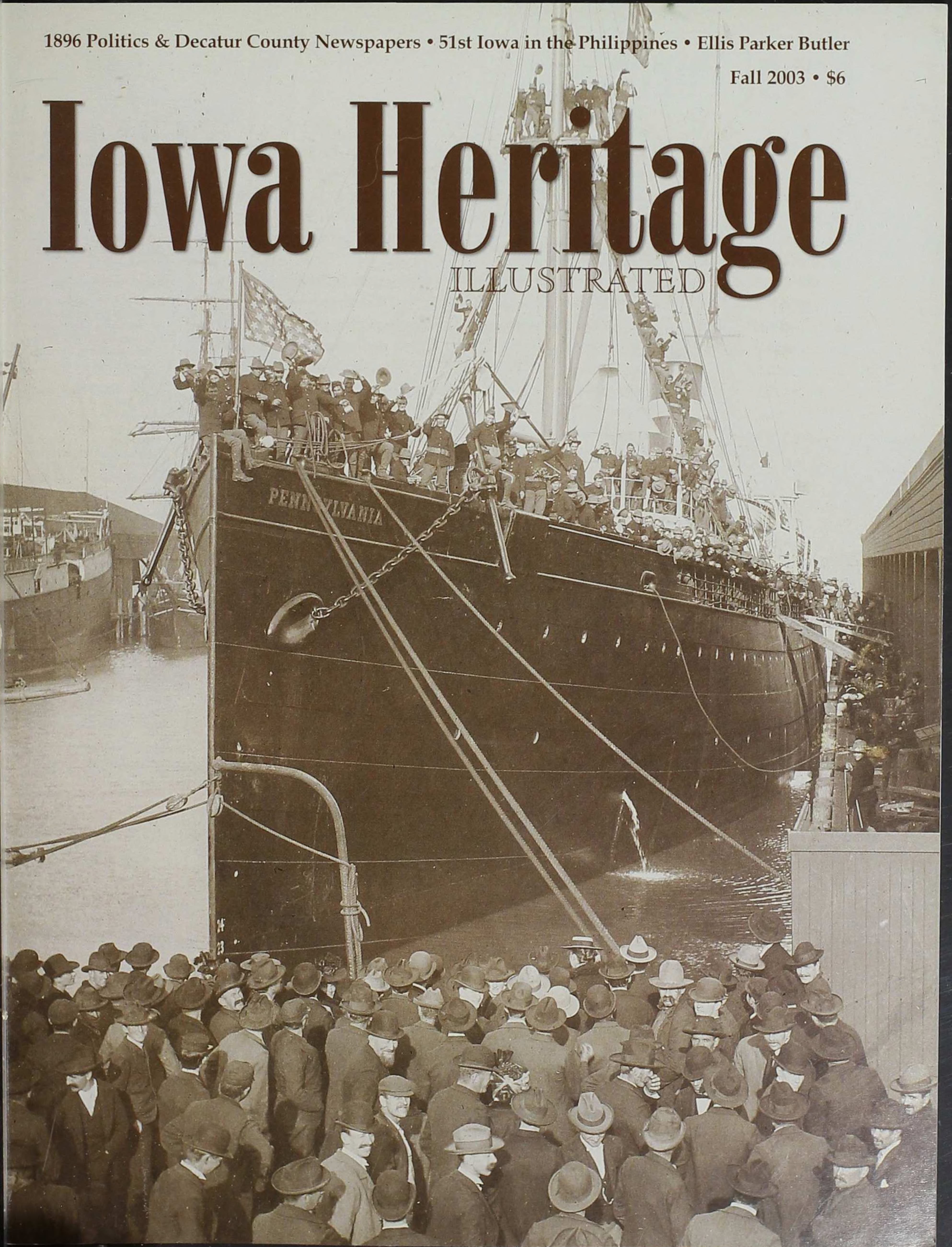


1896 Politics & Decatur County Newspapers • 51st Iowa in the Philippines • Ellis Parker Butler

Fall 2003 • \$6

Iowa Heritage

ILLUSTRATED



Front Porch

Dear Readers:

On November 4, 1900, as Arch Hemphill waited for the next train, he scrawled a quick letter to his family in Coralville, Iowa. Writing from Marysville, Kansas, where he was a foreman for Postal Telegraph Cable Company, Arch had just been ordered to Lincoln, Nebraska. "We have a 'way up' job to do there," he explained. "We are going to run a loop in to W. J. Bryan's residence. I suppose we ought to think ourselves highly honored but we don't, it means an all night's ride tonight."

William Jennings Bryan relied on Arch Hemphill and the current technology for the most timely news about the election outcome on November 6, 1900. Bryan was running against William McKinley, as he had in the momentous 1896 presidential campaign. As our opening article recounts, the 1896 election pitted agrarian interests against urban industrialists. On the horizon was the Spanish-American War and the Philippine-American War—also covered in this issue. Although Bryan was a colonel during the Spanish-American War, in 1900 he campaigned on anti-imperialism but lost to McKinley.

This is about the same time that Iowa-born humorist Ellis Parker Butler, subject of a delightful profile in this issue, was making a national name for himself in the pages of mainstream magazines. While his popular stories were far more light-hearted than the sobering issues of currency or imperialism, apparently the gentle humorist had strong feelings about Bryan, as he revealed in a questionnaire for Iowa's Historical Department in 1912.

William Jennings Bryan's voice would be heard often throughout the early 20th century. He ran for president again in 1908 but lost to Taft. In 1912 Woodrow Wilson named him secretary of state. He was a popular lecturer on Chautauqua circuits. In 1925 he testified for the prosecution in the famous Scopes "Monkey Trial," which was broadcast live on radio stations across the nation.

In 1921 Bryan reenacted and recorded his famous 1896 "Cross of Gold" speech, and that speech is now one of 50 sound recordings added to the Library of Congress's National Recording Registry. An ever-growing collection of the nation's "audio legacy," the registry includes recorded sounds considered significant on cultural, historical, or aesthetic grounds. For more on this registry, visit www.loc.gov/nrpb. To hear several minutes of Bryan's speech, visit www.americanrhetoric.com/speechbank.htm. Look under "Get speeches S-Z," and then under "W" for William Jennings Bryan.

I'm curious about the conditions under which Bryan recorded his speech in 1921. Perhaps he was in a sound studio of some kind, carefully moderating his volume for the microphone and missing the energy of a live audience. The recording seems to lack the explosive power attributed to the speech in 1896 at the Democratic convention. In another article in this issue, Bryan biographer Robert W. Cherny helps us understand the convention, the events leading up to it, and how Bryan seized the moment.

Even as national events commandeered the front pages of American newspapers, the current of certain traditions in the lives of everyday people continued into the 20th century. Our "Traditions" department looks at one of these—the rural practice of moving on March 1.

On another note, remember our story a few issues back about searching for gold in Iowa in 1858? Frances Graham, from the Fayette County Historical Center in West Union, wrote to tell us that she researched the Fayette County newspaper *The Pioneer* for that time and indeed found more references about gold in Iowa—and in Fayette County. "People have recently been interested in the articles and planned to search the Fairfield Township land," she wrote. "No exciting results have been reported."

We're delighted to bring you yet another batch of fascinating stories, rare photos, and historical insights that resonate with the present.

—Ginalie Swaim, editor

Iowa Heritage Illustrated

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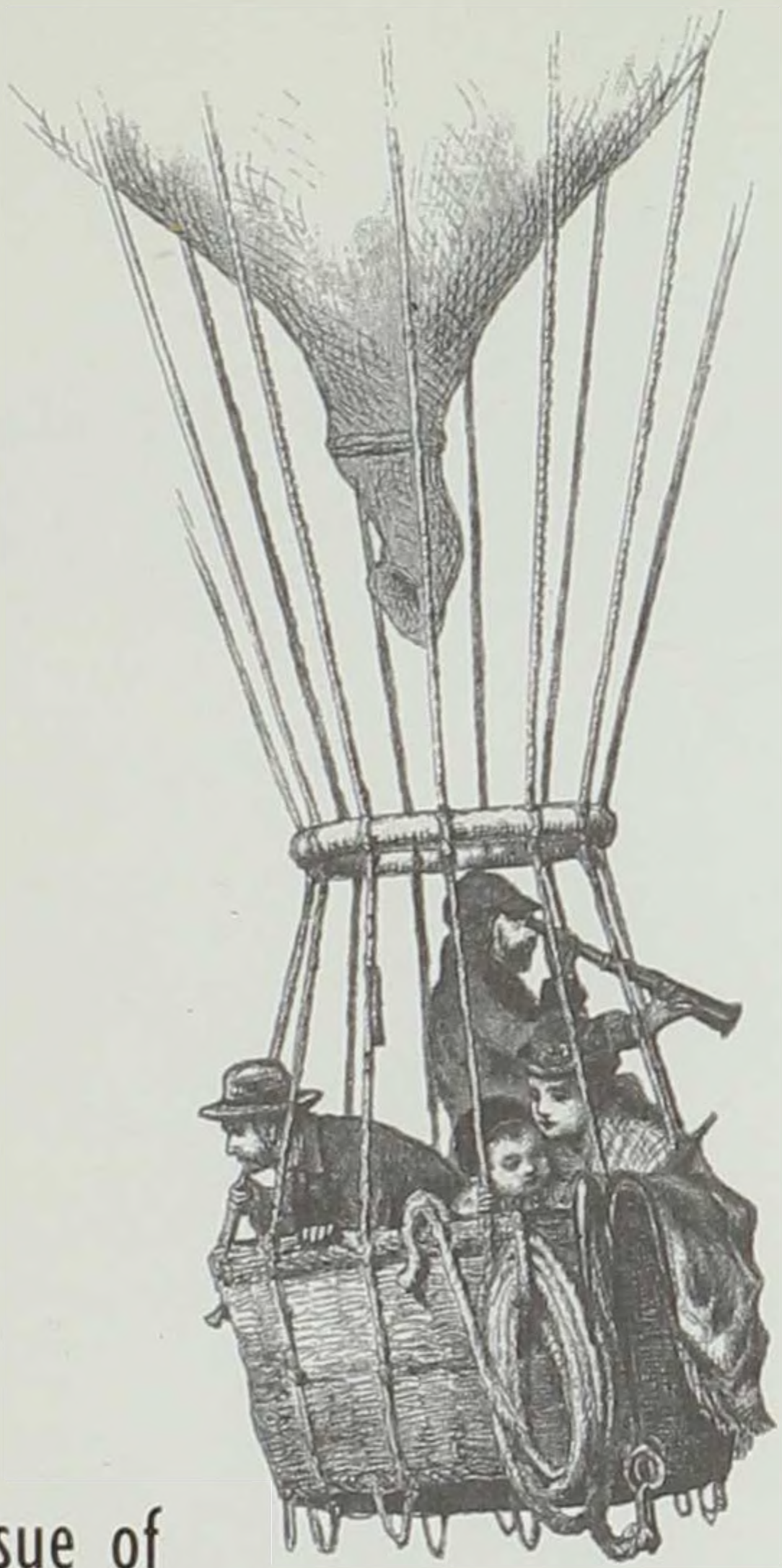
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FRANK MEREDITH COLLECTION, SHS (IDES MOINES)

On the Cover

Soldiers in the 51st Iowa Volunteer Regiment wave farewell from aboard the *Pennsylvania*. Comprising companies from southwestern Iowa, the regiment was leaving San Francisco for the Philippines in November 1898. Inside this issue is a close-up look at the men in the 51st and their experiences in the first American war fought overseas.



“Get Ready for ’96”

The Decatur County Press,
Partisanship,
and the Presidential
Campaign of 1896

by Robert B. Mitchell

Two days after Iowans filed to the polls in 1895 to vote in state elections, the *Davis City Advance* of Decatur County, Iowa, offered readers some simple advice: "Get ready for '96." As the *Advance* crowed about setbacks suffered by Democrats in the recent balloting, it claimed momentum for the Populists in the upcoming presidential and congressional elections. But the comment also foreshadowed a remarkably energetic and colorful year of political journalism in Decatur County.

The presidential campaign of 1896 pitting William Jennings Bryan against William McKinley came during a period of change and economic tumult in Decatur County. Hilly terrain and a lack of rich topsoil meant that Decatur and its neighboring counties along the Missouri border ranked among the poorest in the state. Nonetheless, Decatur County, like most of the rest of Iowa, had enjoyed steady growth in the decades after the Civil War. That trend continued in the first half of the 1890s, when the county's population increased by 6 percent. In 1895 Graceland College held its first classes in Lamoni, the center of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the county's second-largest town, with a population of 1,153. The following year, the 1,651 residents of Leon, the county seat and largest town in the county, looked forward to communicating by telephone with Des Moines, Council Bluffs, and Omaha. The Methodists of Garden Grove were building a new church. In Davis City, the town council voted to expand the city's sidewalks.

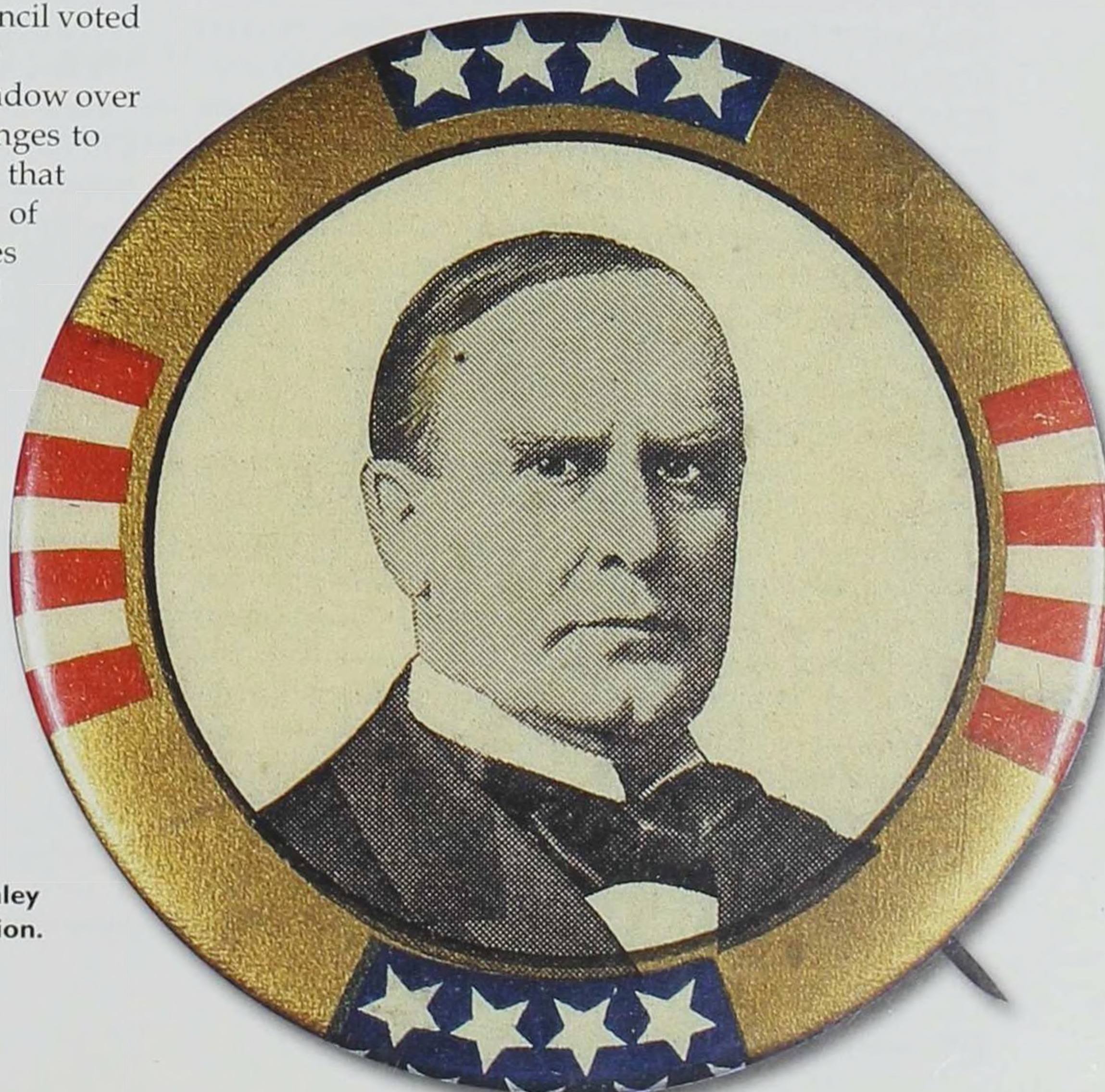
The Panic of 1893, however, cast a long shadow over this period of growth, posing serious challenges to Decatur County farmers and the businesses that depended on them. The stock market crash of that year led to the failure of major businesses and investment houses throughout the United States. Banks and other financial institutions collapsed in record number, setting off serious financial distress across the country. The depression hit farmers particularly hard because it came at a time of declining commodity prices.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Decatur County's recovery from the depression proceeded unevenly. A Leon bank proudly advertised in 1894 that it had survived "the worst financial panic ever known to the present generation." A year later, the *Advance* observed that many farm-

ers had not been so lucky. Reviewing the state of commodity prices, the paper scoffed: "Prosperity, you bet." As the presidential election approached, the depression and its aftermath remained a troubling reality for many Decatur County residents.

Despite the Panic of 1893, the strength of the Republican Party in Iowa left most of the state immune to the agrarian revolt that swept Populists to power in nearby Plains states. Populism prospered, however, in Decatur County, where voters had long been attracted to insurgent third-party movements. In 1881, the gubernatorial candidate of the Greenback Party received 23 percent of the vote in Decatur County, nearly equaling the 26 percent garnered by the Democratic standard-bearer. More than a decade later, in 1892, the Populist presidential candidate, James B. Weaver of Iowa, received 11 percent of the vote in Decatur County. The combined Populist-Democratic percentage of the vote in the county that year narrowly topped the 49 percent received by President Benjamin Harrison, who lost nationwide to Democrat Grover Cleveland.

The Populists backed a platform that called for some fairly radical solutions for the time, such as government ownership of railroads, an income tax, and the unlimited coinage of silver. The movement's real goal, however, was not overhauling American society along socialist lines but protecting the economic position of farmers



William Jennings Bryan (left) and William McKinley (right) faced off in the 1896 U.S. presidential election.

BOTH BUTTONS: SHSI (DES MOINES)

and laborers. "Many wage earners by 1892 were convinced that their pockets were being picked by giant corporations and their lackeys in government," historian Ray Ginger writes. "Lots of farmers felt the same way."

By the mid-1890s, Populists were firmly established as a potent political force in Decatur County. In 1894, the Democrat–People's Party unsuccessful fusion candidate for Congress gained a larger portion of the vote in Decatur County than in the district as a whole. In 1895, the Populist gubernatorial candidate received 13 percent of the votes cast in Decatur County—five points ahead of his statewide percentage—and outpolled the Democratic gubernatorial candidate in several townships. The showing of the Populists in Decatur County led the *Davis City Advance* to ask in its post-election analysis: "Who said the pops were dead?"

Contributing to Decatur County's political volatility, a vigorous and varied collection of weekly newspapers developed to serve the county's readers. No fewer than 11 locally published newspapers brought the news of the day to Decatur County's 16,639 residents in the mid-1890s. Five stand out as particularly significant.

