



"We like a house full," Anna Larrabee once said. Here, the Larrabees host a gathering at Montauk, their elegant Victorian mansion in northeast Iowa. Mrs. Larrabee is the woman in the center (white dress, hatless). Her husband, Governor William Larrabee, is the short man with the moustache, standing on the right. Their longtime friend, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives David Henderson, stands with a cane, on the left. U.S. Senator Jonathan P. Dolliver stands between the Larrabees.

# *The Larrabees of Montauk*

*Text by Mary Bennett*

*Color photography by Chuck Greiner*

Any archivist dreams of the day when she stumbles upon a collection infused with vast amounts of historical detail, a fascinating cast of characters, and a chance to re-create some semblance of the past. Such is the case with the Larrabee Collection at the State Historical Society of Iowa, which docu-

ments not only the life of an influential patrician clan headed by a dynamic Iowa governor, but also provides the story behind one of the state's leading historical attractions—Montauk at Clermont—and the family who lived there.

My first encounter with this colorful and cosmo-



politan family came in the summer of 1976, when I had the opportunity to work with over one thousand historical photographs from Montauk. Through the multitude of images, I gained a new perspective on how wealthy Iowans lived in the Victorian and Edwardian age, enjoying many comforts of the upper classes and yet contributing substantially to the cultural, social, and intellectual upbringing of a young state. Both Governor William Larrabee and his wife, Anna Appelman Larrabee, led by example and fostered an interest in education, civic duty, social reform, economic fairness, and celebration of the arts, whether music, literature, painting, or sculpture. The Larrabees left a distinctive mark on Iowa.

It is not uncommon for a small town in Iowa or elsewhere to have a "mansion on the hill" or a scenic boulevard where the prosperous merchant, banker, or factory owner lived, and, more often than not, from where the civic leadership, philanthropy, and political influence emanated. Local historians across the state have studied the impact of town founders and leading proprietors on their communities. Some prominent names—like Musser in Muscatine, Thompson in Forest City, Hubbell in Des Moines, Kirkwood in Iowa City, or Larrabee in Clermont—are families whose collections can be studied at the State Historical Society. Among the state's original pioneers, these families came prepared to build empires in the West and persisted over several generations through hard work and careful investment.

These Iowans of affluence represent just a handful who came to the state when it was young, often as venture capitalists. They enjoyed the financial support of established families in the East or offered businesses essential to frontier communities. In the early 1850s, entrepreneurs like Peter M. Musser and his brothers made their fortunes in the lumber trade in Muscatine and Iowa City, while Jasper Thompson was able to parlay the financial success of his general store in Clayton County into banking and land speculation, which ultimately drew him to Winnebago County. Others invested

in railroad expansion. But the main attraction was farming, with the potential to reap benefits from some of the most fertile land in the world.

Iowa's premier crop in this period was wheat, which necessitated the building of local mills to grind the wheat into flour for shipment. The Turkey River in northeast Iowa was just one of the waterways to provide the power to operate these mills. This is how William Larrabee would begin amassing his fortune. After laboring as a manager of his brother-in-law's farm, William Larrabee wrote to his father back in Connecticut about the opportunity to acquire a flour mill in Clermont in Fayette County. Seizing the chance to make a profit—

ultimately a sizable one—William Larrabee invested in the mill in 1857, soon bought out his partners, and continued to operate it until 1872, when wheat crops were diminished by cinch bugs and corn came into favor.

According to some sources, Larrabee owned more land than anyone else in Iowa and became one of the wealthiest men in the Midwest during the Gilded Age. With diversified investments and a savvy understanding of economic trends, Larrabee not only earned riches as a miller and land baron but also found success with banking interests in

Clermont, McGregor, Dubuque, and the Dakotas. He had mixed results as a railroad financier and builder, but his knowledge and intuitions ultimately guided railroad legislation in America.

**T**he little village of Clermont was not even on the map when the Larrabee family first appeared in Iowa. John Larrabee, son of a veteran of the War of 1812, traveled here from Windham, Connecticut, in 1849. He composed eloquent and profusely written letters to the Windham Reading Society describing the wilderness he encountered. He provided detailed descriptions of the prairie, river valleys, and ravines while documenting the wildlife around him, the birds, animals, and flora. He commented on Indian affairs, the lead mine



**Built in 1874 on a hill above Clermont, Montauk was the Larrabee family's third home. The first two were far more modest. Donated to the state in 1976, Montauk is now a historic site.**



he saw in July 1849, and cholera and sickness prevalent among frontier settlers. Before he could realize his ambitions out west, John died of dysentery in September 1852, leaving his father, Adam, little option but to send William to carry on instead.

The Larrabee family had already established a satellite home in the Midwest. The eldest daughter, Hannah, had married a well-to-do Connecticut neighbor, Elias H. Williams, who came to Iowa in 1846 to purchase 1,700 acres of farmland near Postville. Hannah described their journey west in the spring of 1849 and expressed surprise at the number of villages "like our own in Connecticut" along the way. When William Larrabee first arrived in Iowa in 1853, the 21-year-old taught in a log cabin school, but by May of 1854 he wrote to his father, "I am at work for Mr. Williams." He took the job of foreman or manager of his brother-in-law's Grand Meadow farm and noted in another letter, "Mr. Williams is putting up his fence. He has about 40,000 rails on his place. We had engaged his help for the season."

**T**hat summer, Larrabee also renewed his acquaintance with Mr. Williams's closest relatives, Gustavus and Prudence Appelman, who had recently migrated to Iowa with their young daughter Anna Matilda and two other children. By October 1855, Larrabee was in Clermont and wrote: "We are to Appelman's now. Mr. A has the ague, all of Clermont is shaking with it."

Mr. A—or Captain Appelman, as he was called from his days as a ship owner and sea captain in Mystic, Connecticut—had resisted the transition from sailing ships to the use of steam engines in the 1840s, supposedly remarking: "I'll be damned if I will go to sea with a fire in the hold of my ship." Though established as a prestigious family living in a fine home and enjoying Mystic's rich cultural life of lyceums and musical recitals, the Appelman family had decided to settle in the new country west of the Mississippi.

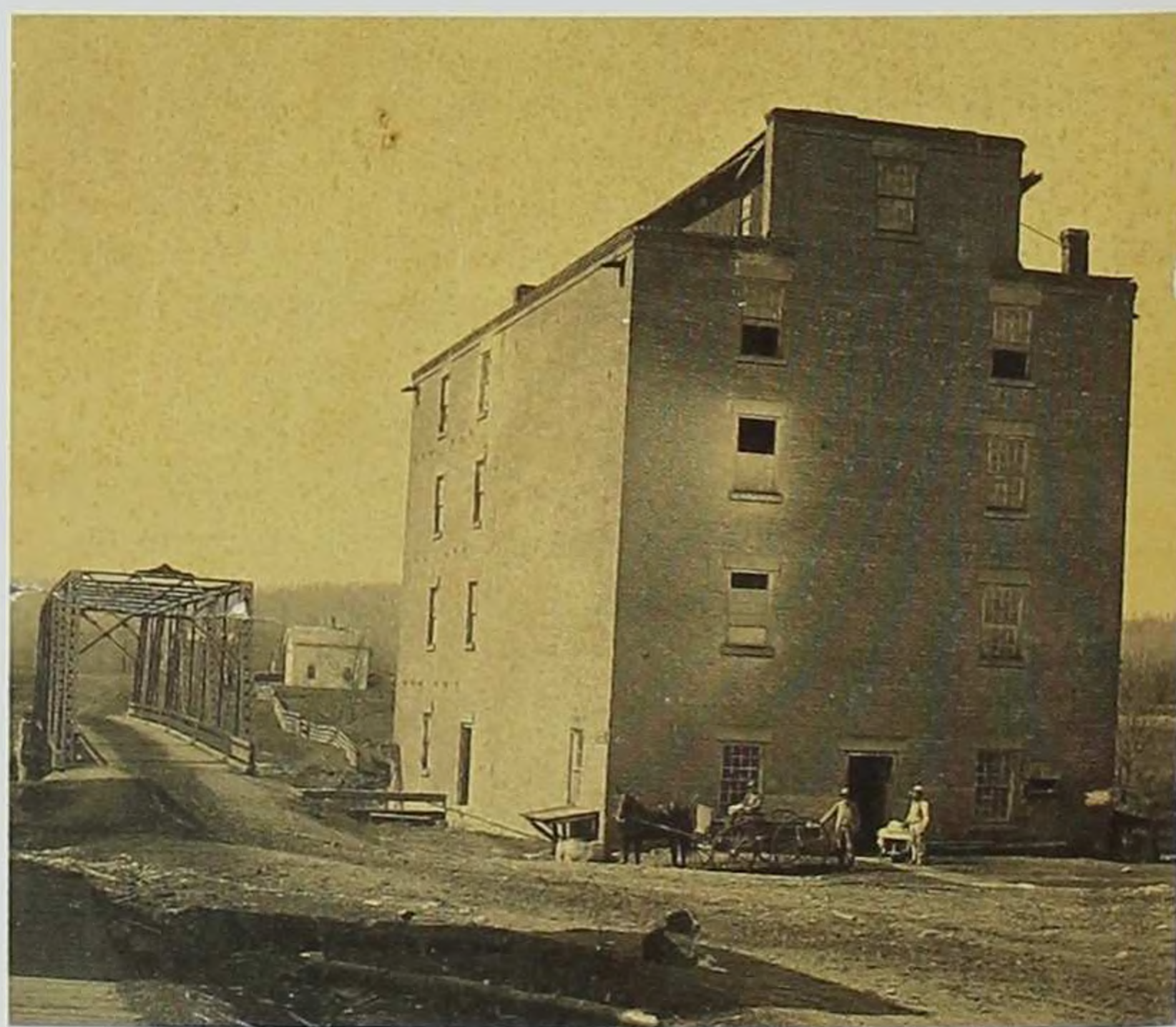
As was typical in the 18th and 19th centuries, the young men of the family trained for the world of business, politics, or farming, while the young women were encouraged to find suitable mates and settle in a marriage where they became economically dependent on a husband. If a husband wanted to take the risk of uprooting his family and move to the wilderness of Iowa, the wife dutifully followed regardless of any personal regrets. Anna Matilda's mother, Prudence Williams Appelman, wrote from Iowa of her dilemma and despair in profound and heartfelt words. In a letter dated December 20, 1854, she wrote of her homesickness for

Connecticut: "I feel as if I could hardly contain myself I want to be in Mystic so much. The country here is beautiful and rich but inhabitiveness is so great in me and the love of society that my heart never changes for the old house and the loved ones at home."

