

# Symbolic Trees and Practice

## The Iowa Arbor Day Manuals

by Lori Vermaas

"TO-DAY LET US drop school and lessons, and spend the day in the open air," exhorted Iowa Superintendent of Public Instruction Henry Sabin in the annual Iowa Arbor Day manual of 1891—surely welcome instructions to many students. "Put your books in the desk, you will have no need of them," he directed, because nature "is a book as old as the world." In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Arbor Day was one of the strongest efforts to raise awareness about tree planting, cultivation, and appreciation. But the holiday inculcated other goals, too: to inspire patriotism and to improve schoolgrounds. A look at some of the early Arbor Day celebrations in the United States and the yearly Arbor Day manuals produced by the Iowa Department of Public Instruction (DPI) a century ago reveals the ebb and flow of these goals in the Iowa school system.

ARBOR DAY was the brainchild of J. Sterling Morton, editor of the *Nebraska City News* (and later U.S. secretary of agriculture). He proposed at a Nebraska State Board of Agriculture meeting in January 1872 that the state's citizens needed to observe a day of tree planting in the spring. Premiums were announced (\$100 to the county agricultural society that planted the most trees, and a collection of books on farming to the individual who planted the most). Three months later, Nebraska's Arbor Day was a triumphant success, with Nebraskans reportedly planting over one million trees.

The idea spread to other states and was



# ical Tree Care

PHOTO AND MANUAL: SHSI (IOWA CITY)

77  
WLB  
3625  
15-4  
1899



THE  
**Loyal Leaflet.**

ISSUED BY THE  
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION,  
DES MOINES, IOWA.

In commemoration of Our Country's Centennial, under its present Constitution,  
and marking the One Hundredth Anniversary of the inauguration of the  
FIRST PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

The Good Son, the Great General, the Generous Commander,  
**GEORGE WASHINGTON.**

Specially designed for the school children of Iowa, their teachers and friends,  
in the observance of our ANNUAL ARBOR DAY, to be celebrated on  
The 30th Day of April, 1889.



# Symbolic Trees and Practical Tree Care

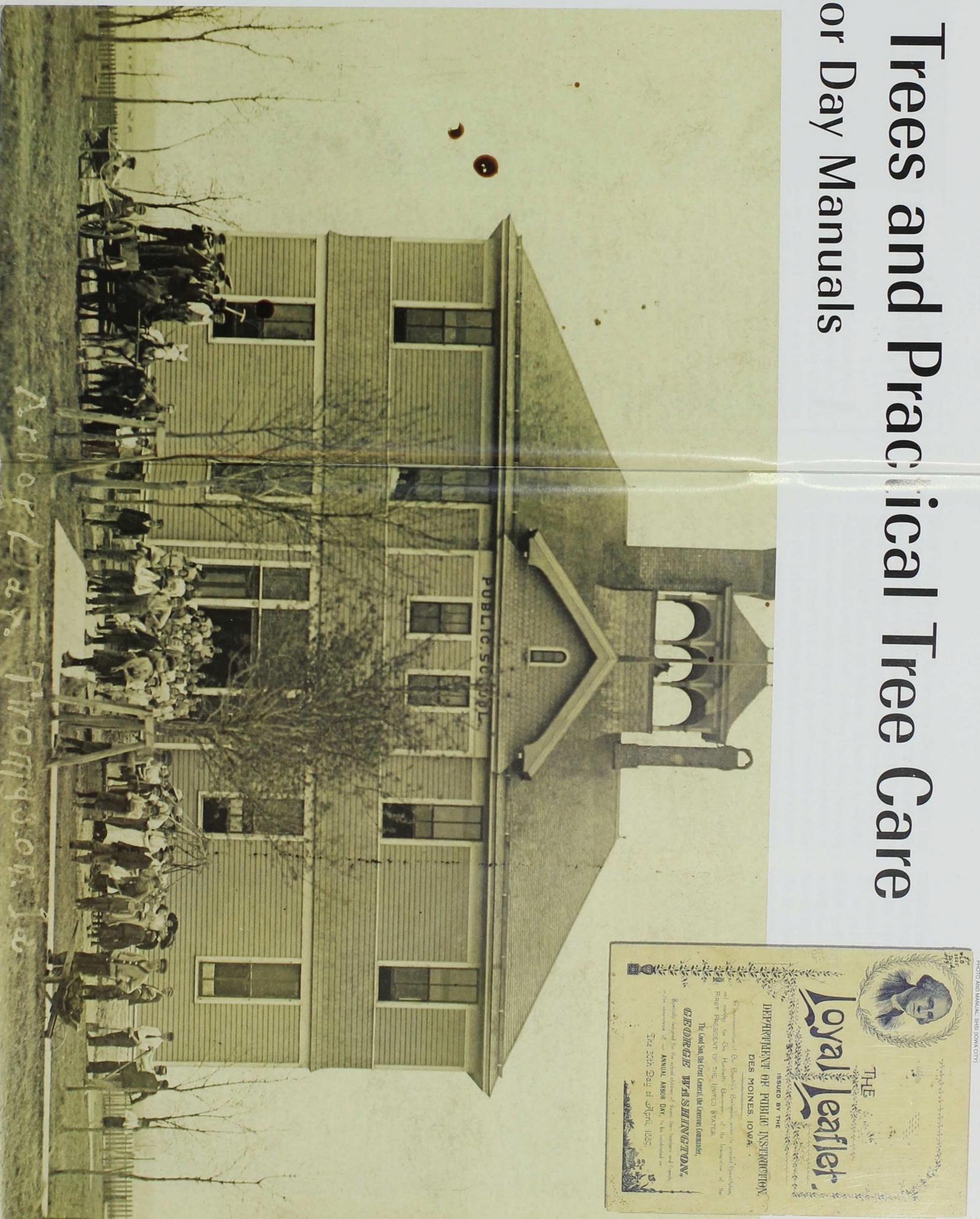
## The Iowa Arbor Day Manuals

by Lori Vermaas

"TO-DAY LET US drop school and lessons, and spend the day in the open air," exhorted Iowa Superintendent of Public Instruction Henry Sabin in the annual Iowa Arbor Day manual of 1891—surely welcome instructions to many students. "Put your books in the desk, you will have no need of them," he directed, because nature "is a book as old as the world." In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Arbor Day was one of the strongest efforts to raise awareness about tree planting, cultivation, and appreciation. But the holiday inculcated other goals, too: to inspire patriotism and to improve schoolgrounds. A look at some of the early Arbor Day celebrations in the United States and the yearly Arbor Day manuals produced by the Iowa Department of Public Instruction (DPI) a century ago reveals the ebb and flow of these goals in the Iowa school system.

