

A hand-colored lithograph of Davenport by Rufus Wright ca. 1858. Wright, born in Cleveland, studied at the National Academy. Though he spent most of his life in New York and Washington, D.C., he lived for at least three years in Davenport, painting at least seven works while there. Two of these were panoramic views of the city, from one of which this litho was made. Famous as a portrait and still-life artist, he advertised himself while in Iowa as a sign-painter. (courtesy Putnam Museum)

THROUGH THE EYES OF ARTISTS

Iowa Towns in the 19th Century

by

Loren N. Horton

©Iowa State Historical Department/Division of the State Historical Society 1978 0031—0360/78/0910—0133 \$1.00/0

A common method of publicizing a town in 19th-century America was to publish lithographs depicting the area. The prints took several forms—simple plats, plat maps (surrounded by drawings of major buildings), panoramic paintings, and bird's-eye view engravings. Real estate salesmen and associations of businessmen—forerunners of modern chambers of commerce—used these pictures to promote not only the larger cities, but also the small towns, as well as an occasional imaginary one. Prospective buyers were well advised to visit the town where they intended to purchase lots, since enterprising land agents often produced attractive panoramas of thriving towns where, in fact, only uncleared timber stood.

But businessmen and confidence men were not the only people who used such early images. Ordinary citizens bought them, mounted them in ornate frames, and displayed them in parlours and living-rooms. Hotels, offices, and other commercial establishments, too, used the lithographs as a part of their interior decor.

Little is known about the average run of a particular print, but John R. Hebert, an authority on panoramic views, has estimated the normal printing to be 500 copies or less. The original paintings and sketches from which the lithographs and prints were copied are now highly prized as works of art. Original copies of the lithographs and prints are scarce enough to bring a high price on the collectors' market, justifying reproductions by commercial firms, historical societies, and museums as useful and profitable ventures.

Ranging from brightly-colored to delicately-tinted to sepia-toned to black-and-white, the views are valuable historical documents. Occasionally the artist's imagination caused him to include things

non-existent, but most artists did at least depict the major buildings, streets, parks, and general outline of the respective towns quite accurately. Sometimes the views are the only historical evidence we have to help us understand what 19th-century town building was actually like. Their accuracy is even more impressive when we consider the difficulty of the artist's task. He had to paint using oblique angles, from an impossible seat high in the air over the town, and in a way that would satisfy the "boosterism" of those who commissioned the print.

Common elements appear in hundreds of these panoramic views. If the town happened to be located along a river, lots of smoke-belching steamboats will appear. If the town had acquired a railroad, lots of smoke-belching trains will appear. If the town was large enough to have any industry, lots of smoke-belching factories will appear. Smoke was relatively easy to draw.

Houses in all towns look suspiciously alike. So do churches, schools, courthouses, factories, and businesses. Maybe all the buildings in all the towns throughout the Midwest did look exactly alike, but the impression one gets is that most artists had stock methods of sketching buildings that were varied only to accommodate topographical features, size, and easily-recognized landmarks. For instance, octagon houses—uncommon enough to be particularly noticed—were almost always depicted accurately, and in their correct locations. Trees, as well, exhibit a remarkable sameness from panorama to panorama. Generally of uniform height, they run up and down streets, across fields and hills, in precise little rows. In works produced by artists of the "Hudson River School," and in Albert Bierstadt or Edward Hick's prints, trees are less standardized, often appearing as mystical shadows so romantic and mys-

terious that one expects to see a unicorn, a leprechaun, or perhaps a valkyrie lurking among them.

There seems to have been three types of artists who made town views. The earliest type was the traveller. He kept for later publication meticulous journals of what he saw, often illustrating them with pictures of the towns and outstanding scenic sites. It was common for such an artist to accompany government expeditions. These official travellers produced the great pictures of Native American housing, customs, and costumes. Most people are familiar with pictures of this kind by George Catlin, Charles Bodmer, and Charles Wimar. Since these artists were not employed by local businessmen, they had no reason to favor any particular town, and their representations may be more accurate than later commercial efforts. But because they visited areas still on the frontier, or only very recently settled, few sizable towns were included in their portfolios.

A second important type of artist was the entrepreneur of panoramic exhibits. Such men as John Rowson Smith, John J. Egan, John Risley, and John Banvard painted enormous canvases. One such canvas was reported to be three miles long. Sometimes the painting would be a series of pictures, which in combination portrayed the entire upper Mississippi River valley or a similar geographical region. The long canvases could be unrolled before an audience as a narrator read an accompanying descriptive text.

By far the most important of these panoramic-exhibit artists—from an Iowa point-of-view—was Henry Lewis. Born in England, Lewis moved to this country in 1829. A stage carpenter by trade, he lived in Boston and St. Louis. While in St. Louis,

he conceived the idea for a gigantic panoramic painting of the Mississippi valley. This panorama was unveiled in St. Louis in 1849. The section portraying the upper Mississippi valley was 825 yards long and 12 feet wide, but the section devoted to the lower Mississippi valley was only 500 yards long. The premier showing in Concert Hall lasted for two hours and cost 50-cents admission. It reportedly played to full houses from September 1 through 19. Lewis then took the exhibit to many eastern cities and to Europe. In 1858, individual pictures from his panorama were included among the 78 color plates in *Das illustrierte Mississippithal* published in Düsseldorf.

The same year Lewis produced his epic view, his two assistants left him to create their own panoramas. Leon Pomarede's was 625 yards long, and Samuel B. Stockwell's was about the same length. That same year a young man named Hudson painted a panorama of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers that was 20,000 feet long.

Following the Civil War, a third type of artist produced a far greater volume and variety of town views. Compilers of state and county atlases, commercial cartographic and lithographic firms, and periodicals of wide circulation all hired artists as illustrators. They fanned out over the United States, drawing pictures of towns, farmsteads, individual buildings, and landscapes. It was in this late 19th-century period that the bird's-eye view replaced the panorama as a technique. The panoramic view concentrated on a wide horizontal area, while the bird's-eye view was made from a point in space above the object portrayed. It was also in this period that the greatest similarity among individual prints became evident.

In the Midwest these views were common in the decades immediately after the

Civil War. By the latter part of the 19th century, their popularity spread throughout the East. But this form of commercial art was never as common in the West or the South. Madison, Milwaukee, and Chicago were the major publishing centers, although companies located in Morrisville, Pennsylvania, in Meriden, Connecticut, and in New York City also produced large numbers of the illustrations. A list of the important artists of the third type includes such men as Henry Wellge, Oakley Bailey, Albert Ruger, Thaddeus Fowler, and Lucien Burleigh.

Towns along the Mississippi River were the most popular subjects in Iowa for both panoramic and bird's-eye views. These towns were settled early and for many decades had the largest populations in the river valley. Of them Dubuque, Davenport, Muscatine, and Burlington seem to have been favorites with artists.

John Caspar Wild was responsible for the earliest panoramic views of Iowa towns. A native of Zurich, Switzerland, Wild studied art in Paris before he emigrated to the United States in 1830. Beginning with four views of Philadelphia, he continued his painting career in Cincinnati, and published a book in 1838 entitled *Views of Philadelphia, and Its Vicinity*. Wild then moved to St. Louis where he painted at least nine local scenes. In 1841, he published another book entitled *The Valley of the Mississippi Illustrated In a Series Of Views*. In 1844, Wild painted a panoramic view of Davenport, and the next year completed pictures of Dubuque, Bloomington (now Muscatine), and another of Davenport. The last-mentioned view shows little of the town, but it does portray the ferry house on the river bank, and also features Antoine LeClaire, one of Davenport's founders and leading citizens.

Besides Wild and Henry Lewis, Rufus Wright, William Bourne, W.J. Gilbert, William Williams, J.M. Peck, L.C. Turner, Philippe Ronde, Henry A. Waugh, Seth Eastman, Lucinda Farnham, Robert Hinshelwood, and George Simons painted or drew in the years following the Civil War panoramic views of Iowa towns. Unlike many of the earlier workers, each of these artists brought an individual perspective to his or her work, so that views of the same town at approximately the same time bear little resemblance to one another. Such nationally circulated periodicals as *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing Room Companion* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* also carried pictures of Iowa river towns.

Post-Civil War artists in general are fewer in number, but panoramic and bird's-eye views of Iowa towns are more numerous. The Library of Congress checklist includes 20 pictures, many of interior towns. A good many others are known to exist in local historical societies and museums throughout the State. Even though photography was both common and popular after the Civil War, the artists' drawn or painted conceptions were still very marketable products.