She continued: "[My husband] Gustavus does not like to have me want to go back but I feel like a person between two fires. I want to feel contented & I want to be at Mystic."

Regardless of her sentiments, Prudence Appelman survived those trying years on the frontier and that particularly cold winter of 1854, when she was ill and taking care of her children, including a baby boy. As a great-granddaughter wrote years later, "Luxuries were not known and the bare necessities difficult to obtain. The furniture in the home was crude, a large dry goods box serving the double purpose of table and a place in which to store the seed corn. At first lard lamps were used for lighting but later the family made their own candles. The ordinary light was one candle, two if the children were reading or studying, and three when Great-grandmother [Prudence] sewed on black."

Her daughter, Anna Matilda, not only helped with the house and care of the children but she "often went into the fields to help her father with the ploughing." Anna attended school three months of the year and was given lessons at home by her father and mother. Anna's mother was determined to provide the social refinements and education befitting a cultured lady of the mid-19th century, so she sent 14-year-old Anna back east



**William Larrabee invested hard work and money into his mill on the Turkey River, but his extensive landholdings would make him reportedly the wealthiest man in Iowa.**



to attend the Mystic Academy in Connecticut. Though she was born in Ledyard, Connecticut (in 1842) and spent her early childhood on a Connecticut farm, Anna Matilda soon grew homesick for Iowa.

Upon her return to Clermont, Anna's friendship with William Larrabee blossomed when she attended the evening singing school he conducted. Ten years her senior, William "used to lead her horse to the school house on Henderson Prairie where the meeting was held." Once they were engaged, Anna taught two terms of school, earning twenty-five dollars a month in salary, which she saved for a wedding dress.

**T**he Larrabees were married September 12, 1861. The groom was nearly late for the wedding because he worked until seven o'clock at the mill. "He rushed to his rooms over the company store to change clothes," and on his way up the hill, "he picked a yellow rose for his bride." After the ceremony, "a fine supper was served, the meat consisting of quail and fried prairie chicken. For sugar it was necessary to send to McGregor, and it came in a large loaf or brick which had to be ground. In order that it might be fine it was then sifted through a piece of [the bride's] wedding dress—a very fine Swiss muslin." The couple moved to the second floor of an old frame store building next to the mill and had their first child the following summer.

William Larrabee worked long hours at the flour mill to make it a success. It was not uncommon for him to "bring men up to dinner who had driven from a distance with wheat," and Anna prepared a meal even if it only consisted of bread and butter and radishes. A family friend reported on Larrabee's insatiable appetite for reading, often standing at his station at the mill with book in hand. Reading about a wide range of subjects from historians like Macaulay to books on economics, philosophy, psychology, and natural history, he had the whimsical habit of signing his name on the page corresponding to his age at the time he acquired the book. A devoted admirer of President Abraham Lincoln, Larrabee was committed to the Republican cause and probably began to nurture his political aspirations at this time. The loss of sight in one eye in a boyhood accident prevented him from enlisting in the Union Army during the Civil War, but he helped organize a regiment in Clermont and provided free flour to soldiers' wives.

By 1867, the Larrabees had a five-year-old boy, Charles, and a three-year-old daughter, Augusta, with a new child on the way, so before long they built a brick home in the midst of timber alongside the riverbank, two blocks from the mill. Beginning with the birth of



**Anna Matilda Larrabee and William Larrabee, about the time when his political career began.**

Julia in 1867, four of their children were born in this house, including Anna in 1869, William Jr. in 1870, and Frederic in 1873.

Like his father, Adam, who had been a member of the Connecticut legislature, William Larrabee enjoyed politics and had a long career as a public servant, beginning with his election to the Iowa senate in 1867. In an era when the Republican Party dominated political life in Iowa, Larrabee emerged as an effective leader and respected lawmaker. While serving 18 years in the state senate—the longest consecutive tenure in Iowa during the 19th century—Larrabee became an expert on railroad affairs and regulation as well as other issues before the legislature. As chair of the committee on ways and means, he wielded considerable influence over public policy and gained the favor of his peers, who encouraged him to resign from the senate and run for governor in 1886. (He had consid-

**"I packed my trunks and set out for Iowa," William wrote in his diary on October 10, 1853, when he was 21. As he acquired wealth, power, and culture, he also acquired the trappings of a gentleman farmer, including a collection of walking sticks. The trunk is one he brought to Iowa in 1853.**







Family, music, and art, all valued by the Larrabees, are reflected in this image taken at Montauk, circa 1883. From left: William Jr., Augusta, Frederic, Anna (named after her mother), Julia, Helen, Mrs. Larrabee, and Charles.

ered launching a bid for governor in 1881 but entered the contest too late to succeed.) Larrabee was elected to two terms as governor between 1886 and 1890.

Governor Larrabee worked tirelessly to ensure fair rates for farmers who needed to ship products to markets by rail, forcing regulation of railroads at a time when their corporate power was largely unchecked. A progressive reformer within the Republican Party, Larrabee risked his political alliances with the more traditional Standpat Republicans, who believed in a laissez-faire economy. He was also concerned about broader social reforms and was particularly adamant about prohibition of liquor sales, a cause to which his wife, Anna Matilda, was equally dedicated.

Larrabee will most likely go down in history as the man who changed the course of events for railroads in America. He distilled his valuable ideas and distinctive

philosophy about the need for railroad regulation in his book, *The Railroad Question* (1893). Offering a history of transportation and a treatise on the abuses of power by big corporations, Larrabee was ahead of his time in understanding the interactions between government, business, and the public. He was able to articulate the importance of a cooperative commonwealth.

Always a firm believer in the value of an education and a strong advocate of state institutions for infirm, disabled, or disadvantaged persons, Larrabee sought improvements and accountability in state government. He thought it necessary to create governing boards to manage and advise about the operation of these institutions; eventually, in 1898, an Iowa Board of Control was established for state prisons, hospitals, and asylums. Larrabee became chair of the first board for two years, an activity that kept him busy long after he had retired to the "quiet" life at Montauk in 1890.

**W**illiam Larrabee will also be remembered for the home he built, Montauk, concurrent with his early political career. But the distance between his home in Clermont and the capitol in Des Moines complicated family life, especially in the early years. Traveling to visit her husband in the winter of 1870, with the temperature 27 degrees below zero, Anna took the shortest route then available: by stagecoach to McGregor, where she took the train, first to Dubuque, then to Fort Dodge, and finally to Des Moines. By the mid-1870s, Clermont had two daily trains, making travel to Des Moines easier and quicker. Still, the family endured long absences. The children were young and they often wrote letters to their father, anxious to see him again.

Their mother was also unhappy with the location of their house along the river, where low-lying fog and dampness added to her concerns about sicknesses like malaria prevalent in the area. Besides, Anna Matilda had fond memories of the hill on her parents' farm overlooking Clermont, where she had picked wildflowers and played in the lovely pastureland. Her dream for a house on this hill came true in 1874, in a stately new brick home that she christened Montauk, after a lighthouse on the tip of Long Island that had signaled home to her seafaring father.



In 1876, two years after the family moved into Montauk, the last child, Helen, was born. During Larrabee's two terms as governor, from 1886 to 1890, Anna divided her time and attention between the duties of the wife of the governor and those of the mother of seven children. Eventually the family temporarily relocated to Des Moines, although as soon as his term of office was over in 1890, they returned to Montauk.

While in Des Moines, the governor and his family joined Iowa's prestigious social elite, no doubt enjoying center stage in the cultural life of the city and the honors befitting a popular governor. Along with the state legislature and the state supreme court, Governor Larrabee and his incoming administration in 1886 were the first to occupy the modern quarters of Iowa's glorious new statehouse. Under construction for several years, the elegant new capitol finally offered the architectural grandeur symbolic of Iowa's political maturity and a highly civilized culture. With the help of historian and collector Charles Aldrich, and artist Charles Atherton Cummings, Larrabee himself acquired paintings, display cases, and other decorative accoutrements for the new building. By then Larrabee had already developed his eye for fine art and architecture.

Following an 1873 trip to Europe with two of his closest friends, Judge Crosby and Dr. Linton, Larrabee began his ambitious plans to build Montauk, an Italianate-style mansion, to be situated on landscaped grounds on the hill overlooking Clermont. From there, the empire builder could survey the beautiful vista of the Turkey River valley. He promptly secured the services of Milwaukee architect E. Townsend Mix, who had recently completed the Villa Louis mansion in Prairie du Chien. Larrabee's country estate would feature a monumental house built of locally made red brick and dolomitic limestone from the Williams quarry three miles away.

Nevertheless, Larrabee's Yankee sensibilities soon took hold, and he reminded his extravagant architect to "work plain." The twelve-room house included six

bedrooms with running water, plus two bathrooms, a full cellar, and attic, but Larrabee approved only one of six proposed bay windows. As noted by local historian Henry Follett, Larrabee also eliminated side verandas from the architectural plans, "simplified the interior of the house, and substituted painted grain pine woodwork for varnished walnut woodwork which Mix had envisioned."