ARBOR DAY was the brainchild of J. Sterling Morton, editor of the *Nebraska City News* (and later U.S. secretary of agriculture). He proposed at a Nebraska State Board of Agriculture meeting in January 1872 that the state's citizens needed to observe a day of tree planting in the spring. Premiums were announced (\$100 to the county agricultural society that planted the most trees, and a collection of books on farming to the individual who planted the most). Three months later, Nebraska's Arbor Day was a triumphant success, with Nebraskans reportedly planting over one million trees.

The idea spread to other states and was



initially promoted by state agricultural and horticultural associations. In Iowa, for instance, the State Horticultural Society sponsored the state's first Arbor Day in 1874 (see sidebar). But within a decade, the American public school became the most accepted venue.

The "Cincinnati Plan" influenced all other Arbor Day celebrations in U.S. schools. The plan emerged in 1882, when the first American Forestry Congress met in Cincinnati and Ohio's public schools hosted the state's first Arbor Day festival, a three-day event. National forestry experts lectured, schools dismissed students for two days, and reportedly 50,000 Cincinnatians planted commemorative tree groves.

On the next year's Arbor Day, 17,000 Cincinnati students converged on the city's Eden Park to dedicate the Authors Grove, one of the five commemorative groves planted the previous year. Thousands of spectators watched the pleasing spectacle "of gayly dressed children in active motion . . . whose voices . . . sounded like

the chattering from a grove full of happy birds." Some children organized into imaginatively named companies, like the Emerson or Longfellow Forestry Cadets, or Franklin or Whittier Foresters. Forming 25 or more "circles of humanity around the young trees, with the populace massed between," the children installed granite tablets bearing the honored authors' names and the ceremony's date. The children recited literary selections (usually by tree enthusiasts like William Cullen Bryant, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and James Russell Lowell), read forestry essays and extracts related to the trees' honorees, and sang patriotic and celebratory songs. The state forestry association dedicated the four other groves in Eden Park to presidents, military heroes, pioneers, and other distinguished citizens. Playing up the patriotic symbolism that 19th-century Americans characteristically attached to trees, organizers hailed the young, named trees as forming "the first memorial groves ever planted in America."

### **Arbor Day and the Iowa State Horticultural Society**

By the 1860s, concerned Americans were drawing attention to the dramatic deforestation of parts of the United States, and in the following years, citizens and states embarked on organized efforts to plant trees, often through local granges and state agricultural or horticultural associations. In Iowa, to celebrate Iowa's first Arbor Day—April 20, 1874—the Iowa State Horticultural Society offered cash awards to those citizens (adults, children, and groups) who planted and maintained the most trees, in permanent groves or belts, in the four categories of evergreens or larches; nut-bearing trees (like oaks); elms, maples, and other soft-wooded deciduous trees (basswoods, willows, cottonwoods); and trees not native to Iowa. Later, honey locust and hardy catalpa were added. Strict rules dictated that the trees must be planted on Arbor Day; in October, only competitors accompanied by two witnesses could tally the healthy trees; participants then needed to secure a certified affidavit from a justice of the peace.

Yet Iowa's first Arbor Day, complained Horticultural Society member Lawrie Tatum, "was wholly a failure." Continuous rain in eastern Iowa and snow in the western half prevented tree-planting for that day. But Iowans planted trees "extensively . . . in hundreds of neighborhoods" the following two days, and then flooded the society's offices with "scores of applications asking if entry could be made for trees planted" past the April 20

deadline. From that point on, the society allowed that trees planted throughout the spring would qualify.

But other problems remained. Although many Iowans professed enthusiasm for the contest, they found the rules troublesome and tree seedlings difficult to locate and too costly. Nurseries had problems maintaining forest trees in the Iowa climate. Consequently, Iowans tended to purchase non-native seedlings from nurseries outside Iowa, a matter of concern for the Horticultural Society.

The Arbor Day tree-planting contests continued for several years, but the State Horticultural Society announced only a few winners: two in 1878, one in 1879, and one in 1880. The organization still encouraged Arbor Day, pushing schools to tie practical lessons in horticulture to nature study. F.M. Powell (retiring president of the Horticultural Society and superintendent of the State Institution for the Feeble-Minded in Glenwood) affirmed that it was all horticulturalists' duty to encourage both. "Teachers are becoming [obsessive and overly enthusiastic] cranks on nature studies," Powell noted in 1897, "and I consider this an opportune time to introduce horticultural studies in the schools. It is a fad and is going to have its run." Children, especially rural children likely to be farmers, needed sound, science-based instruction on planting and cultivation, provided by Iowa schools.

—by Lori Vermaas

IOWA'S PUBLIC SCHOOL system started its own Arbor Day celebrations in the late 1880s. Intending to bolster an 1882 Iowa school law that required the planting of at least 12 shade trees per schoolhouse, State Superintendent John W. Akers (1882–1888) looked to Ohio's Cincinnati Plan as an effective model for the initial celebration of Arbor Day in Iowa's schools in 1887. In a forestry circular directed to the schools, Akers suggested that teachers engage the students in literary and singing exercises during tree-planting ceremonies and also encourage them to regard trees as "living emblems" of admirable personalities, the latter via tree-naming ceremonies. American educator Horace Mann was the suggested honoree that year.

The 1887 forestry circular proved so popular that the next year the Iowa Department of Public Instruction produced the state's first Arbor Day manual specifically for schools. In the next several years, these DPI manuals provided endless material about trees and their aesthetic beauty for classroom recitations and performances, including poetry, songs, "personations," and playlets. The focus of Arbor Day was ostensibly tree stewardship, nature study, and appreciation of the nation's natural resources, but the early manuals vigorously promoted the nation's historical and cultural riches as well. With titles like *The Loyal Leaflet* and *Patriotism and the Playground*, they revealed the symbolic allure of American trees, scripting patriotism as the ultimate object lesson of the first decade of Arbor Day celebrations. Indeed, promoters believed, planting, naming, and caring for trees would improve young citizens' budding sense of civic duty and allegiance.

Iowa Superintendent Henry Sabin in particular championed the naming ceremonies. For example, because Iowa's Arbor Day in 1888 (April 27) coincided with Ulysses S. Grant's birthday, Sabin advised teachers to center activities around the Civil War general's moral and historical significance. Regarding tree care as an expression of "a sacred trust and duty" and a tree's growth as "emblematic of the heights attainable in human character," Sabin encouraged teachers to have their students plant a tree in Grant's name.