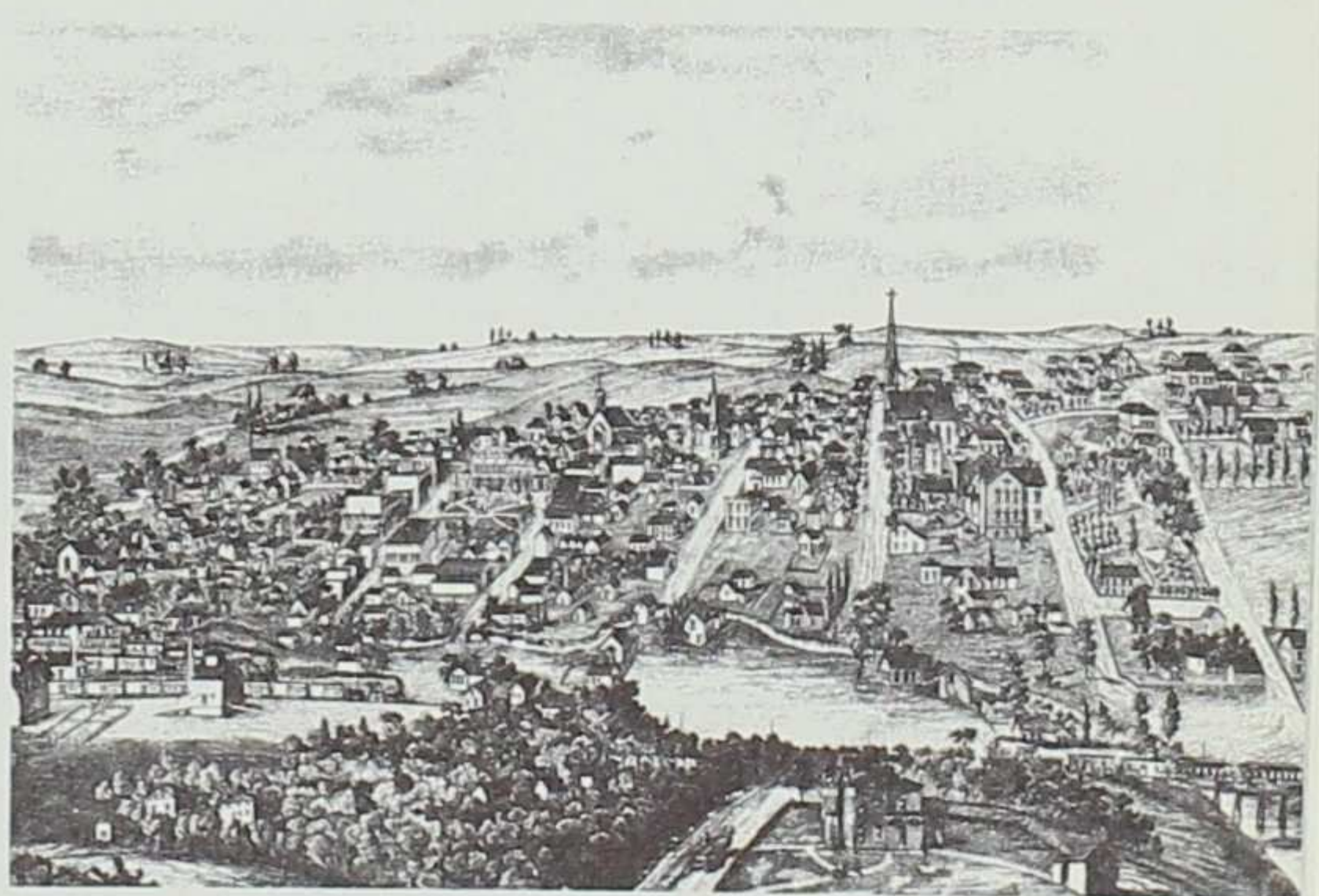
Alfred T. Andreas was a Civil War veteran from Dubuque. In 1865 he tried—unsuccessfully—to go into business in Davenport. By 1871 he had formed another company that did succeed. He moved to Chicago in 1873 and published state atlases of Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska, and many county atlases and city directories, over 30 volumes in all. All of the Andreas atlases are filled with illustrations: portraits of prominent citizens; pictures of business establishments; public buildings; residences and farmsteads; plats of municipalities; maps of counties; and bird's-eye views of towns. Andreas' com-



A commercial bird's-eye view of McGregor



A hand-colored reproduction of a drawing of Dubuque typical of the type printed in Ballou's Pictorial Drawing Room Companion, Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, Harpers, and other national magazines in the latter half of the 19th century, partly to spur migration to the unsettled areas in the interior, and partly to boost circulation (courtesy Wayne Norman)



Red Oak (from the A.T. Andreas Illustrated Atlas of the State of Iowa 1875)

pany employed well over a hundred persons in the field as artists, writers, cartographers, canvassers, and solicitors. Because none of the individual artists signed their work, the credit for the illustrations is normally given to Andreas himself. There is really no way of knowing now whether Andreas himself actually made any of the views he published, or whether they must all be attributed to his anonymous staff.

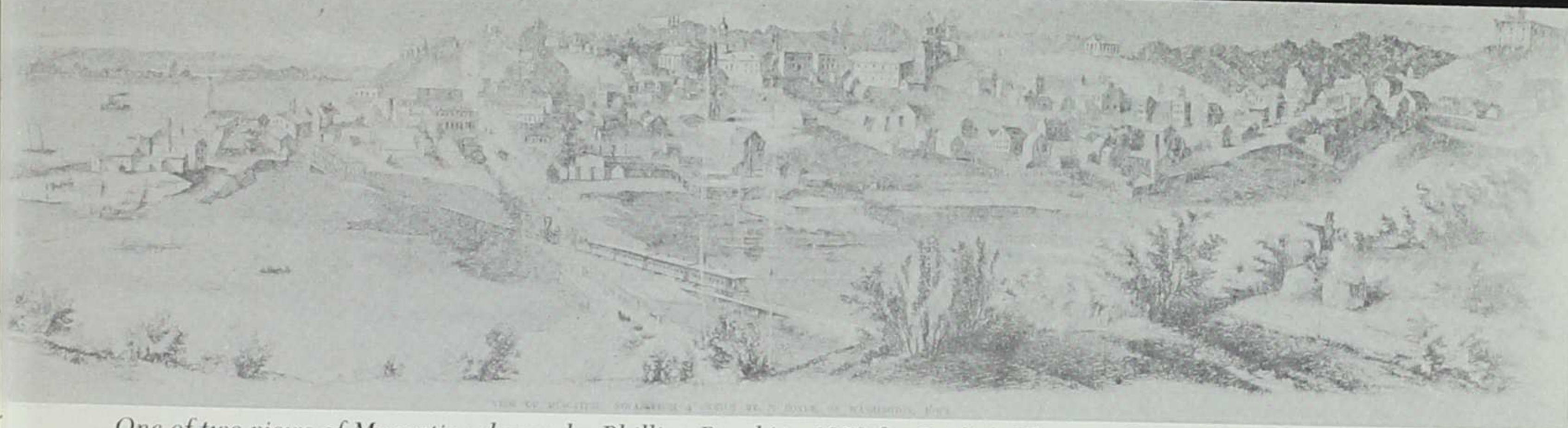
Alexander Simplot was a native of Dubuque and lived there until his death. During the Civil War he was a special artist for *Harper's Weekly* and the chief illustrator for *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War*. After the war, Simplot began using the photo-engraving process and operated successfully in Dubuque throughout the rest of the 19th century. Most of Simplot's views are of Dubuque and its component parts. Although usually photographic, many are stylized and retouched to resemble engravings. It was common for Simplot to publish his material in souvenir-booklet form, almost always in sepia

tones.