In the county seat of Leon, where two papers fought for dominance, Republican Millard F. Stookey edited the *Decatur County Journal*. Stookey had lived in Leon since 1877. In 1893, along with his cousin, he took control of the *Journal*, which routinely skewered Democrats and championed Republicans. Stookey's main rival in Leon was O. E. Hull, publisher of the *Leon Reporter*. Hull bought the paper with a partner in 1887 and assumed full control in 1890. He proudly—and accurately—claimed that the *Reporter* was "the only Democratic paper in Decatur County."

Just 15 miles away, in Lamoni, residents could also choose between two papers promoting divergent views. The *College City Chronicle* became an energetic advocate for the Republicans, reflecting the views of its editor and publisher, W. H. Deam, a self-described lifelong supporter of the party of Lincoln. Deam and the *Chronicle* fought for supremacy in Lamoni with the *Independent Patriot*, edited by local educator Daniel F. Lambert. The *Independent Patriot* steered clear of party affiliation, making it unique among Decatur County papers. Yet Lambert's paper did not hesitate to wade into the controversies of the day—particularly those involving currency—with great energy.

In Davis City, roughly halfway between Leon and Lamoni, the leading paper stoutly supported the inter-



STILL BEGGING FOR BREAD.

A Scene in the Rear of a Chicago Restaurant—Yes, Good Times Are Here.

"Yes, Good Times Are Here," chides this cartoon in Decatur County's *Davis City Advance* in mid-July 1895. The 1890s were divisive times, economically and politically, and Decatur County's 11 newspapers did not shy away from partisanship.

ests of the Populist Party. The *Davis City Advance* was owned and edited for much of the period by Charles A. Wickes, a local businessman who was no stranger to controversy. He had been expelled from the Reorganized Church of Latter Day Saints and later published a sectarian newspaper in Davis City that promoted the interests of a church faction. Wickes sold the *Advance* in the spring of 1895 but reacquired the paper in 1896. Throughout the period, the *Advance* energetically advocated Populist positions.

The multiplicity of editorial voices in Decatur County reflected the changing nature of American journalism at the end of the 19th century. By the mid-1890s, newspapers had evolved from purely partisan undertakings published solely to advance the interests of a political party or faction, into businesses whose success or failure depended on their ability to attract readers and advertisers. The trend toward what historian Gerald Baldasty has called the "commercialization" of news was apparent in the content of the county's newspapers, which carried serialized novels, sports, and national and international news. The *Journal* and the *Chronicle*, for example, featured the sermons of the Rev. T. DeWitt Talmage, the nationally renowned preacher from Washington, D.C. The *Journal* ran *Heart of the World*,

by H. Rider Haggard, author of *King Solomon's Mines*. The *Reporter* published a mid-winter "Baseball Letter" with "gossip of the national game" for sports-starved readers. Many of the papers offered discounted subscriptions on the local paper and major newspapers from the East or Chicago.

This movement toward the commercialization of news did not mean, however, that editors had abandoned older editorial traditions of political advocacy. Indeed, "partisanship reflected newspaper market variation," Baldasty writes. "Where partisanship paid . . . it flourished." Decatur County's newspapers often explicitly linked partisan orientation to business success. Under the headline of "Populists, Attention," the *Advance* in June 1895 detailed a discounted subscription offer. "A few minutes work would get up a club of short time subscribers at ten cents each," the paper noted. The following year, the *Journal* urged Republicans to subscribe and ask friends and neighbors to do the same. The prospect of courthouse business doled out to friendly publishers added another economic consideration to political advocacy. In November 1896, the *Reporter* complained that the *Journal* "has for many years been enjoying undisputed all the advantages to be had in the way of county patronage by reason of the county offices being filled with republican officials. If it had not been for this patronage the Journal would have had

a hard road to hoe." Local publishers and editors often saw partisanship as a tool for building profitable newspapers.

But business considerations alone did not drive the county's editors to political partisanship. Most clearly believed that the forthright declaration of partisan views was an essential part of their duty as journalists, and partisan considerations sometimes trumped business goals when there was a conflict. One week after Wickes assumed control of the *Advance*, the paper commented on a sudden decline in advertising that it attributed to its newfound Populist convictions. The *Advance* vowed to stay the course, declaring, "we are not at all disheartened. In fact, we expected it. . . . To our Populist friends we would say, you have wanted a paper in the county which would advocate your principles squarely. You now have such a paper, but it takes money to run it." More often, however, editors saw no conflict between partisanship and business goals. In Lamoni, W. H. Deam stayed away from partisan affiliation during the state elections in 1895 but declared in February 1896 that the *Chronicle* was officially joining the ranks of Republican papers. "This course is adopted because it is believed to be the best for the publisher, the patrons and the public in general," Deam explained.

On the subject of partisanship, the *Decatur County Journal* spoke for the vast majority of county editors

when it proclaimed in April 1896 that the straightforward promotion of political opinions was a "Mark of Patriotism." "There is a mistaken notion abroad that earnest partisan convictions unfit a person for citizenship or public office, and that some exclusive and popular virtue attaches to non partisanship, or rather to an individual who can truthfully boast that he has no clear and positive political persuasions. The impression is due to pharisaical bigotry and an erroneous

REPUBLICAN IDEA OF FINANCE.



The man with SMALL income, who pays BIG interest and taxes.

The man with GREAT income, who RECEIVES big interest and pays small taxes.

OPPOSED TO INCOME TAX, BUT INTEREST MUST BE PAID IN GOLD.

Billing itself as "the only Democratic paper in Decatur County," the *Leon Reporter* ran this cartoon on August 27, 1896, faulting the Republican Party and the gold standard.



Gold lettering on shell badges for McKinley and silvery white campaign ribbons for Bryan (opposite page) echoed the key issue of the 1896 election: the gold standard versus bimetallism, the use of both gold and silver for currency.

idea of the duties of an American citizen. . . . No one can point to a single reform in this country which has ever been brought about by a non partisan leader or organ. Partisanship freed the slave, gave 160 acres to every poor man, and suppressed a gigantic rebellion."

Reflecting their commitment to political advocacy, most of the Decatur County newspapers devoted their front pages almost entirely to political news and partisan commentary. Front pages became platforms for their party and venues for attacks on the opposition. Political parties stoked the partisan inclinations of editors, preparing special material for publication by newspapers. As elections approached, Decatur County papers printed the names of the candidates leading the favored

party ticket on the front page along with locally written commentary and editorials culled from out-of-town newspapers. There could be no mistaking the political orientation of the *Journal* in November 1895 when it reported on the Republican sweep of state offices. Under a front-page cartoon of a rooster crowing about the GOP victory, the paper's account of the election results began, "Thank God, it is another Republican landslide."

So as they reported and commented on the rich tableau of personalities and issues that dominated the 1896 campaign for the White House, editors in Decatur County felt no need to pull their punches. In Leon, Millard F. Stookey's *Decatur County Journal* sought to rally readers to the Republican cause, praising the party's candidates and positions and excoriating Democrats. O. E. Hull, at the Democratic *Leon Reporter*, emerged as a strong advocate for the party of Jackson and Jefferson and rivaled Stookey in his contempt for political opponents. In Lamoni, W. H. Deam's *College City Chronicle* joined the Republican ranks and lobbed salvos at Democrats, while Daniel F. Lambert, in the pages of the *Independent Patriot*, stayed above the partisan fray but argued vigorously for currency reform. Meanwhile, in Davis City, the *Advance* crusaded for the Populists. As Decatur County's editors battled for influence, the 1896 presidential election emerged as a high-stakes news event in which hard-edged partisan commentary and reporting became both a business requirement and a civic duty. For newspaper readers in Decatur County, this meant an extraordinary year of lively political journalism.

Decatur County newspapers provided early indications of their highly charged partisan approach to the presidential campaign in their assessment of President Grover Cleveland's record on dealing with the economy. As Cleveland returned to the White House for a second term in 1893 after losing the office to Republican Benjamin Harrison for an intervening term, the national economy spiraled into depression. In Decatur County as well as in the rest of the country, views on the Democrat Cleveland were colored by opinions about the currency system.

To remedy the deflation that plagued the American economy in the decades after the Civil War, debtors—farmers in particular—favored "bimetallism," the use of both gold and silver for currency. Pumping unlimited quantities of silver—"free silver"—into circulation, silver advocates believed, would increase the supply of money, inflate prices, and make it easier for farmers to pay mortgages and other loans. "Nobody is satisfied

with the price of labor or farm products; and no wonder. These things have been measured by the single gold standard," an item in the *Davis City Advance* complained.

On the other hand, banking and business interests opposed the use of silver, arguing that it threatened to undermine the soundness and stability of the currency system. In Lamon, the *Chronicle* asserted that the interests of bankers and farmers were identical on the currency question. "Every business man is glad when the farmers are prosperous with good crops and good prices. It is to the interest of financiers that we have a revival of business and prosperous times. The best financiers say silver will not restore confidence."

Cleveland antagonized silver supporters because he opposed using the precious metal to expand the money supply. In 1893, Congress, at the urging of the White House, repealed the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, a measure that authorized the limited use of silver for currency. When Treasury gold supplies began to dwindle, the president further enraged silver supporters by purchasing gold from J. Pierpont Morgan and other bankers through the sale of bonds on terms highly favorable to the financiers.

While the administration's pro-gold stance infuriated silver supporters, many Republicans were also unhappy with the Democrats for the repeal of the highly protective McKinley Tariff Act of 1890. In its place the Democratic-controlled Congress passed legislation that lifted tariffs on items such as raw wool and lumber but left them in place on commodities such as iron, glass, chemicals, and sugar. The measure also eliminated reciprocity provisions of the McKinley Act that farmers had hoped would promote exports. "Farmers," historian Ray Ginger concludes, "were sacrificed." Because it retained many protectionist provisions, Cleveland refused to sign the bill, but Republicans blamed him anyway when it became law without his signature. In 1894, powered by widespread discontent with Cleveland, Republicans made massive electoral gains in the House and Senate to regain control of Congress.

By early 1896, the assessment of the president made several years earlier by Andrew Carnegie—"Cleveland is a pretty good fellow"—seemed wildly erroneous to most Decatur County editors and many other Americans. In November 1895, the *Chronicle's* "Letter from Washington" saw in the Republican gains of that year, as well as in the Republican recapture of Congress a year earlier, clear evidence that voters had shaken off "the hoodoo under which they elected Mr. Cleveland President." The *Decatur County Journal* attributed the depletion of Treasury gold reserves, the subsequent controversial bond sales, and the nation's depressed economic condition to the repeal of the McKinley Tariff Act—and put the blame for repeal squarely on the president and his Democratic congressional allies. A long item in the *Journal* complained that Cleveland had not learned that high tariffs protect prosperity at home, "the most obvious lesson of the democratic panic of 1893." The *Journal* also took delight in noting Cleveland's unpopularity in a humorous item in December 1895. "Correspondence from London to the leading daily papers asserts that 'England likes President Cleveland still.' Well, the democrats in the United States like him that way too, but he will look up and make a noise occasionally."

The *Populist Advance*, likewise, left no doubt where it stood on the president. "Patrick Henry said, 'Give us liberty or give us death.' Grover says, 'Give us gold and we will give you bonds and take the boodle.' One was a patriot, what is the other?" Cleveland's ample girth provided an easy target for the *Advance* when it printed an item referring to the president as "Old Tub-of-Fat." But nothing made the paper's contempt for bond deals, the gold standard, bankers, and the administration plainer than a vitriolic item announcing that financier J. Pierpont Morgan's "10,000 dollar dog drowned itself the other day while the master of hounds was out exercising his lordship's pups. Any self respecting dog would rather die than eat the food bought by money stolen from the United States in the last bond deal."

SHSI (IOWA CITY)



BRYAN.

Decatur County editors, like their counterparts elsewhere, kept close watch on political developments and assessed the situation according to their partisan inclinations as the campaign took shape. As county editors searched the field of presidential hopefuls, their gaze fell initially on two of Iowa's favorite sons. For the Democratic nomination, the *Leon Reporter* backed former Iowa governor Horace Boies (the only Democrat to be elected governor in Iowa between 1854 and 1932). In February 1896, Hull's paper hailed his endorsement by Buchanan County Democrats and predicted that Boies would prove "the strongest candidate that the democracy can put up." Another item in the *Reporter* informed readers that Boies's support extended well beyond Iowa into the South, largely due to his support for silver. Similar reports continued to appear in Hull's paper despite Boies's protest in March that he was not seeking the Democratic nomination.

Meanwhile, in the campaign for the Republican presidential nomination, Ohio governor and former U.S. congressman William McKinley faced a number of rivals. Decatur County's Republican editors initially favored U.S. Senator William Boyd Allison of Dubuque. A rooster displayed on the front page of the *Journal* in November 1895 is pictured as saying, "I crow for . . . Allison for president in 1896." Nevertheless, it soon became apparent that McKinley was winning the battle for the nomination. An item in the *Chronicle* in March 1896 reflected his growing strength. While the paper hailed Allison's stand on trade and currency questions and proclaimed him "one of the greatest statesmen of the age," it acknowledged that McKinley would be an acceptable candidate. The *Journal* argued in April that the choice of McKinley or Allison mattered little to Iowa Republicans. They were "not so much concerned whether Allison or McKinley shall be president as they are to rid themselves of the free trade curse which is . . . bringing hard times and bankruptcy to every hearthstone."

McKinley's emergence as the Republican front-runner also caught the attention of the *Democratic Reporter*. In March the paper attacked McKinley's record on tariffs. "Just as people suffering from alcoholism crave more of the ruinous stimulant, so now the people who are suffering from McKinleyism are thirsting for more of the deadly poison," the *Reporter* warned on March 26. The paper also ridiculed the politics of McKinley's home state. Informing readers that the Ohio state legislature had recently passed a law banning the wearing of high hats in theaters, the paper commented, "The fool killer has plenty of work to do, and he shouldn't neglect it."

The partisan edge of Decatur County's newspapers sharpened as the parties selected their presidential nominees. In June, the Republicans nominated McKinley on the first ballot in St. Louis. In July, William Jennings Bryan's stirring "Cross of Gold" speech won the hearts of the delegates at the Democratic convention in Chicago and earned him the party's presidential nomination. Two weeks later he received the nomination of the Populist Party. Party platforms, detailed coverage of the proceedings, and engravings of the candidates appeared in the newspapers. Decatur County editors seasoned their convention coverage with plenty of pointed front-page commentary and continued to portray the campaign in starkly partisan hues through the summer and fall.

Republican papers loyally lined up behind McKinley after he won that party's nomination. The *Journal* could barely contain its excitement. "The Ticket Will Be A Winner," a *Journal* headline confidently forecast on June 25. On the same day, the *Chronicle* proclaimed in Lamoni: "The convention at St. Louis simply ratified the wishes of the people. Next November there will be another ratification of McKinley, protection and sound money."

As for the Democrats, Bryan burst Boies's bubble when he seized the Democratic nomination with his "Cross of Gold" speech. The *Reporter* grudgingly noted the Nebraskan's "special luck in speeches" in its first post-convention issue but soon became an enthusiastic supporter of the Nebraska orator. At the end of the month, the *Reporter* reprinted an item from the *Red Oak Sun* that likened Bryan to Lincoln. The *Journal*, however, dismissed Bryan's chances, calling the Nebraskan "unquestionably the weakest candidate ever presented to a democratic national convention." Nor did the paper think much of Bryan's intellect. "Bryan is not a profound thinker. He is merely a man of lively parts, quick observation, and profusely endowed with the gift of gab."

In the months following the conventions, Bryan and McKinley campaigned in dramatically different styles. Bryan traveled 18,000 miles and spoke to 5 million people. McKinley campaigned more traditionally, staying at home in Canton, Ohio, and making speeches from the front porch of his home to visiting delegations.

The Republican *Journal* took a dim view of Bryan's campaign. In Chicago, the paper noted, a campaign appearance had to be canceled due to heat and a disorderly crowd, and in New York City "a vigorous use of clubs [by] police" secured "a semblance of order." The Democratic *Leon Reporter*, on the other hand, noted the "vast assemblage" that turned out to hear Bryan in New

York but made no mention of chaos in its news story.

The *Journal's* coverage of McKinley never strayed from boosterism. Typical in this regard was its fawning account of a delegation of Pennsylvania workers visiting McKinley at his Ohio home, where McKinley detailed his views on tariffs and currency. The newspaper noted the workers' enthusiastic endorsement of his views parenthetically (as "tremendous cheering") throughout its transcript of his remarks.

McKinley's "front porch" campaign left little for Democratic editors to aim at, but that didn't stop Hull's

Leon Reporter from attacking the Republican nominee for his ties to Ohio financier Mark Hanna and other well-heeled Republican supporters. McKinley "Is Owned by Hanna," the *Reporter* harrumphed in an October headline. "M'Kinley Will Never Be Our President."

In Decatur County, as elsewhere, economic questions—tariffs and currency—dominated the campaign as the nation struggled with the aftermath of the depression. As part of their campaign coverage, editors from Leon to Lamoni gave detailed attention to these issues, offering readers extensive commentary, with prescriptions for economic recovery depending on the paper's political orientation.

The Republican papers initially had stressed a return to the protectionism of the McKinley Tariff Act as the best cure for the nation's economic woes. The *Journal's* support for protectionism led to a brief feud with the *Cedar Rapids Gazette* that highlighted what was at stake for Iowans in the debate on tariff policy. Under the headline "Free Trade Yawp," Stookey's *Journal* derided the *Gazette's* criticism of sugar tariffs imposed under the McKinley Act. Stookey, claiming that Iowans spent more than \$7 million annually to buy 180 million pounds of sugar, argued that the tariff promoted the development of a sugar beet industry in the United States. Iowa, he added, contained "a vast area of soil" ideal for growing sugar beets; with properly protectionist tariff policies,

"there is no reason why we should not produce what we can consume ourselves and keep our millions in our own pockets." The *Gazette* responded by charging that "the Leon Journal is in favor of taxing Iowa farmers who raise cheap corn, cheap oats, cheap potatoes, cheap horses and hogs and cattle that pay none too well in order to pay a bounty to the sugar trust." Stookey remained unperturbed. He dismissed this attack by one of the state's leading papers as a "specimen of falsehood and misrepresentation."

The county's Republican papers also highlighted the difficulties experienced by the Meek woolen mill in Bonaparte as an example of the suffering caused by free trade in Iowa. In an item reprinted from the *Burlington Hawk-Eye* in March, the *Decatur County Journal* detailed layoffs at the mill and attempts by its owner to sell a \$25,000 dam to the state. Making the Van Buren County mill's plight more remarkable, the *Journal* noted, was that its owner was a well-known champion of free trade.

As the campaign continued, the currency controversy supplanted trade as the major issue for Decatur County editors and the national press alike. The debate about gold versus bimetallism emerged as the primary issue of the campaign after Republicans adopted a "sound money" plank at their national convention in June, declaring support for the gold standard until or unless silver was accepted for use as currency overseas. The phrase "16-to-1," referring to the ratio of silver to gold needed to mint a dollar coin, became a campaign rallying cry for Populists and Democrats.