Naming trees after famous Americans was not uncommon, especially in the years preceding the young nation's 1876 centennial. In Philadelphia, Penn's Treaty Elm honored Quaker leader William Penn and his signing of a peace treaty with the Delaware, Mingoes, and other Susquehanna Nations in 1682. The Washington Elm in Boston's Common commemorated George Washington's act of assuming command of revolutionary forces under its branches in 1775. In the 1860s and 1870s, some of California's long-lived sequoias had been

named after famous Americans. Swept up in the trend, Sabin soberly advised in 1888 that the Arbor Day tree planted by students "be called 'the Grant Tree.'" "Let the little children, as they plant it, be taught to revere the name of him, who by his sword carved victory out of defeat, and opened the way to peace, to his distracted country." Visualizing the memorial tree as "a perpetual reminder of the debt" children owed to both Grant and "the humblest Union Soldier," Sabin hoped that this and other Arbor Day activities would serve as "the truest incentives to patriotism."

SABIN CONTINUED his energetic commentary in Arbor Day manuals throughout his eight years as Iowa's superintendent (1888–1892 and 1894–1898). He exulted in the panorama of American history. In the 1889 manual, *The Loyal Leaflet*, Sabin triumphed that the past century was a marvel, marked by breathtaking urban development and territorial and industrial expansion, where once "was only the silence of the forest [and] the untrodden surface of the prairie." The favorable result of stunning technological inventions—the railroad, telegraph, telephone, steamboat, and electric lighting—the United States as recounted by Sabin was a dynamic country, blessed with "a free government" and "divine Providence."

The year 1889 was an especially stellar one for it marked two historical moments—the 100th anniversaries of the U.S. Constitution and George Washington's inauguration as the first president. Sabin again proposed that students plant a memorial tree—this time for George Washington. This time more strongly elaborating on the metaphorical meaning of such a tree-planting experience, he directed that students "plant it deep, that its roots may take a firm hold, as his name has in the hearts of his countrymen. Water it in the drought of summer, guard it and strengthen it to resist the winds of winter." Encourage "the children to call it their Washington tree," he advised teachers. "Let them associate with it his words, his deeds, his character, and thus form within their minds that lofty ideal of citizenship which is the soul of true patriotism, the safeguard of republican liberty." Planting Washington trees, as with the Grant trees the year before, figured more as lessons in civics and citizenship than in nature. Indeed, Sabin's final remarks expressed less interest in the appreciation of trees than anxiety about appreciation of the nation's history—as if something was at risk of falling away. Amid a syllabus of tree-related readings and patriotic songs ("America," "The American Flag," "The Ship of

State," "Centennial Hymn," "Union and Liberty," and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"), Sabin lamented that "the founders are all dead, [and] the ranks of the defenders grow thinner with each passing year."

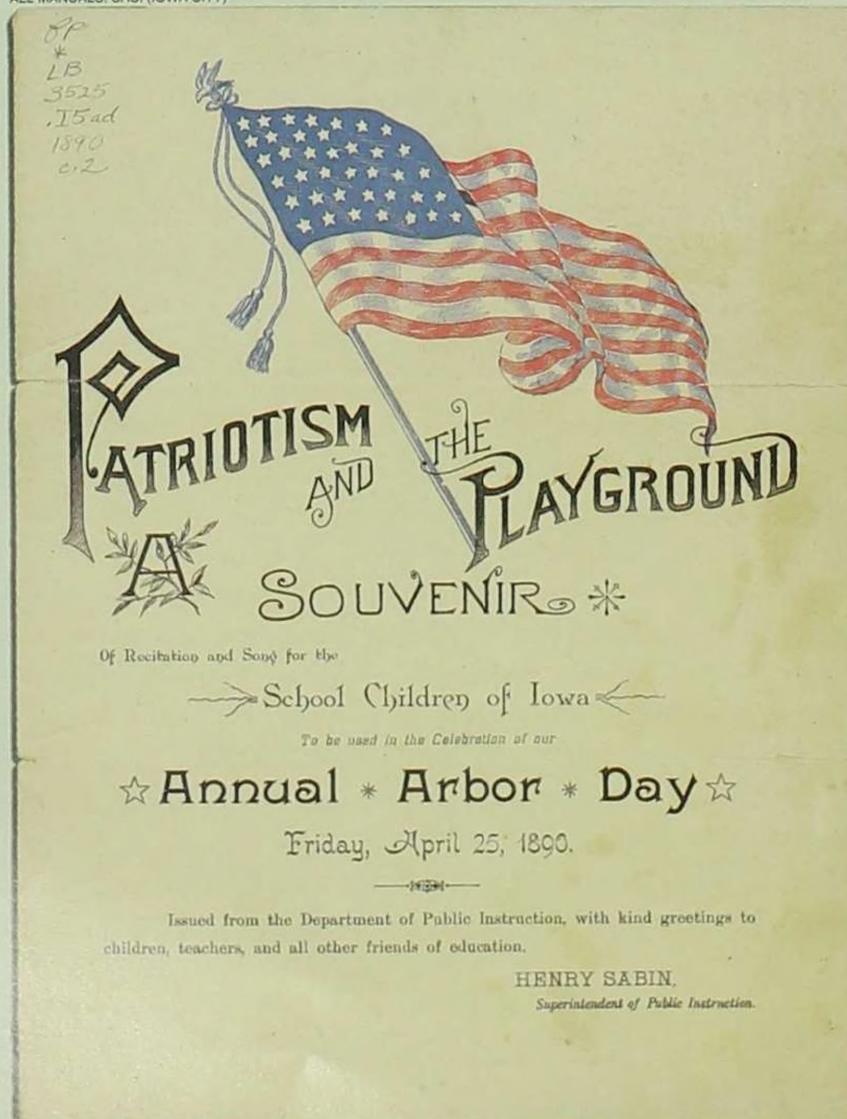
In subsequent manuals during the 1890s, Iowa superintendents continued to encourage students to use trees, "trimmed or festooned," to personify and celebrate American literary or historical figures, along with other patriotic ceremonies, including singing songs about the flag and participating in a variety of flag-drill activities. The 1892 *Arbor Day Leaflet* was particularly historically minded. The new interim superintendent, John B. Knoepfler (1892–1894), conceded dual goals. He announced that it was "a day to be devoted to tree-planting and the study of nature, and to lessons in patriotism and the language of our flag." The year 1892 also marked the 400th anniversary of Columbus's arrival in America, so Knoepfler singled out Columbus as the figure to be memorialized with a named tree. With a literary excerpt from geographer and geologist Arnold Henry Guyot later in the pamphlet describing the Old and New Worlds as trees themselves—the Old as "a mighty oak, with stout and sturdy trunk," and America as "the slender and flexible palm tree"—Iowa's Arbor Day celebrations continued to use trees to embody patriotic lessons and stimulate the desire for civic duty.