To enhance the 160-acre estate, Larrabee planted 100,000 trees—white and yellow pine, arbor vitae, and larch—making the property even more picturesque. Townspeople in Clermont "considered the location to be both impractical and pretentious," Follett notes, especially when Larrabee built a winding road up the steep hill. Local laborers, many of them Irish, found work on the construction site, and other residents in the area were employed to help maintain the estate.

Electricity was brought to the house in 1910, but kerosene lighting and expansive windows provided light before then. A coal-fired furnace forced steam to radiators throughout the house, and it was reported that when coal came into town by rail, an entire carload would be reserved for Montauk.



With seven gregarious and curious children and two parents involved in issues of the day, guests were commonplace at Montauk. The social gatherings ranged from serious political discussions among the powerful to parties with silly hats, from musical soirées in the music room to spirited games of tennis and croquet and artistic afternoons outdoors.





Guests traveled up this gently curving lane, which opened onto Montauk's front lawn and a magnificent view of the mansion.

Certainly Montauk could have been grander, but instead it reflected the character of its occupants, who despite their wealth were steeped in the Puritan tradition that demanded simplicity rather than an ostentatious style. The house suited the Larrabees and their lifestyle, yet it made a clear statement of their pride in the success that comes from hard work. By relying on classical design elements and adding their personal touch with keepsakes and objets d'art they had collected, the family created a home that became the perfect stage for the drama between public and private life.

**W**illiam and Anna Larrabee insisted on cultivating varied interests and the highest standards in their seven children. Not only did they provide solid religious training, they promoted the idea of a college education for both their sons and daughters. Moreover, the parents groomed their children for their role as members of an elite social class. From 1895 to 1903, they employed a French woman, Mathilde Laigle, to school them in the cultured manners and refined graces of high society ladies and gentlemen. As their companion and teacher, she "held regular French language sessions with the four daughters" and "often planned entire days when only French was spoken." Daughter Helen had met Laigle while attending St. Katherine's School in Davenport and brought her home to Montauk for a visit.

A deep and lasting friendship was formed with Laigle, and Larrabee's appreciation (and wealth) was

shown in the \$5,000 he sent to the family governess in 1905. Expressing her gratitude, she wrote back, "Montauk has ever been the sweetest home I had in life. . . . You are not only my benefactor financially, Mr. Larrabee, but you always have been so, morally and intellectually, and my ambition in life is to become more and more worthy of your interest and precious friendship."

A visit to Montauk was a special occasion, and a number of distinguished visitors found their way up the steep lane to this country retreat. The Larrabee family always welcomed political allies from across the state, and the younger members of the family invited their college friends and Delta Gamma sorority sisters to vacation at Montauk. Summer sojourners enjoyed lawn parties and instruction in the arts, like Antoine Sterba's drawing classes. Both he and Cedar Rapids artist Marvin Cone painted landscapes of Montauk's russet-colored pines. Naturalist Thomas Macbride, from the University of Iowa, wrote often of the pleasurable moments spent with his Montauk friends. Music, laughter, and the warm embrace of family and friends made a trip there memorable, as did the comfortable and attractive setting.

William Larrabee had parted with the Republican Party regulars when he chose to support the Bull Moose third-party candidacy of Theodore Roosevelt in the 1912 presidential election. With the death of Governor Larrabee that same year, his wife, Anna Matilda Larrabee, once again welcomed the more conservative Standpat Republicans back to Montauk. As reported by

**The elegance of Montauk is still readily apparent to visitors who tour the historic house and grounds. The architecture, furnishings, and artwork are obvious reminders of the Larrabees' wealth. Here in the music room, a copy of the painting *The Fruit Vendors* hangs over the marble mantel, and French Sevres vases, dating to the 1780s, flank the fireplace.**

**Dozens and dozens of dresses worn by the Larrabee women were kept in the house over the decades, and these too became part of the family collections donated to the state of Iowa in 1976. Although the dresses are seldom on display—many are fragile, and excess exposure to light is damaging—Chuck Greiner skillfully photographed several of them situated in various rooms at Montauk for this issue of *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*. Each dress in its own way is a work of art.**

**Right: Mrs. Larrabee wore this two-piece dress at her husband's first inauguration as governor, in January 1886. The front panel is embroidered in a fern-like design in bronze metallic and cream-colored silk thread. The three-pound skirt is fully lined with a cream-colored cotton fabric. Three inverted pleats in the back act as a bustle. The waistband label reads "Bazar de Modes, Mantel Bros., Paris, Chicago, Berlin." Depending on the lighting, the color of the dress shifts from a golden green to a dark olive.**









Some elements of the Larrabees' way of life were decidedly rural. Above: Anna and William gather flowers from Montauk gardens. Roses from the Appelman home in Connecticut were planted on the grounds; some still thrive there today. Other aspects of the Larrabee lifestyle were urban and sophisticated, evidenced by Mrs. Larrabee's opera glasses and cape alongside William's fine clothing.



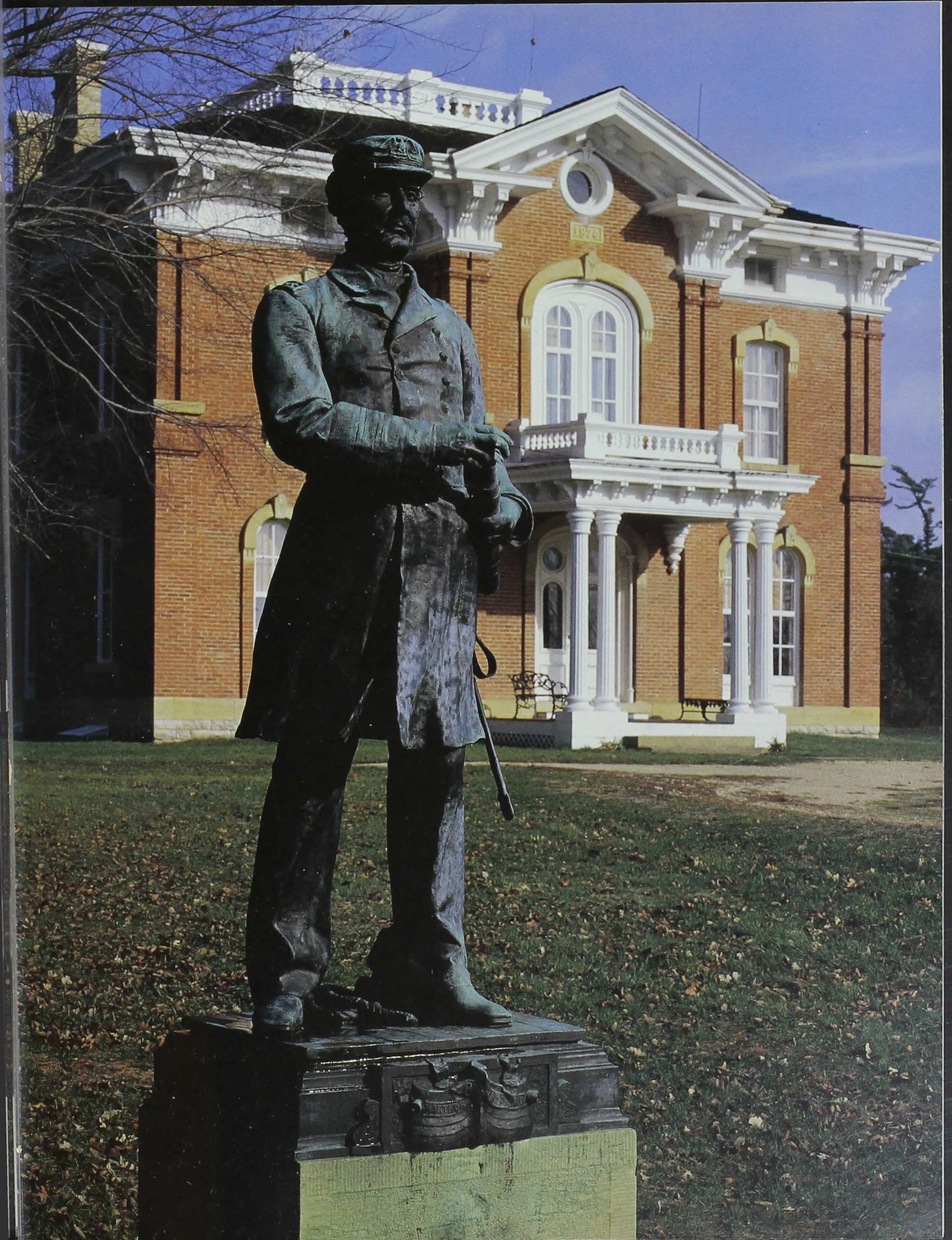
Henry Follett, "Life at Montauk became more elegant. More servants were hired and the social life took on a character reminiscent of the earlier years."

Montauk is now 130 years old, and no Larrabee has lived there for three decades. The house tells us much about the social expectations, roles, and aesthetics of the Victorian and Edwardian periods, and the home and grounds still resonate with the dynamic personalities of William and Anna Larrabee, their seven children, and their extended family.

The Larrabees were atypical Iowans in terms of their wealth and power, but their story also demonstrates values shared with other Iowans who have cherished the concepts of home and family and enjoyed life in a pastoral Iowa setting. Touring Montauk, as you will on the following pages, reveals the Larrabees' individual accomplishments and losses, their passions and pleasures.

In the lawn at Montauk, a bronze statue of Admiral David Glasgow Farragut faces south towards Louisiana, symbolic of his Civil War victory at the mouth of the Mississippi. Larrabee commissioned noted sculptor George Edwin Bissell to create this and two other statues. (See related story, page 44.)