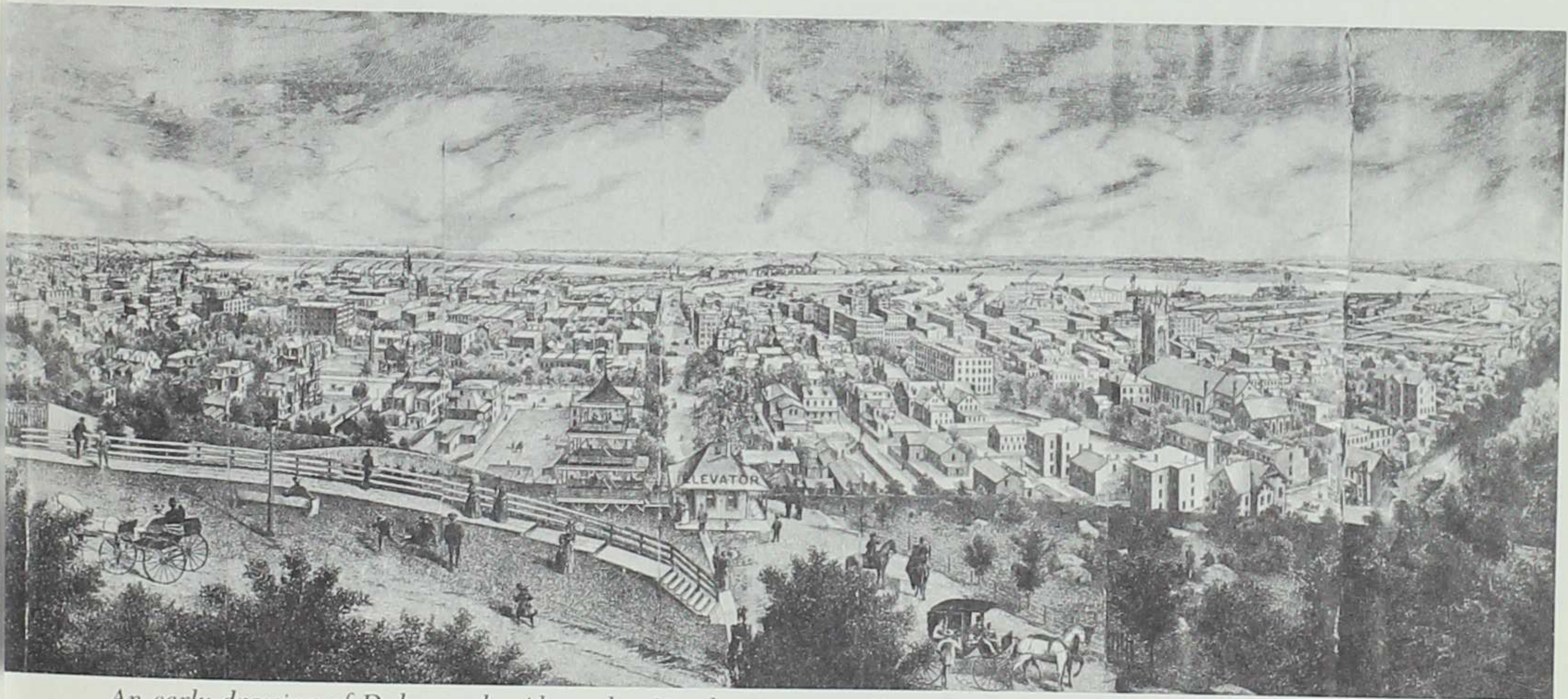
Henry Wellge and Albert Ruger were the two artists who produced the majority of the bird's-eye views of Iowa towns in the later decades of the 19th century. Ruger is most noted for his dozens of works on Michigan cities and towns, but he also drew views of towns and college campuses in at least 20 other states, including at least 12 Iowa towns. A prolific artist, in 1869 alone he is reputed to have done more than 60 pictures. Henry Wellge is credited with views from some 24 states, including at least five Iowa towns.

By the turn of the century, use of panoramic and bird's-eye views was largely restricted to letterheads for business stationery, calendars, advertising flyers, and the like. Photography and cheap mass-printing technology were crowding out the individual artist of the 19th century. Produced in relatively small numbers in the first place, copies of town views became rarer and rarer. They are generally regarded now as precious historical documents. □

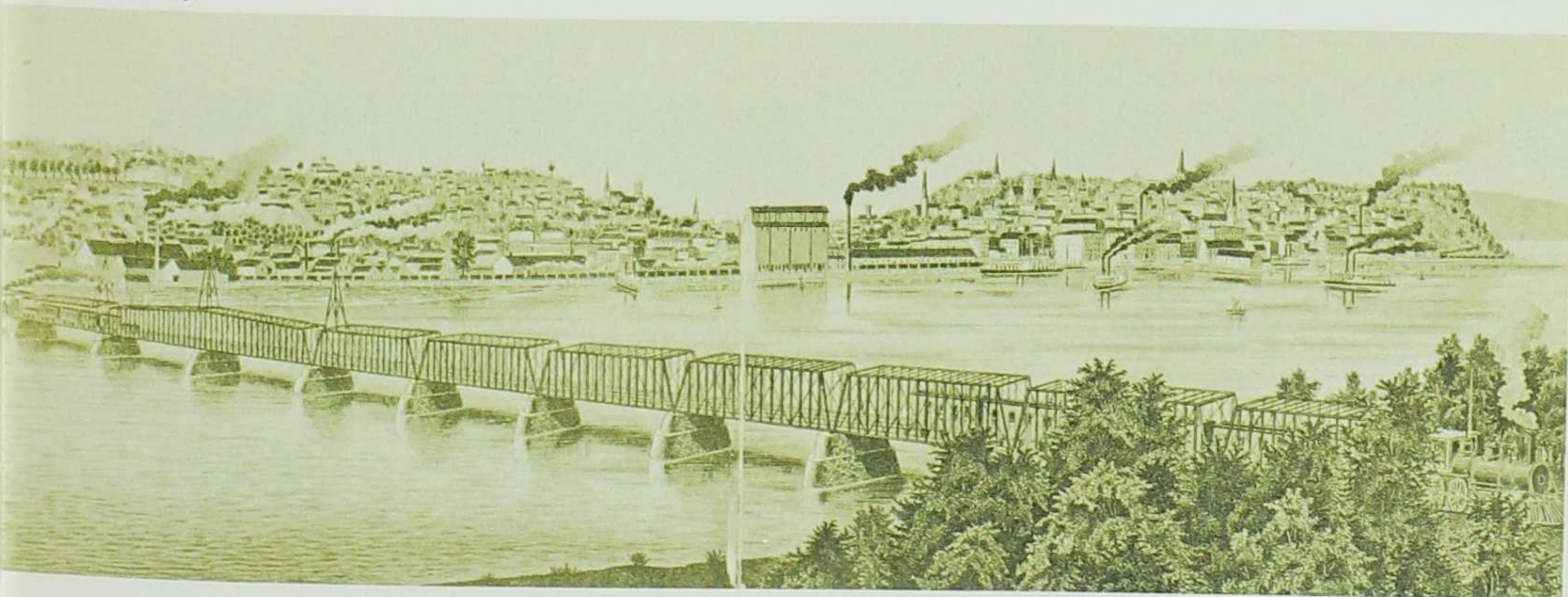




One of two views of Muscatine drawn by Phillipe Rondé in 1858 for Leslie's Illustrated (courtesy The Musser Public Library)



An early drawing of Dubuque by Alexander Simplot (courtesy Ham House Museum, Dubuque County Historical Society)



A photo-engraving of Burlington published by E.C. Gnahn in 1891 in souvenir-booklet form similar to Simplot's late 19th-century work