THE MANUALS' CONTENT, however, began to change significantly by the early 20th century. School administrators teamed with state horticulturalists to steer their content towards more practical activities. Educators began to realize that the day's celebration of trees, nature, and national history was not beautifying schoolyards, nor were children learning about tree care. Although DPI calculations since 1886 showed an increase in the number of trees "set out and in thrifty condition," by the late 1890s the accuracy of these estimates came under dispute. Horticulturalists and state officials noticed that many schoolhouses were "without trees" and described schoolyards as "bleak, open places generally." For every seven trees children planted, usually only one would remain, and that one would be "barely alive."

Some educators blamed the teachers by suggesting that they failed to follow through. Even Sabin complained, saying in 1894 that "it is not enough to plant a tree, with pleasant Arbor Day exercises." "It must be cared for afterwards," he chided. "The children should be taught to have a real pride in the growth of the Washington Tree, the Grant Tree, or of any other even though it may have no particular name."

"We make this address to you, and not to the children . . . for good and valid reasons," Sabin scolded.

ALL MANUALS: SHSI (IOWA CITY)



## Leafing through the manuals

The 1890 Arbor Day manual (left) encouraged "patriotism in our schools" through the use of portraits of Washington, Lincoln, and Grant, recitations, and flag exercises. "Then, if their country ever needs their help, [students] can keep time to the roll of drums and understand the bugle call." On the practical side, tips were provided for transplanting trees and growing screens of ornamental vines. Only brief mention was made of extending the study of nature beyond Arbor Day.

The next year's manual, *A Forest Festival of Song and Sentiment*, had a decidedly Iowa focus. Thirty-nine Iowans contributed brief articles on Iowa trees, flowers, and birds. "The Oak—Outline for Study" presented a simple botany lesson, new to the manuals. But most of the content was still literary, like the nine-stanza poem on Iowa trees: "Catalpa loose and flowery, and honey locust clean/Put out their long, dry fingers here, to cast the ripened bean."

More nature study and less naming of trees characterized the 1893 and 1894 manuals. For Arbor Day in

"Traveling about the State at times, we are pained to notice the bare and desolate condition of too many of the school-house yards. Often the trees which were planted in former years have been allowed to die, evidently through want of care. Seldom have we noticed any attempts to cultivate shrubbery or flowers about the grounds. Very little has been done to make the approaches to the building, or its surroundings, in any way attractive." Unsightly outhouses stood out in the open, without the benefit of the privacy and shade that trees or even a cluster of evergreens would provide.

Teachers did not accept all the blame. Some complained that local school directors gave little help, or that districts didn't "allow them the necessary time" for Arbor Day exercises. They reported that consequently many trees planted for Arbor Day died over the summer or were destroyed by vandals. Horticulturalists chimed in too, pointing out that even when they offered trees free of charge to school districts, most never took advantage of the offer.

Educators and state officials thus began to realize that they needed to work together to develop year-round curriculum in nature study and incorporate it more thoroughly into their Arbor Day celebrations. Such a shift was part of a larger educational phenomenon, the nature-study movement, which encouraged exper-

iential instruction and field observations via practical and hands-on lessons. These revolutionary ideas in U.S. classroom instruction, which first appeared in the 1880s, figured as especially beneficial for a nation needing both manually trained workers for industry and agriculturally trained farmers to feed that nation.

THE NEW FOCUS in the manuals began to surface at least as early as the 1910s. For instance, the 1913 manual, *Iowa Arbor and Bird Day Book*, fortified teachers' knowledge with pointers on planting trees and showed the practical benefits of schoolyard improvement. A photograph of "A Much Neglected School House"—its yard bereft of trees and full of weeds—contrasted sharply with three others that depicted the Arbor Day ideal: verdant and well-managed schoolgrounds.

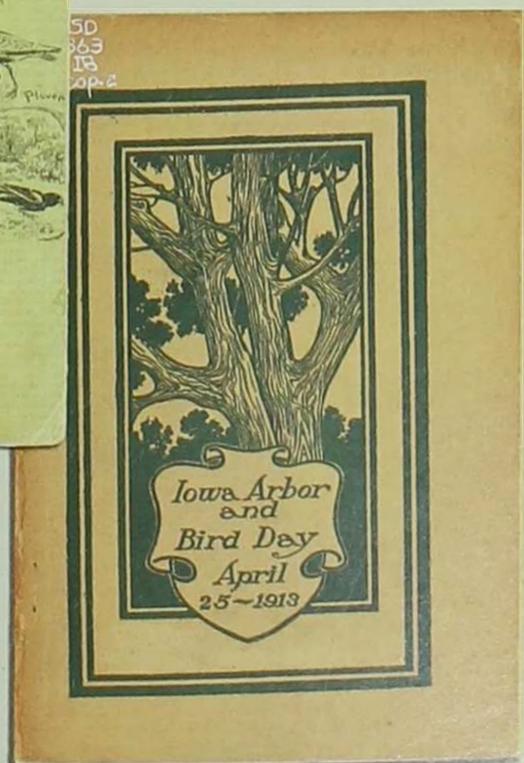
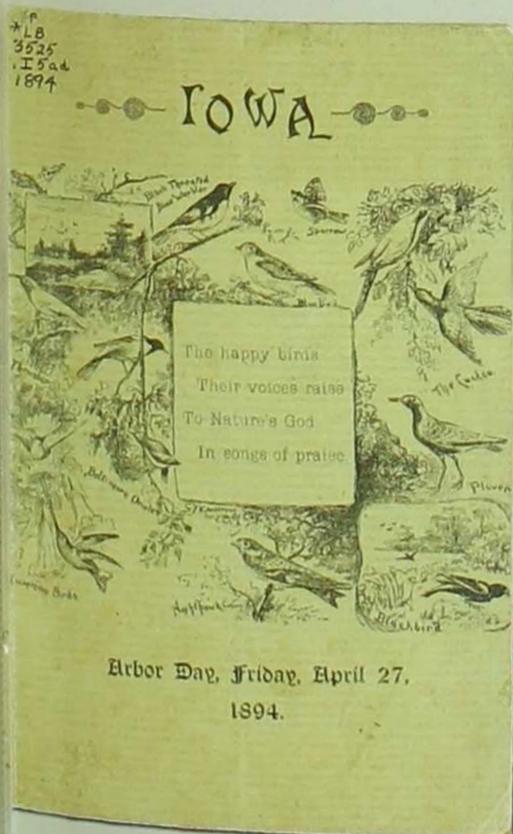
These healthier environments would "bind young people to country life," while allowing them "to cultivate the habit of observation," explained Iowa Horticultural Society member Eugene Secor, of Forest City. Students would learn to "see things," "enlarging their outlook in life and increasing their happiness." Photograph captions described the ideal schoolyard as a site of natural splendor, a place "Where Leaves Rustle to

1893, for instance, the manual encouraged students to write essays on the uses and benefits of trees, and to improve and beautify their schoolyards—instead of marching among trees with flags, or naming them after historical figures. Iowa State College professor J. L. Budd called "attention to some of our handsome and useful trees . . . neglected by our planters": oaks, hackberry, and linden. Students were instructed to choose among the previous year's top three vote-getters: oak, maple, and elm for state tree, and rose, pansy, and goldenrod for state flower. The manual still included nature poems for classroom recitation, but the lessons no longer exclusively fo-

ocused on patriotism and the reverence for American history. The use of trees in American schools had shifted from the symbolic to the practical and scientific.