*Anna Matilda Appelman Larrabee*  
(1842–1931)

ANNA LARRABEE'S auburn hair turned silver during her lifetime, but what did not change was her strong will. She was known to dominate the lives of those around her, as did her husband. She was a strict Prohibitionist and committed to her work with the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Clearly, Anna took on an active public role alongside her husband as he earned a seat in the Iowa legislature and later when he was governor. As Iowa's First Lady, she often represented the state on national commissions and organizations, attending important receptions and political gatherings. She identified herself as Protestant and as a Republican in a survey and said her hobby was "making clippings," a reference to the careful record she made of her husband's press clippings.

Always interested in children and education, she was the Sunday School superintendent at the Union Sunday School and helped her husband realize his dream of the ideal school in Clermont. She was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, Delta Gamma, and the Red Cross.

Of an old-fashioned persuasion, Anna Larrabee always objected to woman suffrage, though ironically her husband supported the idea of political equality. Even after the passage of the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote in 1920, she refused to vote.

One of her prime social causes after World War I was her financial support of many French war orphans, as documented in the numerous photographs and postcards she received from the beneficiaries of her charitable work. Throughout their lives, the Larrabees liberally supported various projects, making gifts to schools and churches and purchasing expensive items for public use, such as the pipe organs they donated or their investment in the Iowa Building at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904. Although the Larrabees were admired for their generous philanthropy, their tremendous wealth set them apart from most people in Iowa and especially in Clermont and the surrounding neighborhood.

Upon the death of Governor Larrabee in November 1912, Mrs. Larrabee took over the supervision of Montauk and management of the family's vast financial holdings.

According to local historian Henry Follett, when the "Grand Dame of Montauk" died at age 89, Charles Burton Robbins "created quite a stir when he flew to Clermont on the day of her death, circled Montauk, and dropped a spray of roses on the front lawn" in honor of his late mother-in-law.

**As the matriarch of Montauk, Anna Matilda Larrabee presided over the home, welcoming distinguished guests and old family friends through the arched double doors and into the front hall. Victorian homes like Montauk were divided between public and private space. The formal front area of Montauk is separated by doors from the back service area, with its own stairway for servants. Just visible in the back is a kerosene ceiling fixture; the governor believed kerosene was less explosive than gas lighting. In 1910 electrical lighting was added; see fixture in foreground.**

**The dress on this mannequin was worn by Mrs. Larrabee for her fiftieth wedding anniversary in 1911 (see photo, top left). The black lace and sequins cascade down into a train. Fifteen stays in the inner bodice and a bustle pad in the underskirt add strength and structure to the delicate gown. To celebrate her fiftieth anniversary, she also had her 1861 wedding dress recreated and wore it that day.**









## *The Larrabees Abroad*

**From left: Helen and the governor at the Dead Sea; the Larrabees on camels at the pyramids; a market in Jerusalem; and Anna and William in a gondola.**

THE DAUGHTER of a sea captain who sailed all the oceans of the world, Anna Larrabee must have been thrilled to launch her own voyage across the ocean to Europe and the Middle East in the spring of 1900. Although William Larrabee had traveled abroad over a quarter of a century earlier, this trip would delight his wife and provide an unparalleled education for three of his adult children. The little band of sightseers included Helen, who was 23, and Frederic, 26. Also along were Julia, age 33, and her husband, Don Love. Together they witnessed new sights, sounds, and smells, tasted strange foods, photographed famous locations and native dress, and admired the architecture of foreign cities. They also purchased artwork for their home in Iowa.

Despite her adventuresome spirit and fascination

with the Holy Land and the Middle East, Mrs. Larrabee wrote home, "We hope the vegetables we have at this hotel come from these gardens and not from the dirty booths along the streets." In another letter she comments that "the odors of the streets and byways tend to make a resident of a clean country hurry along to cleaner scenes." Nevertheless, even in her late fifties, she was not hesitant to ride a donkey or camel to her destination or endure a rough carriage ride.

Helen wrote, "Jerusalem is awfully dirty, the poverty and degradation every where are evident and the filth and odor fairly make one sick." She told her sister Anna, "You'll laugh to see your family in Jerusalem. Three or four times a day we meet in our rooms and visit. We have only one chair so mother takes that—

and the rest of us climb up on the beds—strong wind and dust flying outside so we've been around the house a great deal."

World travels inspired the family to pursue ways to bring home souvenirs to illustrate classical styles. After visiting the Acropolis in Athens and seeing ancient columns sixty feet high and six feet in diameter, they wrote, "Father says he would like a column for Montauk hill." Mrs. Larrabee wrote home, "We spent a half day in the bazaars but didn't buy much. I am saving my money for Italy so you must be



**Trunks, satchels, and suitcases in Montauk's attic are mute evidence of the Larrabees' frequent travels.**





The Larrabees purchased this marble table top and its gilt stand in Rome in 1900. The colorful flowers, Italian scenes, and birds were all created by tiny inlaid mosaic. As a prized showpiece, it would have been displayed in the music room (below). Mrs. Larrabee's distinctive gray silk suit (World War I era) was designed with triangular insets and V's and lined with silk print of stripes and roses on pale yellow. Weights sewn into the points in the jacket front maintain its line.



pleased with anything I buy for you there and think of the many times I did not yield to temptation in these countries and buy you things that you would not care for." As Helen noted, "My shopping usually consists of photographs," though reproductions of fine art were also purchased. The touring group loved the antiquities of Egypt, Jerusalem, Jericho, and Constantinople but also enjoyed the sights of Venice, Florence, and Rome. Mrs. Larrabee remarked, "Some writer whom I can not recall said, 'the past rises before me like a dream' and so does my visit to Rome." Gone for more than six months, the family also traveled to Paris (for the 1900 Exposition), Holland, Norway, and London.

Perhaps one of their favorite moments is described in Helen's letter from Venice: "Our omnibus was a gondola and our dream began. The gondolas are so picturesque and the 'streets' so beautiful with the red tumbled down houses along the sides. And as the seats in the gondola are upholstered in leather—they are beautifully comfortable. . . . I really can't describe the night. It would take a poet to do that. The moon is half full, the night was clear and quiet; in the canal were any number of boats anchored and in them were orchestras and singers who sang beautifully. . . . There were hundreds of gondolas floating around and as each one has a light and there are hundreds of lights along the shores—imagine the lovely picture we had. . . . Ah—it was like a dream."









Right: Evergreen garlands outline the doorway; the house was often decorated with flowers, leaves, and boughs, in step with Victorian customs of bringing nature inside. In the quartet, the youngest Larrabee, Frederic, sits in front.

Left: Black net over a wine-colored satin blouse sparkles with glass beads, sequins, and spangles in the shape of oak leaves. Crinoline at the shoulders supports the leg-of-mutton sleeves, and a hidden red ruffle stiffens the skirt.



## The Music Room

THE CENTERPIECE of family and social life at Montauk was undoubtedly the music room, where recitals and formal entertaining occurred. Music was an integral part of the Larrabees' lives. Governor Larrabee—whose baritone voice had led a singing school during his pioneer days in Iowa—played the cello and his son Frederic played the violin. Other instruments, including a banjo, mandolin, cornet, and small drum, appear in historical photographs of the music room. Both Mrs. Larrabee and her daughter Anna played the Steinway piano, an instrument on which Anna became quite accomplished. In fact, there were two Steinways in the house; one was reserved for practice. A Mason-Hamlin baby grand piano was purchased later. Talented guests were invited to perform in this room, but it was a private space for the family to gather in as well. Although the room adjoins the dining room, food was never allowed in the music room, nor were servants permitted to enter the room.

Victorians practiced conspicuous consumption; their homes reflected their economic and social standing as well as their personal tastes. The possessions displayed at Montauk, particularly in the the music room, suggested the presence of wealthy and cultivated women with keen aesthetic tastes. A car-

pet was purchased from France when the house was built, and daughter Augusta later painted a delicate frieze along the upper wall near the ceiling. An air of refinement permeates the room with artwork and antique furniture dating back to the beginning of the 19th century, including an empire sofa from the 1830s or 1840s and chairs of a design based on the Chippendale style of the 1700s. A copy of the *Mona Lisa* hangs on one wall. The marble sculpture, *Kiss of Love*, fits in with Victorian ideals of love and beauty, and the drape behind it helps define its line and shadow. Similar red velvet draperies hung at the windows, but only in this room. Mrs. Larrabee preferred shutters in all the others.

This large Swiss-made music box with rosewood inlay played eight different songs. Purchased in the 1880s, the music box still works and is often played for visitors, delighting them with its delicate music.







## *The Sitting Room*

EACH DAY before the evening meal, the Larrabee family gathered in the informal sitting room. They discussed the day's events and Mrs. Larrabee usually played the piano while the others sang, or the children practiced on this piano. Sometimes, too, they received guests here, arranging comfortable furniture in a circle to make visiting easier.

Although the architect's plans originally called for six bay windows, the ever-frugal governor allowed only this one, facing east (*see right*).

Daughters Julia, Augusta, and Helen were each married in the bay window. At Julia's 1890 wedding, newspapers reported, "the large bay window . . . was a solid wall of arbor vitae. There was a handsome floral ball suspended over the heads of the bridal couple which when the ceremony was ended opened and showered roses upon them." The rest of the house was "profusely decorated with flowers and evergreens. Down the side of the grand staircase and balustrade were wound broad festoons of beautiful arbor vitae and corn."

**Above:** Mrs. Larrabee's navy silk crepe dress has side panels with swallow-tail designs, with weights, tassels, and balls at the points. The Mexican onyx table is one of eight William purchased, one for Montauk and one for each child. Well aware that buying in quantity reduced costs, he once purchased 20 birdcages with mechanical birds. Much of Montauk's woodwork was painted with a faux grain, to imitate more expensive woods. **Below:** Wicker and geraniums fill the sunny bay window.