Before the Republican convention, the *Journal* had asserted the primacy of the trade issue. "Whether we have gold or silver mono-metallism, or bimetallism, there will be no permanent prosperity among the people until the tariff is adjusted on protection lines," the paper wrote in February. As McKinley and the Republicans embraced gold and sound money, so did the *Journal*. A June 25 headline proclaiming "Free Silver Not Satisfactory" signaled this change in emphasis. A similar change occurred in the pages of the *Chronicle*. On



In the 1896 campaign, brass "goldbugs" were popular lapel pins and watch fobs for supporters of the gold standard. (Size: one inch wide.)

SHSI (DES MOINES)

June 18, Deam's paper assailed the Cleveland administration's trade policies as the "cause of hard times" but gave more prominent play to the Republican "sound money" platform plank.

The *Journal* stepped up its attack on silver advocates after the Democrats nominated Bryan. In a front-page editorial on July 16, the *Journal* declared that the currency issue was of prime importance to Iowa and avowed that "The People Want Prosperity—Not Free Silver." "The people of Iowa, and especially the farmers and laborers of Decatur county, have been robbed of thousands of dollars under democratic rule which certainly ought to make them conservative in their political judgments. To add the free silver humbug to the list of democratic experiments is not to supply a panacea for the distress and starvation which has attended a democratic free trade policy. . . . Let no honest man be deceived by the free silver shriekers and the long haired, beer guzzling anarchists who have temporarily obtained control of the democratic party. They are just now making windy appeals to our farmers and laborers but they will make but little headway."

The *Journal* turned to a variety of sources to make the case against silver as the campaign continued. In August, it heralded a speech by Ohio's senator John Sherman, the "Great Financier" (and brother of prominent Des Moines businessman Hoyt Sherman), who appealed for a "safe, sound and stable currency" and warned against the danger of free silver. In September, the *Journal* turned to a higher authority. In an article headlined "The Bible on 16-to-1," the paper cited Deuteronomy to conclude that those who support the free coinage of silver "are an abomination unto the Lord thy God."

Anticipating that the Democrats would adopt a pro-silver platform plank, the *Reporter* in early July began to trumpet the virtues of bimetallism. Attacking McKinley on the issue, the paper chuckled that, having embraced the gold standard, "the little Napoleon has indeed met his Waterloo." After the Democratic convention, the *Reporter* printed the party's currency plank, sometimes on the front page and sometimes on inside

pages, with a decorative border around the text to highlight the item.

The *Reporter* also played to the frustrations of farmers. In October, Hull seized on a resolution passed by the "Creston Railway Men's Sound Money Club" that endorsed the Republican currency plank as the best means of protecting the value of railroad stock and rail-

road jobs. "Do the farmers want to cast their votes in aid of the railroads?" the *Reporter* asked. "Do the farmers want to keep the price of their produce which the employes of the railway corporation have to buy down to the present starvation prices . . . ? If not we fail to see how they can blindly close their eyes to their own interests and vote in favor of a single gold standard policy."

The currency question also emerged as the major campaign issue in the pages of the Populist *Davis City Advance*, where the issue had long preoccupied of the paper. Occasionally its feisty attacks on anti-silver banking interests strayed into anti-Semitism: "Eighteen hundred years ago the Jews crucified Christ. They have improved since then; instead of killing they take a mortgage, which gives them all of the proceeds of labor above a bare living," the paper had snarled in 1895.

With the campaign swinging into high gear, the *Advance* maintained its focus on currency. As a loyal Populist paper, it dutifully reprinted the party's platform, with its call for government ownership of railroads and a graduated income tax, on its front page for four straight weeks beginning in early August. Otherwise, however, the paper paid little heed to tax, transportation, and other reform questions, editorializing instead on currency and silver.

Shortly after the Republican convention, the *Advance* derided the party's "sound money" plank in ringing tones. "Great Gods and little fishes! Somebody has been guilty of a lying record that would put the imps of satan to shame," the paper thundered in early July. The *Advance* compared gold supporters to the followers of Aaron, who fashioned the golden calf in the desert and worshiped it as a god. Like the *Journal*, the *Advance* cited scriptural authority, turning to the Book of Mormon to find an endorsement



Thin celluloid covers the portrait of the nominees ratified in Des Moines. Celluloid first appeared on campaign buttons in 1896.

of free silver in an attempt to appeal to the Reorganized Latter Day Saints concentrated in the southern half of Decatur County. "If our Latter Day Saint friends are well posted and consistent, we do not see how they can avoid favoring Bryan in the present contest," the paper argued in October. "How a man can honestly claim to believe that book, and yet vote for the present Republican platform, is a mystery."

The Lamoni *Independent Patriot* offered perhaps the most dramatic example of the primacy of the currency question in Decatur County. While Daniel Lambert continued to maintain the paper's editorial independence, he left no doubt about the paper's support for silver. As the campaign year progressed, commentary in the *Independent Patriot* became increasingly focused on currency questions. The paper had long espoused bimetallism, but the importance Lambert attached to the use of silver and gold became especially apparent in late June after the Republican convention, when he argued that the upcoming presidential campaign should be a referendum on currency. In September, he published a remarkably detailed explication of the paper's support for bimetallism. According to the its analysis, the "appreciating dollar" produced by the gold standard threatened Americans' prosperity and political independence. This loss, in turn, jeopardized prospects for freedom throughout the world "because it is our duty and privilege to be a political light and largely a political savior to the world." As a result, Lambert concluded, the currency question "is of as great or greater consequence to the world than the question of slavery; and demands of every patriot a bold, fearless and if necessary defiant stand for what he believes to be right and just, and for the greatest good of his nation and the world."

After a year of reading about the presidential campaign and the issues, on November 3 Decatur County voters rendered their verdict on Bryan and McKinley, silver and gold. Voter turnout throughout Decatur County was 31 percent higher for the presidential election than for the gubernatorial race in 1895. While McKinley easily carried Iowa with 56 percent of the vote, defeating Bryan by more than 55,000 votes, Bryan eked out a narrow victory in Decatur County, defeating McKinley by 95 ballots and capturing slightly more than 50 percent of the vote.

Reaction to the results was as spirited as the coverage of the campaign. Only a year earlier the *Chronicle* had offered the briefest rundown of election results on its front page and poked fun at overtly partisan papers.

The *Chronicle* showed no such restraint this time, running a series of pointed items heralding the Republican victory and mocking Bryan. "McKinley is elected. Ha, ha," typified the tone of the *Chronicle*. In Leon, Hull was clearly overjoyed by the local results, which included a sweep by Democrats in county races. The *Reporter* tweaked William Allen White, the Kansas editor whose famous "What's the Matter with Kansas?" editorial mocked that state's Populists. "What's the matter with Decatur County?" Hull gloated November 5. "The 'anarchists' have captured Decatur County." Nor could Hull resist taking a shot at his Leon rival, the *Journal*. Hull speculated about the business implications of the county Democratic victory on his rival. "Will the *Journal* reduce the size of its paper and discharge part of the office force?" While pleased with Bryan's showing in Decatur County, Hull conceded that the Nebraskan had not fared as well nationally. "Boodle and coercion

IT'S M'KINLEY!

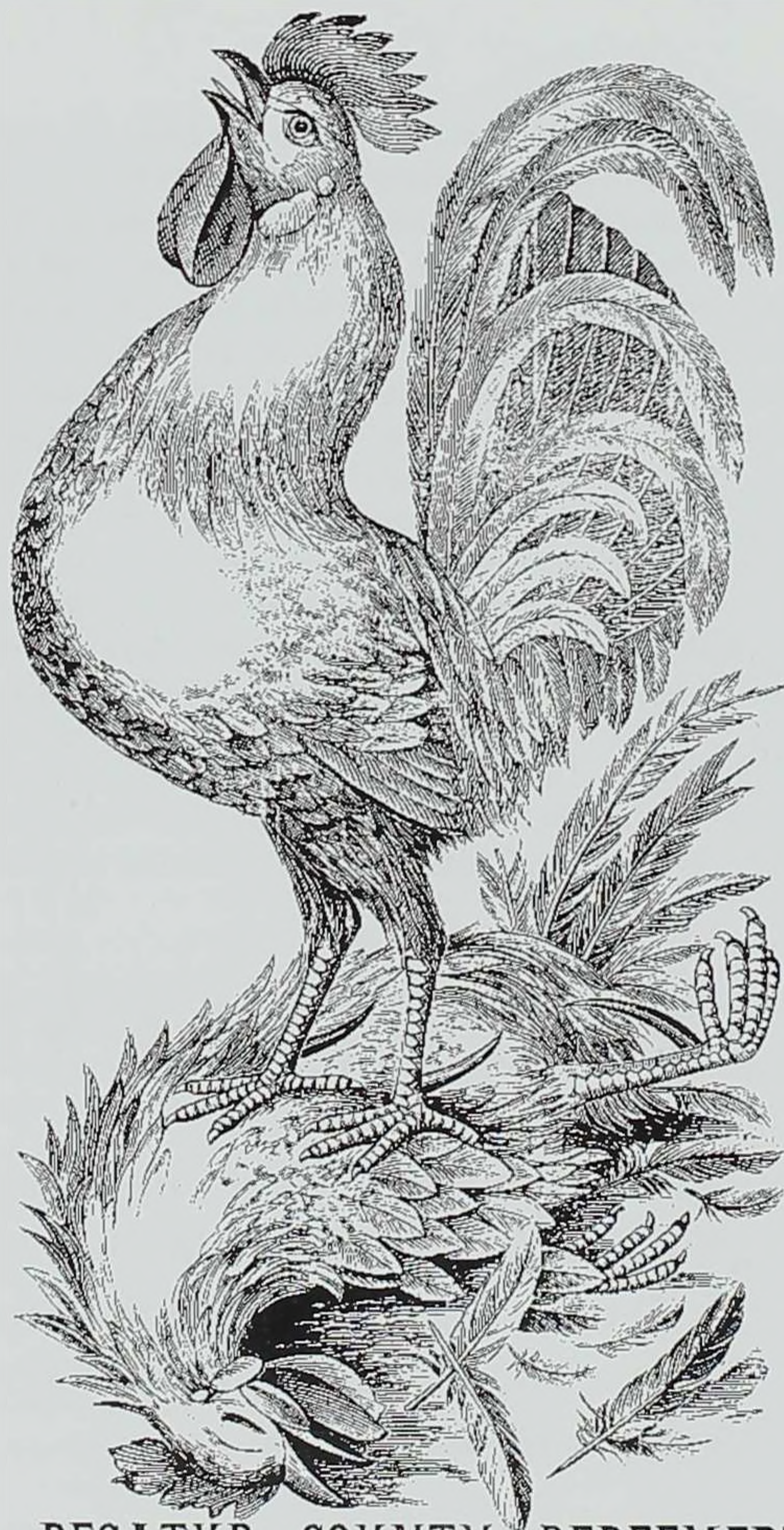
He carries the solid East, together with Illinois, California, Iowa, Indiana, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Oregon, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

Iowa Goes Republican 40,000

Missouri Gives Bryan 60,000 and Nebraska 15,000.

The result will be close and it may take the official canvass to decide in several States.

On November 5, 1896, the Democratic *Leon Reporter* announced McKinley as the national winner, in a story and headlines in the upper corner of the front page. But dominating that same front page was an enormous crowing rooster and the results for Decatur County—where Bryan and free silver were the winners. (See next page.)



DECATUR COUNTY REDEEMED!

The County Swept Clean by the Free Silver Ticket.

BRYAN HAS AN EVEN 100.

Every Candidate on the County Ticket Elected!

FREE SILVER MAJORITIES.

Bryan	-	100.
Robb	- -	88.
Baker	- -	253.
Sears	- -	245.
Garber	-	225.
Stockton	-	81.
Niece	- -	81.
Bruce	- -	24.



has been successful, the voters of the cities flocking to the support of Mark Hanna's candidate."

Like Hull, Stookey saw the dark hand of graft in the results—but he discerned corruption at the local level. Bryan's victory in Decatur County, the *Journal* claimed, was the result of "illegal voters and the unlimited use of boodle and whiskey." Strong support for Bryan among impoverished small farmers—dismissed by Stookey as "long-haired, popocratic hickory-peelers"—also played a role in Bryan's local triumph, the editor conceded. The outcome clearly embarrassed Stookey, who noted that most of the state's counties had favored McKinley. "Decatur county is one of the few counties which has everlastingly disgraced itself by rolling up a majority . . . for free trade, hard times and a debased currency," the *Journal* complained.

Stookey's shame would prove short-lived. When McKinley cruised to a re-election victory over Bryan in 1900, he carried Decatur County along with the rest of Iowa. As prosperity returned, the Populist movement fizzled across the country. Republicans held on to the White House until 1912, when Woodrow Wilson—the first Democratic presidential candidate to carry Iowa in 60 years—was elected president.

As for the county's newspapers, many continued well into the next century but went for years without political storms of the size that produced the editorial thunderbolts of 1896. The *Advance* had proved more prophetic, perhaps, than it realized when it urged readers to "Get Ready for '96." The confluence of journalistic and political trends in that fateful election year produced a uniquely colorful chapter in the history of Decatur County and Iowa journalism. When the ballots were counted, that chapter came to a close. ❖

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NOTE ON SOURCES

Background on the economic conditions and issues of the 1890s came from Ray Ginger, *The Age of Excess: The United States from 1877 to 1914* (New York: Macmillan, 1975). Background on the campaign of 1896 came from Paul W. Glad, *McKinley, Bryan and the People* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1991). Joseph F. Wall's *Iowa: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), provided background on Iowa. Gerald J. Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), offered insights into the evolving state of American newspapers during the period. Biographical material came from several sources: *A History of Decatur County*, vol. 2 (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1915); Joseph Anthony, *Lamoni's Passing Parade: Stories of Lamoni and Lamoni's People* (Lamoni: Blair Printing Co., 1948); *The Memoirs of President Joseph Smith III (1832–1914)*, ed. Richard P. Howard (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1979); and other archival material from the Community of Christ church library in Independence, Mo. The newspapers themselves—the *Decatur County Journal*, *Davis City Advance*, *Leon Reporter*, *Lamoni Independent Patriot*, and the *College City Chronicle*—exist in microfilm at the State Historical Society of Iowa in Des Moines. Annotations to the original manuscript are held in the Iowa Heritage Illustrated production files (SHSI-Iowa City).



From Genealogy to History

The idea for “Get Ready for ‘96” grew out of genealogy research I was doing on the Mitchells who lived throughout Decatur County, Iowa, in the mid-1890s. My great-great-grandfather, the Rev. George E. Mitchell, was a Methodist “supply preacher” based for several years in Davis City. I was reading micro-filmed Decatur County newspapers of the period to learn basic facts about my family’s history.

Family lore suggested that Ralph Mitchell (one of George’s children, and my great-grandfather) had worked for a brief time in the newspaper business, but no one knew where or when. Imagine my surprise and delight, then, when I found a brief item in the *Decatur County Journal* reporting on the purchase of the *Davis City Rustler* in 1895 by

Ralph Mitchell and a business partner.

The newspaper microfilm suddenly provided a window into the journalistic and political milieu in which my great-grandfather plied his trade. Even a casual glance at the newspapers showed that Ralph’s career as an editor came during an exciting period, with a high-stakes presidential election and accompanying partisan rhetoric dominating the front pages of Decatur County’s newspapers. The desire to learn more about this particularly fascinating chapter of my great-grandfather’s life led me to write the accompanying article.

Only one copy—the final edition—of the *Rustler* still exists, and there is no microfilm record of the paper, but it is still possible to draw some basic conclusions about the publication based on references

made in other county newspapers of the period. The *Rustler* seems to have supported the Republicans but was the secondary paper in Davis City, a town of 500, where it struggled with the Populist *Davis City Advance* for readers and influence.

Ralph’s career in the newspaper business did not last long. He married my great-grandmother, Mary Helen Davis, in September 1897. Soon thereafter he swapped the press for the pulpit, leaving the newspaper business to follow in his father’s footsteps as a Methodist minister. Although his journalism career was brief, Ralph nonetheless played a role in the fascinating political and journalistic drama that unfolded in Decatur County during 1896, even if he had only a bit part.

—Robert B. Mitchell

Years after his riveting 1896 "Cross of Gold" speech, Bryan still attracted huge audiences, like this one, circa 1910.



FELTON COLLECTION, SHSI (IOWA CITY)

William Jennings Bryan and His "Cross of Gold" Speech

by Robert W. Cherny

When television crews set up their cameras at a presidential nominating convention and network anchors gather in their booths, it is only a matter of time before someone alludes to William Jennings Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech at the 1896 Democratic convention as the leading example of an orator's ability to sway listeners. In 1953, a poll of 277 professors of American history or government ranked Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech among the fifty most significant documents in American history. A century after Bryan delivered the speech, his words still have power, and some of his metaphors have passed into the common idiom.

Born in Salem, Illinois, in 1860, Bryan grew up in a devoutly religious household. His mother, Mariah, came from the locally prominent Jennings family and was active in the Methodist Church. His father, Silas Bryan, a lawyer and judge of the circuit court, was a prayerful Baptist and a committed advocate of the Democratic party. Bryan, at the age of fourteen, joined the Cumberland Presbyterian Church, then moved to a mainstream Presbyterian denomination upon leaving Salem. He disappointed his father in his choice of church, but no such apostasy marked his choice of political parties—he was a Democrat all his life. After graduating from Illinois College and Union Law School and marrying his college sweetheart Mary Baird, Bryan practiced law briefly in Jacksonville, Illinois, then moved his law practice and his family to Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1887.

In Nebraska, Bryan plunged into Democratic party

politics and won election to the House of Representatives in 1890. Democrats had rarely won elections in Nebraska over the previous quarter century, but Bryan was aided by two unusual circumstances. First, a new party emerged, soon to be called the Populists, attacking the older parties and demanding governmental action to assist hard-pressed farmers and urban workers. In Bryan's congressional district, the new party drew a number of votes that might otherwise have gone to the Republican candidate. Second, Nebraskans voted on a referendum to prohibit alcohol, actuating an all-out campaign by the opponents of Prohibition, especially in the "wringing-wet" metropolis of Omaha, then part of Bryan's district. Personally a teetotaler, Bryan nonetheless endorsed his party's strong opposition to Prohibition, and he benefited from the antiprohibitionists' work to mobilize wet voters.

Leaving their three children in the care of Mary's parents, the Bryans formed a strong team on Capitol Hill. Mary followed public issues closely, and the *Washington Post* commented that "her judgment is excellent." The two of them always worked closely together—she had been admitted to the Nebraska bar in 1888 to assist with his law practice and at home they had a desk designed so that one of them could sit on either side to facilitate their cooperative endeavors. With Bryan a congressman, they now worked together on his speeches. When Bryan rose to speak on the floor of the House, Mary sat in the visitors' gallery, coaching him by nodding her head or signaling disapproval.

Though Bryan's winning campaign in 1890 concentrated on tariff issues, he also endorsed "free coinage of silver on equal terms with gold." That issue soon loomed larger in the nation's politics. By 1892, when he sought reelection, Bryan had emerged as a prominent spokesman for what had become known simply as "silver."

"Silver" was, in fact, an argument for a federal currency policy that would counteract the long-term deflationary tendencies of the post-Civil War era. From 1865 onward, most prices had fallen, due partly to more efficient production in agriculture and manufacturing, partly to a persistent federal surplus, and partly to the failure of the money supply to grow as rapidly as the population. Some who focused on the last of these argued that the government could stabilize prices by issuing more currency—they reasoned that inflation came about when the currency supply grew more rapidly than the economy, and, conversely, that deflation occurred when the currency supply failed to grow as rapidly as the economy. What was needed, they concluded, was a currency that grew in proportion to the population.