Arbor Day manuals also began to include material on studying and appreciating birds and celebrating Bird Day. In the 1893 manual, Iowa historian Charles Aldrich decried the disappearance of "precious song birds" due to cultivation, mowing machines, and drainage; America's bird populations were declining also because women's hat fashions called for feathers, wings, and even entire birds. In the 20th century, Arbor Day and Bird Day would be clearly tied together.

—The Editor



## The Ideal and the Actual

Arbor Day manuals vigorously promoted tree planting on schoolgrounds, but how thoroughly was that ideal carried out? Photographs, school records, and teachers' papers yield conflicting answers. Judging from this 1934 photograph (right), Mercer School #4 in Adams County lacked every kind of trees or shrubs.

At the other extreme were two rural schools where Sarah Gillespie Huftalen taught. According to her sketch below, trees bordered three sides of the yard of Oneida Township School #7 (known as Arbor Vitae Summit School). Huftalen taught at this Delaware County school from 1904 to 1909. According to her drawing, 19 trees surrounded the school; most were arbor vitae and probably functioned as a windbreak. All but one bore names, including temperance leader Frances Willard, authors

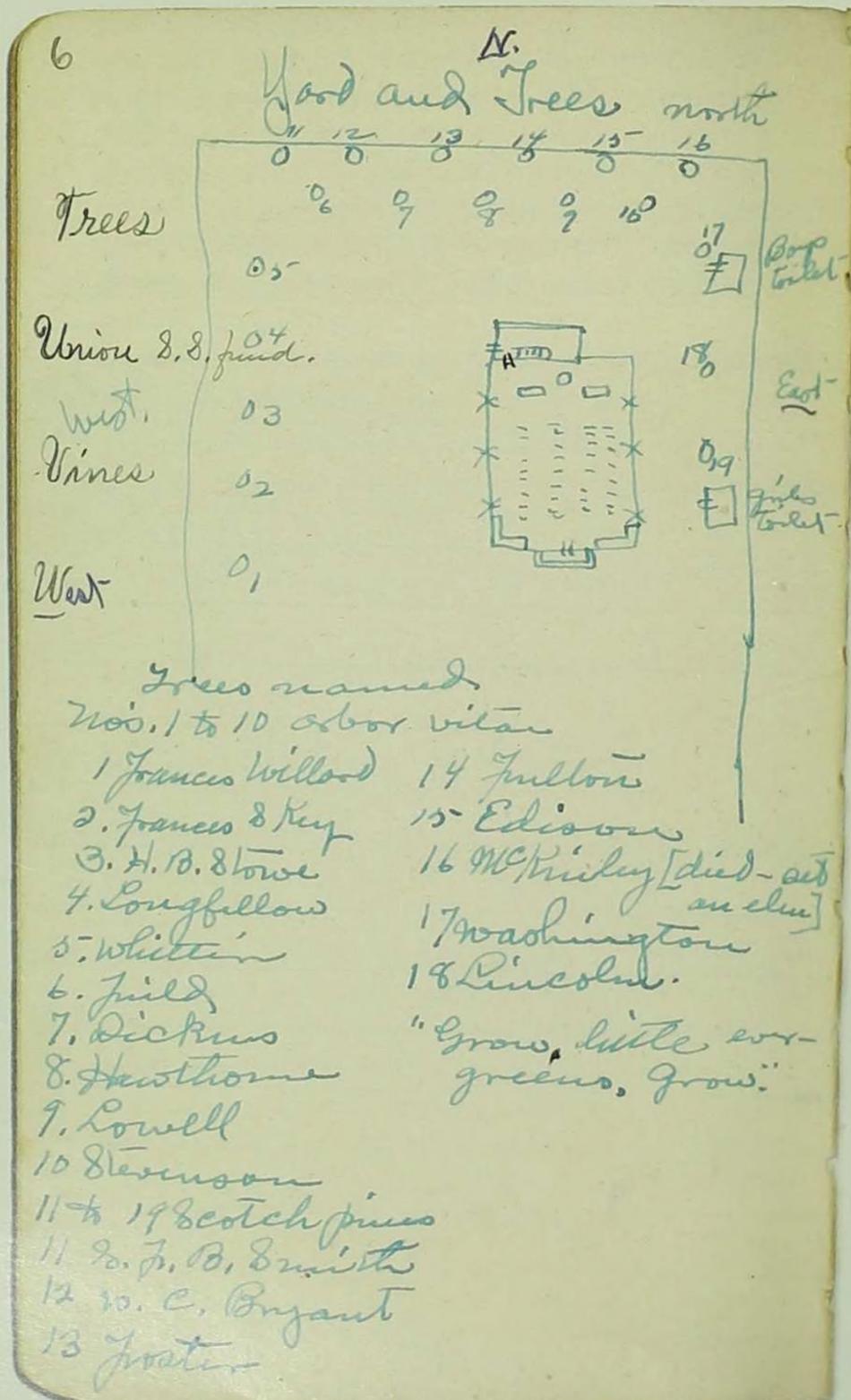


Stowe, Hawthorne, and Bryant, inventors Fulton and Edison, and presidents Washington, Lincoln, and McKinley. Of the McKinley tree she noted, "died—set an elm."

In August 1909 Huftalen took a new teaching job in Tarkio Township in Page County. Faced with a neglected schoolyard, she rallied students, parents, and others to help beautify the site. They mowed weeds and hauled away brush and trash (including wagonloads of ashes, broken glass, and old iron). They cut and graded the slope into a level playground, sodded a lawn, planted flower beds, laid walkways, and, of course, planted trees. One of her photo albums documents the labor and love poured into the schoolyard improvements, which stretched over two years. She captioned the photo below, "Mildred and Beulah Hall looking at a little tree which they planted on the school grounds in the spring, watched and hoed it during the summer and are now loving it through the winter."

The Huftalen Collection at the State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City) comprises 13 boxes of school and curriculum records, photographs, diaries, and scrapbooks.