This full-circle skirt and blouse (in the monobosom or "pouter-pigeon" style) is made of strips of border eyelet, pin-tucked lawn, and lace, all sewn together to become the actual fabric. The lace medallions at the shoulders were probably sewn in place while the dress was on a form. The stand-up collar has wire supports.







## The Governor's Library

THE LIBRARY was not a family room and was reserved for quiet and privacy. William Larrabee longed to spend time with his beloved books in his library, but up until the end of his life he was usually preoccupied with work, meeting with politicians and business people, corresponding with his associates, or writing.

As was the practice at that time, Larrabee used a letterpress to press dampened tissue paper against his correspondence to make faint copies that were later assembled into letterbooks. His friend and colleague, Colonel David B. Henderson, longtime Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, suggested Larrabee hire a secretary as his handwriting was so hard to read it irritated people. Ultimately, the misfortune of Larrabee's life is the difficulty for anyone trying to decipher his scribbles—hence the lack of any full-fledged biography or interpretation of the important role he played in state and national politics.

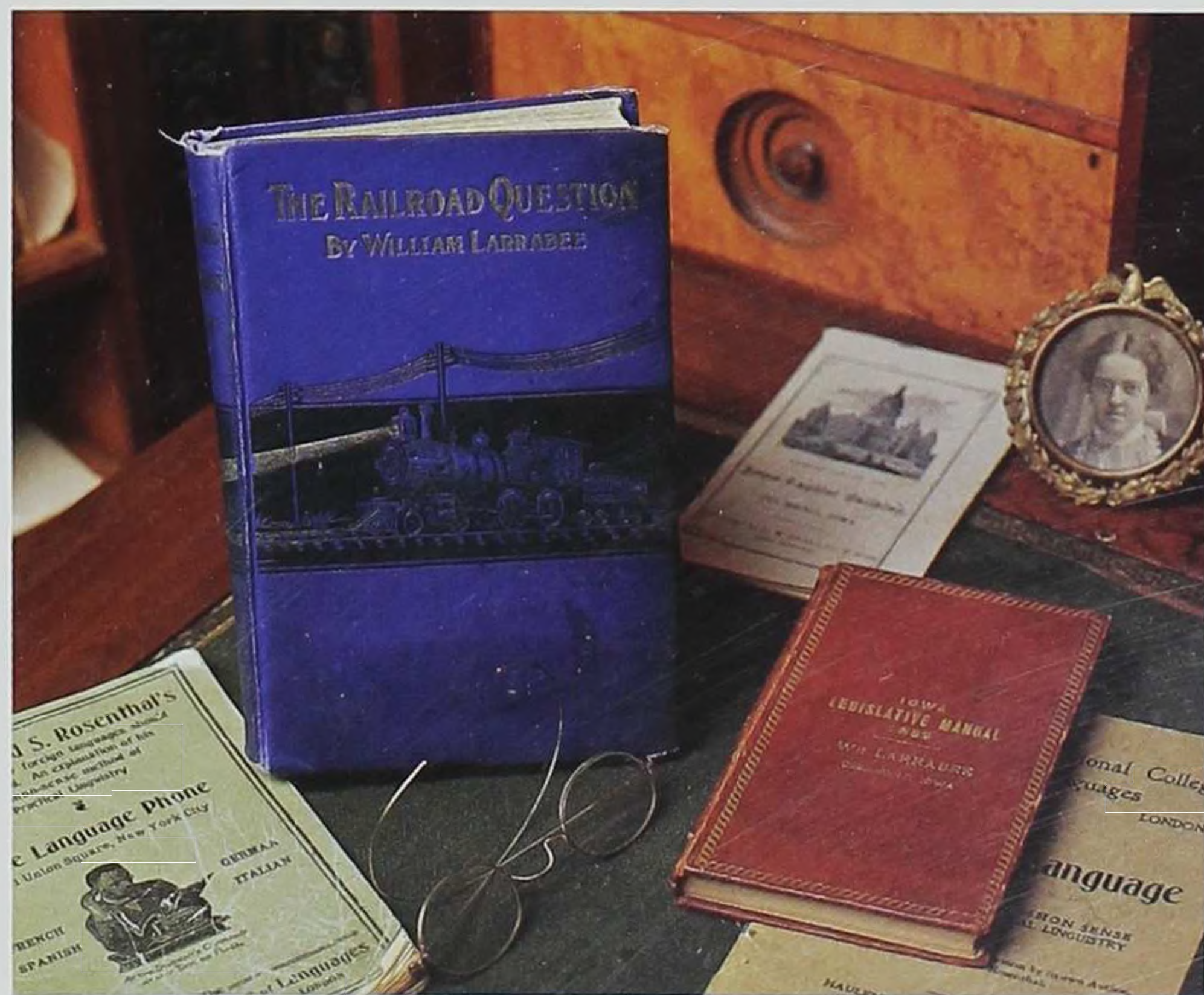
Still, he corresponded with the major politicians of the day, including Robert Todd Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Iowa's congressional delegation, and just about any aspiring candidate for political office seeking advice, wisdom, and blessing from one of the most revered leaders around.

After his death in 1912, politicians continued to make the trek to Montauk to consult with Mrs. Larrabee and daughter Anna about political issues. The family kept his memory alive and literally preserved his paperwork exactly as he left it, stuffed in the many cubbyholes of his Wooten desk. Designed to serve as a complete office, the large wooden desk made in the 1870s was a gift from Larrabee's Clermont friends.

Also in the library was his language phone, used when he was in his seventies to learn Spanish before embarking on a trip to Mexico. Always a student, Larrabee was known to be analytical with strong opinions and forward-looking ideas. He was remembered as quiet and firm with a sense of humor, though he seldom smiled. Although he was not an exceptional speaker, he had a tremendous impact on railroad regulation and legislation at the state and federal level. He expounded his views on regulation in his book, *The Railroad Question*, published in 1893 (see right).



Although many Montauk rooms housed books, some of Larrabee's favorites were shelved here in his library. "To know William Larrabee well was to know him in his home; it was a part of himself," U.S. Senator William Kenyon once wrote. "It was not unusual to find him at six o'clock in the morning reading, and some days he would read all day."









## *The Dining Room*

ON A DAILY BASIS, everyone dressed in formal attire for dinner, with men wearing coats and ties to the family's evening meal. Fine English Coalport china, crystal glassware, and white linen were laid out on the table in the dining room, even for breakfast. Children were allowed in the dining room only when they had mastered polite conversation and impeccable manners. Each person was expected to bring a quotation to recite in front of the gathering. Even the grandchildren would scurry to find something from a book before dinner. One grandson, knowing of Larrabee's admiration for Lincoln, frequently recited the same Lincoln quotation.

Meals prepared in the kitchen were handed through the "pass through" opening, to a servant stationed behind a screen (visible here in the back corner). The dining room table had several unfinished tops in different sizes, to allow for different numbers of guests. Chairs based on a William and Mary revival style were gathered around the table, a reminder of the Larrabees' family ties back to the colonial era. On the walls hung paintings by artists like Austrian Antoine Sterba, from the Art Institute of Chicago. The large painting visible here is a reproduction by C. E. Baldwin of an original piece by 17th-century Spanish artist Murillo.

Conversation at the table was lively. If no guests were visiting, the

family would sometimes go find someone to invite to dinner. No liquor was served, and Larrabee banned smoking in the house. His granddaughter recalled, "Once, when his old friend Colonel Henderson lit up his cigar after dinner, Grandfather took him by the arm and asked, 'Have you seen the fine view from the porch?'"

The Larrabees also hosted stand-up teas, and large gatherings were common. More than 150 people attended Julia and Don Love's wedding reception at Montauk in August 1890, a challenge for any household. "The dining room was a scene of beauty," newspapers reported. "From the ceiling hung festoons of evergreen and on the radiator hung banks of flowers. The tables spread their snowy length across the spacious room, loaded with all the delicacies of the season."

Although Victorian interior decor often dictated amazing mixtures of colors and patterns in fabrics and wallpapers, Mrs. Larrabee preferred walls painted light colors. Only two rooms at Montauk were wallpapered.

**Augusta Larrabee and one of her sisters wore dresses of this navy and crimson silk brocade (but of different styles) for their father's second gubernatorial inauguration, in 1888. The collar of one was stiffened with newspaper, revealing only the clues of these words—"Des Moines" and "January."**





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Today the kitchen appears as it did in 1965, when the last Larrabee resident, daughter Anna, died. The tea cart was rolled into the sitting room everyday for 4 o'clock tea. In terms of conveniences, Montauk was both modern and behind the times. The house had running water and a sink in each bedroom, but the Majestic cookstove, purchased in 1900, was still used into the 1960s; the house never had a standard water heater. Instead, a wood fire in the stove heated water in the reservoir, which was then piped over to the vertical holding tank and supplied hot water for the house. Anna Larrabee purchased the electric stove before World War II and an early-model dishwasher sometime after. But when she died, an old-fashioned icebox was still in use.

## The Kitchen and the Servants

AS MEMBERS of the leisure class, the Larrabee family had a limited role in daily chores like housekeeping, cooking, or farm work—but someone had to bake the bread, scrub the floors, wash and iron the linens, and harvest vegetables from the garden if the household was to run smoothly. The Larrabees relied on domestic servants, hired farmhands, and a groundskeeper for manual labor.

Cousins Nora Askelson and Minnie (Kleppe) Anderson worked as servants at Montauk for one year in the early 1920s. By that time, only Mrs. Larrabee, her daughter Anna, and three grandchildren lived in the home, but they generally had company for the evening meal. "Meals were served at 8 a.m., noon, 3 or 4 (tea time), and 6 p.m.," and each meal "consisted of three courses, with Mrs. Larrabee always being served first," Askelson recounted to a local newspaper decades later. Askelson loved setting the table—"The Larrabees had the most beautiful hand-painted china and matching pearl-handled silverware for everyday use"—but she disliked serving. "We weren't supposed to say anything."

