a hospitable home, telling stories, guessing riddles and enjoying delicious refreshments in the form of baked apples or fruit preserve.”

Minne taught sociology at Iowa State and was promoted to assistant professor, but then became a victim

UNDATED PHOTO, EDWARD AND MINNE ALLEN PAPERS, RS 13/14/51, UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES, IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY



Edward and Minne Allen pose in their home for a holiday greeting card [year unknown].

of a since repealed rule against employment of two members of the same family. Such rules were fairly common throughout American university communities during this time period, and faculty wives with academic appointments often were the first to lose their positions.

Early in their marriage, the Allens had become keenly aware of the need for justice in all walks of life, and, in 1935, Edward co-founded the Iowa Civil Liberties Union (ICLU) and served as president for several terms as well as long-time board member. He also coordinated the work of the university’s Civil Liberties Union chapter.

Throughout the 20th century, the ICLU dealt with issues ranging from loyalty oaths to police practices; from censorship to academic freedom; from child custody to the rights of the mentally ill; from student hair styles and antiwar armbands to the protection of personal information in government data banks.

Edward Allen was active in all of these battles, as well as those against racial, religious, and sexual discrimination. In his 1977 history of the ICLU he wrote: “It is certain that we will always have civil liberties problems in Iowa—some of natures we cannot yet guess. [The ICLU] should be the best embodiment of the state’s motto: ‘Our liberties we prize [and] our rights we will maintain.’”

The Allens demonstrated their devotion to paci-

fism and internationalism through a variety of activities and organizations. They were founding members of the Ames congregation of the Society of Friends. For the Allens, Quakerism was a "most embracing religion" that encouraged its members "to feel all the world a friend." About their core religious beliefs, Minne stated, "We know how we wanted our life to become and how we could best help in building a world in which we would have peace."

Both Edward and Minne rejoiced in student activism movements that worked for a better world. The couple frequently hosted international students in their home and participated in the Iowa State Cosmopolitan Club, which encouraged friendship, respect, and understanding among men and women of all nationalities. Edward was fond of quoting Einstein to the effect that "the job of the peacemaker is not to abolish national boundaries but to make them unimportant." He frequently spoke on behalf of the Fellowship of Reconciliation on WOI Radio. "We must use peaceful means for bringing about peace among nations," he remarked. "We must show understanding, trust and good will, so that ways for true cooperation and genuine fellowship may be opened."

Equally dedicated, Minne was proactive in the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, United Church Women, and the YWCA's national board, and she contributed to the founding of the Child Development Department at Iowa State. In the days of World War II she was one of a group of people at Iowa State who provided books and other items for students displaced by the war.

One must "work with serious conviction and the sense of responsibility," Minne said. "You have to help those who are less privileged than you are." Her friend Louise Dengler remembered: "At Church Women United [Minne] was disturbed that we were eating refreshments at the morning meeting right after breakfast and, for a number of years, we quit that because of her concern. She brought a little box and we put our offering in and the money went for the children of the world who were hungry because she said, 'I can hear the children crying.' And I know she could."

In 1977, on Edward's 90th birthday, the mathematics department dedicated the Edward S. Allen Mathematics Reading Room. In 1986 the student government funded the installation of the Edward S. Allen Free Speech Platform on campus. The platform provides a place for impromptu speeches and assemblies and serves as a reminder of the need for oral debate. His portrait hangs in Carver Hall to this day.

Besides sharing social justice goals, they both loved music (Edward was a violinist and Minne a pianist), displayed a warm sense of humor, and were avid readers. "Be careful of the Allens," Minne had been warned when they first met. "They will read you to death." After 60 years of marriage, she commented, "Not a moment [passes] when I am brushing my hair or do[ing] some mending, Edward asks 'what may we read together?' And he reads aloud."

**A**fter a long and full life, Minne Allen died on September 9, 1980, at the age of 93. Edward died on May 8, 1985, at the age of 97. Iowa is richer for providing the fertile ground where these two remarkable people lived and flourished.

Dorcas Speer, host of the radio program *Sixty Plus*, interviewed the Allens when they were 85. Speer asked Minne the secret of their strong relationship. She responded, "We love each other and loving means sharing. We want to share something with each other that is worthwhile, and what we want to share is not restricted to this family."

Speer also wondered, "Why do you, at the age of 85, spend your time doing these [civil rights] things?"

Edward chuckled, "Same as when we were 35, I guess. We are very interested in democracy, having equal rights, and having the freedom to use them." ❖

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*Karen Lawson is Associate Dean for Collections & Technical Services at Iowa State University Library. She had the pleasure of knowing Edward Allen during her early years at Iowa State. Tanya Zanish-Belcher is Head of Special Collections & University Archives at Iowa State University Library.*

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

The Edward and Minne Allen Papers, RS 13/14/51, are housed in the University Archives, Iowa State University Library. The collection includes Dorcas Speer's interview (c. 1972) of the Allens. Major sources are: Minne Elisabeth Allen, trans. and ed. Julius W. Allen, *Tenderness & Turmoil: Letters to a German Mother, 1914-1920* (Santa Ana, CA: Seven Locks Press, 1998); Edward S. Allen, *Freedom in Iowa: The Role of the Iowa Civil Liberties Union* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1977); Minne Elisabeth Allen, "An Historical and Sociological Study of a Rural Town in Central Iowa" (master's thesis, Iowa State College, 1929); and the Iowa Civil Liberties Union Collection, Special Collections, University of Northern Iowa.

# Reaping the Bounty

In the 1890s, Iowa boasted of its agricultural productivity by constructing elaborate though ephemeral exposition palaces and exhibits, ornamented with festoons of grasses, mosaics of grain, and pyramids of produce. As one exhibit proclaimed, “The prayer [of] ‘Give us this day our daily bread’ is answered best in Iowa.”

Although these exuberant celebrations of the state’s fertility fell out of style after a few years, Iowa’s productivity continued, ever dependent on the workers who planted, cultivated, and gathered in Iowa’s annual harvest.

Here, then, are a few of the ordinary people who year after year reaped Iowa’s bounty. —The Editor

SHSI (IOWA CITY): FOSTER COLLECTION



**Above: Glen Foster carries John Foster (c. 1900) amidst a garden in Iowa Falls. Right: Mrs. Ralph Mann of Jefferson County poses by shelves of canning and a bin of potatoes (c. 1940s).**



SHS (IOWA CITY) - WETTACH COLLECTION

Drivers of seven wagons await the loading of cabbages into refrigerated boxcars in August 1916 in Nichols, Iowa. J. W. Rummells first grew cabbage in 1912 on five acres near Nichols. Within a few years he was shipping 10,000 tons of cabbage from southeastern Iowa and supplying the Midwest's major produce markets. Fellow horticulturists dubbed him the "Cabbage King."

Every February, workers hired by Rummells unloaded tons of railroad cars of manure and topsoil to prepare seedbeds in hothouses and cold frames. Thousands of seedlings were set out when the weather warmed. Heads were harvested and shipped from June through October. An ice plant, crate factory, and railroad siding, all constructed to accommodate the heavy yields, provided additional jobs in the Nichols area.