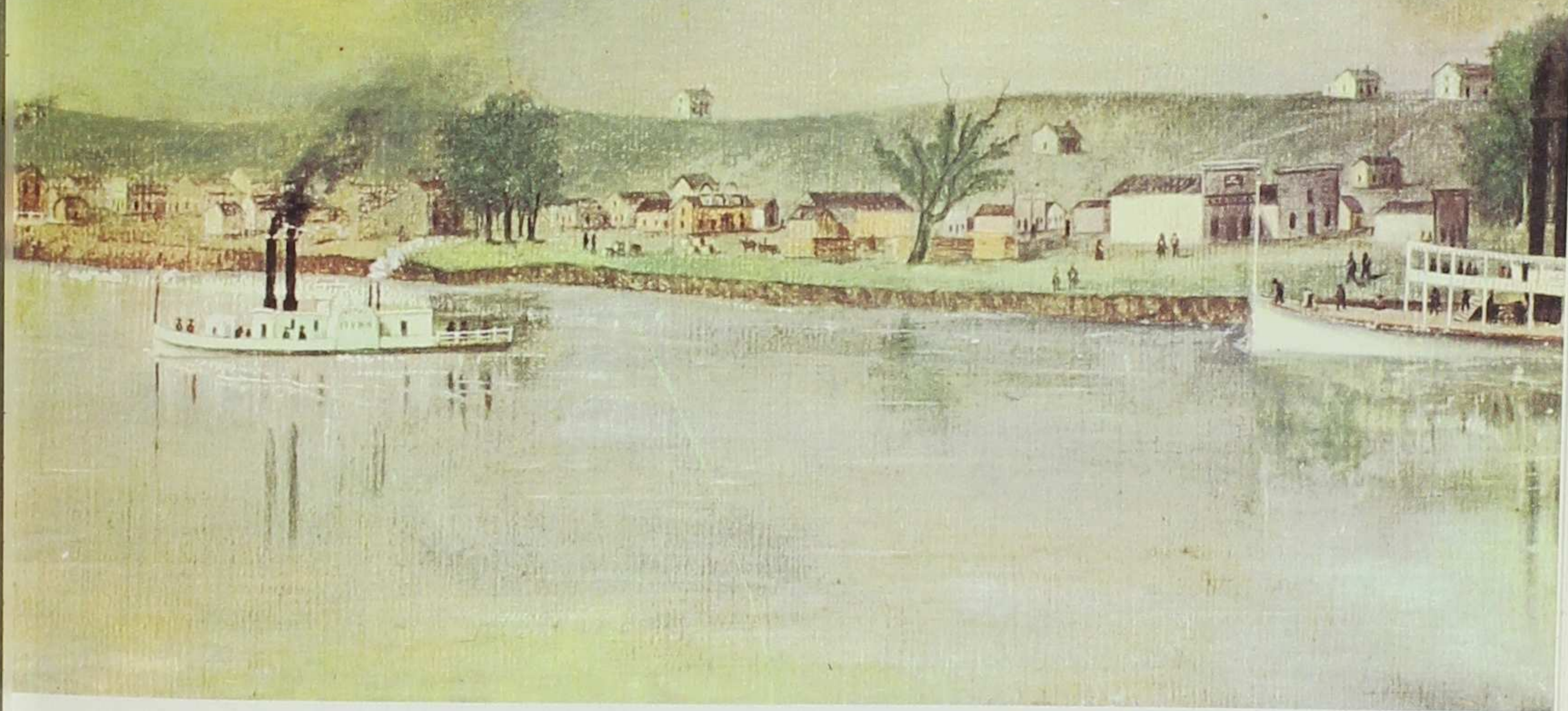
A print of Wm. Momberger's engraving (left) of the Upper Mississippi near Lansing, Iowa published by William Pate & Co., New York and L.A. Elliot & Co., Boston in 1869

George Simons lived in Council Bluffs from the 1850s through the 1890s. Little is known about his background and training, but he listed himself in city directories as a painter, a portrait painter, a stage-scenery painter, a gunsmith, and a locksmith. During his years in the area and his travels to the West Coast, he painted over 25 works and made dozens of pencil drawings. According to some reports, he produced a panoramic view of the Missouri River between St. Louis and Sioux City, as well as one of the gold-rush trail from Omaha to Denver. His pencil sketches are realistic and accurate (see page 143). His paintings, also precise, are valued by historians as representations of Council Bluffs and Sioux City predating any extant photographs. The painting here of Sioux City was done in 1856. (courtesy The Iowan Magazine)

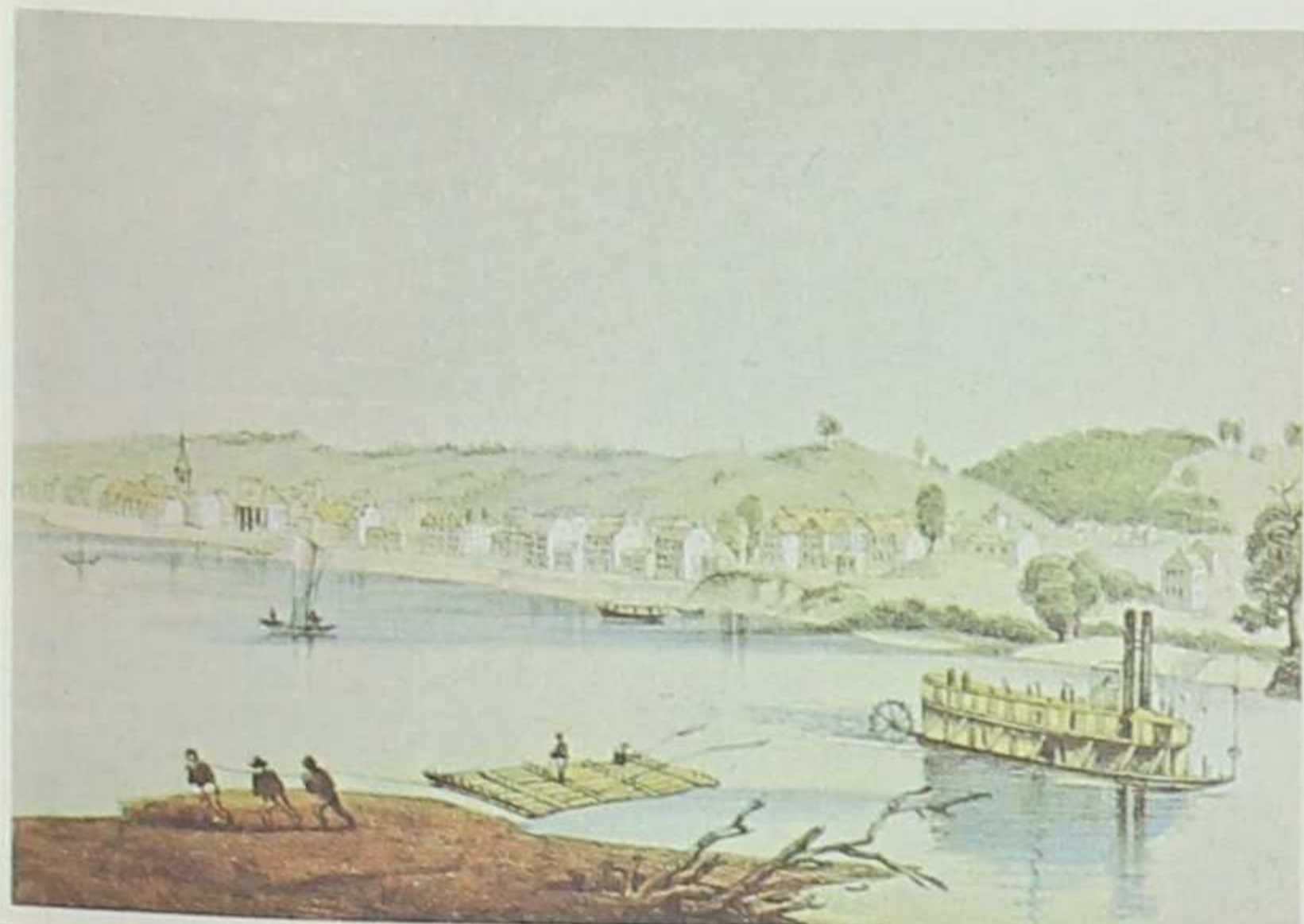
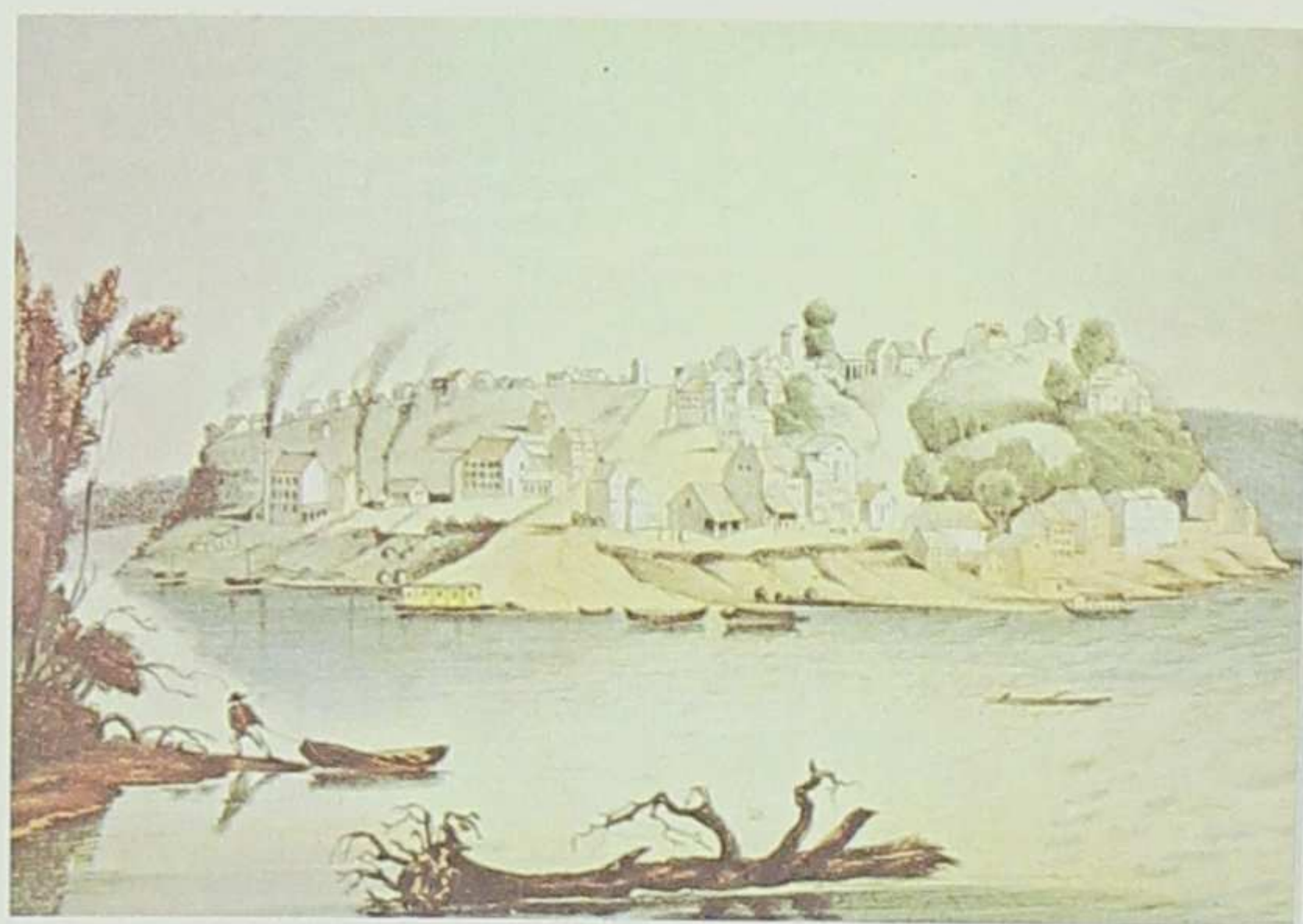


