

# Newsletter of the Iowa Archeological Society

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# Burn Up The Corset!

Angela R. Collins

Office of the State Archaeologist, University of Iowa

Before the bra burning protests of the Women's Movement of the 1960s there was a call to burn the corset by an American author and early feminist Elizabeth Stuart Phelps. In her 1873 harsh review of Victorian fashion trends in *What to Wear*, Phelps called for women to "Burn up the corset! ... Make a bonfire of the cruel steels that have lorded it over the contents of the abdomen and thorax so many thoughtless years, and heave a sigh of relief; for your 'emancipation,' I assure you, has from this moment begun" (Phelps 1873:79).

This sentiment has particular meaning in light of a recent find in an unlikely place, inside a stone well in the heart of Iowa City. At archaeology site 13JH1436, four features were excavated as part of an emergency mitigation prior to the construction of the new University of Iowa Voxman School of Music building. One of the features was an un-mortared stone well filled to the brim with trash—not just any trash, but century-old trash (Figure 1). Yes, the well was filled with various items and materials dating to the first decades of the twentieth century. Among the myriad of materials representing food, medicine, grooming, and home improvement, archaeologists discovered a bundle of steel straps amid furnace-refuse materials. Upon closer examination, the straps of various lengths strongly correlate with steel stays from a 1910s woman's corset (Figure 2). No fabric was present anymore and the straps were blistered from extreme heat, meaning that a corset was burned up leaving behind only the metal stays. The length of the stays vary from 4 inches to almost 17 inches. Corsets that included such long back stays correspond to a fashion trend in which not only the chest and waist were constricted but also the hips in effort to form an unrealistic narrow body profile (Sears 1913, Figure 3).



Figure 1. Initial discovery of the well at 13JH1436 filled with early twentieth century refuse.

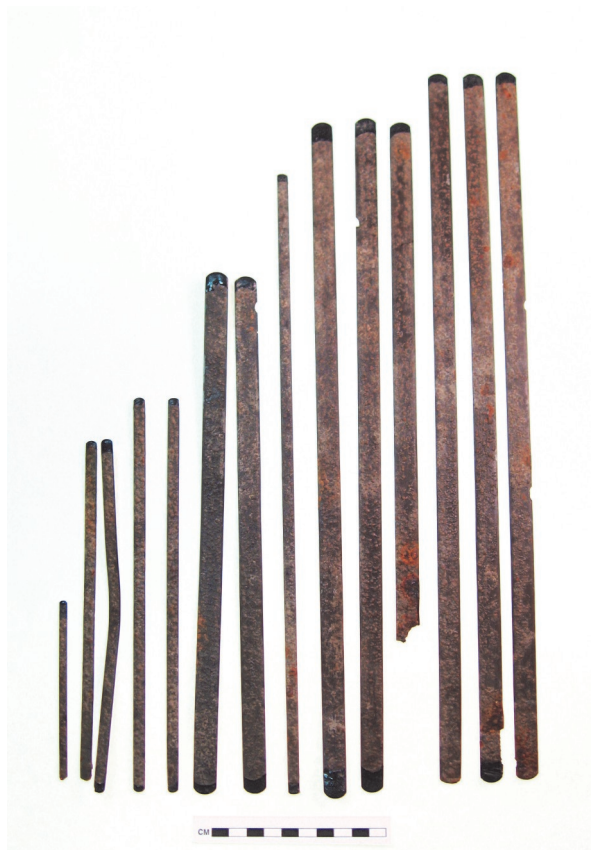


Figure 2. Corset stays from 13JH1436.