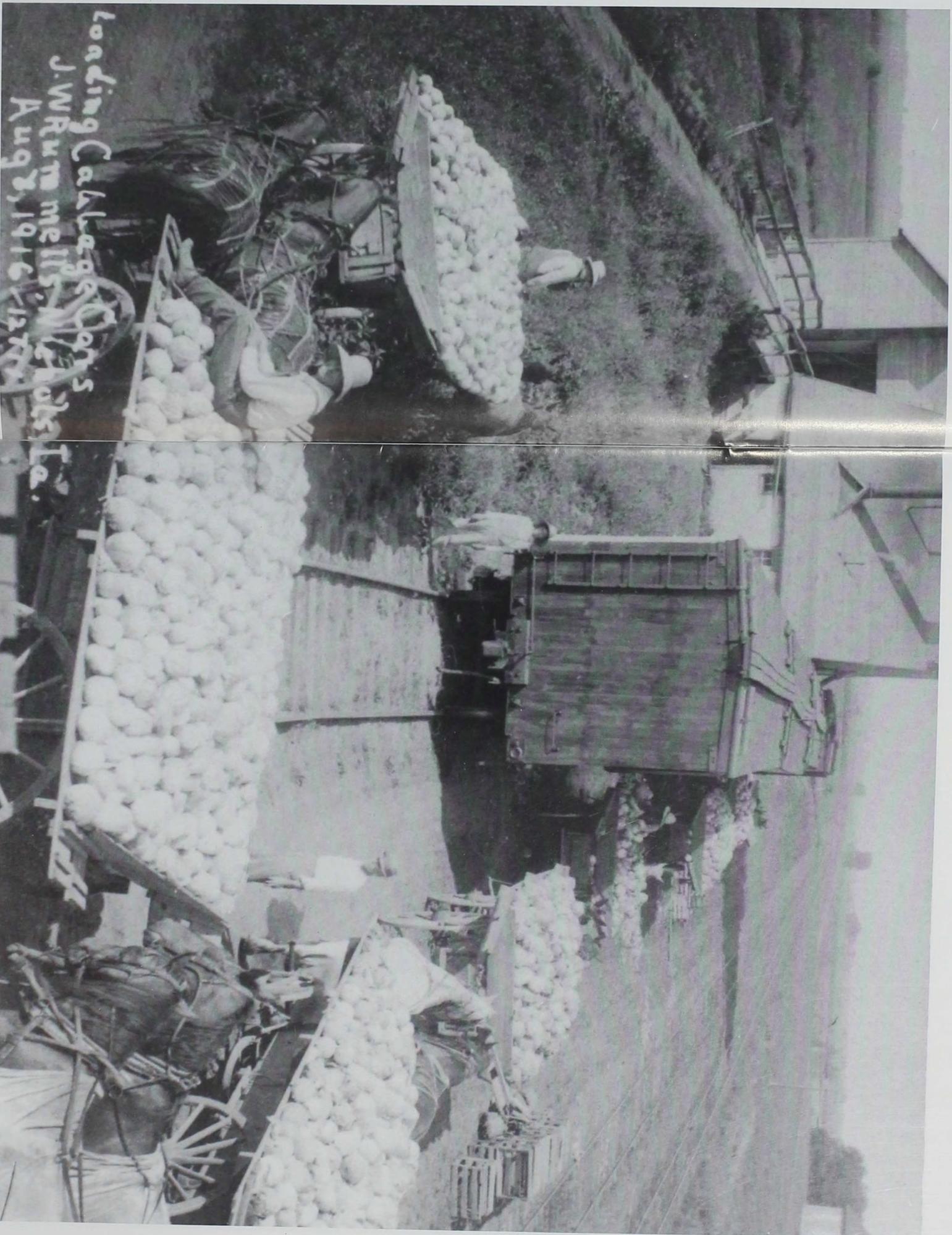




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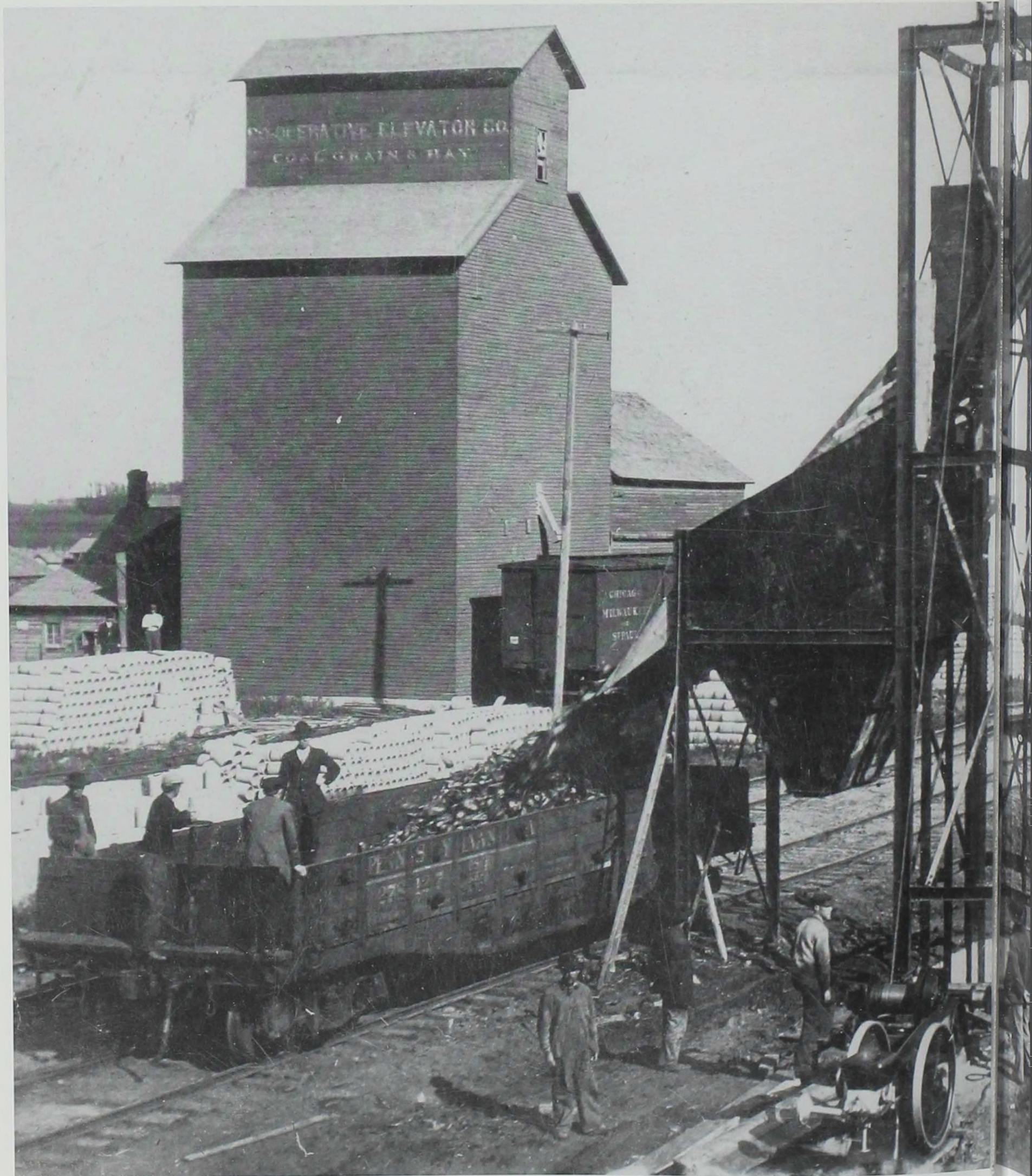
Although corn proved to be better suited to Iowa's soil and weather, wheat was still a major crop in Iowa in the 19th century. But the number of acres of wheat steadily declined, from 3.4 million in 1880, to less than half a million acres in 1930. Regardless of the decline, shocking even a single acre of wheat was still labor intensive in the 1930s and '40s, when this photo was taken.

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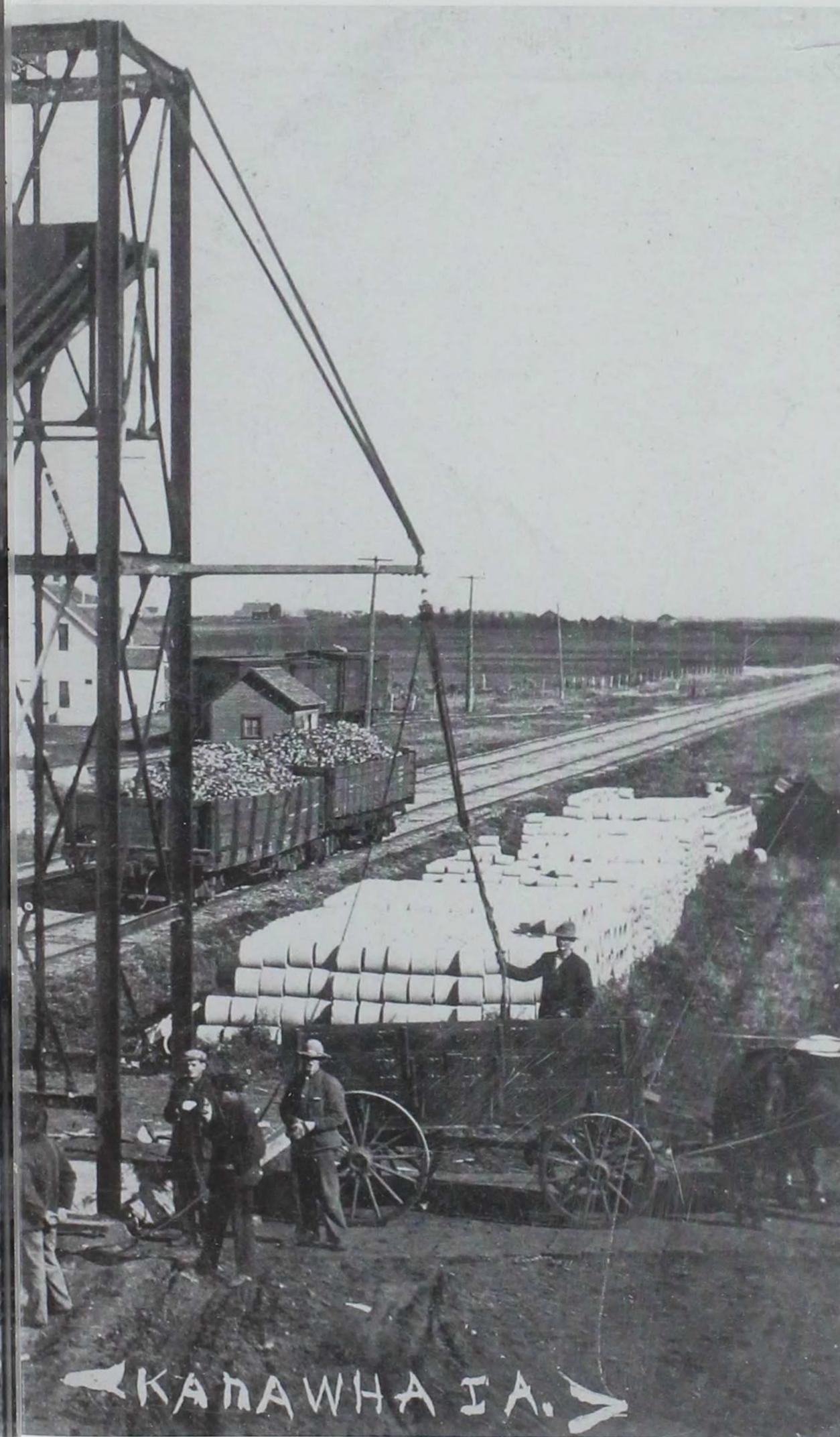




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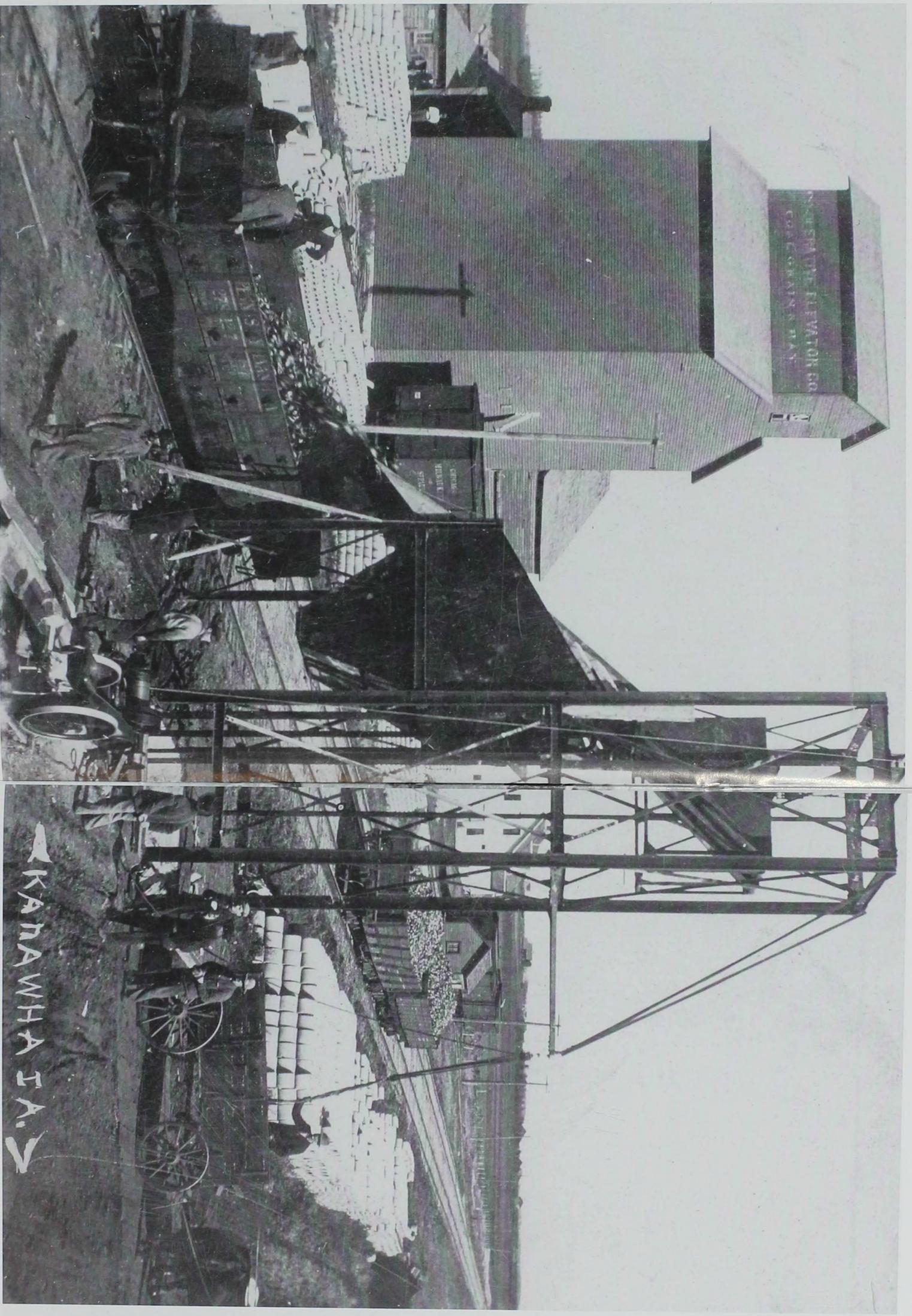
SHS (IOWA CITY)



Dwarfed by a grain elevator and stacks of clay tile, a handful of men oversee the loading of sugar beets into railroad cars at Kanawha, c. 1910–1915.