A commercial bird's-eye view of Muscatine in 1874

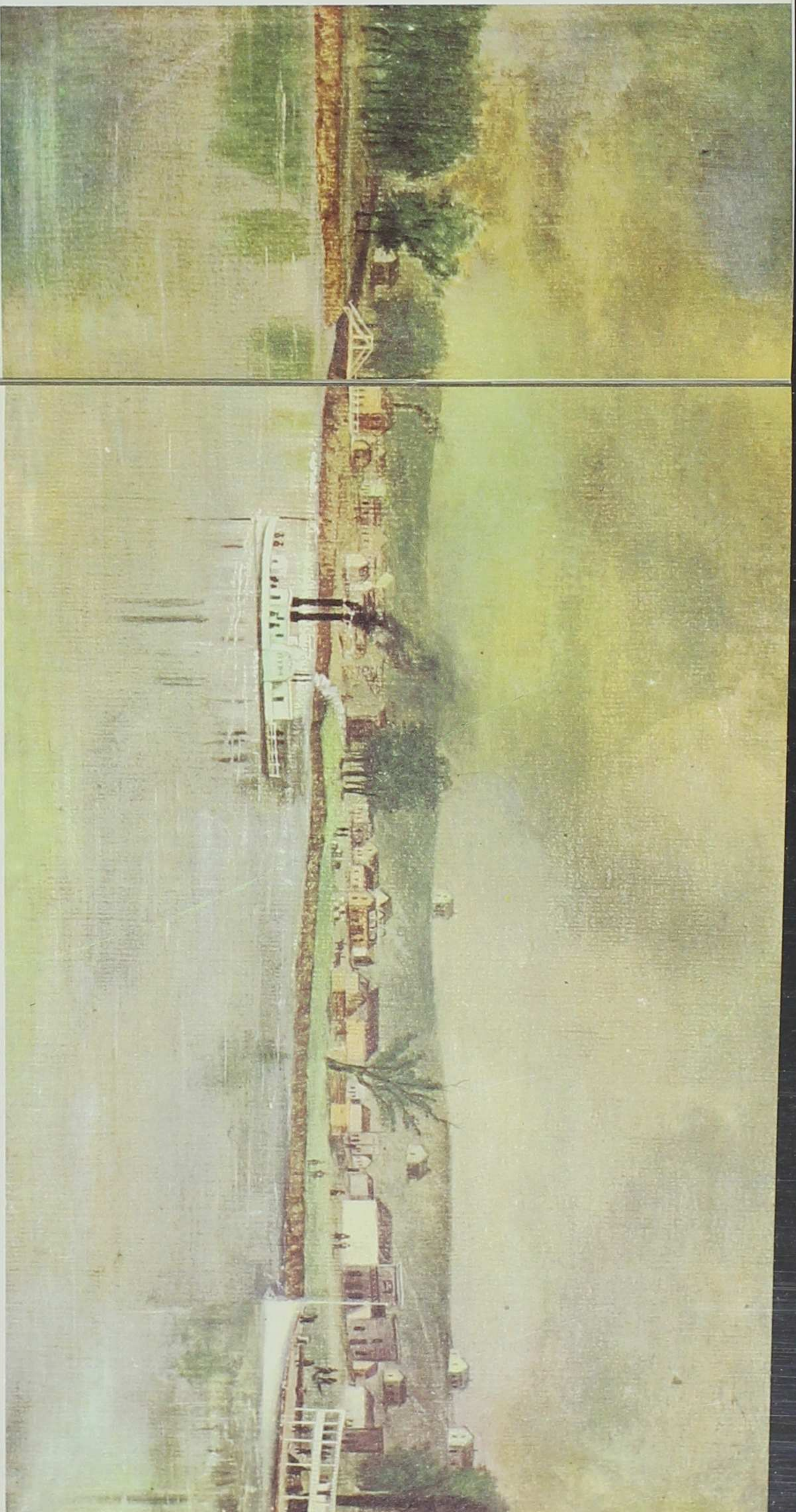




Two Iowa towns—Fort Madison (below) and Keokuk (right)—from the 1849 panoramic painting of the Mississippi Valley by Henry Lewis (courtesy Minnesota Historical Society)