Most of the food was cooked from scratch, and perishable food was kept in the icebox out in the milkhouse. "Sometimes it seemed like we ran back and forth all day," Askelson recalled.

Servants wore blue uniforms in the morning while they were cleaning, and changed to white in the afternoon "because of all the company." The formality and hierarchy of the household were strictly maintained, and even the nurses who took care of the grandchildren were required to wear all-white uniforms. The servants made sure that everything was cleaned thoroughly "top to bottom" every day—except for the music room. Servants were not allowed in that room, and Mrs. Larrabee cleaned it herself. To vacuum the house, the servants had to "carry a hose around, hook it up to a hole in the wall in each room, then run downstairs to start the motor."

Although the caretaker lived in a home on the grounds, the household servants lived in quarters on the third floor—a bedroom, a sewing room, and a small room with a bath-

tub. In the 1920s, they received \$10 weekly, with room and board, "top wages at the time," Askelson said. "We really deserved that amount of money because we were busy every minute, from 6:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.," waiting on Mrs. Larrabee, the grandchildren, or the many guests. "Mrs. Larrabee didn't like it when we were idle."

The servants washed their own clothes in the laundry house on the farm, but they sent the Larrabees' clothes to Oelwein to be laundered. They were only granted Sunday afternoons and Christmas off. Mrs. Larrabee cooked the Sunday evening meal, always New England dishes like baked beans and codfish.

Clermont native Margaret Wagner described how "most of the teenage girls worked at Montauk summers and Christmas vacation. . . . Mother told how they would iron 28 tablecloths a week and make 100 cupcakes everyday. Mrs. Larrabee served cupcakes with tea to the family and guests. There would be so many people they'd set up tents on the lawn. They worked hard. It took 3 girls to iron the long tablecloths, one to roll it up as it was ironed, one to iron and one to do the polishing with another iron."

After Governor Larrabee died, his widow bought a Cadillac touring car and hired a chauffeur, who wore a brass-buttoned uniform when he met visitors at the train station. Millard Johnson became the chauffeur after he returned from World War I, and in 1926, he recommended his brother-in-law, Arthur Nelson, for the job of caretaker. Nelson and his wife moved into the caretaker's house, and after Johnson died, the quiet-mannered Nelson became chauffeur as well as farm manager. He remained a faithful servant and loyal friend to the family for many decades, and daughter Anna Larrabee provided a lifetime annuity for him at the time of her death.





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## *Private Spaces on the Second Floor and the Larrabee Daughters*

AS IN MOST VICTORIAN HOUSES, the second floor was considered private and personal space. The three Larrabee sons slept in bedrooms in the back of the house, the four daughters and parents in the front bedrooms.

Each bedroom had a marble sink. And, like all rooms in Montauk, each had two exits and a fire extinguisher, safety features intended to reassure Governor Larrabee, who could never put out of his mind the death of a family member in a house fire back in Connecticut.

Unlike most homes built in the 1870s, Montauk bedrooms had closets—and they were filled with the latest fashions concocted out of richly colored satins and silks and delicate laces. To create the silhouettes deemed appropriate by fashion, Victorians wore bustles, petticoats, corsets, and layers of undergarments, even (for the Larrabees and other Iowa women) in the heat of

midwestern summers. Although Victorian women's clothes restricted movement and therefore their range of activities, the full skirts, bodices, and huge sleeves gave substance to female claims of importance. The sheer bulk of the many layers of clothing increased their size and gave an impression of power and stability. Men's dress was far more utilitarian and spare, stripped of any sexual references. William Larrabee, who stood at five feet six, seems diminutive next to his fashionable wife when seen in photographs.

Just as the Victorian symbolism of fruit, birds, flowers, and plants in room decor hinted at abundance and fertility, so too did the sheer volume of women's clothing. This idea of volume and mass even carried over into Victorian furniture styles, as large sofas and chairs, massive armoires, and huge buffets came into vogue.







The four Larrabee daughters, about 1882 (clockwise from top): Augusta, Anna, Helen, and Julia.



### *Julia Larrabee Love (1867–1937)*

NOT LONG after the Larrabees returned to Montauk after living in Des Moines, daughter Julia (*above, left*) married Don Love on August 20, 1890, at Montauk. "The gifts were numerous and costly," newspapers noted, "though not opened to public view. Thus with most favorable auspices two of Iowa's most popular young people were launched on the sea of life." The couple settled in Lincoln, Nebraska.

A generous contributor to the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, Julia provided funding for a dormitory, and upon her death in 1937, her life was commemorated when her husband donated funds for building a new library on campus. Don Love was a lawyer and banker who also worked in the insurance business and served as mayor of Lincoln. He died in 1943.

Although the Loves did not have children of their own, they did help raise the orphaned Charles Burton Robbins, who later married Helen Larrabee.





Posing outside the sitting room bay window on her wedding day, Augusta Larrabee, the shortest woman in this photograph, wears a dress bedecked with ruffles. Her husband, Victor Dolliver stands on the left. His brother, U.S. Senator Jonathan P. Dolliver, and wife Louise are the couple to the left of the pair under the parasol.

Below, the second-floor nook where Augusta often painted, with her artist's smock, her paints, and her portrait of her handsome husband on the easel.





## *Augusta Larrabee Dolliver (1864–1897)*

AMONG THE ROMANTIC figures in the Larrabee saga is Augusta, or "Gussie," as the family called her. She seems to have been the epitome of a young woman living in the relative isolation of the rural Midwest and yearning for an understanding of fine art and exposure to the glories of the art world. Her artistic temperament and interests drew her to faraway places like New York City or Washington, D.C. There she capitalized on her family's political and social connections, particularly to society dames who made sure she had exposure to and opportunities in the art world.

One Iowa politician who knew the Larrabees well was Iowa's U.S. Senator Jonathan P. Dolliver. A man of national prestige from his fame as a Chautauqua speaker, Dolliver was particularly fond of Augusta. In a letter sent from his home in Fort Dodge at the end of July in 1888, he addressed "Gussie" with warm affection: "I thought on July 6th of the quiet and beautiful surroundings of Clermont [and] of that cordial hospitality which makes Montauk so charming to your friends."

In what must have been one of the biggest events of the century in Clermont, two of Iowa's major political scions, William Larrabee and Jonathan P. Dolliver, joined their families in the marriage between Augusta and Dolliver's younger brother Victor on August 18, 1896. Tall, handsome Victor Dolliver was also recognized as a gifted orator, often enlisted by the Republican Party to take the platform at rallies.

Right after the wedding, Victor and his young bride traveled to Maine following an itinerary of speaking engagements. The newlyweds settled in Minneapolis upon their return.

Only seven months after the

wedding, Augusta died of influenza. Her sister Helen had traveled to be with her during her final hours, and the entire family was devastated when the news of the tragedy reached Montauk. Augusta was mourned privately and publicly. A Des Moines newspaper noted that memories of her would always be connected with Montauk: "Both the home and home-life were worth longing for. With all the comforts that this world can give, with all that art and music and literature can yield, with nature unattained outside and none but kind words within, it is no wonder that she

thought more of Montauk than of the cares and worries of political and social life."

Aptly put, the newspaper tribute describes the self-contained world of Montauk. The rewards of hard work in early Iowa and artistic inspirations from an older world wrought the mansion on the hill, but the bounty of love and leisure defined life at Montauk.

After her death, Victor packed her belongings and many of the wedding gifts into trunks and shipped them to Montauk, where they stayed untouched in the attic for decades.



Augusta sometimes set up her easel in the sun-drenched nook on the second floor. The nook also held seashells collected by her grandfather, and family heirlooms like a spinning wheel or the traveling desk of Connecticut patriarch Adam Larrabee.





Bridesmaids wore white chiffon and carried asters at Helen's wedding. "Everything about the wedding, including the bride, was natural and unaffected," newspapers reported. "It was the wish of the bride that everything connected with the ceremony should be modest. . . . But it would be hard to imagine a prettier wedding."



### *Helen Larrabee Robbins (1876–1919)*

HELEN LARRABEE was educated at St. Katherine's School in Davenport, the University of Iowa, and at a finishing school in New York City. In September 1903, Helen married Charles Burton Robbins in a small wedding in the sitting room, decorated in autumn colors. Newspapers reported that the bride is "accomplished and affable, with a disposition that is full of sunshine, even in cloudy weather, as the wedding day proved to be." They planned to honeymoon on a houseboat on the Mississippi.

Helen had met Charles when she visited her sister Julia in Lincoln, Nebraska. One of Julia's close friends and neighbors was a University of Nebraska student, Edith Robbins. Her younger brother, Charles Burton, orphaned at age 14, had stayed with Julia and her husband, Don Love.

Charles Burton Robbins joined a Nebraska infantry unit, saw action in Manila during the Philippine Insurrection, helped General Pershing chase down Pancho Villa in Mexico, served in World War I, and later headed the American Legion in Iowa. As Julia Robbins Allen recalled, "He loved the army. But he was a lawyer basically. And he got his master's degree at Columbia in political science. He was a man of many interests."

The couple lived in Cedar Rapids, where Charles practiced law and Helen was busy with social causes and philanthropy. Following the tradition of Montauk, she "entertained much and her house was always radiantly open to all her friends," a newspaper reported.

Helen and Charles named their first child, born in August 1906, Anna Marcella, after a Spanish woman who had saved his life in the Philippines. Julia was born in 1909 and Lewis Frederic in 1911.



Holding her firstborn, Anna Marcella, Helen wears the same dress in the photo at right. The outfit has two bodices, one of striped organza, pleated satin, and a high neck. The other, in cream tulle, has a lower neck and was more appropriate for evening wear. Sister Augusta Larrabee, trained at the Art Institute of Chicago, painted the floral frieze in the bedroom.