Processing sugar beets was a new industry in northern Iowa early in the century. At harvest time, farmers transported the beets by wagon to a nearby “sugar dump” like this one in Kanawha. From there they were shipped to processing plants in Iowa, where the beets were refined into sugar.

While plant owners provided the capital, and farmers the land, Mexicans and Mexican Americans provided the stoop labor. In 1926, for instance, over 2,000 Mexican nationals labored in the state’s sugar beet fields.



9181 (IOWA CITY)

KANAWHA I.A.

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SHS (IOWA CITY) WERTSCH COLLECTION

A good crop of apples meant a good supply of cider for those with a cider press, muscle power, and spare jugs and jars. Here, the McCabes demonstrate how it was done.

In 1910, three out of four Iowa farm families had apple orchards, and the state ranked sixth nationally in apple production. But severe winters frequently jeopardized orchards. On Armistice Day in 1940, daytime temperatures plunged 50 degrees, dropping to below zero. Orchards in southern Iowa were especially hard hit.

Fortunately, Iowa State pomologist T. J. Maney's experiments with grafting desirable varieties onto hardier, winterproof stocks soon met the challenge of brutal winters.



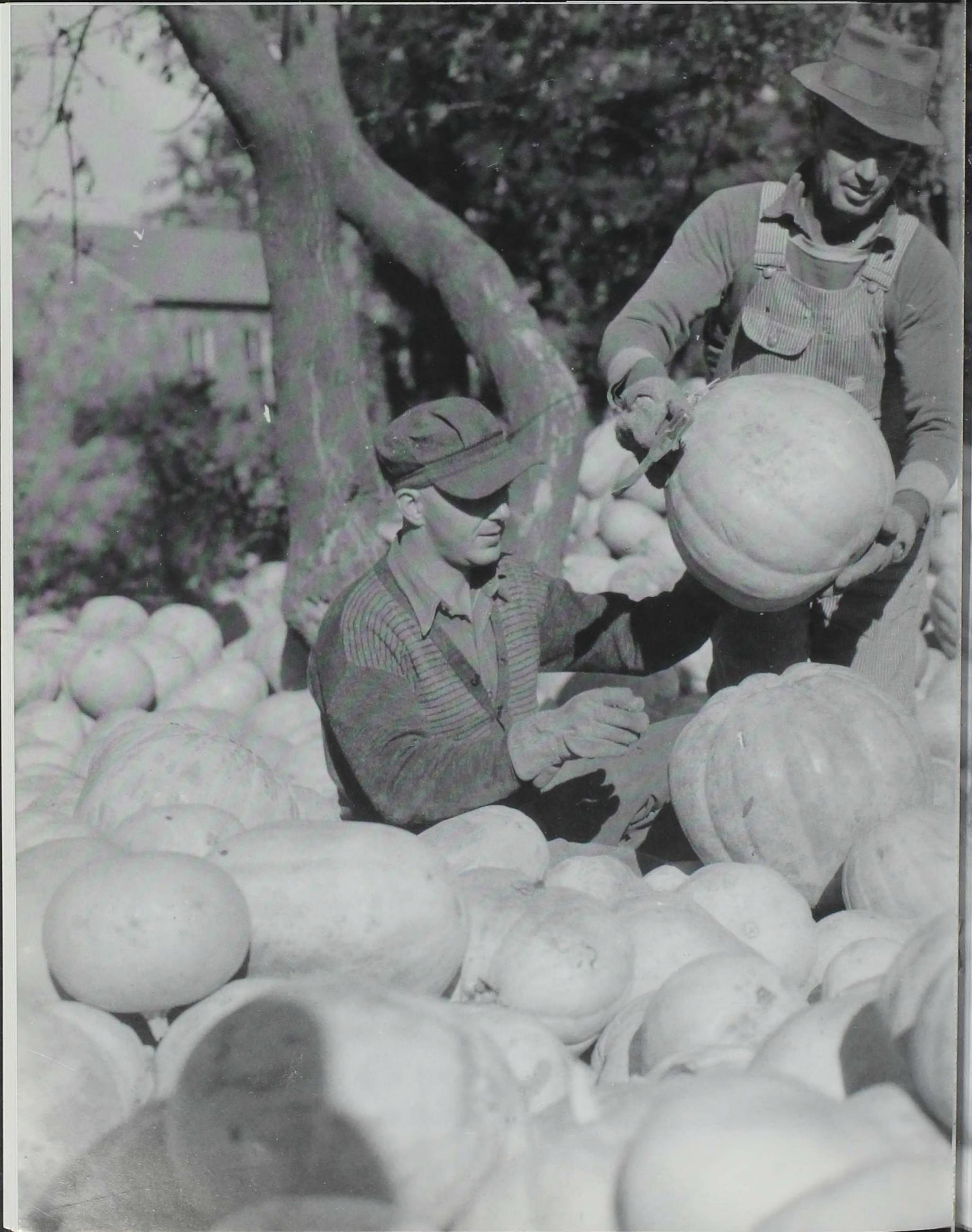
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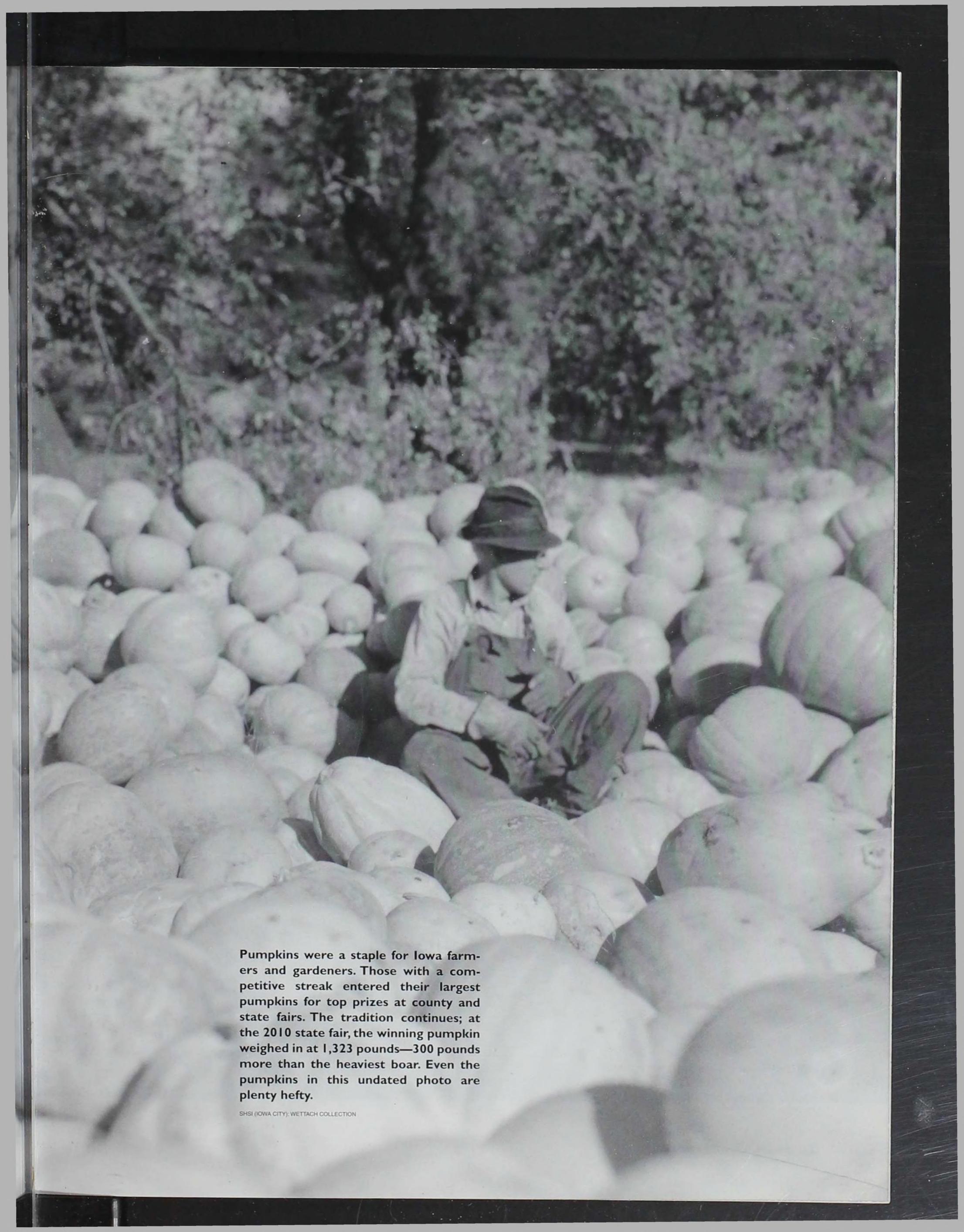


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Pumpkins were a staple for Iowa farmers and gardeners. Those with a competitive streak entered their largest pumpkins for top prizes at county and state fairs. The tradition continues; at the 2010 state fair, the winning pumpkin weighed in at 1,323 pounds—300 pounds more than the heaviest boar. Even the pumpkins in this undated photo are plenty hefty.

SHSI (IOWA CITY); WETTACH COLLECTION



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5861 (OWA CITY) WETLICH COLLECTION



Burlap sacks bulge with black walnuts. Perhaps the driver is calculating whether the sacks and the children will all fit in the auto.

At the time of settlement, black walnut trees thrived in Iowa's rich river bottoms. Used for barn timbers in the 19th century, and still used for fine furniture, the wood has long been valued for its strength and beauty.

The actual walnuts, however, are a bonus for those willing to hull, crack, and tediously pick out the nutmeat—chores that result in stained hands and precious little reward for walnut lovers.