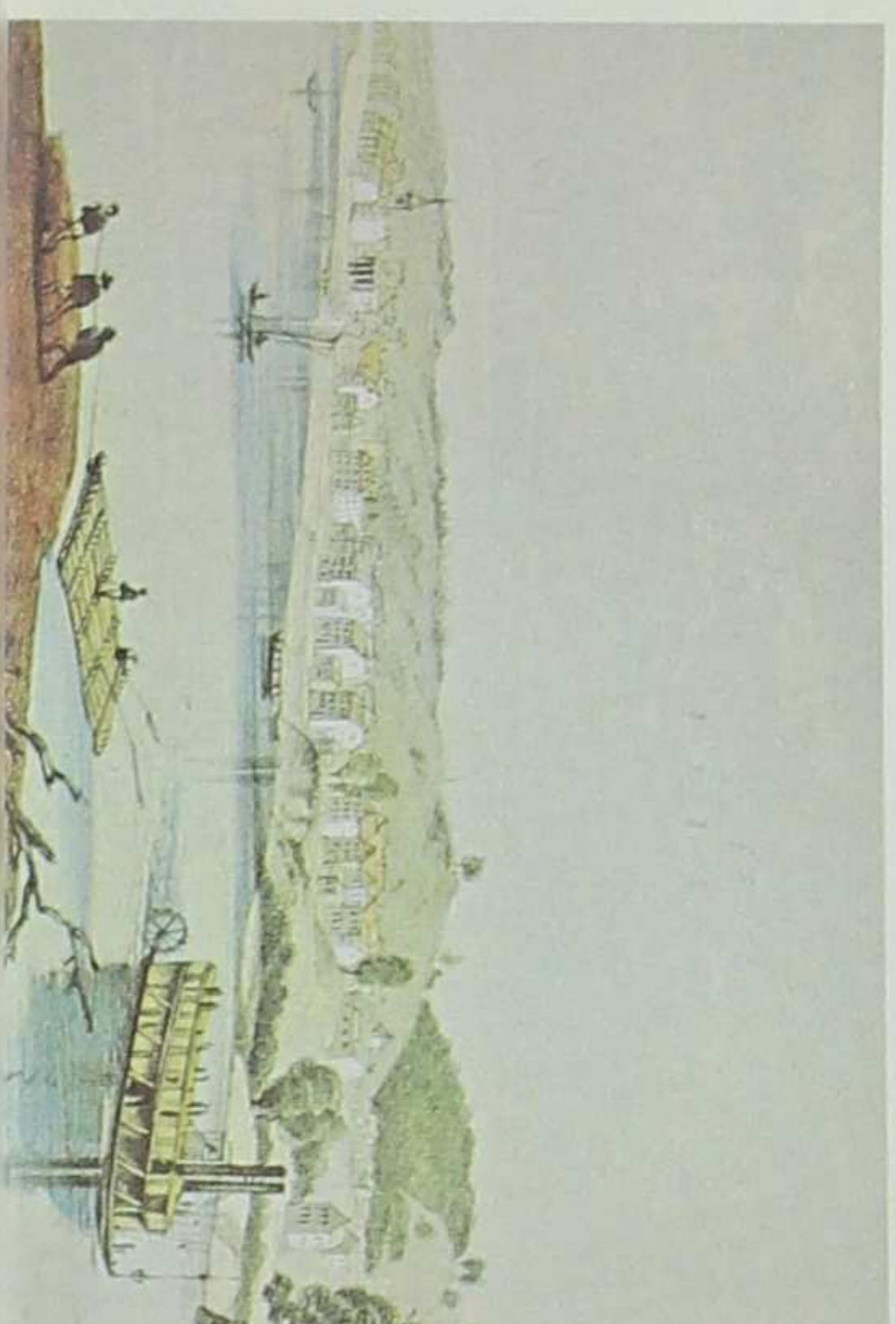
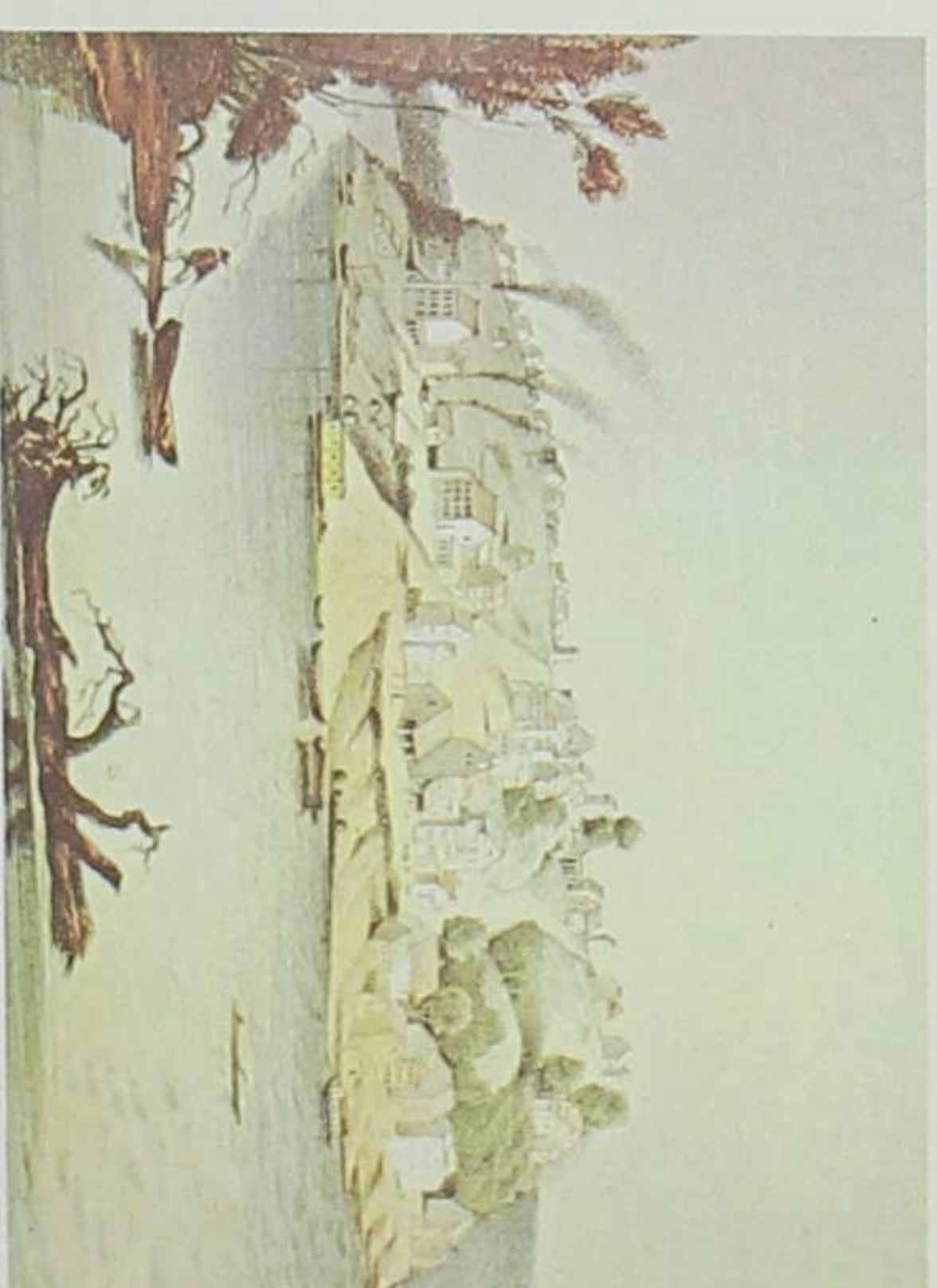
George Simons lived in Council Bluffs from the 1850s through the 1890s. Little is known about his background and training, but he listed himself in city directories as a painter, a portrait painter, a stage-scenery painter, a gunsmith, and a locksmith. During his years in the area and his travels to the West Coast, he painted over 25 works and made dozens of pencil drawings. According to some reports, he produced a panoramic view of the Missouri River between St. Louis and Sioux City, as well as one of the gold-rush trail from Omaha to Denver. His pencil sketches are realistic and accurate (see page 143). His paintings, also precise, are valued by historians as representations of Council Bluffs and Sioux City predating any extant photographs. The painting here of Sioux City was done in 1856. (courtesy The Iowa Magazine)