—The Editor



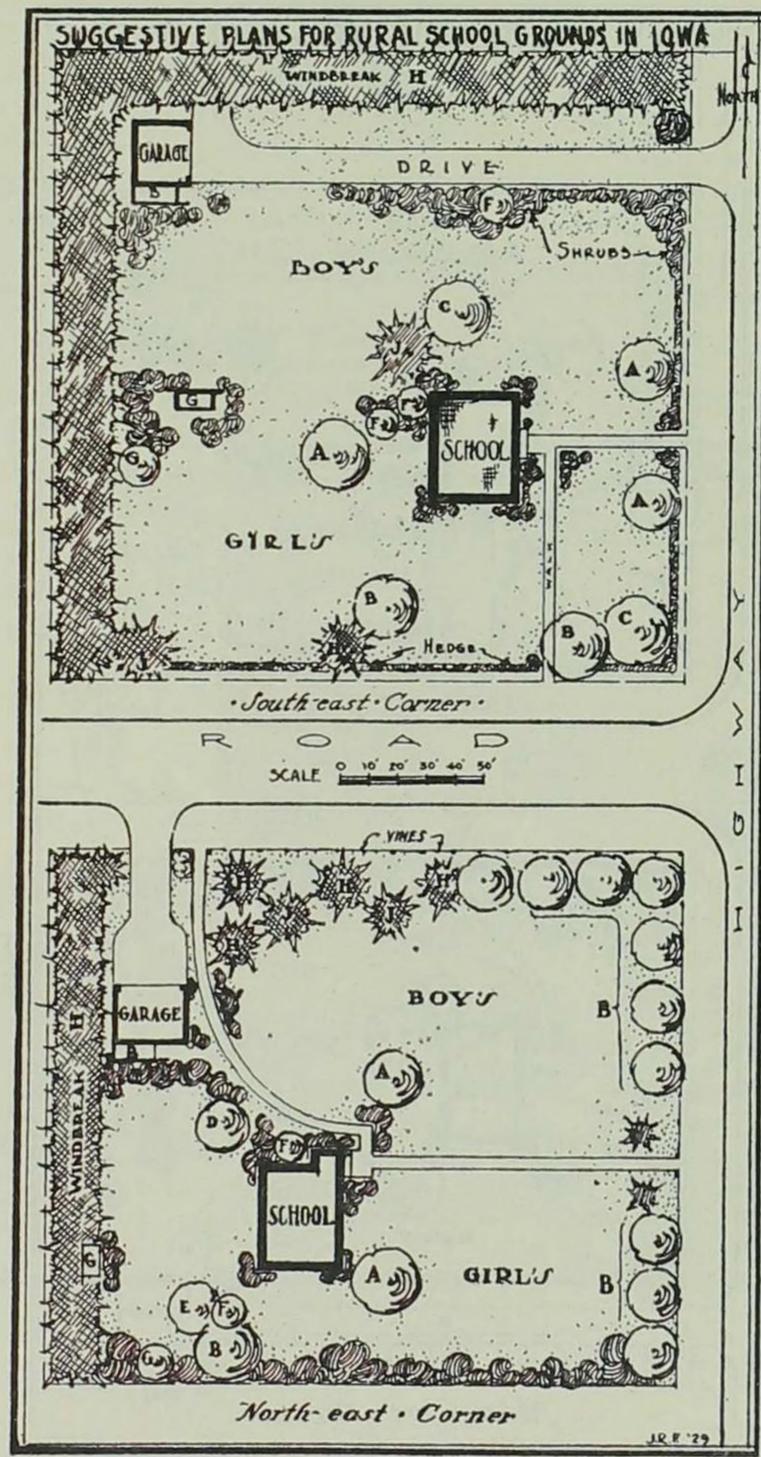
the Rabbits Tread" or "A Place Where Birds Sing."

The spotlight had clearly expanded away from just the appreciation of individual trees. "The tree, itself, is undoubtedly a splendid subject," a U.S. Forest Service article stated, "but sometimes we see so many trees that we fail to notice the forest." The traditional literary snippets on trees, birds, and nature, however, still appeared—even a play with dryads adorned in green tissue-paper rosettes and coronets. But articles on forestry, tree husbandry, Iowa's wildflowers, conservation, and the economic value of birds predominated, some quite lengthy and many written by specialists. The thin, flimsy Arbor Day manuals of earlier years had been transformed into a 109-page manual by 1913, commensurate with educators' more focused commitment to nature education, tree stewardship, and practical instruction.

THE STRESS on a more conservation-based approach predominated in the 1929 manual. The study of birds and their protection, the study of wildflowers, and learning about forest rehabilitation and "the protection and perpetuation of our trees," along with a short section on how to behave responsibly outdoors, occupied fully two thirds of the edition. The tree-related curriculum was much more extensive in that it included month-by-month lesson plans for three age groups; listed references and correlated the "outdoor lessons" with language, geography, art, arithmetic, and other subjects; and offered sample schoolyard landscape designs (see right).

The designs were especially significant, since improving and beautifying schoolyards had been another goal of Iowa educators for more than three decades. The evaluation criteria under the Iowa Standard School Law (first passed in 1919) continued to call for "trees, shrubbery, and flowers attractively placed"—but far too many rural schoolyards were still barren and unsightly. The six model landscape plans for schoolgrounds submitted by extension landscape architect John R. Fitzsimmons, from Iowa State College, aimed to inspire schoolyard improvements. They accommodated different locations and grades of land, with recommendations for specific trees, vines, shrubs, and flowers.

The 1929 manual still included recitations, of course, mostly sentimental verse. A few somber poems spoke to recent American history. "Yankee Trees in France" testified to "those who perished overseas" in World War I. "Tragedy of the Trees" connected drought, impoverished soil, and "abandoned farms" to the tragedy of timberland turned to "real estate" and "waste stump land."