Toys (above) and sports equipment (left) were commonplace in the Larrabee house, where there were always children or grandchildren. Leisure included sports, hunting, and other outdoor activities; Augusta diligently kept track of Clermont's temperature and rainfall as an Iowa Weather Service observer. The portraits over the wicker settee show William and Anna Larrabee not long after their marriage in 1861. This room was always where the youngest child slept, because it adjoined the bedroom of Mr. and Mrs. Larrabee. Other views of this room are on pages 31 and 32.

### *The Children's Room*

IN AUGUST 1919, Helen Larrabee Robbins died, following surgery in Boston for a brain tumor. She had spent several months the previous winter at a Chicago hospital, and then at Montauk, hoping for recovery and for the return of her husband, still in France in the aftermath of World War I. He returned but her health did not, and she died at age 43, leaving three children under the age of ten. Charles Robbins was an attorney in Cedar Rapids, and it was decided that the three children would be brought to Montauk for Mrs. Larrabee to care for. Granddaughters Julia and Anna Marcella Robbins slept in this room, which adjoined their grandmother's room, so she could be close to them. Their brother, Lewis Frederic, slept in another adjoining bedroom.

The three Robbins grandchildren grew up at Montauk, went to college, and married. Through the years they kept close ties with Grandmother Anna M. Larrabee and Aunt Anna Larrabee. Eventually, after the younger Anna died, Julia inherited Montauk. She kept the furnishings intact and in 1976 gave Montauk to the State of Iowa. Julia Robbins Allen and other members of the family are to be lauded, for they became the mainstay behind Montauk's preservation and use as a historic site for understanding the past.





### *Anna Larrabee (1869–1965)*

WITH HER DARK HAIR, dark eyes, and short stature (four feet eleven) Anna Larrabee is easily distinguished from her sisters in family photographs. Musically gifted, Anna studied voice, the violin, the harp, and the pipe organ at the Juilliard School of Music in New York, although most of her public performances were in Clermont. One of her prime activities throughout life was the support and nurturing of the Union Sunday School in Clermont, where she played the Kimball pipe organ donated by her parents. She managed the Union Sunday School's financial affairs and upkeep of the building by employing a janitor, securing furnace oil, and purchasing insurance. At Christmas she provided a tree, Christmas candy, and ornaments.

Although her elderly mother, Anna Matilda, ruled the house, the younger Anna acted as mentor and tutor to the grandchildren who came to live there in 1919. "Aunt Anna" had eleven nieces and nephews to dote on, and whenever they visited Montauk, it was important that she instill a love of music—a long-standing family tradition.

When Mrs. Larrabee died in 1931, Anna, as an un-





married daughter living at home, became the head of the household. Life at Montauk never was the same as it had been earlier; Anna, already 62, was inclined toward a quiet way of life and desired more privacy. She became even more reclusive from the political scene when her brother William Jr. died in 1934. Montauk was no longer a meeting place for the Republican Party faithful, though Anna used her financial resources to support the party. Instead, the usual social activity was only an afternoon tea for a few guests, although the Robbins children continued to call Montauk home even after they went off to college.

Anna Larrabee took on the responsibility of preserving the family home, elegant furnishings, and personal items—hoping to keep it as intact as possible. Without her longevity and devotion to perpetuating the memory of her father and his accomplishments, Iowans today might not have all of the rich evidence of the Larrabees' lives. The family legacy of caring for Montauk demonstrates the wisdom of making this a state treasure, illustrating the experiences of Iowa's intellectual and social elite in the state's formative years.

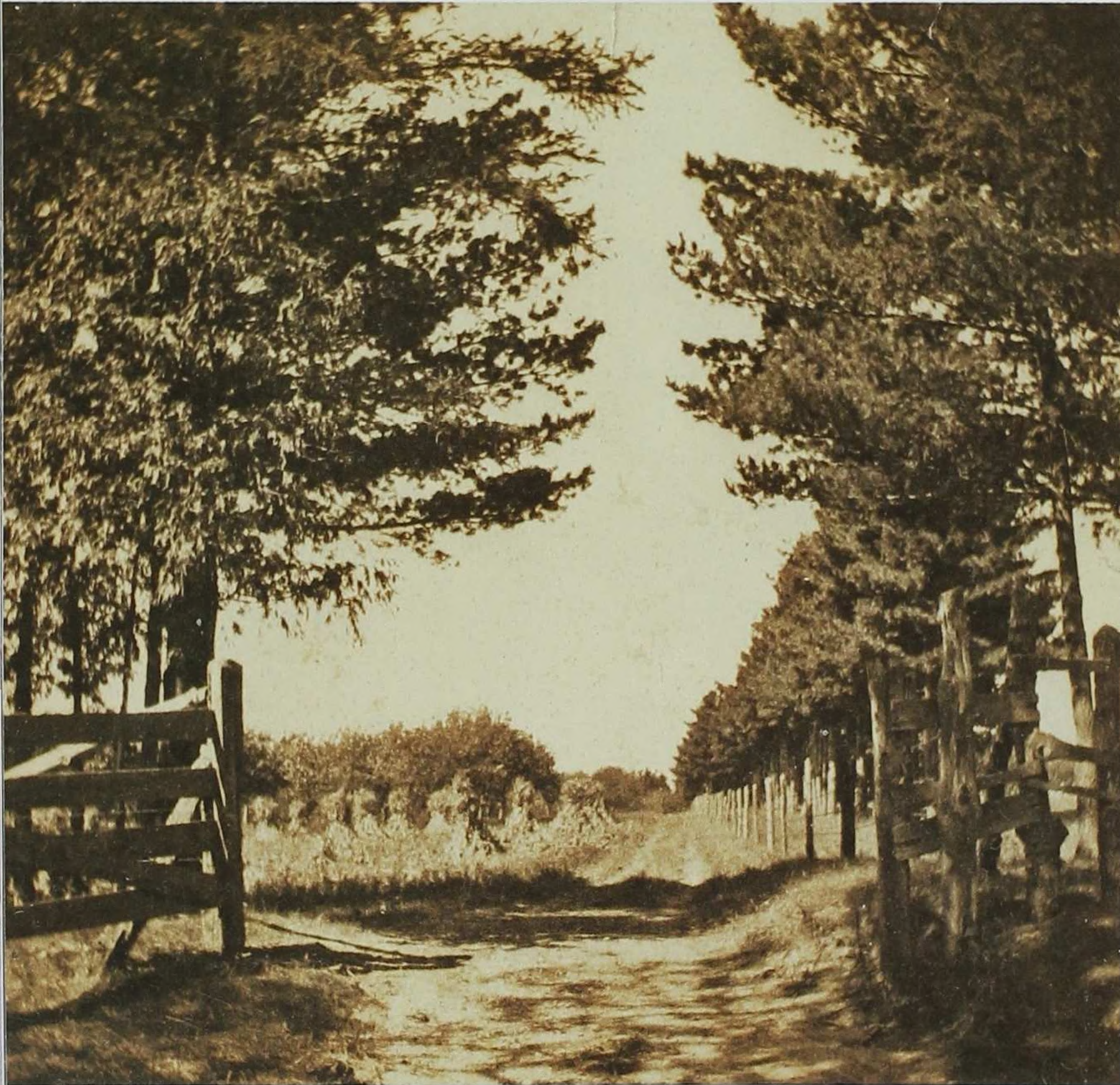
**Left: Anna's room during her youth shows the Victorian tendency to collect and display—or the exuberance of a young woman interested in many things. Note the handwritten sign on the wall: SURPRISE PARTY HERE TONIGHT! This would be her room until she died in 1965, at age 96.**



**Above: When Anna wore this dress for a formal portrait (see opposite page), the sleeves were the voluminous leg-of-mutton style, rather than the slender sleeves with a slightly puffed cap shown here. It was not uncommon for dresses and hats to be remade as fashions changed. Nineteen strips of sequins trail down the skirt, and a small train adds to its elegant lines. The dress bears a Marshall Fields label.**

**Anna on her chestnut-colored Kentucky Thoroughbred, Lady.**





## *Montauk—A Working Farm*

MONTAUK was an idyllic refuge for the Larrabees and their guests, but it was also a working farm of 160 acres, with an orchard, grape arbor, vegetable garden, and cornfields. Although peacocks strolled the grounds, so did turkeys and chickens, and cattle grazed in the fields—though the story goes that the Larrabees named the cattle after gods and goddesses. Sturdy outbuildings functioned as laundry/summer kitchen, milkhouse/icehouse, workshop, woodshed, chickenhouse, smokehouse, and an outhouse for the workers. The barn sheltered horses and milk cows; the attached carriage house protected the carriage (and later the

Cadillac). A windmill, watertower, hog house, machine shed, and corn cribs completed the farmstead. The farm provided milk, eggs, meat, vegetables, and fruit for the family, and the variety of outbuildings made Montauk a self-contained Iowa farm. In this sense, Montauk was not so different from the thousands of 160-acre farms across Iowa in the 19th and early 20th century.

Governor Larrabee planted 100,000 trees (white and yellow pine, larch, and arbor vitae) as windbreaks for the orchard and along the borders and road of the farm. Many still line the property (now 40 acres).

In an essay written soon after the turn of the cen-





ture, Mrs. Larrabee articulated her views on farm and family: "Let us plant trees and flowers around our homes. . . . Enter heart and soul into the plans and ambitions of our children and their friends. Add books and music—anything that will attach them to the old home. Let them visit the city with its turmoil [and] then return to the country home. . . . The farm homes of Iowa are the most attractive of any and may we work together to adorn those homes with the useful and beautiful, that it may be proven that country life is the real life in its broadest sense, and Iowa is as fair as Nature intended it should be."