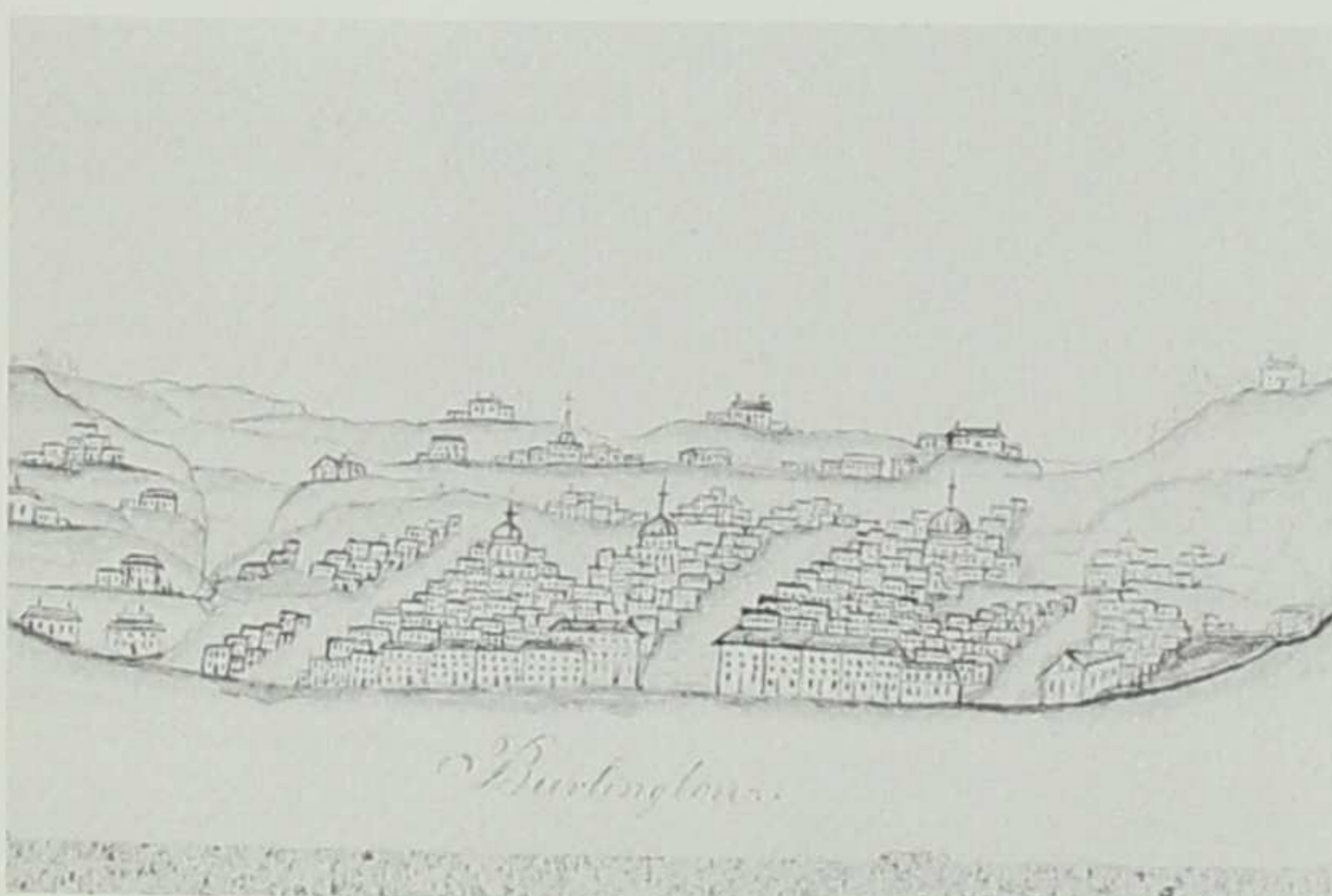
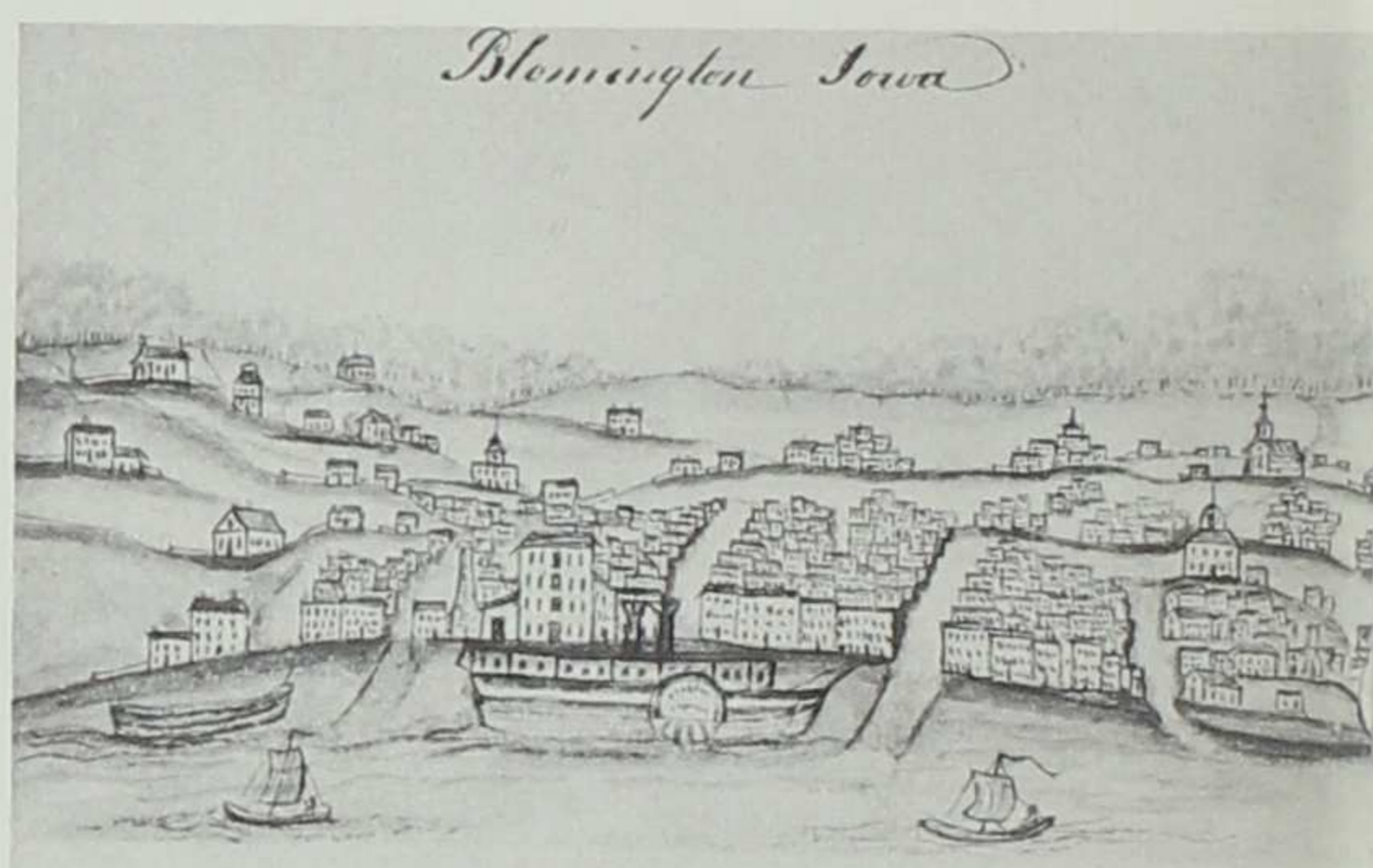
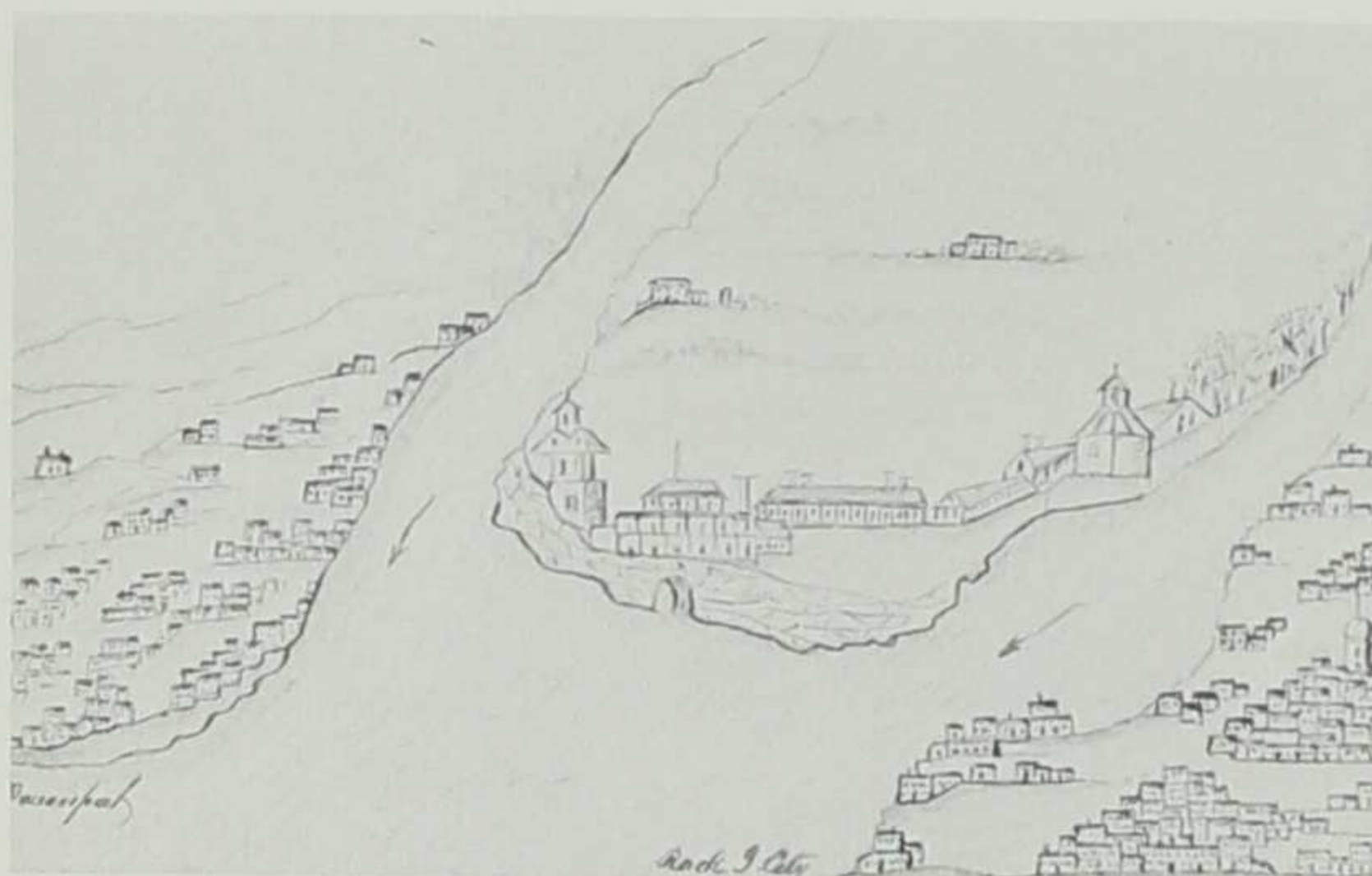