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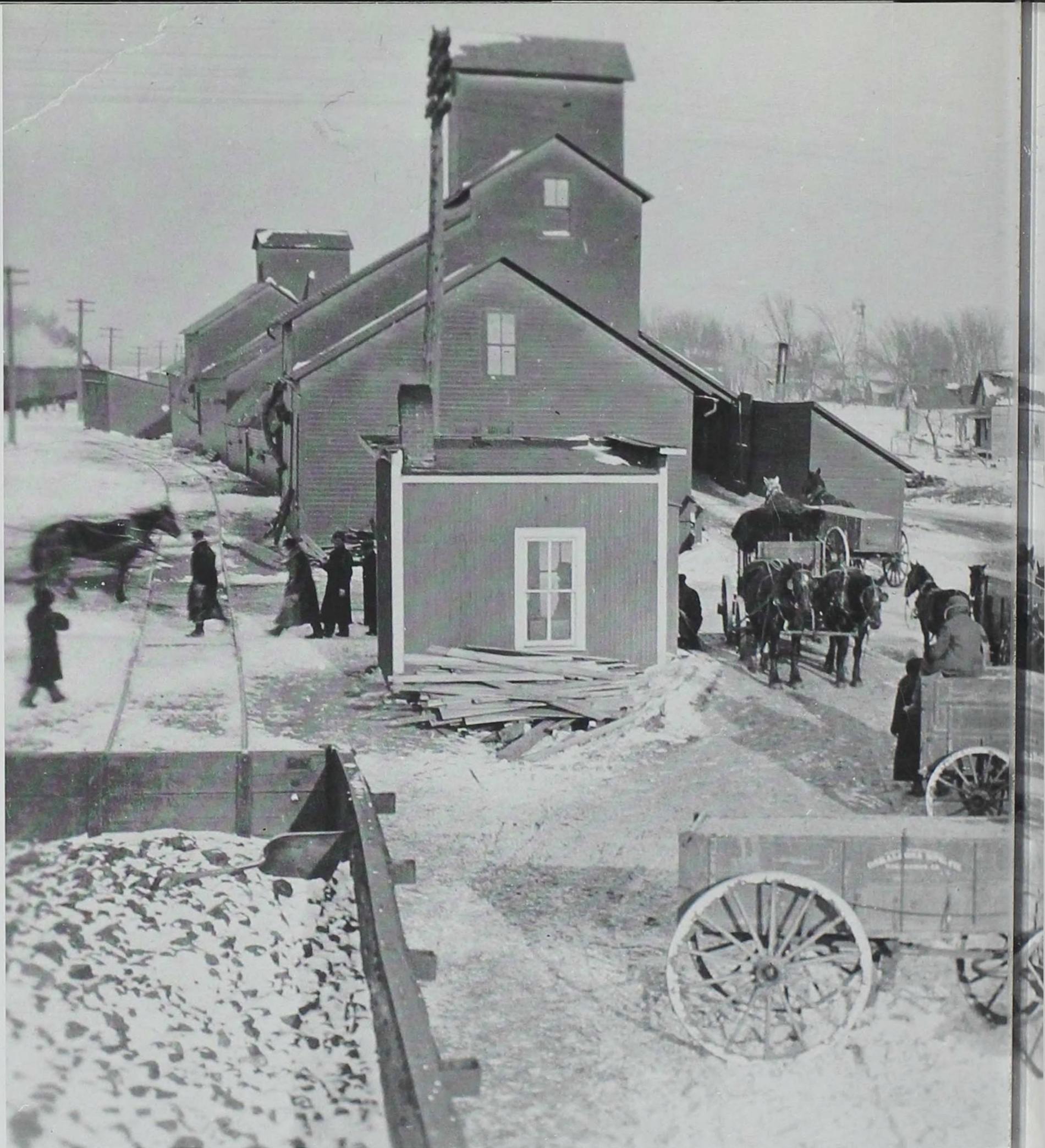
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SHSI (IOWA CITY): KENT COLLECTION



Farmers deliver shelled corn to Corwith on a frigid day in January 1913. With the help of hired men, farm families started picking corn in October, hoping to finish by the end of December if the weather cooperated.

An auto repair business sits across from the Corwith grain elevator. Although Iowa farmers adopted automobiles fairly early, tractors did not replace workhorses until the 1940s, when the war drew farm laborers into the armed services and defense jobs. ❖



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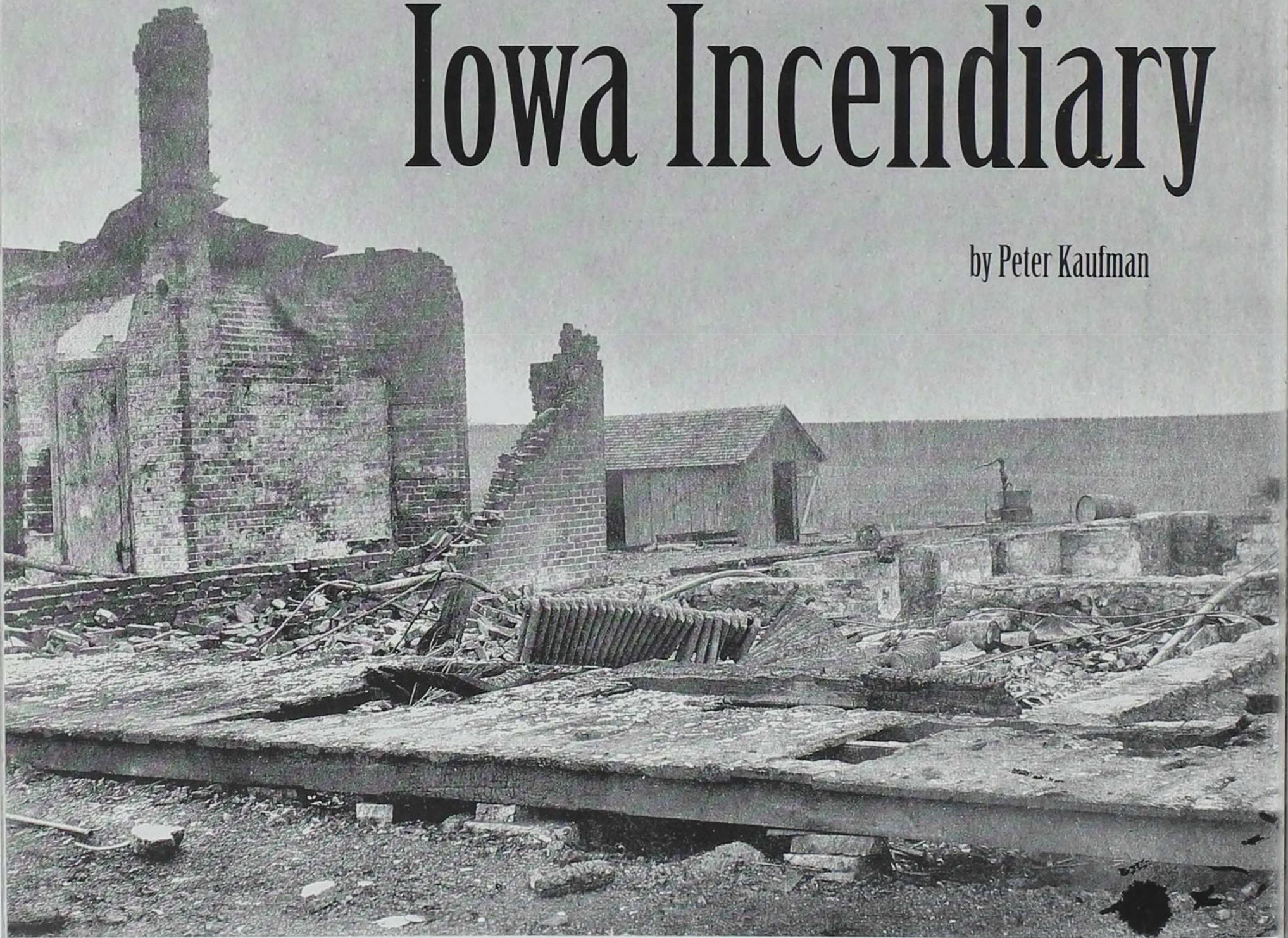


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# Iowa Incendiary

by Peter Kaufman



Frank Novak had the golden touch. At least that's what most people thought in Walford, Iowa, in 1897. To everyone who knew him, the 32-year-old Novak *was* Walford, since he functioned as the community's postmaster, business organizer, and head of civic activities. A native of the area, he had grown up on a farm, attended a commercial school, and, according to later reports, "with a little assistance from his father he opened up a business and it became prosperous and he made one advancement after another."

Novak owned the only bank and dry goods store

in Walford (population, a hundred or so), and he was active socially, his name appearing regularly in the newspapers in Cedar Rapids. It seemed that he could do no wrong, as "everything he touched seemed to turn to money."

In short, Frank Novak could spin the world as fast or as slowly as he chose. Never satisfied with his station in life, and despite some recent business setbacks, this son of Bohemian immigrants was always searching for new endeavors, and he made no secret of his lifelong goal—to acquire a large fortune.

So it was not surprising that by March 1897, Novak

had journeyed to Alaska and was on the Chilkoot Trail, struggling in the deep snow with hundreds of prospectors on their way to the Yukon River and the Klondike gold fields. But there was one difference between the Iowan and the other men on the frozen trail, and it had nothing to do with gold. Frank Novak was suspected of murder back in the Hawkeye state and was making a desperate attempt to disappear in this land of uncharted mountains and roaring rivers. He wanted to vanish and begin a new life under an assumed name, and he was positive that no one would ever find him in this vast territory.

The Walford businessman didn't know it, but someone was already on his trail. It was Novak's personal nemesis, a man who had already traveled more than four thousand miles in search of his prey. The pursuer was still hundreds of miles away, but time and distance meant little to him. Like a clockwork man, this indefatigable tracker was wound up and would stop at nothing to capture Novak, whom one newspaper called "the most daring and villainous criminal Iowa has ever had within her borders."

The puzzling story of Frank Novak began on February 3, 1897, in the village of Walford, located in the southeast corner of Benton County. At about 1:00 a.m., saloon keeper Martin Loder was awakened by his wife's shouts that a fire had broken out at the Novak & Jilek dry goods store down the street. Loder dressed quickly, told his brother-in-law to wake the Novaks (who lived across from them), and raced through the blowing snow to the two-story wood and brick building. The first floor and basement were engulfed in flames. He tried several times to break through the front door, but was driven back by the intensity of the fire as well as the coal gas fumes.

Loder assumed that the store owner, Frank Novak, was trapped inside. In the past year the store had allegedly been robbed, and recently Novak and his brother-in-law, Charles Zabokrtsky, had taken turns sleeping on a cot in the store to prevent another burglary. It was

Novak's turn that night, and, in fact, Loder had seen Novak behind the counter just a few hours earlier, getting ready to close down the store.

The townspeople battled the flames in a frantic race to save the store and stop the fire from spreading. As they pumped water from a nearby well and shoveled snow on the fire, clouds of steam rose into the frigid night air. But the blaze was too strong, their efforts too weak. They finally gave up and looked on helplessly at the ravenous flames, which licked and consumed the building with such ferocity that across the night skies an angry red glow was visible a dozen miles away in Cedar Rapids.

By the following morning, all that remained was the basement foundation and a ragged brick wall, standing like a sentry over the debris. Lars Norland, a farm equipment dealer from nearby Norway, was squirting water on the smoldering wreckage in the basement when he noticed what appeared to be a bone sticking out of the ashes. He played the water over the object and washed away a thick layer of ash and debris, revealing part of a human torso lying on the wire springs of a narrow metal cot. Martin Loder and several others picked their way through the smoking rubble and carried the remains over to a storage shed. All that was left of the corpse was a torso and head. The latter was burned to the bone and the exposed skull appeared to have been fractured.

Returning to where they had found the cot in the wreckage, the searchers discovered, amazingly intact, four small items: a pair of pocket scissors, a penknife, a piece of dental bridgework, and a metal identification tag. Several people claimed that these personal items belonged to store

owner Frank Novak.

But Edward Murray, a young farmer who had had several drinks with Novak that night, was also missing. Murray was later characterized as a "hard-drinking Irishman" and yet a "good-natured [and] harmless fellow." He was not known to be a close friend of Novak's.