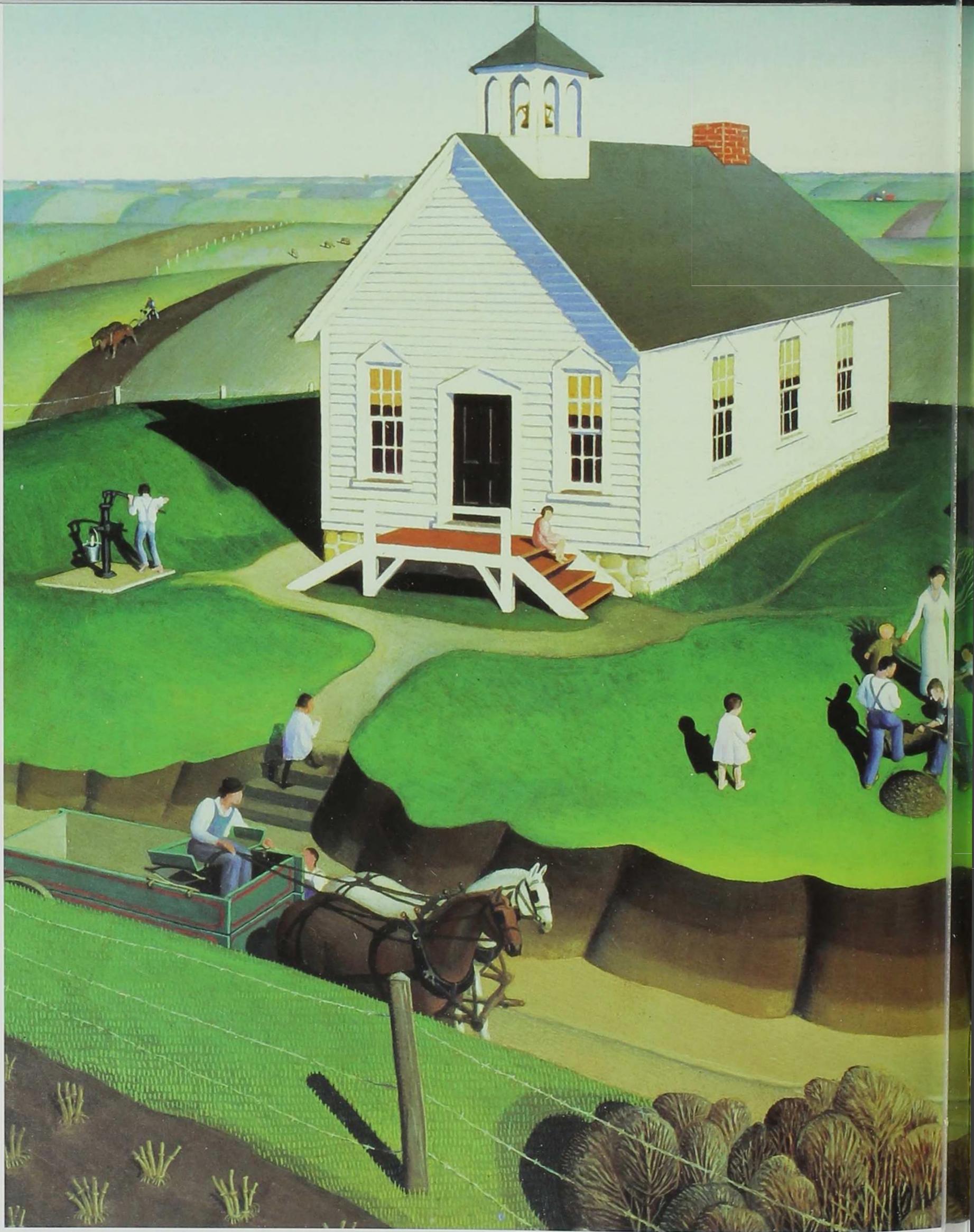


But the main theme had firmly turned to teaching about conservation, ecological concepts, and practical tree care, rather than patriotism and national history.

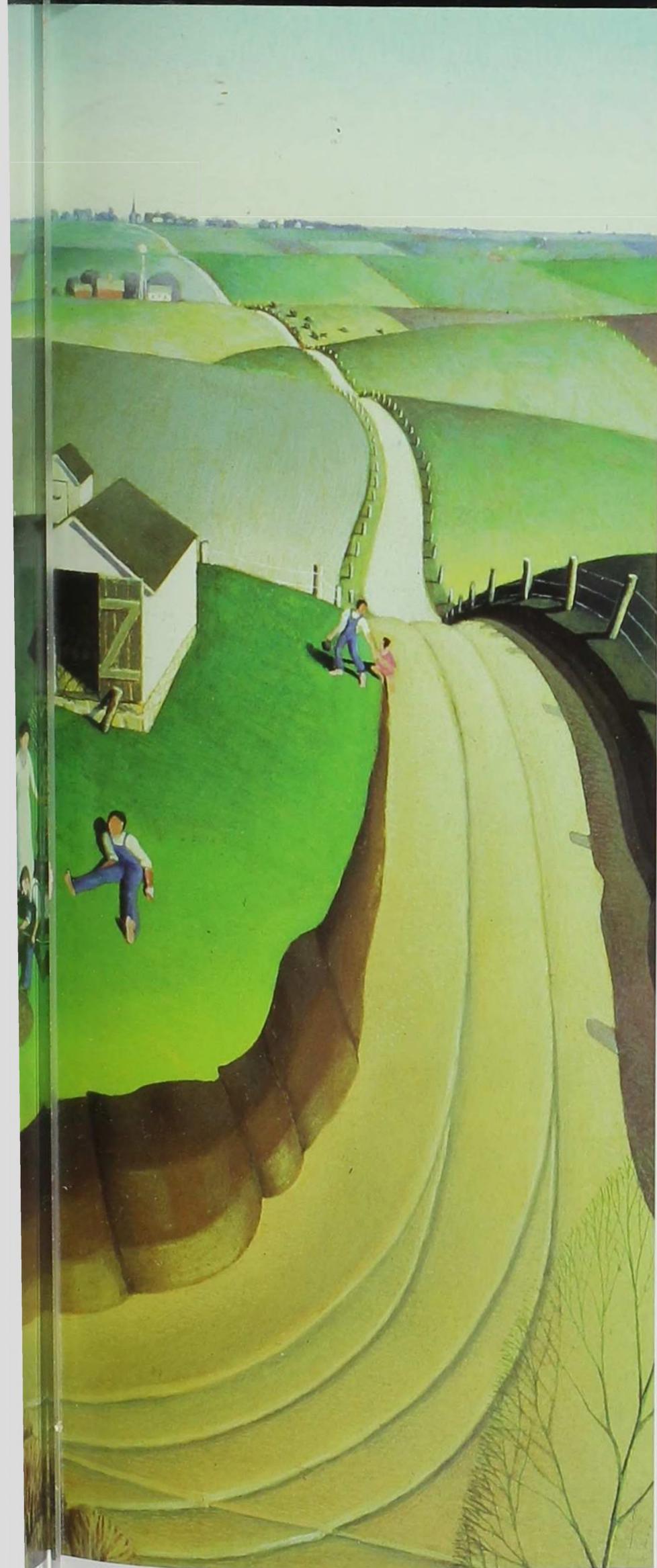
GIVEN THE DPI'S stress on science and tree husbandry in the early 20th century, it might seem ironic that Iowa artist Grant Wood's *Arbor Day* (1932) immortalized the state's earlier Arbor Day celebrations. Nostalgia is powerful.

The painting was commissioned by the Cedar Rapids Community School District in honor of two of Grant's fellow teachers at McKinley School. (In 2003, the painting was used as basis of the design for Iowa's commemorative quarter, "Foundations in Education.")