From the 1870s onward, those who called for the federal government to expand the currency found their most receptive audience among farmers in debt. After the Civil War, farmers in the western Midwest and the South had greatly increased their harvests of corn, wheat, and cotton. As production rose, prices fell. Farmers had accomplished much of their expansion on borrowed money and their high level of indebtedness increased their dependence on cash crops to make their mortgage payments.

Falling crop prices magnified a farmer's debt. For example, a farmer in 1881 who borrowed \$1,000 expected to pay interest each year and to repay the full amount at the end of five years. (Loans then were not amortized.) Corn sold for 63 cents per bushel, at best, in 1881, so the \$1,000 loan was equivalent to 1,587 bushels of corn; in 1886, when the loan came due, corn sold for 36 cents per bushel, so \$1,000 required 2,777 bushels. Ten percent interest would have cost \$100 per year—159 bushels of corn in 1881 but 312 in 1885. Thus, falling prices pushed farmers to raise more and more each year, and the more they raised, the lower prices fell. Like the character in *Alice in Wonderland*, they had to run faster and faster just to stay in the same place.

Such debtor farmers quickly understood and readily embraced the promise of an expanded money supply that would stabilize prices. As Bryan put it in 1893, those who opposed currency expansion wanted to make "a man pay a debt with a dollar larger than the one he borrowed. . . . They loaned money, and now they want more than they loaned." He also presented the issue in regional terms. "We simply say to the East [the nation's financial center]," he told a Kansas City crowd in 1891, "take your hands out of

our pockets and keep them out." In 1894, he wrote a platform for Nebraska Democrats that argued that the government should "make the dollar so stable in its purchasing power that it will defraud neither debtor nor creditor."

From the 1870s onward, the advocates of inflation had looked to two sources for additional circulating currency—"greenbacks" (the paper money first issued during the Civil War) and silver dollars. Throughout the late 1870s and the 1880s, a minor political party known as the Greenbackers had advocated more paper money but failed to gain a significant following, due partly to distrust of paper money that could not be redeemed in a precious metal. In 1873, Congress specified that the Mint could coin only gold into dollars, thereby putting the United States on a de facto gold standard, something many bankers and some Treasury officials agreed was necessary for full American participation in the international economy and necessary, specifically, to encourage continued foreign investment. In response to agitation over the currency issue, however, Congress provided for limited coinage of silver dollars after 1877. But prices continued to fall and inflationists argued that unlimited silver coinage had the potential to counteract the deflation. In the 1892 presidential election, the Populist party attracted one voter out of twelve with a platform of far-reaching reforms, including currency expansion.

Three elements stand out in the Populists' analysis of the political economy. The first element dated at least to Andrew Jackson, as Populist campaigners again and again proclaimed their opposition to concentrations of economic power. Jay Burrows, a Nebraska Populist, wrote that corporations had made "the toiling millions" into "the tools of a few plutocrats." For the Populists, concentrations of economic power—railroads and grain markets were the most obvious to Nebraska farmers—posed dangers to economic opportunity for the individual as well as to political liberty. To control monopoly, the second element in their program, Populists called for more governmental involvement in the economy, specifically, for federal ownership of the railroads and of the telegraph and telephone systems and for government alternatives to savings banks. "We believe the time has come," they proclaimed in their 1892 platform, "when the railroad companies will either own the people or the people must own the railroads." Their 1892 platform also demanded inflation—through either greenbacks, silver, or both—and a graduated income tax to replace the tariff. Populists argued—the third element in their analysis—that the people had to bring government itself more closely under their control, and they proposed a range of reforms including the secret ballot, the direct election of United States senators, and direct election of the president and vice-president.

Reelected in 1892, Bryan rapidly emerged as silver's most eloquent defender in Congress the following year when President Grover Cleveland asked Congress to end all silver coinage. Active in Nebraska state politics, he identified silver both as the issue which most distinguished his faction of the state Democratic party from the conservatives who controlled the state party organization, and as the most promising common ground with the state's Populists, whom he had viewed as potential allies from the beginning. In 1893, he worked hard to persuade the Democrats in the Nebraska legislature to help elect a Populist to the U.S. Senate. In 1894, Bryan convinced Nebraska Democrats to endorse the Populist candidate for governor as the best way to defeat the Republican candidate, who was known to be anti-Catholic. Both times, the Populists won.

Having twice swung Democratic support behind Populist candidates, Bryan hoped that a similar fusion might elect him to the Senate in 1895, but those hopes foundered on a Republican majority in the state legislature. Bryan then joined the *Omaha World-Herald* (the state's leading Democratic newspaper) as an editorialist and reporter, and he traveled the nation speaking on the silver issue. He also celebrated his thirty-fifth birthday, making him constitutionally eligible to seek the presidency.

Early in 1896, Bryan wrote to prominent Populists urging all silver advocates to unite for the upcoming presidential campaign. He also suggested that the Populists schedule their national nominating convention following those of the Republicans and Democrats; that way, if both major parties rejected silver, the Populists could rally all silverites, including Democrats and Republicans, behind their banner. Bryan probably cherished another scenario as well—if the Democrats were to nominate a silver advocate, it would be essential that the Populists not already have a separate ticket in the field. Nearly two months earlier, Bryan had confided to a close political ally that he considered his own nomination possible if silver Democrats controlled their party's convention.

Throughout the first half of 1896, Bryan traveled the country making speeches and working toward two goals: first, silver delegates must comprise the majority of the Democratic convention; second, they must remain uncommitted to any of the leading candidates. By advocating that states send delegates committed to silver but not committed to specific candidates, Bryan knew that he was making it difficult, perhaps impossible, for any candidate to come to the convention with the two-thirds majority necessary to take the nomination. At the same time, his mail brought offers of support from across the South and West. When all the delegates had been chosen, silver claimed the majority, and most of the silver delegates found

a complete set of Bryan's speeches in their mailboxes.

While Bryan bent all his efforts toward keeping the Democratic convention open, William McKinley was tightly locking up the Republican nomination. Bryan attended the GOP convention, in St. Louis, as a reporter for the *World-Herald*. Author of the highly protectionist tariff of 1890, McKinley blamed the Democrats for the depressed economic conditions since 1893 and presented the protective tariff as the cure. He avoided the money question until shortly before the convention, then agreed to a platform commitment to "the existing gold standard." When the convention adopted that gold plank, a group of silver supporters left the convention hall and their party. Their action delighted Bryan, for it pointed to the fulfillment of his hope for unity of all silver supporters.

In Chicago, the Democrats' platform committee, dominated by silverites, drafted a report at odds with the policies of President Grover Cleveland, a conservative Democrat; a minority of the committee favored a platform that opposed silver and applauded Cleveland. To defend the majority report before the convention, the committee chairman designated Benjamin Tillman of South Carolina and Bryan.

The convention took up the platform before it turned to nominating candidates. Tillman wanted to close the debate, but Bryan persuaded him to lead off instead. Bryan later recorded that "I was more effective in a brief speech in conclusion than in a long speech that simply laid down propositions for another to answer." Bryan sat with the Nebraska delegation on the floor of the convention, sucking a lemon to clear his throat, while the early speakers droned on. Tillman harangued for nearly an hour, then came three conservatives advocating the minority report. Only the first of them aroused much enthusiasm and, when the last finished, Bryan sprang from his seat and bounded to the platform. He raised his right arm and bade the crowd be quiet. A wave of anticipation swept the hall as the silver delegates eagerly waited for Bryan to put their emotions into words. He did not fail them.

He began with a modest disclaimer of his own oratorical abilities as compared to those who had preceded him, a technique he used to emphasize issues rather than personalities. As he developed his major points, Bryan later recalled, "the audience seemed to rise and sit down as one man. At the close of a sentence it would rise and shout, and when I began upon another sentence, the room was as still as church."

He defended the full range of reforms in the platform, giving special attention to the income tax, which he had also championed in Congress. The money issue, he insisted, was but the starting point for economic reform. In advocating that his party stand with the people rather than

"the idle holders of idle capital," he presented a metaphor that his party was to employ again and again through the twentieth century. "There are two ideas of government. There are those who believe that, if you will only legislate to make the well-to-do prosperous, their prosperity will leak through on those below. The Democratic idea, however, has been that if you legislate to make the masses prosperous, their prosperity will find its way up through every class which rests upon them."

Bryan's conclusion was the dramatic high point. "Having behind us the producing masses of this nation and the world, supported by the commercial interests, the laboring interests, and the toilers everywhere, we will answer their demand for a gold standard by saying to them: You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns." Bryan raked his fingers down his temples. "You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold." He stretched his arms straight out from his sides as if on a cross and stood silent for a moment, then dropped his arms and took a step back.

The delegates sat in stunned silence as Bryan began to return to the floor, then the demonstration came, shaking the hall for a half hour. Delegates carried Bryan around the hall on their shoulders, and others came to him to shout their support for the nomination. Bryan's "Cross of Gold" speech achieved instant immortality.

The speech accomplished its effect as much by the occasion and the style as by the content. The anxious silver delegates knew they had the majority but many were only weakly committed to a candidate. Bryan later described the need of the moment as "to put into words the sentiments of a majority of the delegates." He proved ideal for the task. His voice, a carefully cultivated and powerful instrument, could reach into every part of the great convention hall, an important ability in a day before electronic amplification. Many of his most striking phrases had been tested, revised, and retested in earlier speeches. He had spent his time during the train trip to Chicago organizing his thoughts in expectation of an opportunity to speak. Anticipating his opponents' arguments, he made final plans the night before, summoning his best metaphors from hundreds of rehearsals. On the convention floor, he stood forth as what he called "the voice of a triumphant majority." The speech transformed Bryan from a presumptuous youngster in the rear ranks of the peripheral candidates into a top contender for the nomination. Since then, his performance has been the standard example of the ability of an orator to sway a convention.

Bryan realized his hope for uniting the silver forces when the Populists and Silver Republicans made him their nominee. The marvelous speaking voice that gave him the

nomination became his major campaign instrument, as he traveled eighteen thousand miles by train, visited twenty-six states and more than two hundred and fifty cities and towns, and spoke to as many as five million people. Mary was usually by his side.

When the voters had their say in November, Bryan got almost six and one-half million votes, more than any previous candidate, and he carried twenty-two of the forty-five states. McKinley, however, received more than seven million votes, and the twenty-three states that he carried gave him a large majority in the electoral college. Republicans had usually enjoyed electoral college majorities from 1860 onward, but McKinley's victory marked the first time in twenty-four years that a Republican received a popular majority. For more than twenty years, national politics had been stalemated as neither party commanded a working majority, but McKinley's victory initiated a third of a century of Republican dominance in national politics. Bryan lost the presidency twice more, in 1900 and 1908, but he remained the most significant leader of the Democratic party until the nomination of Woodrow Wilson in 1912, a period of party leadership almost unmatched in American political history.

As a political leader, Bryan had a sincere and unshakable confidence in the ability of the people to govern themselves, and his confidence in the people was reciprocated in the form of a popular following with few parallels in American politics. This large following gave Bryan a significant role in the passage of such reforms as the income tax, direct election of senators, prohibition, and woman suffrage. Under Bryan's leadership, the Democratic party jettisoned most of the commitment to minimal government that had been the party's most prominent characteristic from Andrew Jackson to Grover Cleveland. Instead, Bryan and his allies fused Jacksonian antimonopolism to a commitment to governmental intervention on behalf of "the people" and against powerful economic interests. "A private monopoly," he never tired of repeating, "is indefensible and intolerable." As Bryan argued passionately for the use of an activist state to defend ordinary citizens from the monopolies and trusts of his day, he laid the basis for the activist twentieth-century Democratic party—the party of Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, and Lyndon Johnson. ❖

Robert W. Cherny is professor of history at San Francisco State University and author of A Righteous Cause: The Life of William Jennings Bryan. This article by Cherny was written as an introduction to a publication commemorating the centennial of Bryan's speech. Reprinted from The Cross of Gold by Williams Jennings Bryan by permission of the University of Nebraska Press. Copyright 1996 by the University of Nebraska Press.



SCHWINN COLLECTION, SHSI (IOWA CITY)

The Fighting 51st Iowa in the Philippines

by Michael W. Vogt

Events in 1898 sent Dan W. Turner (*opposite page, second from right*) and other young Iowa men far from home.

Citizens in towns across the state gathered at railway stations to bid them good-bye, as they did in Red Oak (*above*). While politicians debated imperialism and expansionism, individual soldiers went off to the first U.S. war fought overseas.

On April 25, 1898, the United States declared war on Spain. This culminated a period of declining relations over Spanish colonial policy in Cuba, exacerbated by the destruc-

tion of the U.S. battleship *Maine* in Havana on February 15.

As part of the War Department's hastily prepared mobilization plans for campaigns in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, President William McKinley issued a call for 125,000 volunteers. Congress authorized the use of National Guard regiments as part of this volunteer force, thus providing a semi-trained core of soldiers, later augmented by inducting enthusiastic new recruits.

Each state received a request for troops from the War Department. To



meet the quota, Iowa mobilized its four National Guard regiments—more than 2,000 men—and concentrated them at a make-shift “Camp McKinley” located on the state fairgrounds in Des Moines (*below*).

Under the watchful eye of Iowa National Guard General James Rush Lincoln, a Confederate cavalry veteran of the Civil War and an instructor of military science and tactics at Iowa State College, the aspiring volunteers at Camp McKinley trained and drilled in company, battalion, and regimental sized units. “Many were the weary tramps and valiant charges over the rough,

wooded heights beyond Four Mile Creek, and the valorous advances on the unsuspecting foe over toward Berwick Village,” Company H Corporal John Snure later recalled. “Under this rigorous schooling, the muscles of the men hardened, and hitherto unexercised sinews became steeled.”

Iowa had four National Guard regiments, one from each quarter of the state: the 1st from the northeast, the 2nd from the southeast, the 3rd from the southwest, and the 4th from the northwest. These were re-numbered as the 49th, 50th, 51st, and 52nd, to continue the number-

ing after Iowa’s 48 regiments of volunteers in the Civil War.

Of these four regiments mustered for the Spanish-American War, the 51st Iowa, from southwestern Iowa, served the longest. The story of the 51st Iowa Volunteers, from start to finish, unfolds in the following rare photographs, all from the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa.



DAN W. TURNER COLLECTION, SHSI (IOWA CITY)



SCAMMIN COLLECTION, SPIES (IOWA CITY)

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DAN W. TURNER COLLECTION, SPIES (IOWA CITY)



While honing their martial skills at Camp McKinley, the 51st Iowa received orders in May to proceed to San Francisco and become part of the Philippine Expedition. On May 1, the U.S. Navy's Asiatic squadron, commanded by Commodore George Dewey, had destroyed the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay. Land forces were now needed to surround the city and compel a Spanish surrender.

Arriving by train on June 10–11, the men of the 51st Iowa were assigned first to Camp Merritt and then to Camp Merriam at the Presidio, the military base close to the San Francisco harbor. By July 20 the 51st Regiment numbered 50 officers and 1,336 men.

The men of the 51st spent four and a half months training there and acclimating to life as volunteer soldiers. In late July, Private Fred B. Carver of Company G wrote to his friend Alta Mathews in Fontanelle: "I am not a bit homesick . . . We sleep in our tents with rubber

blankets under us and woolen ones over us . . . We scour our dishes in the sand and then rinse them off under the hydrant." The tedium of camp life—including re-filling ticks with fresh straw (*left*)—was occasionally broken by a spirited football game (*below*). The team from the 51st Iowa beat Berkeley, 6–0.

Company H Cook Frank E. Wood wrote home, "Our rations are very good. We have fresh meat every other day and soup for dinner and for supper we have fried bread and bacon, for breakfast we have oat meal or mush with boiled potatoes and coffee."

As the months passed, enthusiasm for army life faded, distractions lost their appeal, disease took its toll, and the likelihood of combat against the Spanish dwindled. Fred Carver commented about the soldiers' morale: "The glitter of the brass buttons has faded and they want to get home."



NETTY HAZARD COLLECTION, SHSI (DES MOINES)

More than 90 percent of U.S. casualties in the Spanish-American War were caused by disease. Crowded conditions in the tent cities at the Presidio military camp didn't help. Early in September, this funeral procession for two men of the 51st Iowa made its way down a San Francisco street. Company B Private Barton J. Brown, age 18, of Guss, Iowa, died of "measles complicating pneumonia" on August 30. Company I Private Louis Dunn, age 23, of Lenox, perished from typhoid fever on September 2.

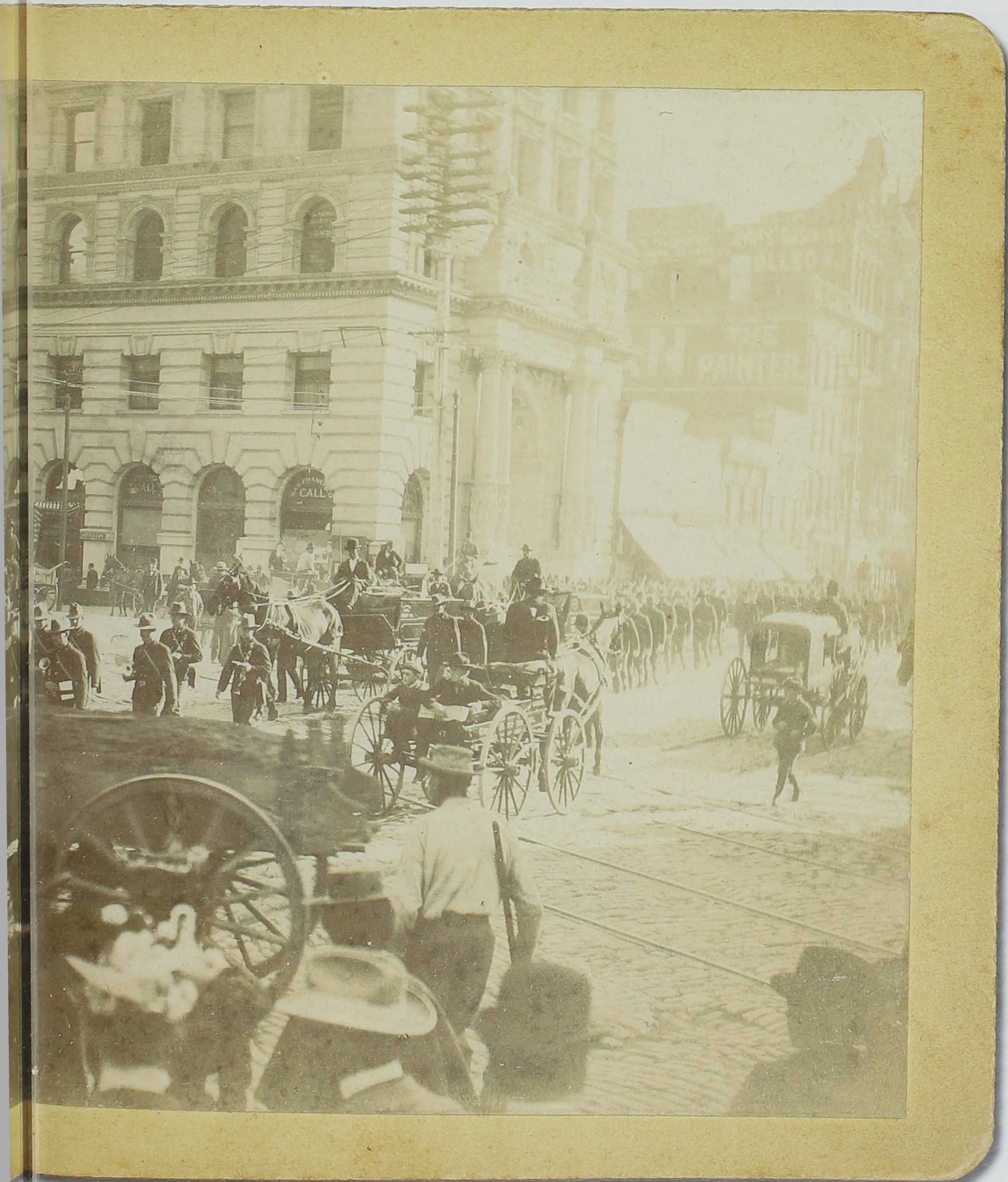
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"Camp has been rather quiet this week," Private Joseph Markey of Company M wrote the following day. "So much sickness in every company has a depressing effect on the spirits of all. B Company has more sickness at present than any other, some twenty-five of their men being in the hospital."