A storm of controversy swept through the little town. While many were certain that the body was



Frank Novak

NOVAK: COURTESY THE AUTHOR, MURRAY: CEDAR RAPIDS GAZETTE, FEBRUARY 2, 1897



Ed Murray



**"Searching for the other body in basement ruins." Two days after the Walford store burned down, this sketch of the scene of the fire appeared in the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*.**

Novak's, others argued just as strongly that it was Ed Murray's. A handful believed that Murray had murdered Novak and robbed the store. To others, it was clear that Novak had killed Murray. Yet another theory was that both men had died in the fire—that burglars had robbed the store and then set fire to the building to destroy the evidence.

In short, the scene in Walford was chaotic. "Intense excitement prevails," shouted a headline from the February 5 *Cedar Rapids Daily Republican*. "Everybody has his own theory and wild stories [are] in circulation [and] hundreds and hundreds of people, farmers from miles around the little burg [are] driving into town to view the ruins and hear the latest news." It was, another paper concluded, a "mystery boundless and fathomless."

People picked through the coals and wreckage, speculating as to who had perished in the flames. In-fighting broke out between the two anguished families—Novak's and Murray's—as each set of relatives claimed that the remains should be turned over to them for funeral preparations. The anxiety in the little town was so palpable it was reported that Novak's father attempted suicide by swallowing poison.

Amidst all this tension, Michael James Tobin, a young attorney with a sterling reputation, appeared in town. Born in 1865 in New York to Irish immigrants,

Tobin had graduated from Cornell College in Iowa and Columbia Law School and then established a fledgling legal practice in Vinton, the Benton County seat. Still in his early thirties, Tobin had just been elected county prosecutor. The Walford incident would be his first case as an elected official. In one of the many ironies woven into the story, Frank Novak had campaigned for Tobin's election.

Meanwhile, the Benton County coroner, Dr. C. B. Chenoweth, ordered an inquest. A coroner's jury heard testimony from several witnesses, including Nellie Shea, Ed Murray's sister. Shea, a widow who lived on a farm near Walford, was positive that the remains were her brother's. Scraps of fabric wedged in the corpse's armpits matched a shirt she had given him for Christmas a few years ago. She recognized the pattern of white crescent moons and stars on a blue background. She also noted that on the corpse were remnants of a St. Joseph's cord. Murray, as a Catholic, had worn such a cord around his waist.

Wencil Ruml, a well-known physician from Cedar Rapids, examined the remains and noted that although the brain had been scorched, he had discovered a fist-sized amount of baked blood clotted inside the left portion of the head. Tobin pressed the physician as to whether a blow to the head might have resulted in this clot before the fire and could have been the cause of

death, but Ruml said that because the rest of the skull was so badly burned, it was impossible to reach that conclusion.

Then a 19-year-old dental assistant named Louis Hasek was called before the coroner's jury. After scrutinizing the upper and lower jaw, he noted that the left upper bicuspid and incisor were missing. The skull could not be Novak's, Hasek stated. He was certain beyond a doubt that in his examination a few weeks earlier, Novak still had had those teeth. And while Hasek had no explanation why Novak's bridgework was discovered under the cot, he was adamant that this was not Novak's skull.

After three days of testimony, Tobin was convinced that it was Ed Murray—and Murray alone—who had died in the fire. The county attorney's next step was to determine what had happened to Frank Novak.

Tobin did more digging and discovered that Novak had recently taken out \$27,000 in life insurance through five different insurance agencies and that he was deeply in debt from playing the Chicago grain market while running up heavy gambling losses in Cedar Rapids.

Tobin now had a theory and a motive. He believed that Novak had concocted a plan to murder someone of a similar height and weight, burn the body beyond recognition, and disappear. If he could get away with it, his wife would receive all of the insurance money for herself and their two sons, and he could begin a new life elsewhere, freed from his financial burdens.

Despite this new information on Novak's debts and insurance policies, something still didn't quite add up, especially to those who knew him well. "But why," an acquaintance wondered, "did he not protect local creditors, settle outside claims the best that he could and go on with business? The people of Walford thought everything of him and would have stood by him to the end." Still convinced that Novak had planned the whole insidious scheme, Tobin moved forward.

The county attorney was not alone in his suspicions; Travelers Insurance Company also believed that a scam was being perpetrated. Travelers hired Thiel Detective Agency to find Novak if he was still alive.

G. H. "Gus" Thiel was the company's president, a former Civil War spy and a Pinkerton man who had left Allan Pinkerton's well-known detective firm and founded his own competing company in 1873.

Thiel now dispatched several detectives to Iowa, where they diligently chased down each lead. The county sheriff had already telegraphed descriptions of Novak to officials in major cities and seaports, and, in fact, a report came in that Novak had been seen in Bal-

timore boarding a ship for Europe. This proved to be false, and the focus quickly returned to Iowa.

Thiel's men combed eastern Iowa, following up on reports of possible Novak sightings. Carrying photographs of Novak, they interviewed people in Walford and the surrounding area and discovered that a man resembling Novak had traveled south through Homestead and Holbrook on the afternoon after the fire, and that he had paid a young farmer for a 20-mile wagon ride to Iowa City.

A Thiel detective picked up Novak's trail at an Iowa City depot. After interviewing several conductors, he learned that on the night of February 3 a man matching Novak's description had purchased a ticket to Omaha, signing it as "Frank Alfred." More of Thiel's men joined the chase and followed Novak's trail from Nebraska to Portland, Oregon, and then up the coast to Vancouver, British Columbia. Thiel's agents now believed that Novak was using other aliases, including "J. A. Smith," which had appeared on another train ticket in nearly identical handwriting. Discovering that Novak had arranged passage on the *Al-Ki* steamer, the agents guessed that he was now working his way up the Alaskan coastline to Juneau.

They were right. The "Iowa incendiary" had picked the Yukon, thinking that he could safely assume a new identity there.

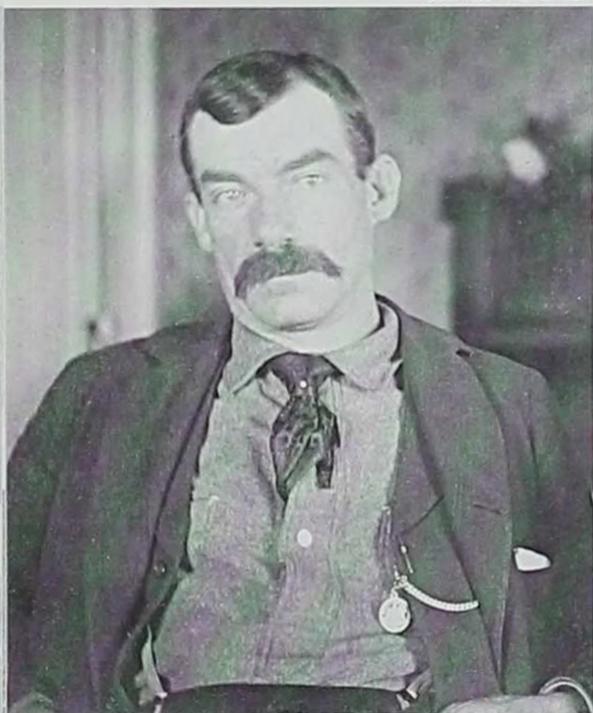
When the agents asked their boss about the next move, Thiel abruptly called them off the hunt. Although pleased with their progress, he now had someone else in mind, the perfect man for the next part of the chase. His name was C. C. Perrin—part bloodhound and part rattlesnake.

Tall, with a square jaw, auburn hair, and a thick red mustache to match, "Red" Perrin grew up in the Southwest and had a reputation as a hard-bitten deputy sheriff in the Arizona Territory. A veteran of the Apache Wars with the scars to prove it, Perrin had also worked as a security agent at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and recently had tracked down a Chicago embezzler in Mexico.

Now the Arizonan was in for the adventure of his life. He was handed a photograph of Novak and, as one reporter put it, "told to find the original."

Perrin first traveled by train to Ottawa for extradition papers. By the time he reached Vancouver, Novak had a six-week head start. Most other men handicapped by Novak's long head start into the Alaskan wilderness might have simply turned around, but Perrin had no "give up" in him. He caught a steamer heading up the Inside Pas-

COURTESY THE AUTHOR



Detective Red Perrin

sage to Sitka, where he hired a Norwegian carpenter named Knudson to help him in the long journey ahead. The two men followed Novak's trail north through the Alaskan panhandle, traveling by boat up the stormy Lynn Canal from Juneau to Dyea, where they engaged seven Indians to help pack their goods over the rugged Chilkoot Pass to Lake Lindeman.

There Perrin and Knudson set up camp. They hiked five miles be-

fore they found wood suitable for building a boat, then cut the timber and floated it down to the lake. Having Knudson along was an excellent choice, as his carpentry skills were needed for a boat. They whipsawed logs, nailed the wood together, and sealed the hull with oakum and pitch. Then they set off down the Yukon, battling the deadly White Horse Rapids, where they nearly lost their provisions and came close to drowning. They endured swarms of mosquitoes and powerful headwinds while fighting off hunger and fatigue.

Five weeks and 600 miles after breaking camp at Lake Lindeman, the two ragged and exhausted men beached their boat at Dawson City. Ironically, despite all of the hardships on the trail and the river, the pair had made such good time that they had unknowingly passed Frank Novak aboard a scow on Lake Bennett.

Single-minded and relentless, Perrin was closing in. Unfazed by the mad merry-go-round of the gold rush town and the riches that surrounded him, he scoured Dawson City, showing Novak's photograph to dance hall girls, Indians, gamblers, and greenhorns—whom the old prospectors called *cheechakos*. No one had seen the man. Perrin also alerted Inspector Charles Constantine of the North West Mounted Police that he was searching for a murder suspect.

Ten days later, on July 12, Perrin spotted a man sitting in a scow tied up at the riverbank. At about 5'9" and 180 pounds, with a full beard of reddish-brown whiskers, the man matched Novak's description. Perrin approached him.

"Hello, Novak, I have followed you a long time but I caught up with you."

"You are mistaken. My name is J. A. Smith."

"It is, is it? Well, you are accused of killing a man by the name of Ed Murray in Walford, Iowa, and that is why I have had you arrested and am holding you under arrest now, but if you can identify yourself as being J. A. Smith, why, we will turn you loose."

The bearded man vehemently denied everything and said that Perrin was making a mistake. He was not from Iowa but was born in Cincinnati and had lived for some time in Chicago. But when Perrin grilled him about Chicago, the suspect could name only a few streets and knew little else about the city.

"You claim to be J. A. Smith," Perrin said, taking out an envelope and asking him to write that name on the paper.

The bearded man complied. Perrin reached into his pocket and pulled out an old letter that Novak had written. He compared the handwriting and said, "These signatures look very much alike."

Novak said slowly, "They certainly do."

Without "the batting of an eye or twitching of a muscle," Novak listened to Perrin read the arrest warrant and then was marched to the Mountie headquarters, where the post physician compared the suspect's mouth with Perrin's written description of Novak's teeth. Amazingly, Inspector Constantine had found a man in Dawson who was from the Cedar Rapids area. This man positively identified the suspect as Frank Novak. Back in Iowa the two had belonged to the same fraternal lodge.