According to art historian Wanda Corn, Grant Wood's *Arbor Day* depicted the typical Iowa school-



Grant Wood's painting *Arbor Day* (1932) honored Catherine Motejl and Rose L. Waterstradt, who had taught in rural schools and organized Arbor Day celebrations. The painting became the basis of the design for Iowa's commemorative quarter in 2003.



COPYRIGHT CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA, COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT. OIL ON MASONITE, 24 X 30 INCHES

house "as it looked in the 1890s, when it stood out on the barren landscape." This was the very landscape that had dismayed and embarrassed school officials like Sabin, although arguably barren rural schoolyards still existed by the 1930s, even into the 1950s. Yet Wood placed the tree-planting celebration on a stage, with the schoolgrounds heightened as a "brilliantly lit" "island of land cut away from the surrounding roads and fields," bewitched, as Corn argues, with "magically glowing green grass, the pristine white schoolhouse, . . . and the immutable shadows cast up on the grass." Wood's elegiac landscape, absent of mechanization, suggested that many Americans now appreciated a simpler time. As one reviewer of the 1932 painting put it, "things . . . are fast being swallowed up in the modern civilization."

Wood captured the essence of the early impetus for the Arbor Day holiday as celebrated in Iowa's schools and prescribed in state manuals. Painted during a time when enthusiasm for the nature-study movement peaked, his depiction of the tree-planting holiday restored the basic act of planting trees in Iowa as a wholesome ceremony—a rite of passage involving children's physical labor, likely followed by romantic poetry recitations and appreciative literary chants, as the class encircled their newly planted and soon-to-be-named sapling. ❖

*Lori Vermaas is the author of Sequoia: The Heralded Tree in American Art and Culture (Smithsonian Press, 2003) and production editor for the Journal of Paleontology. The book developed from her American studies dissertation (University of Iowa, 2000).*

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

Several of the Iowa Department of Public Instruction's Arbor Day publications (1889–1894, 1913, and 1929) are in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City). The biennial reports of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the yearly reports of the Iowa State Horticultural Society are also in the collections.

Other sources used include Henry Clepper, "The Man Who Gave Us Arbor Day," *American Forests* 88 (April 1982), 50–53, 60–62; Wanda Corn, *Grant Wood: The Regionalist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Nathaniel H. Egleston, *Arbor Day: Its History and Observance* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1896); Charles M. Harger, "Foresteering the Prairies," *World's Work* 10 (June 1905), 6255–6261; Iowa State Horticultural Society, *Forestry Manual* (Des Moines: N.p., 1881); L. H. Pammel, "The Arbor Day, Park and Conservation Movements in Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 17 (Oct. 1929), 83–104; John B. Peaslee, *Trees and Tree Planting, with Exercises and Directions for the Celebration of Arbor Day* (N.p., 1884), found attached to Department of the Interior, *Planting Trees in School Grounds and the Celebration of Arbor Day* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1885); Kent Pellett, *Pioneers in Iowa Horticulture* (Des Moines: Iowa State Horticultural Society, 1941); Peter J. Schmitt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969); William L. Sherman, "The Iowa Standard School Law: A Turning Point for Country Schools," *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* (Fall 2001), 132–37; and Adeline Taylor, "Grant Wood's Penetrating Eye and Skillful Brush to Deal Next with Some of America's Pet Institutions," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, Sept. 25, 1932. Annotations to the original manuscript are held in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files, State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City).



Grant Wood's painting *Arbor Day* (1932) honored Catherine Motel and Rose L. Waterstradt, who had taught in rural schools and organized Arbor Day celebrations. The painting became the basis of the design for Iowa's commemorative quarter in 2003.

house "as it looked in the 1890s, when it stood out on the barren landscape." This was the very landscape that had dismayed and embarrassed school officials like Sabin, although arguably barren rural schoolyards still existed by the 1930s, even into the 1950s. Yet Wood placed the tree-planting celebration on a stage, with the schoolgrounds heightened as a "brilliantly lit" "island of land cut away from the surrounding roads and fields," bewitched, as Corn argues, with "magically glowing green grass, the pristine white schoolhouse, . . . and the immutable shadows cast up on the grass." Wood's elegiac landscape, absent of mechanization, suggested that many Americans now appreciated a simpler time. As one reviewer of the 1932 painting put it, "things . . . are fast being swallowed up in the modern civilization."

Wood captured the essence of the early impetus for the Arbor Day holiday as celebrated in Iowa's schools and prescribed in state manuals. Painted during a time when enthusiasm for the nature-study movement peaked, his depiction of the tree-planting holiday restored the basic act of planting trees in Iowa as a wholesome ceremony—a rite of passage involving children's physical labor, likely followed by romantic poetry recitations and appreciative literary chants, as the class encircled their newly planted and soon-to-be-named sapling. ❖

*Lori Vernias is the author of Sequoia: The Heralded Tree in American Art and Culture (Smithsonian Press, 2003) and production editor for the Journal of Paleontology. The book developed from her American studies dissertation (University of Iowa, 2000).*

NOTE ON SOURCES

Several of the Iowa Department of Public Instruction's Arbor Day publications (1899–1894, 1913, and 1929) are in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City). The biennial reports of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the yearly reports of the Iowa State Horticultural Society are also in the collections.

Other sources used include: Henry Clepper, "The Man Who Gave Us Arbor Day," *American Forests* 88 (April 1982): 50–53, 60–62; Wanda Corn, *Grown/Wood/The Regionalist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Nathaniel H. Egerton, *Arbor Day: Its History and Observance* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1896); Charles M. Harger, "Forestry the Primes," *Words Work* 10 (June 1905): 6255–6261; Iowa State Horticultural Society, *Forestry Manual* (Des Moines: N.p., 1881); L. H. Parmel, "The Arbor Day Park and Conservation Movements in Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 17 (Oct. 1929): 83–104; John B. Peaslee, *Trees and Tree Planting with Exercises and Directions for the Celebration of Arbor Day* (N.p., 1884), found attached to Department of the Interior, *Planting Trees in School Grounds and the Celebration of Arbor Day* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1885); Kent Bellitt, *Pioneers in Iowa Horticulture* (Des Moines: Iowa State Horticultural Society, 1941); Peter J. Schmitt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969); William L. Sherman, "The Iowa Standard School Law: A Turning Point for Country Schools," *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* (Fall 2001), 132–37; and Adelaide Taylor, "Grant Wood's Penetrating Eye and Skillful Brush to Deal Next with Some of America's Pet Institutions," *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, Sept. 25, 1932. Annotations to the original manuscript are held in the Iowa Heritage Illustrated production files, State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City).