The 51st Regiment lost 27 men to disease before even leaving for the Philippine Islands.



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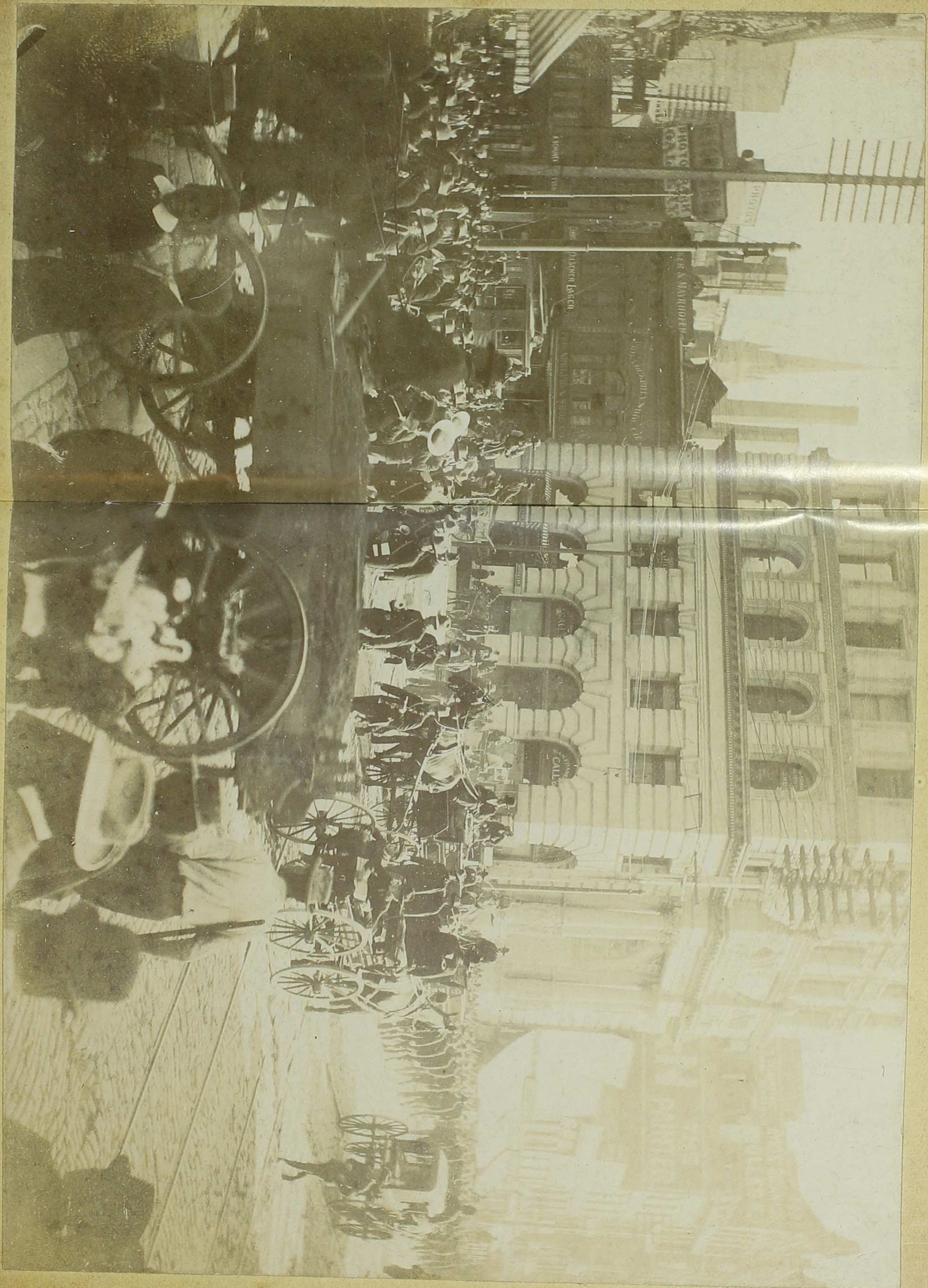


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DAN W. TURNER COLLECTION, SRSI (OWA CITY)



BETTY HAZARD COLLECTION, SHS (DES MOINES)

51ST IOWA BREAKING CAMP AT PRESIDIO FOR MANILA BY SS PENN. M.V. Had son

n October the 51st Regiment received orders to sail for the Philippines. Soon the men were disassembling their camp (*left*), packing their equipment for the trip overseas, and marching out through the Lombard Gate of the Presidio (*below*).

Hospital Steward Raymond D. Weakley wrote to his mother in Des Moines, "We broke camp at 9 am Thursday Nov. 3 '98. We hospital men were left to draw up our ground and so got out of the 5 mile march to the ferries. One of the sad sites that did anything but cheer us up was to see the Iowa Camp fall."

Captain Warren H. Ickis (Company G) wrote to his cousin, "We had remained in San Francisco so long we had made many friends and acquaintances there."

Hostilities had ended with Spain in mid-August. Under the protocol agreement, the United States would occupy Manila until a peace treaty was signed. Filipinos had assisted U.S. forces in the fighting against Spain, believing that they would be given independence.



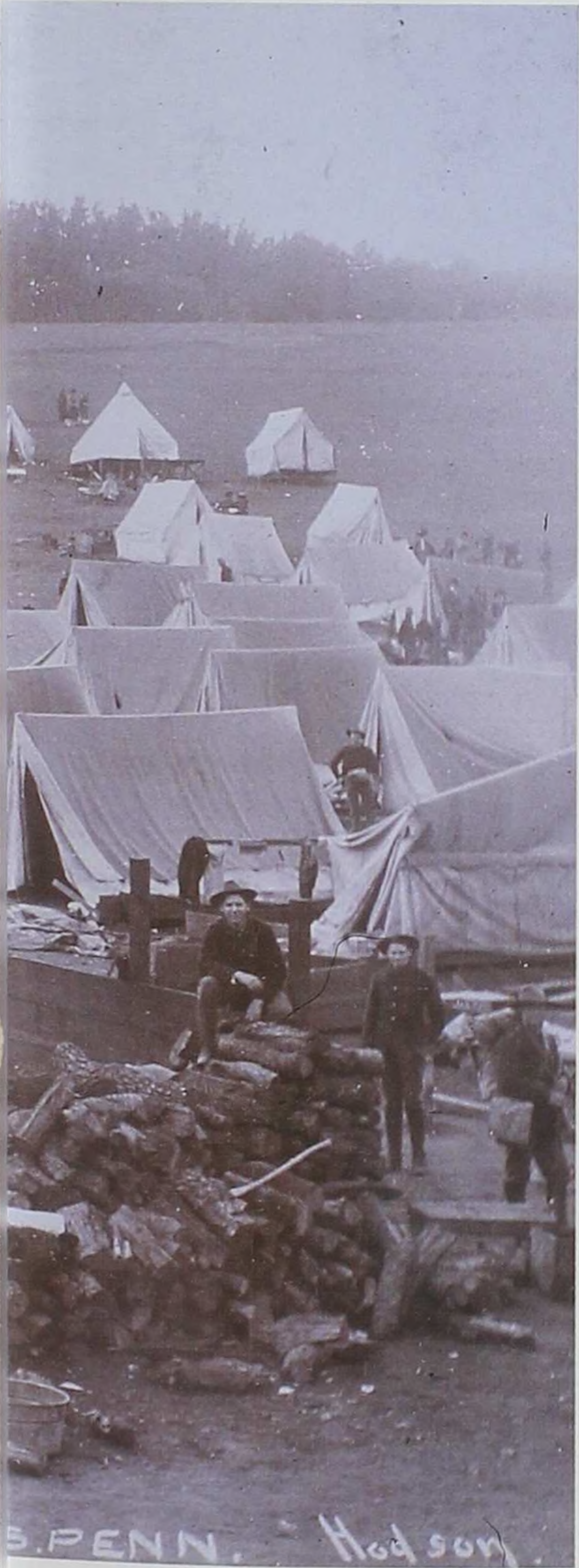
FRANK MEREDITH COLLECTION, SHS (DES MOINES)

WILLER & STAFF, ESCORTING 51ST IOWA TO S. PENN., FOR U.S.A. MANILA



5TH IOWA, BREAKING CAMP AT PRESIDIO, FOR MANILA, BY

BETTY HAZARD COLLECTION, SHSI (DES MOINES)



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FRANK MEREDITH COLLECTION, SHSI (DES MOINES)



FRANK MEREDITH COLLECTION, SHS (IDES MOINES)

Few if any of the men of the 51st Iowa had traveled outside the United States. Private Ole Oleson of Company M described in his diary the *Pennsylvania* (left and front cover) pulling away from the dock: "Right there is where the tears began to flow and the white handkerchiefs began to wave from every hand."

Like most other transport vessels contracted by the U.S. government during the war, the *Pennsylvania* was a hastily converted freighter with cramped quarters, inadequate ventilation, and few amenities. Only hours after departure, the soldiers grappled with an unseen enemy. Seasickness had set in. "About midnight I went up on deck," Oleson wrote. "It sounded mighty mournful." Private Francis Hime of Company A wrote in his diary: "Rough seas sick as h___ can't through up." Raymond Weakley, who worked in the ship's hospital (below), wrote to his mother: "And how sick I was. I wished the ship would sink and I would sink with it."

Others proved immune to the debilitating effects and enjoyed the gruesome, rail-gripping spectacle of their fellow passengers. Among them was Warren Ickis, who recounted: "About two-thirds of the men were seasick, and it was better than a circus just to watch the hundreds of them hanging over the rail . . . We felt perfectly justified in tying a piece of fat pork to a string and letting it down in front of

one of the officers as he was looking over the railing vainly trying to increase his contribution to feed the fishes."

The trauma of seasickness subsided and the monotony of shipboard life took over. Two weeks out, Hime penned a typically negative entry in his diary: "same old song living like hogs." Four days later on Thanksgiving he wrote: "general opinion of regiment that we have nothing to be thankful for."

The 51st Regiment arrived in the Philippines on December 7 but remained on board awaiting orders. On December 10 Spain signed a treaty in Paris, ceding the Philippines to the United States in exchange for \$20 million. The Filipinos settled into an uneasy peace with the United States. After 94 days on the *Pennsylvania*, the 51st began to disembark on February 3. Fighting erupted the next day between U.S. forces and Filipino insurgents who desired independence. The Philippine-American War had begun.



R.D. WEAKLEY COLLECTION, SHSI (DES MOINES)



HENRY HACKTHORN COLLECTION, SHSI (IOWA CITY)

Private Henry Hackthorn described these barracks in Fort San Philippi as "solid comfort." Hackthorn was in Company E, which shared these quarters for a while with Company M. Most of the time, however, men in the 51st Iowa were out in the field, where they slept in "dog tents" or improvised huts.

Writing from the trenches south of Manila on March 11, Corporal Paul Bellamy described the more typical experience: "We are very comfortable here in the trenches plenty of rice straw to sleep on and a palm leaf roof." The following day: "It rained pretty hard last night and I found out what it is to sleep in the rain . . . I couldn't keep my feet under and as a consequence they are clean this morning." Three days later: "Our life here in the trenches is not as bad as it might seem altho' it is bad enough . . . We sleep in our shoes and leggings with our belts and guns by our sides."

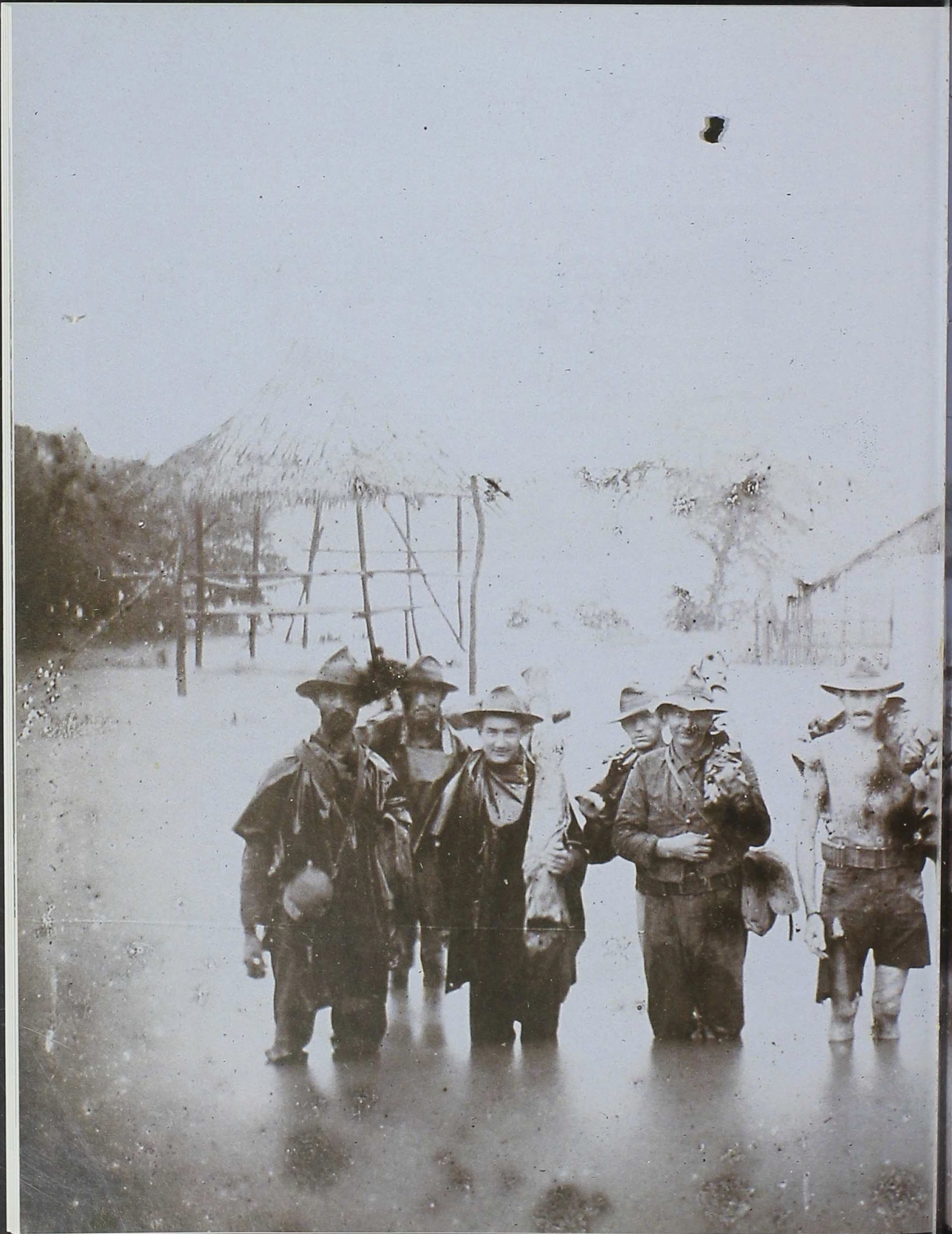
One of the problems faced by the U.S. Army was transporting fresh meat and rations to soldiers in the field. Supplied rations were supplemented by "liberating" chickens and livestock along the line of march or from areas adjacent to camp. Francis Hime jotted in his diary on April 21: "chicken hunt 35 chickens," and predictably added the following day, "fine dinner roast chickens."

Under a picture in his diary of a slain swine, Ole Oleson wrote: "wild pig for evening mess," and on April 26 he described the day's field rations as "two slices of pork sow belly, three small potatoes, . . . large spoonful of beans, . . . two pieces hard tack."

Another problem was the heat of the tropics and the rainy season. Company G Artificer Ernest C. James, of Greenfield, recalled: "The thing that stands out in my mind was the way we fought the mud in the Philippines . . . during the rainy season the mules kept getting stuck."

Private Karl Kraemer (Company H) described in his diary a heavy rainstorm at San Fernando on July 16: "On outpost started raining in evening between 1 am and 5 am. It was so you couldn't see a foot in front of you. The rain poured down the fields covered with water the ditch overflowed we waded around in water up to our waist the water run over the tops of the trenches."

A compelling image of the rainy season was captured in a photograph (*next page*) owned by Frank Meredith of Company G and labeled, "Co. C going on out/post in high water San Fernando."









HENRY HACKTHORN COLLECTION, SHSI (IOWA CITY)

Cannons—like this one, captured from the insurgents and inspected by men in Company E—were rare in the arsenal of the Filipinos. Most of their artillery pieces were outmoded muzzle-loading Spanish cannon barrels or reinforced pipe attached to field-made carriages. They fought with a variety of captured or smuggled firearms, swords, and knives.

Many Iowa soldiers remarked on the insurgents' inferior marksmanship due to their lack of formal small-arms training. Warren Ickis wrote to his aunt and uncle in Indianola that "the natives always shoot high." Henry Hackthorn noted that although "the 51st to date

has been in 9 engagements, 3 battles, and 6 skirmishes some of which have been quite warm," few had been killed or wounded because the enemy "are such poor shots and fire upon the men so far away that they can't hit us only once in a great while."

Many U.S. troops arrived in the sweltering Philippines wearing blue wool uniforms. Newly adopted uniforms of durable cotton duck were issued to officers and later to enlisted soldiers when available. The major (*above, center*) wears a Pattern 1898 blouse and trousers of tan duck. The soldier in the background holds a .45-70 caliber single-shot trap-door Springfield rifle and wears a typical enlisted man's campaign uniform.

During the first months the 51st Iowa was divided by battalion. Each battalion rotated between front-line duty in the trenches around Manila (*bottom right*) and guard duty in Cavite (*top right*).

The 51st Iowa served in the Philippines for eight months and was most often deployed in forward areas. Its companies or battalions participated in combat at Guadalupe Church (March 5); Quingua (April 23); East and West Pulilan (April 24); Calumpit (April 25); and San Thomas (May 4). The entire regiment served together in engagements at San Fernando (May 5, 25–26, and 31; June 16, 22, and 30; July 4) and at Calulut and at Angeles (August 9).

The 51st Iowa remained on the



BOTH PHOTOS: MATHEW TINLEY COLLECTION, SHSI (DES MOINES)

front line northwest of Manila until relieved by a battalion of the 22nd U.S. Infantry on September 4, 1899. Fifty-three percent of the regiment was on the sick list.