There was no doubt. Perrin had the right man.

It took six weeks of travel from Dawson City before Perrin and Novak finally reached the Midwest. At 2:30 a.m. on September 2, Train No. 2b of the Burlington, Cedar Rapids and Northern Railway pulled into Vinton, Iowa. Waiting patiently for them with about 50 other Iowans was M. J. Tobin.

As county attorney, Tobin now faced two problems. First, the case centered on circumstantial evidence alone, and it would be difficult to obtain a conviction without direct proof. "This will be a desperately fought case, as all the evidence is of a circumstantial nature," he had written to the president of Travelers Insurance. "Novak's case is one of the most heinous in the history of crime in Iowa and the state proposes to convict him of murder . . . because we believe him guilty."

Tobin was also worried about the defense attorney who would be sitting across from him; Novak had quickly engaged Thomas Hale Milner of Belle Plaine. Milner—like Tobin, a graduate of Iowa's Cornell College—had been in practice for about 20 years. A fiery,

# FRANK NOVAK FOUND

## Insurance Swindler and Murderer Captured at Last.

TRAGEDY TO FAR-AWAY KLONDIKE.

Sharp Work Done by a  
Daring Officer.

CEDAR RAPIDS DAILY TIMES, AUGUST 26, 1897

Headlines in the *Cedar Rapids Daily Times* announced the dramatic events in the Yukon to readers in Iowa.

red-headed dynamo and a formidable courtroom opponent, Milner was known for his "fierce" attacks.

Milner also apparently relished colorful phraseology. In his advertisements he referred to himself as "quick as a hippopotamus and gentle as a sunstroke . . . I am ready day or night—Sundays excepted—to try a lawsuit. It is my Eden, and in it perpetual flowers bloom, for me. Better is a dry morsel and contentment therewith than a stalled ox with contention. Give me the stalled ox and clothes or I perish. To get them I must have business. References given. Always ready."

Both Tobin and Milner knew that they needed additional legal firepower. For Tobin, the choice was easy. He picked Earl L. Boies, son of former Iowa governor Horace Boies, to help develop the prosecutor's strategy. Also a Cornell graduate, Boies was a polished, eloquent orator—"a Titan in intellect," according to a colleague—and in fact would give the final summation in the case.

On the defense side, Milner had sought a solid legal jurist. He selected a well-known retired judge, John J. Ney, a law professor at the State University of Iowa. Both Boies and Ney would make important legal contributions to the case.

The trial began on November 9, 1897, nine months after the fire. Throughout the trial, Novak's father and Murray's father sat only three feet apart, both near the jury. Spectators and reporters packed the stuffy, cramped little courthouse in Vinton. Reportedly more than half of the attendees were women, many of whom sent a steady stream of candy, flowers, and cakes to Novak's cell. The accused man had an easy time of it in jail, reading, playing cards, talking with friends, savoring the home-cooked meals from Sheriff Metcalf's

wife, and granting an occasional interview with a reporter.

From the start, Milner's main defense strategy was based on his old tactic: "Deny everything and ask for proof." He also placed special emphasis on Novak's version of what had happened the night of the fire—that he had placed a bottle of whiskey laced with morphine behind the counter, with the hope that burglars would likely drink it. He left Ed Murray for a few minutes, and when he returned he noticed that Murray was acting strangely. Novak assumed that the young farmer had unwittingly drunk from the spiked whiskey bottle. He helped the groggy young man to a cot and fell asleep himself. When he woke up, the store was on fire. After searching for Murray through the dense smoke, Novak panicked and fled, thinking, as Perrin later put it, that "the best thing to do was to fall off the earth for awhile."

The defense also contended that the gases released by the burning coal and wood may have caused Novak to act irrationally and wander around the countryside in a stupor. From the witness stand, L. W. Andrews, a professor of chemistry at Iowa State College, supported this theory. Someone exposed to these gases, Andrews said, would be "more or less dazed" and not in full control of his mental faculties.

Milner and Ney had another ace up their sleeve—a maneuver to discredit Perrin, the prosecution's star witness. In later July, after Novak was arrested by the Mounties, he had made a confidential confession to Red Perrin as they left the Yukon. Perrin had promised Novak that he would keep the confession a secret until the grand jury convened in Iowa. But as soon as they reached Vinton, Perrin allegedly broke his word to Novak and told Tobin about the confession. Milner claimed that this showed that Perrin couldn't be trusted and that any testimony from him was highly suspect.

Milner now made it his job to rattle the detective, and he began with Perrin's lengthy diary, which had appeared in a number of newspapers and was serial-

COURTESY THE AUTHOR



Frank Novak, after he was captured by Red Perrin in the Yukon.

ized in *The Travelers Record*, published by Travelers Insurance Company under the tantalizing title "The Diary of Detective Perrin: Adventures in the Klondike While Searching for Novak, the Murderer and Insurance Swindler." Milner saw Perrin's diary as nothing more than a bid for publicity and fame.

"You wanted to come in the form of a conquering hero and publish that yourself, didn't you, Perrin?" Milner asked.

"Yes, I was looking for all kinds of notoriety, that is right," Perrin said with more than a hint of sarcasm.

"And you wanted your employer to know you had obtained it, didn't you?"

"Oh, he knew that all right enough."

After two weeks of testimony, the final summations began, drawing hundreds of people to the courthouse. Many were turned away. The crowd was so dense that it took the sheriff and his prisoner a quarter hour to fight their way to their seats.

For the prosecution, Tobin described the case as "clothed in mystery deep and profound" and reviewed the testimony. He discredited Milner's ad hominem attack against Perrin: "This cross-examination was not made to break down his testimony. It was made to prejudice you in your minds against that detective." He argued that Perrin had disclosed Novak's confession to Tobin as a "duty," not "treachery."

Arguing that Novak had dealt a fatal blow to Murray's head and then set fire to the store, Tobin said dramatically, "For money, for \$27,000, Ed Murray was hurled into eternity and his poor body burned beyond recognition."

Speaking for the defendant, Ney stated that no evidence pointed to a murder conviction. He assailed the prosecution for failing to establish a motive. Novak was "in the full tide of his prosperity," he reminded the jury. "Murder? Bosh." Milner made the same point: "That he would sell the love of a beautiful wife, and the



Defense attorneys Thomas Milner (left) and John Ney, as portrayed by the *Cedar Rapids Gazette* during the trial.

kisses of two lovely children and separate himself forever from them for the purpose of collecting the little insurance policies. Why, gentleman, it is a libel."

Ney tried to dismiss the idea that Novak's flight to the Yukon was proof of his guilt. "You cannot convict a man because he has not the bravery to face circumstances," he said. "What could he do; what could he do? He had to do one or the

other of two things; one to come back and the other to flee and get away. Not from a sense of guilt, but from a sense of fear of being accused."

Prosecutor Boies countered: "When [did] it become necessary for innocence to shield itself by flight and behind names that were assumed? . . . When did it become necessary for innocence to invent stories that stand here demonstrated to be false?"

In a masterful summary for the prosecution, Boies described Novak's story as "teeming and reeking with lies and falsehoods." Would the jurors, he asked, "turn loose upon this country, unpunished, a man guilty of such a crime?"

The jury retired to deliberate at 11 a.m. They returned with a verdict after 11 that night. Since the jurors could not agree on first-degree murder, they voted for murder in the second degree and recommended ten years of hard labor. After some consideration, Judge G. W. Burnham decided that this was too lenient and sentenced Novak to life imprisonment.

"The condemned man sank back in his chair," one newspaper reported, "and a ghastly pallor overspread his face. He nervously clutched at the edges of the table and fixed his eyes toward the floor."

Many Iowa newspapers were astonished by the verdict. "We venture to say that ninety-nine percent of those who followed this trial were disgusted with the outcome," wrote a Cedar Rapids paper. "The verdict lacks the first hint of consistency," stated another. Others believed No-



Prosecuting attorneys M. J. Tobin and Earl Boies.

vak should be freed. Some felt that the second-degree verdict was a poor compromise by the jurors. For his part, M. J. Tobin always insisted afterward that one of the jurors had been bribed.

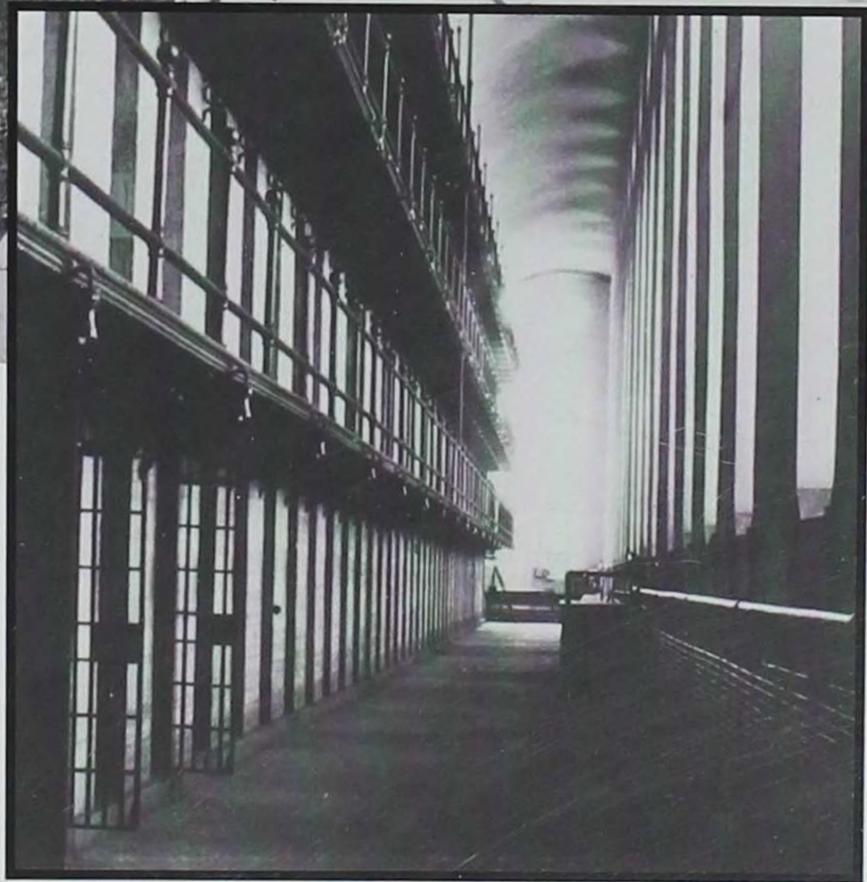
Defense attorney Milner immediately filed an appeal, but Novak could not post the \$18,000 bail, and so, on the evening of December 30, 1897, while the rest of the state was preparing to celebrate the New Year, Novak traveled by train with Sheriff Metcalf to the State Penitentiary in Anamosa.