Why the corset was burned in the furnace is an interesting question. Could it have been because it was out of fashion or just extremely uncomfortable? If so, was it common for unwanted clothing to be burned rather than otherwise discarded? I propose another possibility. In light of the changing times of the early twentieth century in a college town when tenants at the site included single-working women and female students, perhaps the corset was burned as a denunciation of constrictive clothing signifying a dissatisfaction with the restrictive societal roles of women. This notion of corset burning as social protest is not unreasonable when you consider that the women's suffrage movement was already well established in Iowa and across the nation. In fact, in the year 1913, approximately the time this particular corset was made, thousands of women marched with wide publicity in a national women's suffrage pa-

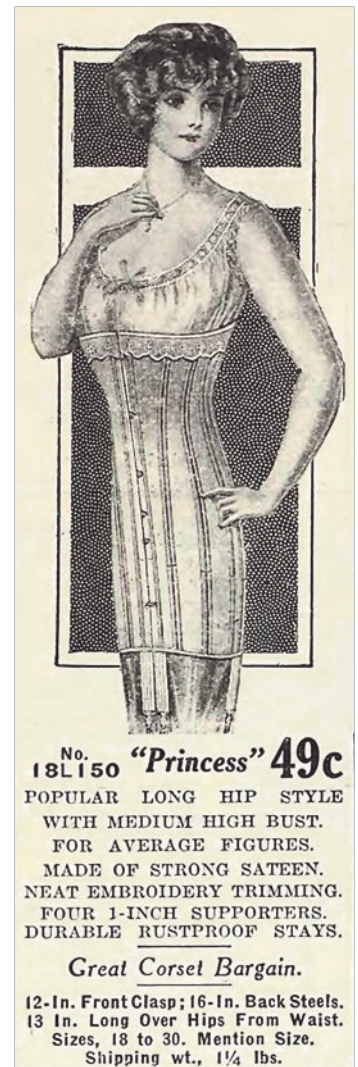


Figure 3. Example of a long corset (Sears 1913).



rade in Washington, D.C. further pushing the dialogue. In Iowa, the movement was strong (Figure 4) leading up to the full right to vote in 1919 with the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (Iowa Pathways). In light of this success, perhaps some women in Iowa were finally able to heave that sigh of relief as promised by Phelps.

## References

Phelps, Elizabeth Stuart  
1873 *What to Wear*. Boston.

Sears  
1913 Corsets. Sears Roebuck & Co. Catalog.

Iowa Pathways  
2016 The Fight for Women's Suffrage. Iowa Pathways. Electronic document, URL: [http://www.iptv.org/iowapathways/mypath.cfm?ounid=ob\\_000320](http://www.iptv.org/iowapathways/mypath.cfm?ounid=ob_000320), accessed March 3, 2016.

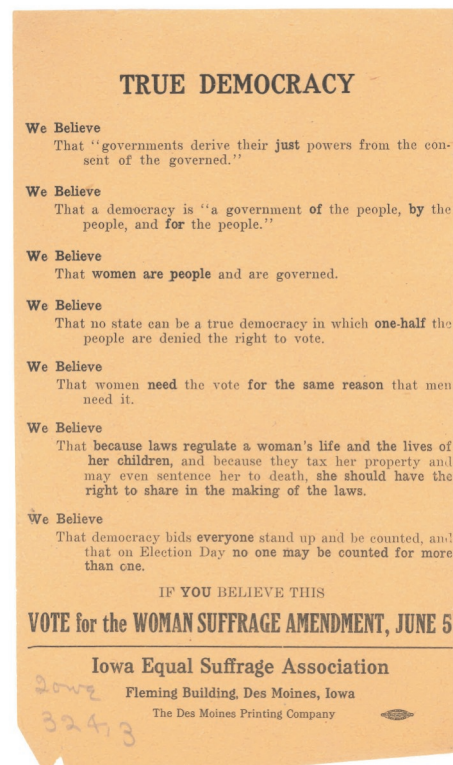


Figure 4. Iowa Equal Suffrage Association flyer.

## KEYES-ORR AWARD GOES TO MARK MERTES Megan H. Stroh, Sanford Museum



Mark Mertes is presented the Keyes-Orr Award.

Mark Mertes was given the Keyes-Orr award this year by the Iowa Archeological Society. Mark has been the Northwest Chapter of the Iowa Archeological Society president since 2001, and an IAS member and board member since 2004. He began involvement with the Northwest Chapter and the Sanford Museum when he was 15 years old. His father, a rural mail-carrier, was the one who got him interested in archaeology and in 1968, Mark was hired to help excavate the Skadeland site, near Larrabee, Iowa. It was supervised by Larry Zimmerman. At the time, he stayed at the business of Joe and Bertie Beals (previous Keyes-Orr award winners) and was paid something like \$3 a day to dig at the site. He was involved with other digs at the museum after, including 13PM65, until he went off to learn business. He became involved again with the Northwest Chapter in 1990 and worked diligently to bolster membership.