Several Iowans stayed behind to serve with newly formed volunteer regiments or to pursue entrepreneurial ventures in the Philippines. "I have thought a great many times that I would like to stay here and take my chances in the further development of this country," Warren Ickis wrote home, "but I haven't been able to give up the idea of going back to Iowa which is a pretty good place after all."

The 51st soon departed from Manila Bay aboard the U.S. *Senator* and headed to American shores.





DAN W. TURNER COLLECTION, SHSI (IOWA CITY)



The regiment arrived in San Francisco October 22 and then marched back to the Presidio (*above*). Private Joseph Markey of Company M recalled: "Along the entire line of march the street was congested with people and traffic was suspended . . . It was certainly a strong testimonial to the place held by

the Iowa boys in the hearts of these hospitable residents of the coast."

Discharged and mustered out on November 2, the 51st headed back to Iowa, recounting their experiences and pondering their losses: 2 men killed in combat, 38 wounded, and 41 deaths from disease or other causes.



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SCHWINN COLLECTION, SHSI (IOWA CITY), OPPOSITE PAGE: MATHEW TINLEY COLLECTION SHSI (DES MOINES)

Four days later, two trains pulled into Council Bluffs with the Iowa troops, home after 18 months. A brief and final diary entry by Private Francis Hime understated the joy of the returning soldiers: "pulled into Council Bluffs a great time."

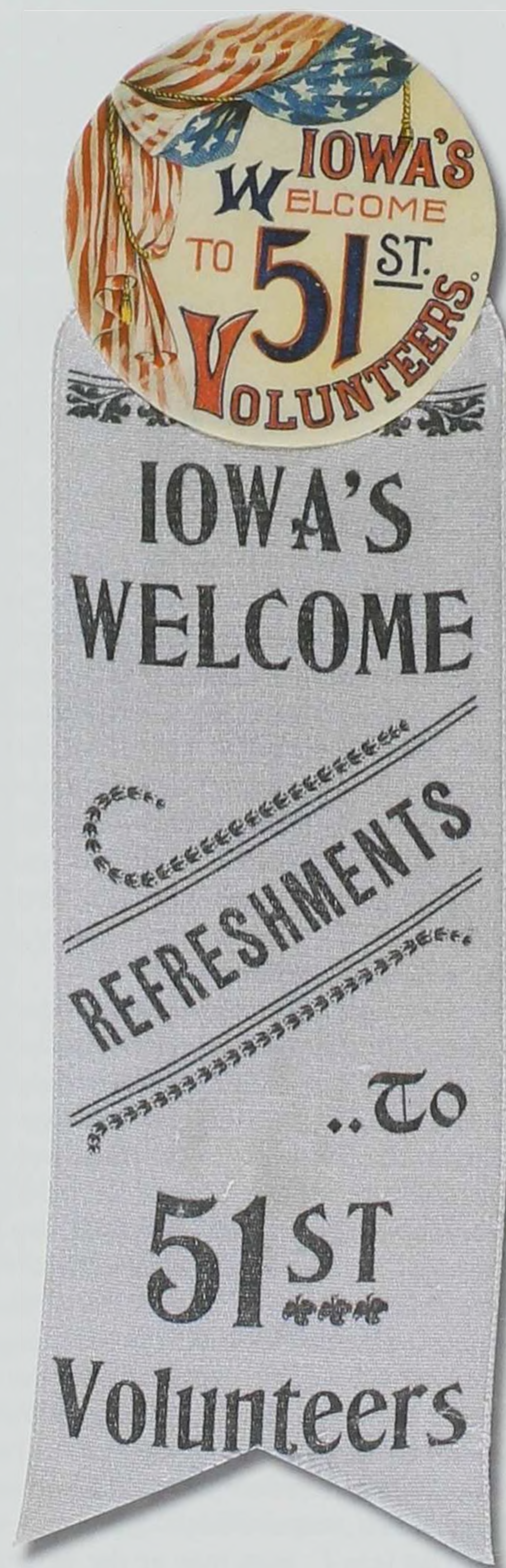
The train carrying Company M arrived in Red Oak at 11:40 p.m. The company smartly formed up for the march into town, down streets lined with admiring friends and family. Private Joseph Markey described the scene: "Turning east on Coolbaugh the scene which greeted the eyes of the returned soldiers must have impressed them with Red Oak's love for her heroes. The street from the court house to the armory was brilliantly lighted, added to which were the hundreds of electric lights in red, white, and blue, which studded a splendid flag-decorated arch at Third and Coolbaugh, and a gigantic letter M a block further on . . . surmounted with 'Welcome Co.' in colored electric lights . . . How proud the fathers and mothers, and sisters were of their heroes."

Similar events were repeated in southwestern Iowa communities as grateful citizens welcomed home Iowa's "bamboo veterans" of the 51st Iowa Volunteer Infantry. Soldiers closed their war diaries and boxed up photographs and letters. Mathew Tinley of Company A pasted a ribbon (right) into his scrapbook and carefully labeled it: "Badge worn by the ladies who served at the banquet given the soldiers. Nov. 6, 1899."

While organized resistance in the Philippines lasted another month, and guerrilla warfare until mid-1902, the men of the 51st resumed their lives in Iowa. Mathew Tinley would later practice medicine in western Iowa. Dan Turner, who had posed for the camera on a grassy hillside at Camp McKinley, became a state senator in only a few years, and then Republican governor in 1931. Henry Hackthorn, who remembered the "solid comfort" of barracks at Fort San Philippi, would become, at age 84, state adjutant of the United Spanish War Veterans of Iowa. Some of the men published their accounts of the war or donated their letters, diaries, and photographs to the State Historical Society of Iowa.

Years later the regimental chaplain, Major Hermon P. Williams, summarized the role of the 51st Regiment: "Our veterans of the Spanish war deserve the gratitude of generations to come. The bondage of the past was broken and the people set free . . . We did not see the significance of all these things then, for the God of History leads us only step by step in the path of duty." ♦

Michael W. Vogt is curator for the Iowa Gold Star Military Museum at Camp Dodge in Johnston, a trustee of the State Historical Society of Iowa, and co-chair of the Iowa Battle Flags Preservation Committee.



NOTE ON SOURCES

The major primary sources for this article are the papers of several individual soldiers, including those of Francis (Frank) Hime, Warren H. Ickis, Karl Kraemer, George W. Landers, Walter C. Larson, and Raymond D. Weakley (all at the State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines); Ole M. Oleson and Ernest C. James, Jr. (Iowa Gold Star Military Museum Library, Camp Dodge, Johnston); James R. Lincoln (Special Collections, Iowa State University Libraries, Ames); Paul E. Bellamy (Special Collections and Archives, I. D. Weeks Library, University of South Dakota, Vermillion); and Fred B. Carver (Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City). Joseph I. Markey published his firsthand account as *From Iowa to the Philippines* (Red Oak: Thomas D. Murphy Co., 1900). A valuable newspaper account appeared in the *Iowa State By-stander*, September 9, 1898.

Also crucial to the study of this topic are a number of official reports: *Report of the*

[Iowa] Adjutant General, 1900; Roster and Record of Iowa Soldiers, vol. 6, 1911; and U.S. Army, Adjutant General's Office, *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain*, vol. 2 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902).

Useful secondary sources include H. Roger Grant, "Letters from the Philippines: The 51st Iowa at War, 1898-1899," *Palimpsest* 55 (Nov.-Dec. 1974), 162-77; Brian McAllister Linn, *The Philippine War, 1899-1902* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000); John Snure, "Official History of the Operations of the Fifty-First Infantry, U.S.V. in the Campaign in the Philippine Islands," in Karl Irving Faust, *Campaigning in the Philippines* (San Francisco: Hicks-Judd Co., 1899); and Hermon P. Williams, "Iowa's First Overseas Expedition," *Annals of Iowa* 32 (April 1955): 561-75.

Annotations to this article are held in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files (SHSI-Iowa City).

In Commemoration of Ellis



The Iowa Beginnings of a Great American Humorist

by Katherine Harper

In July 1919, a portly New Yorker with gold-rimmed spectacles stepped onto the railway platform in Muscatine, Iowa, closely followed by his wife, elderly father, and four children. No brass band waited to meet them, no mayoral delegation, though the new arrival had the right to hope for both. For this was a local boy who had, beyond any doubt, made good. Ellis Parker Butler was one of the most highly regarded humorists in the United States, a writer of sidesplitting tales about ordinary people in anything but ordinary situations.

Success had not caused the visitor to forget his roots. In fact, in the 22 years since he had left Iowa, Butler had been one of Muscatine's greatest boosters. His fictional depictions of the little lumber town reached a nationwide audience through the most popular magazines of the day: *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Collier's*, *Munsey's*, *The Red Book*, *McCall's*, *American Boy*, *Saturday Evening Post*. First National Pictures had purchased his 1913 novel, *The Jack-Knife Man*, set in and around "Riverbank," and he was on his way west to watch the filming. But before that, he, wife Ida, father Audley, and the children were to spend the summer in a cottage-on-stilts on nearby Geneva Island in the Mississippi. There, Butler would absorb details for what would become the well-loved Jibby Jones series of boys' adventure stories.

The family was met at the train by Ida's cousins, Edwin and Laura McColm. As always, Butler found himself a bit tongue-tied in his first few minutes around Laura, for she was a Musser, the town's own answer to the Vanderbilts, and he had once been the young man who supplied her groceries. But the couple's warmth soon overcame his discomfort, and they laughed and chatted together like the old friends they were. Seventeen-year-old Elsie Butler chose to join in her elders' conversation, while nine-year-old twins Jean and Marjorie and their little brother, Ellis, age five, raced up

and down the platform, stretching their legs after the long journey.

Later, the suitcases stowed at the McColms' home and the trunks in the station baggage room, Butler announced his desire to show his children the place where he had been born. He not-so-secretly hoped to find that the town had recognized his fame with some sort of tribute there, at least a plaque with his name and date of birth. His arm linked through his wife's, the humorist led the others confidently up Third Street, noting the sites of boyhood triumphs and tragedies—and then stopped in his tracks, for the little frame house he had expected was gone, dragged elsewhere on the property to make room for newer structures. "I had to go half way around the block and down the alley to find it," he later wrote in *The American Magazine*, "and the only tablet on it was a trivial pine affair, painted white and bearing in black letters the word ICE. It was impossible for me to believe that a grateful community placed that tablet in an outburst of gratitude to the distinguished author that was born there. I tried to believe it. I tried to think that the letters stood for 'In Commemoration of Ellis.' But when the iceman stopped and yanked a few pieces of still unsold frozen water out of his wagon and dragged them into the little storehouse that marks my birthplace, my last shred of hope vanished." Thus this world-famous humorist had learned that in his own hometown a celebrity is just the fellow who used to live down the street.

Ellis Parker Butler first entered that little frame house on December 9, 1869, the eldest of Audley and Adella Butler's eight surviving children. Like other first babies, he was coddled and worried over, particularly after a wave of illnesses in his preschool years left him pallid and easily tired. A doctor would later tell the boy

that his heart was weak and that overexertion would likely kill him. That Butler long outlived this physician says something about the accuracy of the diagnosis, though no one knew it at the time.

Worried about placing her "delicate" son among crowds of other children, Adella kept him home when he reached school age, intending to tutor him herself. But she was occupied by other, more serious concerns. She had borne three more babies in the space of only five years, and Audley, a bookkeeper for a wholesale grocer, was finding it difficult to support so many. At this point one of the strongest influences on Ellis's eventual career entered his life, for in 1876, the Butlers sent their six-year-old son and his sister Daisy, a year younger, to live with their grandmother and an unmarried aunt on the next street.

Like her parents and her brother Audley, Elizabeth Parker Butler had not been formally educated to any great extent, but she was highly intelligent and a voracious reader. Aunt Lizzie's home may have been humble, but it contained a private library of formidable size and depth. Ellis Butler would later recall how, despite having no training in languages, she devoured the works of Goethe, laboriously translating each line with the aid of a German-English dictionary and a grammar. A spare, severe-looking woman, she nevertheless had a soft spot for children. All the young Butlers adored her.

Aunt Lizzie wasted no time in beginning Ellis's education. Once the children were settled in, she sat her small nephew down with Sir Walter Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather* and in short order had taught him to read. For the next five years, winter and summer, she drilled him in penmanship, mathematics, drawing, grammar, spelling, history, and English literature. She also taught him to imitate the sorts of verse they studied together and—having cast a highly critical eye over the result—encouraged him to send it to the Muscatine newspapers. Like many women in Victorian-age America, she would have been appalled to see her family's name in print outside the marriage or

death rolls, so the boy signed his earliest efforts "Ayah," an infant mispronunciation by Daisy Butler of her brother's first name.

Aside from his home-schooling and literary aspirations, Ellis enjoyed a normal village boyhood. He played with his siblings every day after lessons, learned to swim and handle a rowboat, drove his grandmother's cow to and from pasture, ran afoul of a tomboy whose superior strength and agility left him bawling with humiliation, and slipped out one night to watch the docking at

Muscatine of the first electrically lighted steamboat. He made the ordinary unwise choices of youth, "everything," he admitted, "but blow down the barrel of a shotgun to see if it is loaded. I escaped that by never having had a shotgun. However, I did the best I could with a Fourth of July pistol that used .22 blank cartridges. I placed the nose of the pistol against the palm of my left hand in order to see why the trigger did not work. Old Doc Thompson dug out the wad and I fainted only once." These memories became fodder for the tales of "Riverbank" and "Derlingport" that he would produce over a 40-year period beginning in the 1890s.

By the time Ellis Butler was 11 or 12 years old, his father's salary had risen to the point where the two oldest children could move back home. When he joined his brothers and sisters at school, at first, thanks to his aunt's tutelage, he was placed two grades above his peers. Unaccustomed to reciting before a roomful of other chil-

dren, however, he soon found himself in a group more appropriate for his age.

He found plenty of opportunity for mischief, usually instigated by his bosom friend, Fred Schmidt, whom Butler would immortalize in a story series about "Swatty" Schwartz, a born leader of boys. "Schmitty" and Ellis were experts at getting into trouble, but not at eluding capture afterward. Their teacher generally administered a switching to the tough little tailor's son, but assigned still pale and ill-looking Ellis extra compositions, which she required him to read in front of the class. To both his and the teacher's surprise, the other

SHSI (IOWA CITY)



"I have a weak heart," humorist Ellis Parker Butler once quipped. "Thirty two years ago a doctor told me I might drop dead any minute, and other doctors have told me so—off and on—for thirty two years. Most of the doctors have since died, and the others keep dropping off every few days."

children laughed—and not at him, but at the content of his seemingly innocuous essays. Perhaps, thought the boy, this was an activity worth pursuing further.

Emboldened by his success and the more frequent acceptance of his doggerel by the two local newspapers, Ellis began mailing his work beyond Muscatine, to *St. Nicholas* magazine and the many weekly and monthly national papers aimed at a child readership. One afternoon he returned home from school to find a small, squarish package waiting for him. An ephemeral Sunday School publication, *Dawn of Day*, had purchased his story "Shorty and Frank's Adventure" for the magnificent sum of 50 penny postcards. Ellis Parker Butler—or rather, his alter ego, Percy V. Clyde—could and did now truthfully refer to himself as a paid professional author.

In the years between Ellis's birth and his first sale, his parents had continued to produce babies at intervals ranging from nine months to two years. They would eventually have a dozen children; four were stillborn or died in infancy and two lived only to young adulthood. By 1884, with Audley Butler's pay envelope again stretching too thin, the couple found themselves facing an unhappy choice. They scraped by long enough for their eldest son to graduate from grammar school and even to experience a few months of the secondary education they craved for him. But by winter, they knew that they had no choice but to ask 14-year-old Ellis to leave school and go to work.

Many employment opportunities existed for young boys in a Mississippi River port of that day, but most required brawn, something Ellis decidedly did not possess. Thanks to Aunt Lizzie, however, the boy wrote a fairly legible hand and was competent in (if not enthusiastic about) mathematics. The manager of the Muscatine Spice Mill took a chance and hired him as a bookkeeper's helper at \$5 per week. Young Ellis "did as little work as possible" in his first job and surrendered his weekly pay to his mother. When, a few months later, he was offered a position as bill clerk at the Muscatine Oat Meal Mill, producers of Friends Oats, he was astonished at the good grace with which his supervisor took the news and the effusiveness of his good-bye.

Ellis resolved to apply himself at his new job and settled in at what must have been painfully dull work for an active youth. But his employers possessed him only during office hours. The moment the six-o'clock whistle blew, he raced home, bolted down his dinner, and shut himself in his room, where he scrawled verses and stories for hours by the light of an oil lamp. Presumably inspired by Benjamin Franklin's early account of his early work as "Silence Dogood," Ellis signed the name "Elpabu"—an amalgam of his given names—to a

series of topical essays and began slipping them under the door of the *Muscatine News*. The paper's editor chose to print them verbatim, which spurred the teenager to stay up even later and write still more.

The resulting lack of sleep was probably the cause of an incident that he would recount with rueful laughter for the rest of his life. At that time, barrels of Friends Oats were shipped throughout the United States via steamboat and railway. Time was of the essence to get the product to storekeepers before the inevitable weevils made an appearance. One summer day in 1888, Ellis absent-mindedly processed a C.O.D. order for a boxcar of oats in the usual manner, mailing an invoice to the buyer, in care of the freight office in the town of shipment. In this case, the town was New York City and the agent's name was Henry Smith. "It seems that this was an especially good summer for weevils, and there were about seven hundred and sixty-two Henry Smiths in the New York directory," Butler confessed more than 30 years later. But what happened next was not entirely his fault, for instead of notifying the sender of the need for a more complete address, the New York freight office began posting the invoice to one Henry Smith after the other, beginning with the first in the book. Meanwhile, the boxcar sat on a siding in the beating sun, with storage charges mounting and the number of weevils soon exceeding the number of oats.

When the mistake was finally conveyed back to Muscatine and the enormity of the expense calculated, Ellis's supervisor quietly approached the boy's desk and laid in front of him an envelope covered front and back with crossed-out and rewritten addresses. "It was the most painful moment of my career," he later recalled. "There I sat, frightened and ashamed, with my hair cut pompadour and my mustache almost visible to the naked eye, a young and tender being on the very threshold of life, and already an outcast and a ruin. I was the weevil in the oatmeal of industry." Minutes later, he and his hat were out on the street.

Not by coincidence, the bureaucratic insistence of railroads on using the rule book instead of common sense lies at the heart of Butler's most famous story, "Pigs Is Pigs" (1905). Its main character, freight agent Mike Flannery, refuses a customer's payment for a C.O.D. shipment of two guinea pigs, stating that the fee should be five cents per head higher, the livestock rate. When the customer insists that the rate should be the one used for household pets, Flannery points to the rule book, declares that "pigs is pigs," and refuses to budge. A long correspondence ensues between agent, railroad, and an

eminent biologist. By the time all three are convinced that "pigs is pets," the original pair of guinea pigs has multiplied into the thousands—and the customer has moved away.

With his local employment options dwindling, Ellis appealed to George Dillaway, a dealer in glass, silver, and crockery. This merchant knew and trusted Audley Butler and was willing to take on his 17-year-old son in a sales capacity. That was in the late summer of 1888. Although Ellis later claimed to have broken twice as much crockery as his salary would cover, in truth, by November, he was the store's ranking clerk and earned a princely \$30 per month.