After a rough start—he was placed in solitary confinement for assaulting another prisoner—Novak settled down and gradually accepted life at the penitentiary. He lost his appeal in 1898. A few years later, he became interested in photography while assisting the prison photographer in snapping pictures of all incoming convicts. Later on, he took photos documenting life in the prison and even was allowed to shoot landscapes outside of the penitentiary walls. Evidently, he became quite an accomplished photographer, so good that the *Anamosa Prison Press*, a newspaper published by the inmates, featured many of his pictures and mentioned a statewide photography contest that he had entered. Novak even took a studio portrait of Governor Albert B. Cummins when he stopped by the penitentiary in 1905.

Perhaps it was during that visit that Novak made an impression on Cummins. More than likely it was the incessant lobbying by Tom Milner, combined with the efforts of a *Cedar Rapids Gazette* editor named F. W. Faulkes, who was convinced Novak was innocent.

In 1908 Cummins commuted Novak's sentence from life imprisonment to 25 years, and, with time off for good behavior, the former "Iowa incendiary" calmly walked out of Fort Madison on September 4, 1911, a free man. He had served 14 years of his sentence.

Once again, many Iowans were howling mad. One incensed newspaper reader who called himself "Yours for the Truth" wrote a long letter detailing the facts of

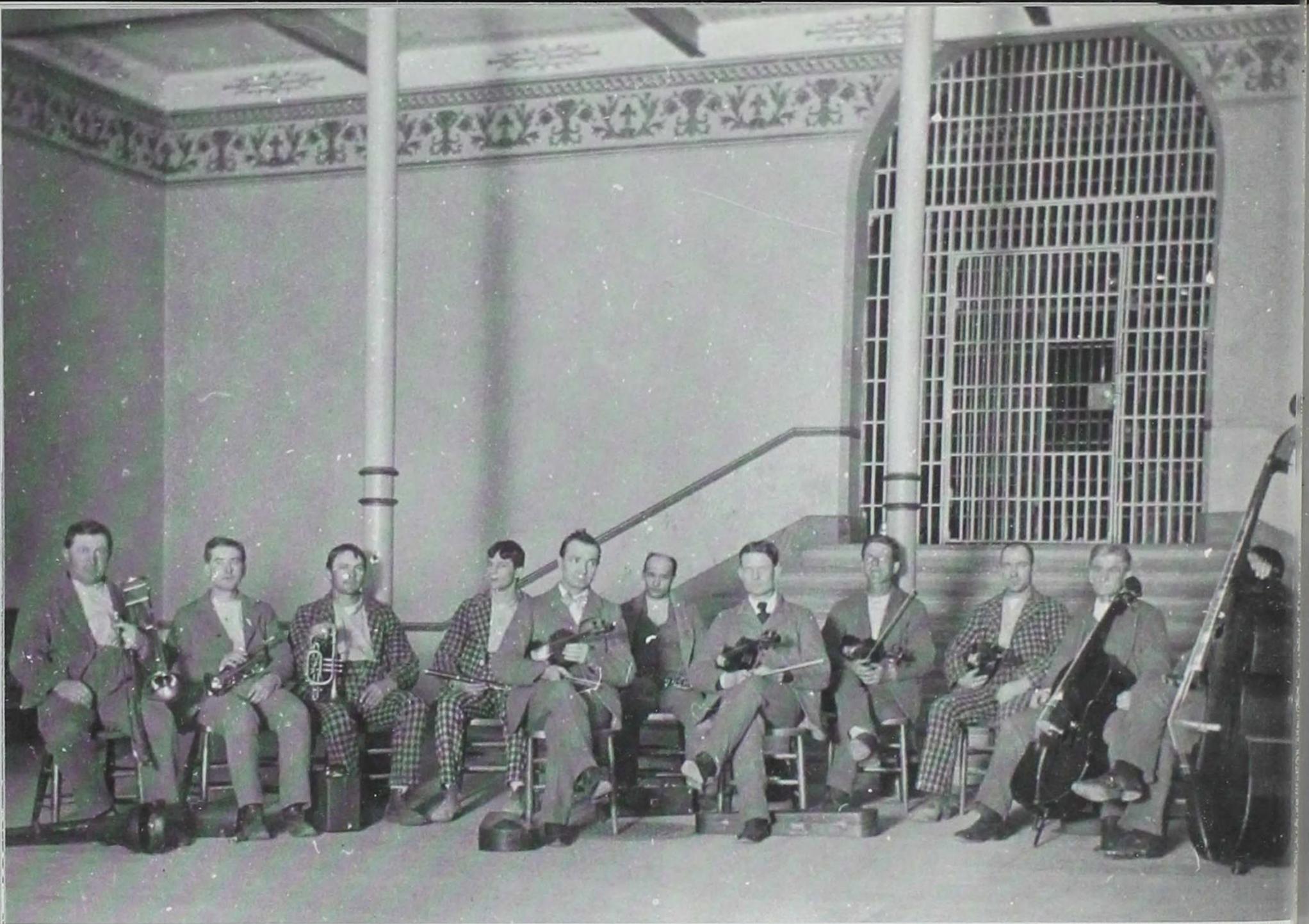


The exterior of Anamosa Penitentiary at the turn of the century, and one of the cell blocks.

the case and blasting Novak's distortions. The writer argued that "the crimes of the [James &] Younger Gang in Minnesota were not as dastardly as the one committed by Novak."

The successful prosecution of the Novak case brought local prominence to Benton County Attorney M. J. Tobin. Propelled by his victory, he opened a law office in Vinton; three of his sons became lawyers and joined the firm later. He became a leader in the community, served on the board of di-

BOTH PHOTOS: SPSI (IOWA CITY)



COURTESY ANAMOSA STATE PENITENTIARY MUSEUM

**Frank Novak (fifth from left) played violin in the Anamosa prison orchestra, c. 1900.**

rectors of the State Bank of Vinton, and was active in the Republican Party as well as various state and local issues until his death in 1945.

The indomitable Red Perrin also had a successful career. As a result of his diary being excerpted in several newspapers, he became known as a famous detective and worked as Gus Thiel's right-hand man. He courted and married Mary Agnes Murray, a cousin of Ed Murray's, and eventually rose to the position of assistant manager of Thiel Detective Agency's New York office. Perrin died in a train crash in upstate New York in 1911, leaving behind his wife and their two-year-old daughter, Helen.

The remainder of Frank Novak's life is somewhat murky. While he was in prison, his wife, Mary, filed for a divorce and was granted one in 1904. After he was released from the penitentiary in 1911 at age 47, Novak stayed in the town of Fort Madison for several months, attempting to sell prison photographs. Newspaper accounts later noted that he had looked into opening a photography studio in St. Louis, Des Moines, or Iowa

City. Then in 1913, a marriage notice appeared in the *Cedar Rapids Republican*, listing the wedding of Ella Johnson of Cedar Rapids to a man named Frank A. Novak, a "banker and prominent real estate broker in Chicago." That was the last known time his name appeared in any newspapers. According to an account by M. J. Tobin's son published in 1970, after Novak was released from prison, he "led a quiet and uneventful life."

**M**ore than 110 years have passed since the Novak story whipped eastern Iowa into a froth. Today, a traveler driving down Route 151 South passes through Walford, now a sleepy little bedroom community of Cedar Rapids with a dozen or so small businesses. The old Milwaukee Road branch line still cuts through Walford but is now operated by the CRANDIC rail system. In the summer, one can stand by the old tracks, just a few dozen feet away from where Frank Novak's store used to be and listen to the corn grow in the blistering Iowa heat.

Five miles from Walford is another small settlement, Norway, and just outside of town on a steep hill is St. Michael's Cemetery. A gravel road neatly bisects the graveyard, with "Catholics buried on one side and everybody else on the right," according to one local citizen. On the left side—the Catholic side—is a three-foot, gray marble obelisk. The years have aged the grave marker, and it now lies broken in the tall grass next to its base.

Buried by the fallen stone, along with his brother, are the remains of poor Ed Murray, an innocent man who by fate, providence, or just plain bad luck, was absolutely in the wrong place at the wrong time. ❖

*Author Peter Kaufman lives in Cincinnati, Ohio, and is writing a book about the Novak case.*

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

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## How to Research a Murder

Voltaire once wrote that "a historian has several duties. Let me remind you of two of them: the first is not to slander; the second is not to bore." A third duty that he failed to mention is "to leave no stone unturned." In researching the strange story of Frank Novak—one with more twists and turns than a New York subway ride—this duty was particularly important.

As an aside, my own interest in the Novak story stems from a longtime fascination with the Klondike Gold Rush, a passion I developed while working in a cannery on Kodiak Island, Alaska. At the time, there wasn't a lot to do on "The Rock" except work, fish, and read. One book I discovered there was *The Klondike Fever* by Pierre Berton. The author, who was raised in Dawson City, wrote a brief but riveting account of Novak's flight to the Klondike and subsequent arrest by Red Perrin.

After I decided to write a book about the Novak case, my first action was to post e-mails on several genealogical websites, asking if anyone knew anything about or was related to Frank Novak of Walford, Iowa, who lived in the late 19th century. I received several responses, including one from Novak's great-granddaughter.

I contacted several organizations in Iowa, including historical societies in Benton and Linn counties and chambers of commerce in Cedar Rapids and Vinton. I wrote to both Iowa state penitentiaries, where Novak was incarcerated—in Anamosa and Fort Madison. The staff at Anamosa State Penitentiary Museum was particularly cooperative in providing details of his stay there.

My next step was to contact public libraries in Cedar Rapids, Norway, Anamosa, Vinton, Belle Plaine, Fort Madison, and several other Iowa towns. Each librarian I talked to was friendly and made a number of suggestions regarding available resources. In fact, the Vinton librarians put me in touch with several of M. J. Tobin's descendants, who provided a great deal of information, including a tattered scrapbook that Tobin's wife, Lucy, had assembled more than 60 years ago.

The web can be a useful research tool for any writer. In this instance, [www.newspaperarchive.com](http://www.newspaperarchive.com) was vital. This online resource includes dozens of Iowa newspapers, many dating into the mid-19th century. (The site also provides access to hundreds of non-Iowa papers.) Searching by name, date, or topic, I tracked down contemporary newspaper coverage of the crime and the case. The State Historical Society of Iowa Libraries subscribe to the website, as do some public libraries. Personal subscriptions are affordable. By Googling "Travelers Record Perrin," I accessed Perrin's accounts of his trip to the Yukon and capture of Novak.

Finally, on three research trips to Iowa, I visited many of the communities integral to the story and spoke with local historians and residents whenever possible. In Iowa City I made extensive use of State Historical Society of Iowa collections, including "State vs. Novak," a 1,600-page typed transcript of the trial. The staff members there, as well as those in Special Collections at the University of Iowa Libraries, were most helpful in my research efforts.

—Peter Kaufman

# Dr. Mary Edwards Walker

*and the*

## Medal of Honor

*by Dennis H. Black*

**A**rmy Surgeon Mary E. Walker is the nation's only female recipient of the Medal of Honor. Of all things written of Walker, authors tend to reflect on her penchant for passionately espousing women's dress reforms and women's rights. Fiercely independent, self-reliant, and sternly willed, Walker truly was a character with whom few could reckon.

With the advent of the Civil War in April 1861, Walker (*right*), who had graduated from Syracuse Medical College, was determined to join the Union Army as a doctor. Denied a commission as a medical officer, she had little choice but to volunteer her services as an assistant surgeon. As a volunteer, she was assigned to the Washington, D.C., hospital that had been set up in the U.S. Patent Offices building and assisted in treating wounded soldiers who had besieged the city following the Battle of Bull Run.