Mark has been a crucial part of the Northwest Chapter. As president he has helped write and edit the newsletter. He also has helped plan a number of NWIAS events, he volunteers at field schools, and public archaeology events. He was known to go around Northwest Iowa with Joe Beals to locate and identify archaeological sites. He has been a very important part of Northwest Iowa archaeology!



# PRESERVE IOWA SUMMIT 2016

Our History. Our Future.

September 15-17, 2016 | Davenport, Iowa  
preserveiowasummit.org

## PRESERVE IOWA SUMMIT

Our History. Our Future.

The Preserve Iowa Summit is the premier statewide annual conference for professionals and volunteers involved in historic preservation in Iowa. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act which has helped foster the strong preservation movement we enjoy today. Come to Davenport to learn, celebrate, and network!

The Summit is a coordinated effort of the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs' State Historic Preservation Office, the City of Davenport, the Davenport Historic Preservation Commission and Preservation Iowa. It is funded in part with Federal funds from the National Park Service, U. S. Department of the Interior.

Details will be posted at [www.preserveiowasummit.org](http://www.preserveiowasummit.org). For more information, contact Paula Mohr at [Paula.mohr@iowa.gov](mailto:Paula.mohr@iowa.gov) or (515) 281-6826.



### Who should attend?

- Historic property owners
- Members of historic preservation commissions
- Professional and avocational archaeologists
- Historic preservation, planning, interior design and architecture students
- Main Street staff and board members
- Preservation professionals, consultants and enthusiasts
- Developers
- Planning professionals (please watch the website for updates about AICP Certification Maintenance)
- Local government officials
- Community leaders and civic organizations
- Architects (please watch the website for updates about Continuing Education System credits)
- Citizens interested in their community's quality of life

## PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE 2016 SPRING MEETING



Above: A break between papers.



Above Right: Dale Henning's 125th Anniversary Marshalltown trowel generated a great deal of interest.





# Iowa Archeological Society

## Financial Report for January 2015 to December 2015

### Account Balances as of January 1, 2015:

Certificate of Deposit (matured 2/20/2015)	\$1,213.96
Checking	\$1,354.12
Savings	\$1,205.84
	<u>\$3,773.92</u>

### Account Balances as of December 31, 2015:

Certificate of Deposit (matures 12/20/2016)	\$1,235.65	
Checking	\$2,411.78	
Savings	\$1,977.94	<u>Gain or Loss(-)</u>
	<u>\$5,625.37</u>	\$1,851.45

### Income - January 2015 to December 2015:

Interest dividends	\$23.79
Memberships	\$8,915.96
Research and Education Fund Contribution	\$770.00
Sales (Journals, Patches, Pins, Royalties)	\$883.81
	<u>\$10,593.56</u>

### Expenses - January 2015 to December 2015:

Archaeology Outreach 2015	\$2,000.00	
Journal Volumes 62(2015)	\$1,544.90	
Keyes-Orr Awards	\$14.40	
Meetings (Board meeting refreshments)	\$41.33	
Newsletters (Fall/Winter 2014; Spring 2015)	\$2,595.98	
Office Supplies	\$326.04	
Plains Anthropological Conference table	\$75.00	
Postage	\$1,605.30	
Printing	\$539.16	<u>Gain or Loss (-)</u>
	<u>\$8,742.11</u>	\$1,851.45

Net Gain or Loss (-) since January 1, 2015 \$1,851.45

Respectfully submitted by,

Alan Hawkins, IAS Membership Secretary/Treasurer



# Historic Thefts!

Andy Andrews

Historic Old Fort Madison suffered two burglaries recently, one in March, one in May. The fort is a recreation of the original 1808 U.S. Army fort that stood in downtown Fort Madison. Items missing include three tomahawks, a bear skin with the head attached, a pipe made of iron with the word "India" inscribed on the back of it, and a Kentucky rifleman's knife.