But that was not to be the year's only triumph. Butler had by then abandoned the "Elpabu Letters" in favor of another project, one that was less time-consuming and infinitely more fun. The *Muscatine Journal* had recently begun serializing a sensational novel of a few years before, Fergus Hume's *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*. Butler seized upon this as an opportunity—why, the title alone was ripe for parody. After writing the first few installments of *The Mystery of the Unhandsome Cab*, he submitted them to the rival *News* under his Elpabu pseudonym, but this time he handed them over in person. The paper's editor, George Van Horne, had long since guessed the identity of his young contributor. He accepted the installments (which burlesqued the serial as it had so far appeared) and agreed to print them if Butler swore to carry his project through to the end. Butler did, and then some: *Hansom* ended its run only a few issues later, but *Unhandsome* continued for a total of 47 installments.

The editor was so pleased with his literary find that he mailed episodes of the serial to other newspapers across the state. H. S. Kneeder of the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, described by Van Horne as "the acknowledged poet-laureate of Iowa," found Butler's satire such a refreshing change from the mannered fiction he ordinarily received that he composed a flowery paean for his editorial page. The *Muscatine News* proudly reprinted Kneeder's essay under the headline "Iowa's Literary Promise." It read, in part: "The boy who has thus turned to authorship in the odd hours snatched from sleep, writes with much of the quality which distinguishes the descriptive passages of Dickens, but he reminds us also in his style of Nathaniel Hawthorne, there being the same use of effective iteration in the quaint dwelling upon grewsome detail. There must be a future for such a boy. . . . We believe that in him Iowa has found a story teller who can catch and hold the interest of the reading world, and with gathering strength and growing talent will be able to develop the talent so manifestly in him."

How did Iowa's Literary Promise react to such praise? According to Butler, "I swelled up like a toad."

A day or so later, Van Horne summoned the budding writer to his office and offered him the city editorship of the *Muscatine News*. His vest buttons now nearly popping, Butler gave his notice at the store. His initial cocksureness, however, slowly turned to panic as he realized all that would be expected of him, a youth of 18 with only three years of formal schooling who, in his own estimation, had already proven himself a failure.

A local business school was then accepting new students, and Butler wasted no time in enrolling. But after so long away from a classroom, the pressure proved too great. Just weeks after he had begun, he returned to Van Horne to confess that the notion of such responsibility was too much for him: he couldn't take the job. This admission was embarrassing enough, but to return to Mr. Dillaway's store and beg for his old job was unthinkable. Butler took the only step he saw available to him; he approached his father, who interceded with his own employer, wholesale grocer and patent-medicine dealer Fred Daut. Thus it was that, instead of settling at a desk to review birth notices and the latest boilerplate proof, Ellis Parker Butler took up a post behind a counter, a spot he would retain for the following eight years.

Although his swelled ego had been deflated by this experience, the young man remained convinced that his future lay in writing—specifically, writing with comic content. After all, Bob Burdette of the *Burlington Hawk-Eye* had become a national success with exactly the sort of verses and sketches that Butler liked to write. Humorists John Kendrick Bangs and Bill Nye—his own favorites—were enjoying huge popularity, to say nothing of one-time Muscatine resident Mark Twain. Butler began expanding the range of his submissions far beyond his hometown. The weekly satirical publications *Truth*, *Judge*, *Puck*, *Up to Date*, and *Life*, all based in New York City, were soon purchasing his humor regularly. So were the *National Magazine* in Boston and numerous small magazines in Des Moines and Chicago. Many of his contributions from this period do not bear his name, but a satisfying number include his initials or even a full byline.

This period saw an equally satisfying development in the budding writer's personal life. One cold winter's day in 1895, on his way home from work, he paused beside a skating pond. A group of teenagers was playing Snap the Whip on the ice, hands joined, skating rapidly in a long, curved chain until one or two at the end lost their grips and sailed away, sometimes tumbling into the snow at the edge of the pond, sometimes bowl-

ing over their fellow skaters like so many ninepins. As Butler watched, the line zigzagged and a female figure broke away and swooped toward him, shrieking and flailing her arms. Just as it seemed that the girl would plunge into the frozen drifts, Butler stepped forward and caught her, swinging her up to the bank. The pair straightened, their laughter frosting in the cold air, and looked for the first time into each other's faces. The young clerk never looked away. For the next 42 years, this woman would remain the love of his life.

Ida Anna Zipser was just 15 years old. A native of the tiny village of Atalissa, five miles northwest of Muscatine, she had lived for much of her girlhood in a sod hut on the Nebraska prairie. After her musician-turned-farmer father went on what was to be a brief trip and never returned, Ida's mother took the girl home to Muscatine to live with her well-to-do aunt and uncle, Lee and Sally McColm. In the years that followed, Ida had grown into a slim, graceful teenager with a level gaze and long, light-brown hair that she had only recently begun to pin up. Today, a girl in her mid-teens would be thought far too young to keep company with a man ten years her senior, but in that winter of 1895, Ida was considered a fine catch. Butler's low-key courtship, appropriate for a girl her age, involved walking her (and her friends) home from school, escorting her to church picnics, and reading aloud to her from the humorous books of John Kendrick Bangs.

Only months after meeting Ida, Butler made his first sale to a "name" magazine. The story had as its genesis a pair of squibs—short "filler" items—that Butler had found in the newspaper, one about a man who constructed a house on a swivel so that it would not be torn off its foundation by high winds, another about the naval theory that a waterspout could be stopped by a cannon blast. In Butler's story, "My Cyclone-Proof House," the narrator is an Iowa inventor whose revolving dwelling has a built-in cannon on the back porch. After a false start, in which a steady breeze leaves the house with its front porch adjacent to the pig pen, the man is given the chance to test his tornado-buster in action. Unfortunately, he misses the oncoming twister and instead blows out a wall of his barn. The story is short but engaging, a series of gag situations squeezed into less than a page of finished type.

Richard Watson Gilder, in whose *Century Magazine* the piece appeared, was renowned for his gentle, encouraging letters of rejection and his advice-filled acceptances. He sent Butler one of the latter in August 1896. Flustered by the attention being paid to him by this literary celebrity, Butler wrote back to thank Gilder for his comments. Unsure about the "references as to

identity"—by which Gilder meant a short biography for the magazine's files—he instead provided a list of a dozen prominent people who could vouch for his character. Butler, Gilder, and *Century Magazine* associate editor Robert Underwood Johnson eventually became good friends and had a good laugh over his mistake.

The *Century's* approval of his work marked the start of a restless period, a time when Butler wondered if he could sell more stories if he lived nearer to the magazines he was supposed to be supplying with up-to-the-minute topical humor. To prepare himself for a move to the city, he spent the payment for his *Century* story on "the first derby hat, narrow trousers and plaid socks ever seen in Muscatine," an outfit that, when he finally did visit a major city, in fact branded him as a greenhorn. After that extravagant purchase, he began cutting back on the few luxuries he allowed himself and putting money aside. By autumn 1897, he had saved \$200, enough to sustain him for months, even given New York City prices. Having made inquiries among his humor markets, he erroneously believed a job was waiting for him at one of the weekly magazines. Suitcase packed, he bought a railway ticket, embraced his parents and Aunt Lizzie, and kissed Ida good-bye, vowing—like so many other romantics before him—to send for the woman he loved as soon as he had made his fortune.

It took an initial period of unemployment and mental drought, but Ellis Parker Butler eventually found all that he had dreamed of. He made a fine career for himself, not only as a writer, but—an odd thing for a man who so disliked figures—as president of one bank and vice-president of another in the New York City suburb of Flushing. He married the beauty of the skating pond, and together they raised four children. Butler had a knack for making new friends, especially among his fellow authors and artists; these would eventually number into the hundreds. He even found immediate fame in 1905 thanks to "Pigs Is Pigs," a story no better or worse than the 2,200 other short stories, poems, essays, stage and radio plays, motion picture scenarios, and other writings published in his lifetime. That story gave him a degree of lasting fame; it has remained in print almost continuously since 1905 and has been adapted for the screen four times.

Most of his achievements—his rise from trade magazine paste-up man to editor to owner (and later, the more surprising jump to bank president); his appearances in silent film, stage productions, and early radio; and his creation of dozens of popular series characters—came after he left Iowa. Yet he remained very much an Iowan at heart. He kept up to date on his hometown with sub-

scriptions to local newspapers and returned to Muscatine or nearby Geneva Island nearly every summer. In addition, he set many of his early stories, including the popular series starring book salesman extraordinaire Eliph' Hewlett, in the fictional hamlet of Kilo, Iowa. And when novelist Theodore Dreiser made an unprovoked attack on the region's intellect in *The Independent* in 1923, it was Butler who publicly lambasted him for it, both in the same magazine and, hitting closer to home, in the *Authors' League Bulletin*.

In his later years, the humorist could look back on himself as a founding member of the Dutch Treat Club and the Authors' League of America, organizations that still flourish today. He could remember his seemingly endless tours on the lyceum circuit (including a year in tandem with poet Joyce Kilmer), his stint as an official U.S. government propagandist, and a self-parodying moving-picture performance that sent F. Scott Fitzgerald into a laughing spasm. In the few hours when Butler was not busy with bank business or his writing, the local YMCA, library, hospital, and Boy Scouts always found him a willing volunteer. His published stories alone were enough to fill several filing cabinets. The full life of Iowa's Literary Promise ended when he died in September 1937, three months short of his 68th birthday.

Ellis Parker Butler's hometown still lacks a monument to the man who once put it on the literary map. However, shortly after his death, an outside source paid him exactly the sort of tribute he had hoped for back in 1919. The authors of the WPA/Federal Writers Project guide to Iowa, published in August 1938, thought Butler's anecdote about the ICE placard so amusing that they recounted it in their chapter on Muscatine—and listed the little frame house, in its new location, as a city landmark. The man once bylined as "America's Foremost Humorist" had received many awards and recognitions during his lifetime, but he surely would have taken special pleasure in this one. The fact of his existence had been vindicated at last. ❖

Katherine Harper is a literary scholar based in central Ohio. For her doctoral dissertation, she manually located and annotated 1,415 of Ellis Parker Butler's published works. (Many more have turned up since.) She is at work on a critical biography of the humorist; its tentative title is "Laughs Is Laughs."

NOTE ON SOURCES

Sources for this article include the Ellis Parker Butler Papers at Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries (Iowa City); the Ellis Parker Butler and *Century Magazine* collections at the New York Public Library; Ellis Parker Butler, "Back to the Old Home Town," *The American Magazine* (May 1920); Ellis Parker Butler, "Ten Ways to Make a Fool of Yourself," *The American Magazine* (June 1927); "Ellis Parker Butler, Author and Humorist—An Autobiography," *Judge* 3 (Nov. 1906); Louise H. Guyol, "Ellis Parker Butler Emerges from the West," *Boston Transcript* (May 1, 1926); and various other items provided by the Butler family. Annotations to the original manuscript for this article are held in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files (SHSI-Iowa City).

Joking around with Edgar Harlan

In 1912, Edgar Harlan, curator of the Historical Department of Iowa, set out to inventory Iowa talent. He sent a four-page questionnaire—an "Outline of Personal History"—to everyone he knew in the literary field, intending to collect biographical information about literary figures, living and dead. In response, he received hundreds of books, photographs, and autographed biographical outlines.

Naturally, Harlan sent the questionnaire to humorist Ellis Parker Butler, then living in Flushing, New York. Butler filled it out and sent it back to Harlan. But did Harlan really expect a humorist like Ellis to give him straight answers? Here's a sample of some of Harlan's questions on the form and Butler's responses:

Name in full	Ellis Parker Butler
Chief occupation or profession	Author
Former occupation of author	Iowan
Date and place of beginning each	Born 1869
Emigrated to American, when	From Heaven 1869
Education	Never had any to brag about. Common school, Muscatine Iowa
Place of death	Somewhere on good old Earth, I hope.
Date of death	Sorry, but I can't give this
Place of burial	Grave.
Political office	None,—always earned my own living.
Politics	Anything to beat Bryan
Religious denomination if any	Golf
Religious preference	Belief that my religion is nobody's business but my own
Miscellaneous	It seems to me that you can't get as good a cigar for a dime as you used to.

Butler also sent Harlan a copy of his most popular story, "Pigs Is Pigs," presenting it "freely to the great State of Iowa which can't afford to spend 25 cts for it." He inscribed the book with this poem.

Dear Iowa
State of my birth
Accept this book —
A quarter's worth.

O, State of Corn
Take it from me,
And ever let
Thy motto be —

"Three millions year—
ly for manure,
But not one cent
For literature."

—The Editor

The Sorry Tale of Hennery K. Lunk

by Ellis Parker Butler

In naming this quiet tall tale to his annual Honor Roll, The Best Short Stories of 1918 compiler Edward J. O'Brien wrote that it "would have delighted Mark Twain." Certainly the American public embraced it when it appeared. The story (and illustrations) appeared in Harper's Monthly Magazine, May 1918. After more than a year of dreary World War I front-line dispatches, its gentle, old-fashioned humor must have come as a happy reminder of times past. —Katherine Harper

When I made my visit to my old home town, after twenty years' absence, I was interested in every one and everything. It is fascinating work to take a shred of memory and watch it grow as forgotten memories add themselves to it. It is as if you discovered an inch of yarn sticking out of a chest. The little tag-end of yarn is nothing of itself, but you take hold of it and pull it and out it comes—yards and yards of it—until you have a great mass of yarn in your hands, and you feel the itchy feel of it, and get the camphor-ballish smell of it, and all at once you exclaim:

"By George! By George! It's that old woolen undershirt I hated so when I was a boy!"

You are as tickled as if you had discovered a five-dollar gold-piece in an old vest. In a little while you walk the streets in a fog of long-forgotten memories. I say "fog" because it is all dim and dreamy and unreal. You are neither yourself nor the person you were twenty years before. You are like a Mohammed suspended between the floor of today and the ceiling of your youth, but as you hang suspended there the tracings on the ceiling grow clearer and clearer.

I remember I walked down to the river and sat on the waterlogged dock of the old ferry-boat *Silas William*. The boat is gone now, and the dock is rotting, but the same old river ran by. I remembered the first time I rode across the river on the *Silas William* and what an adventure that had been. Then I remembered Hennery K. Lunk, who used to own the ferry and was captain and half the crew. I remembered, as if it had happened yesterday, how he warned me



HE WARNED ME NOT TO GO TOO NEAR THE EDGE

not to go too near the edge because the Mississippi River was full of saw-back whales that would glide under a boy if he fell in the river, and saw the boy in two, and then swish around and swallow the boy in two gulps. He told me that if a man fell overboard the saw-back whales would go "swish! swish!" twice—once to cut the man in two lengthwise and once to cut the man-strips crosswise, because saw-back whales could not swallow a man unless he was cut into four pieces. Then the captain—Captain Hennery K. Lunk—dug into his pocket and gave me two peppermint lozenges and told me to eat them immediately. He told me to eat one of them bottom side up and the other one top side down. That would go a long way toward saving my life if I did happen to fall overboard, because saw-back whales could not bear peppermint. If I kept breathing my breath in and out when I fell overboard the saw-back whale would come up and sniff my breath and turn around and swim away again without sawing me or anything.

I remembered how he came around to where I was standing, after he had gone up to the pilot-house to get a chew of tobacco from the pilot, and asked me if I was sure I had eaten one of the peppermints top side down and the other bottom side up, and he did not seem sure that I had, so he gave me another. He kept giving me others all the way across the river and back, because he did not want me to take any chances. My heart warmed to Hennery K. Lunk as the memories returned. There was a sun-roughened old codger sitting on a pile of lath on the dock, netting a seine with slow, exact swings of his arm, and I went over and seated myself beside him.

"Morning, pardner!" I said.

"Mornin'!" he said, without looking up.

"You don't remember me," I said, "and I don't remember you, but I used to live here twenty years ago or so, and I knew a man by the name of Hennery K. Lunk—"

My stranger shook his head without stopping his netting arm. "Poor old Hennery!" he said. "So you used to know poor old Hennery K. Lunk! I thought everybody in the world had forgotten poor old Hennery by this time, he's been dead so long—"

"Dead!" I exclaimed.

"Yep! He's dead," said my netter. "Saddest thing! Saddest durn thing that ever happened in this town. When I think how lively and chipper and always joking Hennery K. Lunk used to be when I first knew him— He was a fine feller, Hennery was."

"I never heard a bad word spoken of him," I agreed.

"He was kind and he was cheerful—"

"Used to run a ferry-boat right from this very livin' dock!" said my friend. "Old *Silas William*, she was. Many's the ride I've had on her. I don't know as I ever heard anything as sad as what come over old Hennery K. Lunk."

"What happened?" I asked.

"Well," said the old fellow, "I don't mean the way he lost his money and all. That was sad, but it only sort of led up to the real sad part. You knowed he sold his boat?"

"The ferry-boat? No, I did not know that."

"Yes, he sold her. Durndest unlucky sale! Sold her one night to two fellers in town here for four thousand dollars—"

"Four thousand dollars!" I exclaimed. "Four thousand dollars for that rotten old hulk?"

"And the next day two fellers come down from Deebuque, and offered him five thousand two hundred and fifty for her! Yes, sir; and it broke Hennery K. Lunk all up! It sort of sickened him, like it would anybody. He wasn't never the same afterward. It made him sort of moodish and glum all the rest of his life. He sort of dwelt on it, he did. He'd intended to retire and live on his money, but he kept mooding about that one thousand two hundred and fifty he'd lost, and he got so durned glum about it he set out to make it up, Hennery K. Lunk did. So he started a saloon—a liquor saloon."

"Bad business, but profitable," I ventured.

"And two days after he got her opened up," said the



A SUN-ROUGHENED OLD CODGER SITTING ON A PILE OF LATH

sunburned old fellow, "they passed the prohibition law and he had to take all his liquor out in the street and smash it in the gutter. It saddened Hennery K. Lunk, that did. Yes, sir! It did so. I guess he lost a good thousand dollars by that deal, and I don't know what he would have done if he hadn't had a chance to buy Thomas Doherty's crockery-store. You remember Thomas Doherty?"

"Yes, indeed!"

"Done a right good business, I guess. Hennery K. Lunk, he thought so. He thought he could make back that two thousand, two hundred and fifty he was short, so he went and bought Thomas Doherty out of his crockery business. That was three days before we had that earthquake here."

"I remember reading about the earthquake," I said.

"Busted every crock and dish in Hennery K. Lunk's store," said the old fellow. "It made a big change in Hennery, too. Made him sort of melancholy like. I guess he might have sort of caved in if it hadn't been he had a chance to buy Droman's livery-stable. He figured that Droman wasn't never any business man and that a good hand at business ought to clean up three thousand two hundred and fifty dollars in no time at all. So when the foot and mouth disease come the next week—"

"You don't tell me—"

"Shot 'em!" said my historian. "State come around and shot every horse in Hennery K. Lunk's barn. And no redress, mind you. I tell you it 'most discouraged Hennery K. Lunk. He got so blue that if he hadn't had the notion to speculate in potatoes I hate to think what he might have done right then. But it looked like a hard winter, and he went and bought all the potatoes he could scare up. He showed me on a piece of paper, with a pencil, how he ought to make up the four thousand two hundred and fifty dollars he was behind if potatoes went up to a dollar a bushel—"

"But they went down!" I said.