Walker realized that hygiene was an integral component of saving lives. In 1862 she enrolled at Hygea Therapeutic College in New York City. Following the completion of coursework in the fall, she again traveled to Washington in anticipation of a commission. The

elusive assignment was not to be, and she again served as a volunteer in the backwoods of Virginia, where an outbreak of typhoid fever was ravaging the troops. By her own design, Walker wore a uniform of dark blue trousers with a gold stripe and the green sash of a surgeon. None dared challenge her boldness in securing a uniform of personal design.

Highly frustrated by her inability to gain official recognition for her devotion to treating the wounded and saving lives, Walker took the unprecedented step of writing her concerns directly to President Abraham Lincoln. Her letter spelled out her loyalty to the cause of the Union and her willingness to go anywhere, anytime, to administer to the ill, infirm, and wounded. Lincoln personally responded, saying only that he "couldn't force the acceptance of anyone contrary to the will of his commanders."

Walker volunteered where needed to treat the thousands of wounded who were pouring into the city after the Battle of Chickamauga, fought on September 19, 1863, in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Other medical doctors and surgeons were incensed that Walker

would be allowed to administer to the medical needs of the wounded. To them, she was little more than a homeopathic herbalist, and suggestions from the highest in the medical corps went so far as to suggest that her medical training was a fantasy. However, by this time Major General Alexander McCook and Major General George H. Thomas had observed her accomplishments and tenacity following the Union defeat at Chickamauga.

**W**hile traveling behind enemy lines on horseback and adorned in her own unique uniform, Walker was captured by a Confederate sentry on April 10, 1864, and held as a prisoner of war at a prison called Castle Thunder in Richmond, Virginia. The prison was a foul place; Walker later noted the squalor, insects, vermin, and little food. Malnutrition was cause for her rapidly deteriorating eyesight.

Four months later, on August 10, Walker and a large group of other Union prisoners were secretly transported behind Union lines and exchanged for Confederate soldiers and a Confederate major.

Mary Walker was now a free woman, convinced that the elusive official duty she had long requested could not be denied.

Shortly following her release, she accepted an appointment as Acting Assistant Surgeon, United States Army, "but spent the rest of the war practicing at a Louisville female prison and an orphan's asylum in Tennessee. She was paid \$766.16 for her wartime service. Afterward, she got a monthly pension of \$8.50, later raised to \$20, but still less than a widow's pension." Walker was released from her contract on June 15, 1865.

In her heart, Walker was a true humanitarian, yet her legacy tends to be more identified with her lifelong personal independence, candor, dressing habits, and outspoken advocacy for women's rights. She was an avid reader, so following the war she became a published writer and highly sought after public speaker. Walker contributed articles to the dress reform journal *Sibyl* and published her recollections of the Civil War in a book, *Notes Connected with the Army*. Two of her books—*Hit*, published in 1871, and *Unmasked, or The Science of Immorality*, published in 1878—are evidence of her aggressive advocacy for the rights of women and her thoughts on suffrage, morals, sexual ethics, and civil liberties.

As would be expected during this time of our nation's history, having a woman receive the nation's highest honor for valor did not set well with some. Thus, during the Medal of Honor "Purge of 1917," when 910 recipients were stricken from the Medal of Honor Roll, Walker was one of the first to go. Although she was directed to return her medals to the govern-



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, C. 1860-1870

ment, she refused, and was seldom seen without them pinned to her jacket. Not surprisingly, no government or military official ever attempted to retrieve them.

Walker retired to her Oswego family farm, and became reclusive as time took its toll on her physical and mental abilities. Virtually penniless, Walker died on February 21, 1919, and is buried in the Rural Cemetery, on Cemetery Road, near Oswego, New York. Her Medal of Honor is displayed at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

**W**alker's deeds were not "event specific" as with other recipients, as attested by the citation read and signed by President Andrew Johnson. Rather, she was selected for her dedication, loyalty, self-initiated exposure to great peril, and valor in facing the hardships of imprisonment.

It was now a known fact that Walker not only selflessly provided for the medical needs of the soldiers of the Union, but was also known to often travel and administer to the medically needy behind enemy lines. It was the latter that caused some to assert she was a spy for the Union, although conclusive proof was never exhibited.

However, it is known that once, when in Chattanooga, Walker passed behind enemy lines, and while there obtained information that was passed on to General Sherman. As a result, Sherman modified his operations and prevented enemy confrontations that could have created substantial setbacks. Conjecture is that this is but one of the reasons that the field recommendation to President Lincoln for Walker to receive the Medal of Honor came from Major General Sherman.

What Walker had experienced, the facts of which were known to two of the Union's greatest generals, William Tecumseh Sherman and George H. Thomas, and the fact that President Lincoln had himself intended that Walker be so honored, makes it understandable that she was selected for the medal. Although this was well over a century ago, there are those purists yet today who feel that the "intent" of the award policy was violated. Regardless, the final decision was made by Executive Order of the President of the United States, Andrew Johnson, after thorough consideration of events.

By Act of Congress in April 1916, which created the Medal of Honor Roll, it was stipulated that the award should be made for action "involving actual conflict with an enemy, by gallantry or intrepidity, at the risk of life, above and beyond the call of duty." The new rules were the basis by which the Medal of Honor Board rescinded Walker's medal, along with those of 909 other recipients.

All arguments became moot on June 10, 1977, when Dr. Mary E. Walker's name was returned to the Medal of Honor Roll, following a recommendation of the Army Board for the Correction of Military Records to Secretary of the Army Clifford Alexander under President Jimmy Carter.

**W**alker was born in Oswego County, New York, on November 26, 1832. Her parents, Alvah and Vesta Walker, had five daughters, with Mary being the youngest. The family livelihood was obtained by the labors of all from their 33-acre farm. Although quite practical, the nonconventional and rugged clothing of the farm would become

an enlightened character statement for Walker.

Walker was enchanted with her father's many books. Reading was her personal triumph, and the books fed an insatiable appetite for knowledge. Alvah, a self-taught "country doctor," influenced his youngest daughter, and before long she recognized an innate desire to pursue that honored profession of medical service.

Like her sisters, Mary Walker began a career of teaching at the age of 16. Although this profession was both challenging and intellectually rewarding, Walker longed for the right opportunity to enter medical school. This she did in 1853 at the age of 21. Walker graduated from Syracuse Medical College two years later.

While at Syracuse, Walker dated Albert Miller, also a medical student. Miller proposed a matrimonial and professional union that would place them at his medical practice in Rome, New York. They were subsequently married, although Mary refused to change her name, and directed that the word "obey" be removed from the wedding vows. She attended the wedding in trousers and jacket.

Their marriage was so unmistakably wrong that it was destined for failure. Shortly after they married, Walker learned of her husband having an active, ongoing affair. She sought a divorce, but due to the stringent laws of the land and the social stigma of the time, their severance never occurred until 1869.

Intent on advancing her education after the break-up of her marriage, Walker enrolled for the 1860 fall term at the newly established Bowen Collegiate Institute at Hopkinton, in Delaware County, Iowa. Bowen was in its infancy, with a mere 98 students, and the

conservative Presbyterian views of the trustees and instructors were foreign to Walker, an independent thinker. Walker was readily recognized around town because of her attire—she liked to wear “bloomers.” From the beginning, Walker was viewed as a “mischief-maker,” according to Miss Cooley, a Bowen instructor who loudly opposed Walker’s desire “to share in the rhetorical exercises provided for the gentlemen, and her insistence on studying German.”

The young men at Bowen had organized a debating society. One evening Walker attended and asked to be admitted as a member. Membership was allowed, but upon learning of Walker’s action, Cooley had Walker suspended from the institute. After being joined by all but two of the men in a procession

and parade of protest to “downtown” Hopkinton, the young men of Bowen were also suspended. Rapidly realizing the error of their ways, the boys openly repented and were allowed to return to their studies. However, Walker’s suspension was permanent.

Befriended by but a few citizens, Walker remained in Hopkinton for a short time, during which she occasionally aided Dr. Cunningham in his medical practice.

**M**ary Edwards Walker will forever be a legend in the annals of American history, and not just because of the Medal of Honor or the controversy that followed. Her entire life was composed of remarkable events.

Perhaps the final proof of her

notoriety occurred on June 10, 1982, when the U.S. Postal Service issued a 20-cent postage stamp with the designation, “Dr. Mary Walker, Army Surgeon,” placed above her portrait, and “Medal of Honor” directly beneath. A fitting tribute, for undeniably and irrevocably Walker was now nationally recognized as being both an “Army Surgeon” and a “Medal of Honor” recipient. ❖

*Dennis H. Black served in the Iowa House of Representatives for seven terms. Since 1993 he has represented Senate District 21 in the Iowa Senate. He has been fascinated with the Civil War since his youth, when he learned that both of his paternal great-great-grandfathers were casualties of the war.*

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## New Book Lauds Iowa's Civil War Heroes

The preceding article on Mary Edwards Walker is reprinted from *Profiles of Valor: Iowa's Medal of Honor Recipients of the Civil War*, written by Dennis H. Black and published by the State Historical Society of Iowa.

In the book's introduction Black recounts, “I was a member of Iowa's Capitol Planning Commission when the decision was made to construct a new historical building just west of the capitol. During one ‘slow’ legislative day, I walked the two blocks down the hill, west, to the State Historical Library to do a little research on our beautiful state capitol. While sitting at a library table, I noticed a copy of *The Annals of Iowa* left on the table by a previous visitor. When I opened the [1905] book, the pages fell to an article by Colonel Charles A. Clark: “Congressional Medals of Honor and Iowa Soldiers.” Black adds, “Life has not been the same since!”

Black took on the challenge of researching “not only these heroes’ acts of intrepidity, but also their attachments to Iowa and their life journeys following the war.”

Proceeds from the sale of *Profiles of Valor* benefit the State Historical Society of Iowa.

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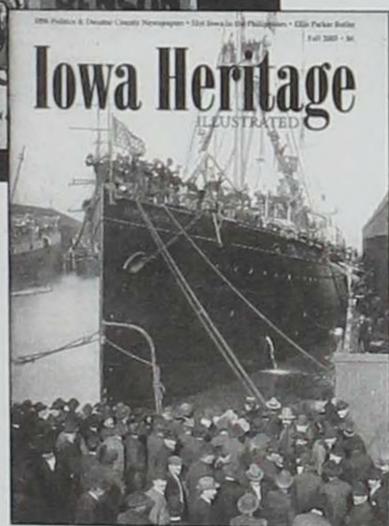
On February 18, 1966, Myra Spencer of Earlham, Iowa, received a telegram delivering the news that her son Lieutenant Larry H. Spencer—a Navy radar intercept officer—was classified as missing in action after his plane failed to return from a mission to Thanh Hoa in North Vietnam. Later communications confirmed he had been captured by the North Vietnamese when his F-4 Phantom was shot down over the Gulf of Tonkin, and with these events the Earlham native became Iowa's first Vietnam prisoner of war.

During the seven years of her son's captivity,

(continued on next page)



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