Also missing was a blue necklace with a bear pendant, a fox skin tail, a Capital knife, blank cartridges, two to three pounds of gun powder, and one bayonet. Below and on the next page are some of the items stolen, the black powder is not pictured. Keep your eyes open! Please inform the Fort Madison Police Department at 319-372-2525 if you have information. Note: the photos are not to scale.



The wolf skin was stolen in March and the bear and fox skin were stolen in May.



The necklace has blue ceramic beads and a real bear claw. It is noticeably heavy.



Two throwing Hawks like this one were stolen. The handle is about two feet long and the blade is iron.

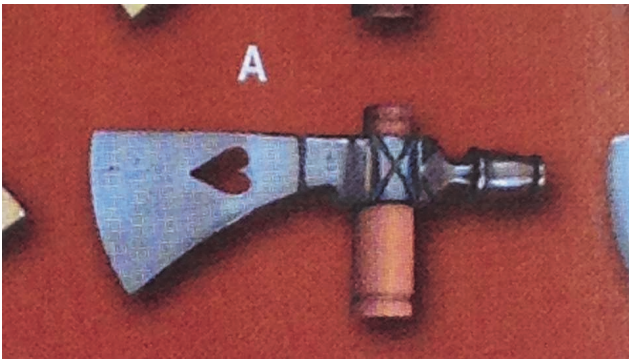


A hunting knife like the above pictured one (ours had black streaks in the handle) was stolen - notice the unique blade. This is a large knife and very sharp.



Capital knife. A curved large blade, sharp on the inside, much like a scythe. Used in the process of amputation to divide the cutaneous and subcutaneous tissue to the bone. Amputation knives came in several different lengths, generally 8-11 inches long and tapered to a point. Of any items, this is the most unique. There is NO REASON anyone outside the hobby would have this item.





An iron smoking hawk was stolen. Ours had a 1 1/2 foot long pipe/handle. It should be easy to identify. The reason it is called a smoking hawk is because it is quite literally a pipe and can be used to smoke tobacco.



A brass smoking hawk was stolen in March.



A cartridge box and bayonet similar to those pictured above were stolen.



This sword and shoulder belt were stolen in March. It is a white leather shoulder belt with a buckle. The sword has a black metal scabbard (what it is held in), a wooden grip and a metal guard. It is a Straight blade sword.



Left: Catlin knife. This item was stolen in March from our surgical display. It is sharp on both sides. This is a small, rather delicate dagger-pointed, double-edged surgical knife used to separate the ligaments between two bones and around joints. It is generally included in all cased sets from c.1750 onwards through 1865.



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## THE 2016 SPRING MEETING

The 2016 Spring Meeting in Marquette was attended by 71 registered members. Thirteen papers were presented on a variety of subjects. Some 20 brave souls endured the rain for a tour of Effigy Mounds on Saturday afternoon (see photographs on the cover).

The business meeting included the election of three new board members: Megan Theis, Brennan Dolan, and Lara Noldner. The sale of digital copies of past journal issues was finalized. The student membership category was also revamped.



Left. Friday afternoon registration.



Below: Settling in for the Friday papers.

### MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Please contact the IAS Membership Secretary:

Alan Hawkins  
The University of Iowa,  
Office of the State Archaeologist,  
700 Clinton Street Building,  
Iowa City, Iowa 52242-1033,  
(319) 384-0989,  
alan-hawkins@uiowa.edu

### MEMBERSHIP DUES

Voting	
Active	\$25
Household	\$30
Sustaining	\$35
Non-Voting	
Student (under 18)	\$14
Institution	\$35

### NEWSLETTER INFORMATION

The Iowa Archeological Society is a nonprofit, scientific society legally organized under the corporate laws of Iowa. Members of the Society share a serious interest in the archaeology of Iowa and the Midwest. The Newsletter is published four times a year.

All materials for publication should be sent to the Newsletter Editor:

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Cresco, IA 52136  
Lowell.Blikre@gmail.com

When submitting articles, please provide text, captions, tables, and figures separately. All photographs should be at least 300 dpi. Graphics should be high-resolution tiff, jpg, or eps files or be scan-ready paper copies.

### IAS WEBSITE

<http://archaeology.uiowa.edu/iowa-archaeological-society>