"Nope! Froze! Froze as solid as rocks, in the old Bergen Mill where he had 'em stored. So he says to me, he says, 'I ain't hardly got ambition to try no more,' he says. 'Seems like,' he says, 'life and every durned thing was against me. For two cents,' he says, 'I'd jump in the river and let one of them saw-back whales cut me in four—'"

"Did he say that?" I asked, eagerly. "I remember—"

"He had a lot of sayin's like that," said the old codger. "Hennery K. Lunk was always sayin' things of one sort or another. So he says to me, 'I only got a dollar an' forty cents left, an' it ain't much to go on,' he says, 'but I can knock together a sort of hand cart with some wheels I can pick up, and I can buy a kerosene lamp for thutty cents, and I can buy a corn-popper for a dollar, and a dime's wuth of pop'-corn, and I can start in at the hotel corner, poppin' corn an' sellin' it for five cents a bag.'"

"'You'll need some salt and butter,' I says, 'and some paper bags, and some kerosene oil, if you want to do business like that.'"

"'Well,' he says, 'I guess if I invest a dollar an' forty cents into a business I can get trusted for a quarter pound of butter, and an ounce or two of salt and a couple o' pints of kerosene oil up to Fackelmeyer's grocery-store, and it's

my only chance to make back the five thousand two hundred and fifty dollars I'm behind."

"So he went ahead and done it, and the first popperful of corn he popped over the kerosene lamp caught fire and burned up the whole durned shootin'-match! Yes, sir; he was an unsuccessful man, Hennery K. Lunk was. He couldn't succeed at nothin' he undertook. Why—"

"What were you going to say?" I asked, when he hesitated.

My friend drew his hand across his forehead and looked out at the river and shook his head.

"Unfortunate! Unlucky!" he said, sadly. "Even when it come right down to suicide—"

"You don't mean to say that he—"

"He tried, but he didn't have no luck at it," said the old fellow. "He shot at himself and missed. He jumped in the river and they pulled him out. He done everything he could, and tried every way he knew, poor feller! but he didn't have no more luck at suicide than he had at business! He was a durned failure at suicide like he was at everything else. He'd be alive yet but for one thing. It was mighty sad!"

"What was it?" I asked.

"He fretted so much over not bein' able to die that it killed him," said the sunburned old man.

I looked at him and at the lines of regret and sorrow that his face had taken on, and then I put out my hand and took his and shook it violently.

"Now I know you!" I exclaimed. "I couldn't quite place you before, but I know you now! How are you, you exaggerating old rascal? How are you, Hennery K. Lunk?"

"Well, I reckon I'll pull through awhile yet," he said, with a cheery smile, "if no saw-back whale don't swaller me in four swallows." ❖



THE FIRST POPPERFUL OF CORN CAUGHT FIRE

Traditions

March 1 was traditionally moving day for farmers in Iowa. Sales of farm land, rent and interest payments, and lease arrangements with new tenants were often dated March 1. As historian Frank Yoder observes, the late winter was a naturally slow time in the agricultural cycle. Moving on March 1 allowed the new owner or tenant to be established before spring field work began. By March, much of the feed, hay, and straw for the livestock—as well as canned goods, firewood, and coal for the farm family—would have been consumed and therefore wouldn't need to be moved. Roads were likely to be clear of snow but not yet thawed into the quagmires of mud that once made spring travel on country roads so difficult.

Iowan Hortense Butler Heywood compared this moving-day tradition to the migration of birds and other natural signs of spring. "One day the whole neighborhood is as permanent, as settled, as stable as if it were to exist thus for years to come," she wrote. "The next the roads are filled with a unique procession—farm wagons piled high with household goods and trailing behind them corn plows, seeders and other pieces of machinery, loads of grain wherein the clever housewife has packed her precious fruit jars, loads of squealing hogs, [and] small herds of restless, frightened cattle."

Hazel Phillips Stimson, of Independence, Iowa, remembered moving day when she was a child in 1917, and in 1976 she wrote down those memories for an essay contest by the Iowa Commission on Aging. To this basic tradition in rural Iowa, Stimson adds the color of detail and emotion. Her essay (like Heywood's) is archived in the Special Collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City).

—The Editor



DON ULTANG COLLECTION, SHSI (IOWA C)



In 1938 professional photographer Don Ultang captured on film the ritual of an Iowa farm family moving on March 1. His image reminds us that this tradition, like so many practiced in rural communities, generally involved neighbors helping neighbors.

Moving On in 1917

by Hazel Phillips Stimson

March 1st, 1917, arrived cloudy with an east wind and twenty above zero. Papa arose about five o'clock and built the fires before he called us, but none of us lingered that morning, we were so excited. Mama nursed the baby while we set breakfast on, big

bowls of oatmeal, slices of homemade bread with butter, and lots of milk. I was twelve and Junior was eleven, so we could help with the moving, but Papa took the girls (Edna, nine; Blanche, six; Nona, three) and six-month-old Donald to stay with a neighbor,

Lizzie. Edna wanted to help move but she had to help Lizzie with Baby.

Papa shook out the grates and emptied the coals outdoors, allowing the stoves to cool. Mama and I folded the bedding and nightclothes and packed them into dresser

my only chance to make back the five thousand two hundred and fifty dollars I'm behind."

"So he went ahead and done it, and the first popperful of corn he popped over the kerosene lamp caught fire and burned up the whole durned shootin'-match! Yes, sir; he was an unsuccessful man, Henny K. Lunk was. He couldn't succeed at nothin' he undertook. Why—"

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"Unfortunate! Unlucky!" he said, sadly. "Even when it come right down to suicide—"

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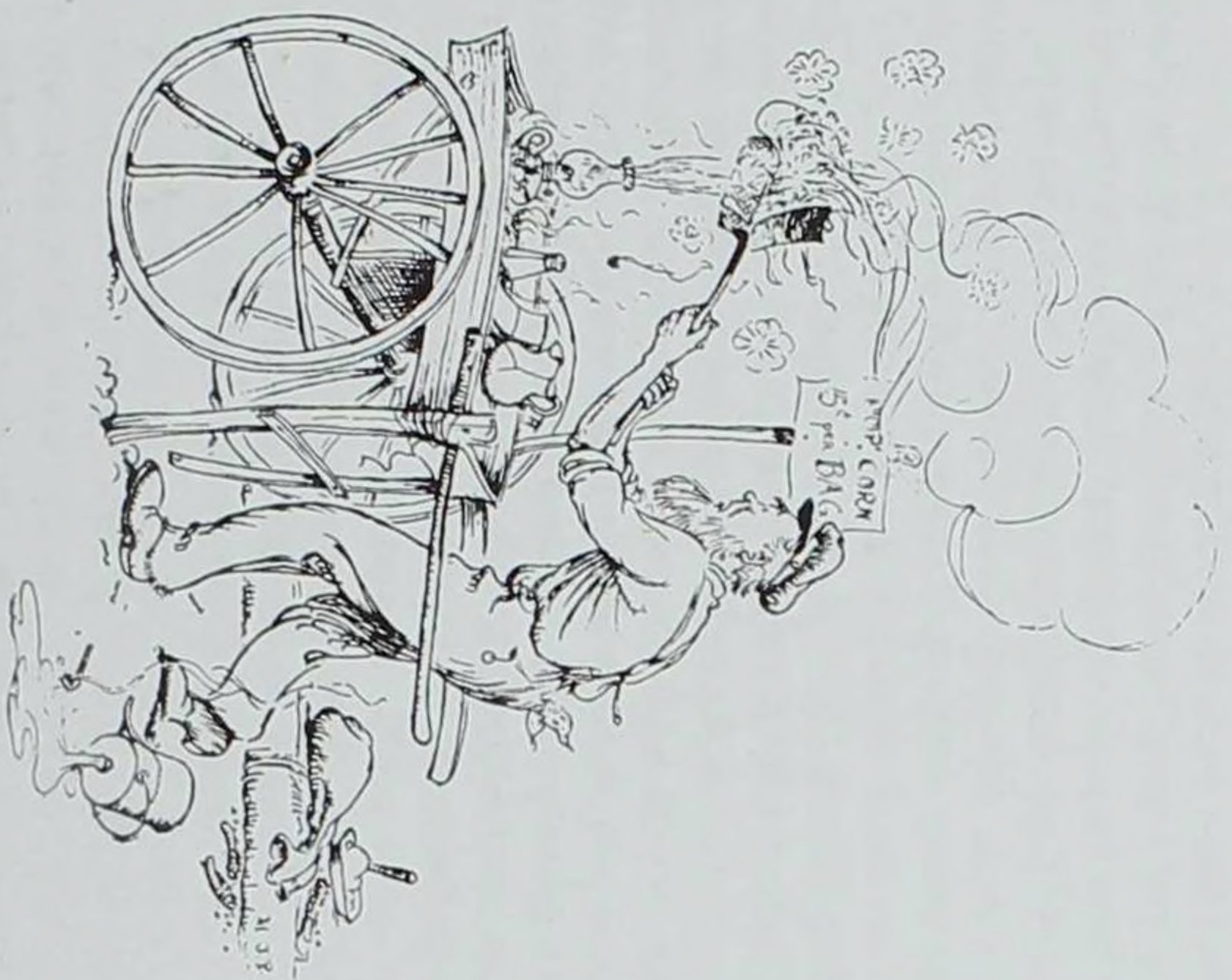
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Moving On in 1917

by Hazel Phillips Stinson

March 1st, 1917, arrived cloudy with an east wind and twenty-five o'clock and built the fires before he called us, but none of us lingered that morning, we were so excited. Mama nursed the baby while we set breakfast on, big

bowls of oatmeal, slices of homemade bread with butter, and lots of milk. I was twelve and Junior was eleven, so we could help with the moving, but Papa took the girls (Edna, nine; Blanche, six; Nona, three) and six-month-old Donald to stay with a neighbor,

Lizzie. Edna wanted to help move but she had to help Lizzie with Baby. Papa shook out the grates and emptied the coals outdoors, allowing the stoves to cool. Mama and I folded the bedding and nightclothes and packed them into dresser

drawers and big boxes, while Papa knocked down the beds and removed the mirrors from the dressers.

Having already packed everything possible, yesterday Mama had made a big baking of bread, a cake, two pies, and many cookies. Now she fixed egg sandwiches and filled a peach basket with baked beans, the sandwiches, and baked goods. She set the big coffee pot on top.

Neighbors' wagons backed up to the front door to take on their loads. Glen was first and the stoves were loaded. The men emptied the reservoir into dishpans, so now Mama did the breakfast dishes and packed them into the round washtub with many towels and washrags. She washed the pantry shelves and cleaned the floor where the stove and cabinet had stood. She kept back a broom and hurried upstairs to sweep and dust the floors, finishing on the narrow stairway. Mama made sure that the boxes containing the good dishes, glassware, and the mirrors went with a careful driver, and she helped him pack quilts and pillows around them.

She swept the front and back porches and each empty room, checking each to be sure it was empty.

Crates had been borrowed from the Produce house, and neighbors caught, crated the two hundred hens, and loaded them and the six brood sows into wagons. Milo, Lizzie's husband, with his two boys and Junior, was driving the cattle along the road.

Everything was carried up from the cellar, and the potatoes and canned stuff were packed in our 1916 Overland Touring car. Mama and I went with the first carload and we passed the cattle

and wagons on the road. I was excited over the big house, but I'm afraid Mama looked at the big windows and open doors with misgivings. Glen was firing up the kitchen range, which soon took some of the chill off the room, but Papa had to go to town and purchase another length of stove-pipe for the living room stove. He also bought several sacks of coal to tide us over.

Mama made a pot of coffee, put the beans on to warm, and set out the sandwiches and baked goods on the short counter. We emptied several boxes onto the pantry shelves and filled the reservoir from the pump just outside the door. One of the wagons with bedroom furniture arrived and Mama flew upstairs to help the men set up the beds and dressers.

There was a big sink with a hand pump for soft water, so Mama hung up a roller towel and set a basin in the sink so the men could wash up. About one o'clock, the table and chairs arrived and the men came in to lunch amid much joshing and horseplay. Soon some of the wagons were rattling off toward home just as the cattle arrived. More mouths to feed but first the boys must race up and down stairs, trying every door. Had they just walked ten miles? They wolfed down the last of the sandwiches and scattered to watch Papa bed the stalls and pens and to help with the poultry and sows as they were unloaded.

The last wagon arrived but alas, the tub of dishes had fallen off the wagon, and we found every dish was broken, as Mama sorted through the welter of towels and broken crockery. She didn't say much in front of the men, but was I glad I didn't do it!

Papa then had to take Milo

and his boys home and pick up the rest of our family as Mama and I hastened into the cold upstairs to make up the beds. Junior would have a single bed in a room by himself, but we had to have two double beds in the west room for us girls, and Baby's bed was in the east room with Papa and Mama's.

Back downstairs, we warmed ourselves and Mama found us some cookies. She sat for a few moments and stared at the mess around her. Sighing, she noted, "That washing machine should have been left on the porch and most of these boxes should have been carried down cellar. Papa and I'll do it after supper." Mama was uncomfortable, her breasts painfully full, as she waited for the baby to come [home from the neighbors].

"Gee, Mom, the new barn is super. It's warm and the hay falls down right in front of the cow mangers," said Junior, still excited. Mama found a cheesecloth and strained the milk into a flat crock and set it to cool on the pantry shelf. Papa arrived with a lustily crying baby. "Here is your mama. Did you think you had lost her?"

Baby clasped his mother and started to nurse hungrily. Mama smiled at her excited little girls and sent me to show them the house. Supper was simple: bean soup, bread and butter, cookies and milk. We were so tired we all dropped into bed, but Mama somehow managed to find time to hear our prayers and to tuck each of us in. ❖

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Iowa Heritage Illustrated

One in a Million

With a wingspan of two inches, this little brass eagle pin announced that its wearer supported President William McKinley for reelection in 1900. The metal pin is similar to the brass "goldbug" lapel pins worn by those supporting the gold standard during the 1896 election year (see page 105). Goldbug pins came in a great variety of styles.

Note that the bird clutches a small bug in its beak. The bird is also mechanical. When a tiny lever by the tailfeathers is released, the wings flip up and outward. Some versions of this pin included a tiny circular portrait of McKinley, revealed when the wings opened.

This campaign pin is part of the extensive holdings of campaign artifacts in the State Historical Society of Iowa museum collections, documenting changes in campaign tactics and materials from the mid-19th century through today.

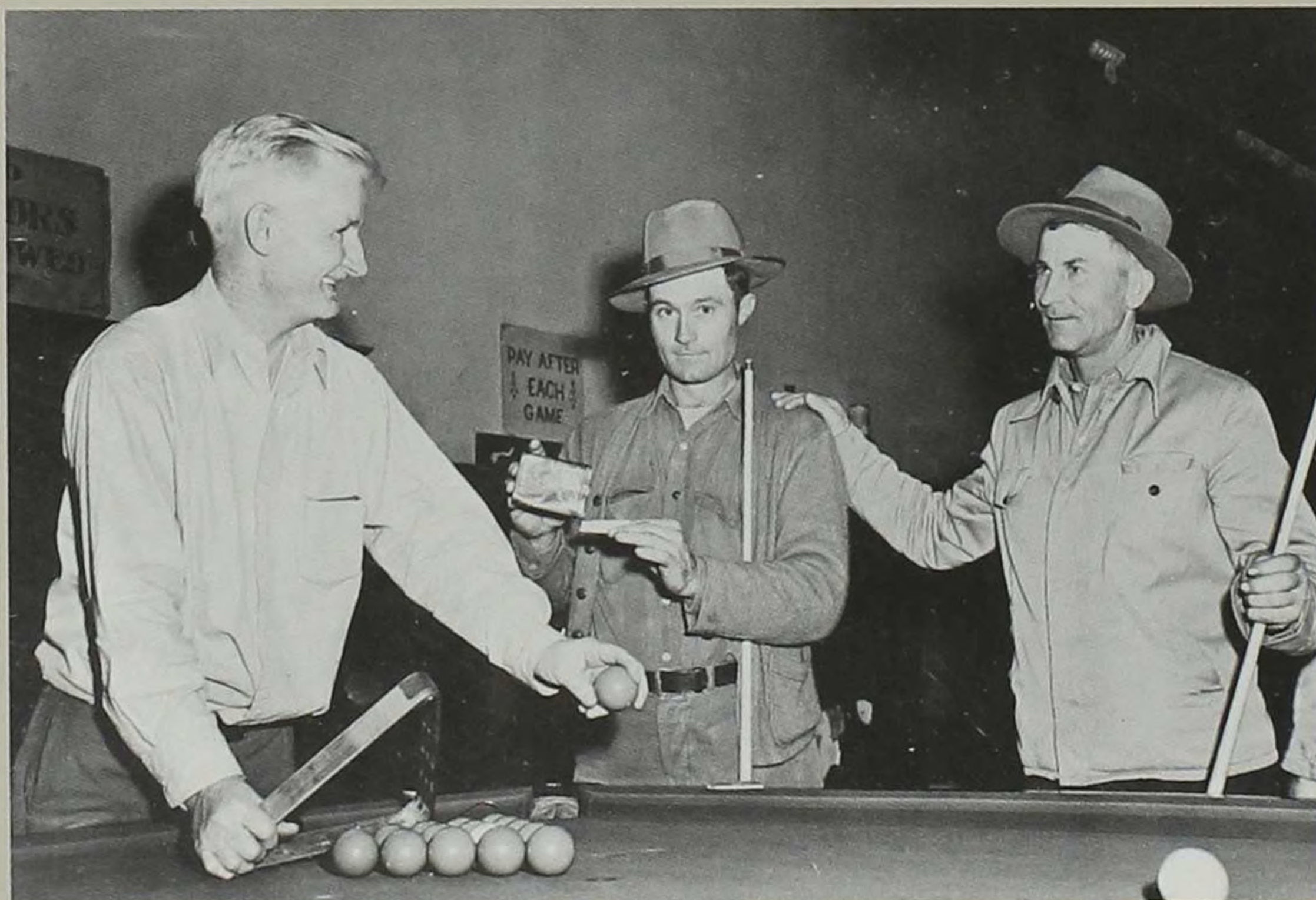
—The Editor



BOTH PHOTOS: SHSI (DES MOINES), DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE



From left: Ed Beasley (of Weldon) sits down in Leon's Hotel Central lobby with townspeople O. S. Perkins, Albert Biddison, and Charles Tapscott to sort out their political differences in November 1944. Below: Albert Cross, Fred E. McDowell, and Jess Norman do the same in the Leon pool hall.



“With the election over and President Roosevelt in for a fourth term, Leon and Decatur county are discovering once again that only rarely do warm words of a campaign cause lasting scars in Iowa,” wrote *Des Moines Register* reporter George Mills in mid-November 1944.

Mills met with locals in Leon to find out whether there were any remaining rifts between the Republicans and Democrats now that the election was over. Differences aside, they figured they'd all get along fine.

Mills wrote, “Decatur [County] is nationally known because it has gone for the winner in a dozen consecutive presidential elections,” back to 1900.

But what about the election of 1896? For a close look at that divisive election year, through the lens of feisty Decatur County newspapers, see the lead article inside this issue.

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