**This view of Montauk today, looking out the back of the widow's walk, shows the outbuildings and the current entrance to the historic site, off of Highway 18. Originally this was a only a rough road through the fields for farm work and deliveries to the back door of the house.**





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The three Larrabee sons—William Jr., Frederic, and Charles—play cards in the workshop with brother-in-law Don Love.



Frederic listens to local fiddler and storyteller Paddy O'Riley.



## The Larrabee Sons

THE SONS in the household, Frederic and William Jr. (older brother Charles had moved on by the early 1880s) could often be found in the “back office”—a room in the back of the house on the first floor (see left, top)—or relaxing in the workshop (left, bottom), where they enjoyed the company of a local character named Paddy O’Riley, known for his own brand of storytelling and fiddle music.

Referred to as “the biggest liar in Fayette County” because of the tall tales he told, O’Riley left a lasting impression on one Larrabee family member, who said, “I don’t think he ever bathed.”

O’Riley, who lived in a rustic cabin, was a handyman and day laborer. He was often invited to entertain guests at Montauk and other homes in Clermont. Visiting artist Antoine Sterba was particularly fascinated with O’Riley and sketched a portrait of him.



## Charles Larrabee

(1862–1943)

THE OLDEST of the Larrabee children, Charles (left) was educated at Iowa State Agricultural College before moving to Kossuth County for seven years. He ended up in Fort Dodge and became active as a staunch Republican in Webster County. He was a bank vice president and

was involved in farming. In 1882, he bought ten cows and a bull from a breeder in the East and became a pioneer in raising Brown Swiss cattle.

Charles married Charlotte Winston Osborn in May 1901, and they had three children: Charles, born in 1902; Frederic Osborn, 1905; and Anna, 1911. This Fort Dodge branch of the Larrabee family further solidified ties with the Dolliver family, as well as with other politicians like U.S. Senator William S. Kenyon.



Some of the Larrabee sons’ Brown Swiss cattle wait patiently near the back porch of Montauk. The multiple chimneys, widow’s walk, the pair of oval windows, and the limestone caps above the other windows made this a far more elaborate “farmhouse” than what most lowans lived in in the 19th century.





The governor poses with his namesakes: son **William Jr.** and grandson **William III.** Note the statue of **General William Tecumseh Sherman** in the background.

When the white pine trees were attacked by a beetle infestation, son **William** (left) and others manually stripped the pests off the trunks. **Helen** recorded carefully that the yellow pines remained untouched by the insects.

### *William Larrabee Jr. (1870–1934)*

WILLIAM LARRABEE JR. graduated from the University of Iowa in 1893. He and Frederic often invited their Phi Psi fraternity brothers to parties at Montauk. Known as a practical joker, he was affectionately called “Uncle Cuba” by younger Larrabees because of his military service during the Spanish-American War, when he contracted malaria. Later in life he was again plagued by this disease after major surgery.

William Jr. fell in love with Lillian Ingles, a Connecticut native who came to teach science at St. Katherine’s School in Davenport. Married in September 1901, they set up housekeeping in the back rooms of Montauk. Under the shadow of her mother-in-law, the young bride had little say over anything commanded by the household matriarch—although Lillian did irritate her mother-in-law by advocating for women’s right to vote.

By this time the governor and his wife were advancing in years (though still socially active), and tensions arose because of the numerous grandchildren living at Montauk. William Jr. and Lillian had six children: William Larrabee III (born in 1904); Lillian Innes (1906); Helen Augusta (1911); and twins Janet and James (1913). Their first child, also named William, was born in 1902 but died the same day. William and Lillian lived at Montauk until 1912, when they built a yellow brick home down the hill.

William Jr. was a lawyer and president of the Clermont State Bank and served in the Iowa legislature. His banking career was ruined during the Great Depression, and he died in 1934. Also active in civic concerns, Lillian presided over the Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs in 1931. She was well loved by the citizens of Clermont for her community service on the school board and for the Episcopal church. She died in 1947.







Photographs of Frederic abound in the Montauk collections, including these: out in the field (in light shirt), on the front porch with one of the family's beloved dogs, and striking a debonair pose with top hat and cane.

### *Frederic Larrabee (1873–1959)*

THE YOUNGEST SON, Frederic, was no doubt spoiled by his mother and coddled by his older sisters when growing up. Even his niece called him "a mother's boy." At some point in the 1890s, Frederic had a camera and took many informal snapshots of life at Montauk as well as creating some exceptionally well-composed images of their 1900 trip abroad. Classic shots of horseplay between young men appear alongside detailed views of Montauk's interiors.

Frederic, or "Fritz," as he was sometimes called, attended the University of Iowa, where he participated in the Iowa Battalion, a student military corps. He graduated in 1897 and went on to earn a law degree in 1898. During his adult years he lived in Fort Dodge, where his brother Charles had settled years before. He was a warm personal friend of U.S. Senator William S. Kenyon, who succeeded Senator Jonathan P. Dolliver when Dolliver died unexpectedly in 1910. Frederic served as a senator in the Iowa legislature, as his father and brother had. During World War I, he helped with the Iowa Council of National Defense and was later involved in the International Chamber of Commerce.

Among his business interests was raising livestock, specifically Brown Swiss cattle, but he dissolved his partnership with his brother Charles in 1935 and sold the herd. Frederic was perhaps the most traveled of the Larrabee clan. Besides the grand tour of Europe and the Mideast in 1900, he embarked on an around-the-world tour in 1914, with his brother-in-law Don Love. They traveled to Hawaii, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Ceylon before moving on to the Middle East and western Europe.







### *The Larrabee Legacy, in Sculpture, Music, and Education*

ANTICIPATING the day when a memorial statue to Governor Larrabee might be erected, and looking for a possible commission, George Edwin Bissell, the New York sculptor who had created three bronze statues for him, wrote to him in 1903: "I asked your daughter for full length photos of you for use in modeling a statuette about two feet high, and it was my intention to model it if possible without your knowledge, but on thinking it over I am sure it will be better to have you knowingly pose for photographs." Indeed, four profiles were taken of the governor (*above*), but no statuette was ever completed.

The other artist who had designed heroic statues for Larrabee, John Massey Rhind, wrote to his widow in January 1914. "It has occurred to me that this might be a very opportune time for me to take up the designing of a monument to the late Governor Larrabee, if you and the family would feel like considering it. I have just been looking over the characteristic sketch model I made, as well as the life size bust, and felt how fortunate we are in having such valuable studies."

A year later, Rhind completed the simple bronze bas-relief of the

governor's side profile (*right*), to be mounted on a ten-foot granite stone weighing more than 20 tons. A temporary spur of the Rock Island Railroad had to be built to the cemetery, and in June 1915, a Chicago firm brought a railroad steam derrick to move the stone off of a flatcar.



Daughter Augusta was commemorated with a marble statue of a weeping woman. Created by Leland & Hall Co. in New York, it was placed in the Clermont Cemetery in 1902, several years after her death. To mark Mrs. Larrabee's death in 1931, a bronze bas-relief (*above, right*) in a far simpler and more modern style was mounted on the reverse side of the ten-foot granite stone at the governor's grave.



WHEN THE STATE Historical Society of Iowa officially acquired Montauk as a state historic site in October 1976, I had the privilege and delight of serving as a docent in the home, greeting visitors and sharing what I had gleaned from the historical photographs. I remember distinctly my amazement that many of the fragile and delicately beautiful gowns and dresses owned by the Larrabee women were still in the home, in closets and trunks, awaiting rediscovery and enjoyment. I marveled at the completeness of this "museum"—a remarkable time capsule of the past—frozen at the moment before the modern world subsumed most of what remained of the Belle Époque era.

The prevalence of documentation accompanying this marvelous building and grounds generates an unsurpassed opportunity to study an Iowa family of the most elite social class. The Larrabee family story and Montauk itself illustrate how experience can be shaped by environment, social and political trends, consumer patterns, education and upbringing, and status within the community. What seems evident in the lives of this one family is how distinctive the Larrabees were as members of a rural gentry class in the middle of America. Other leading families contributed their time and money to the public good, acted as progressive reformers, or modeled the value of intellectual development, but they tended to live in cities and urban areas, not little towns in the countryside. Albeit the Larrabees used a portion of their accumulated wealth in an aristocratic manner, they chose to live relatively modestly, compared to their counterparts elsewhere in the United States, while making substantial philanthropic contributions to their community and state.

—by *Mary Bennett*

Larrabee remembered well the misery of teaching in a frigid schoolhouse in the 1850s, when ink had frozen and mittens were worn inside. In 1886, he outlined his views on education for the State Teachers' Association, calling teachers "the Central Sun of the school." In 1912 he broke ground in Clermont for his vision of the ideal school (right), with good lighting, heating, and ventilation. "In Clermont, Mr. Larrabee will never need another monument," newspapers reported. He demanded a fireproof building (tile and concrete floors, green enameled brick wainscoting, steel window frames) and all materials "doubled in strength." One room was a museum filled with objects from his world travels and intended as teaching tools. A stage curtain painted by a Chicago Art Institute artist graced the auditorium's stage. Today Larrabee School houses the public library, town offices, and the Clermont Historical Society. The museum artifacts are now displayed in the Clermont bank building Larrabee once owned.

PHOTO BY CHUCK GREINER



A massive Kimball pipe organ, a gift from William Larrabee to his talented daughter Anna, commands the space in Clermont's Union Sunday School. Built in 1858 as a Presbyterian church, the small brick structure later became a nondenominational Sunday School and meeting place, maintained by the Larrabees. Anna was the organist here for 60 years. Some of the organ's 1,554 pneumatic pipes stretch beyond 19 feet. Until an electric blower was installed in 1910, local men were hired to hand-pump the organ, a sweltering job in the summer. Today the Union Sunday School opens its door for organ recitals throughout the year and by appointment.