A commercial bird's-eye view of Muscatine in 1874

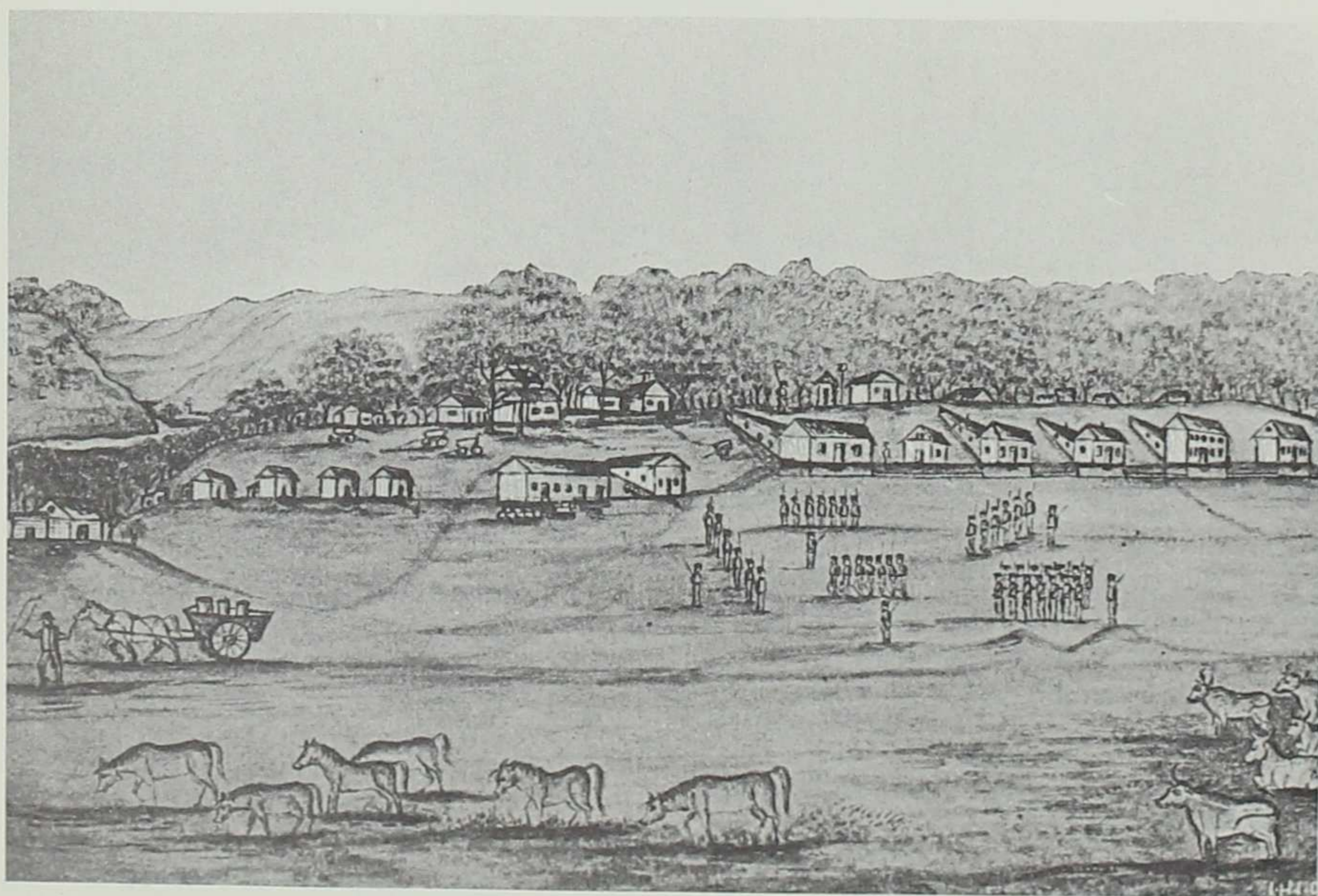


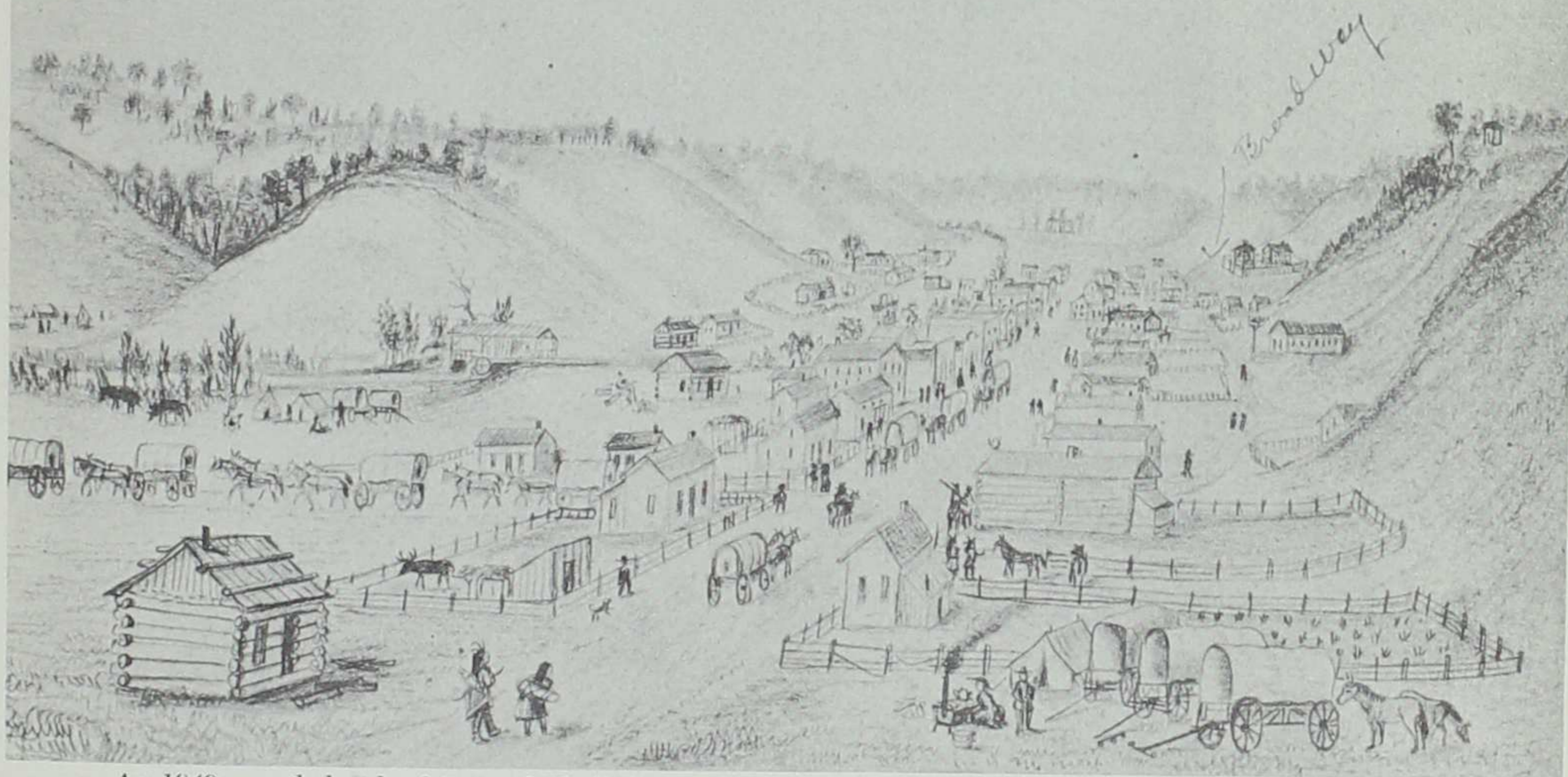
Two Iowa towns—Fort Madison (below) and Keokuk (right)—from the 1849 panoramic painting of the Mississippi Valley by Henry Lewis (courtesy Minnesota Historical Society)



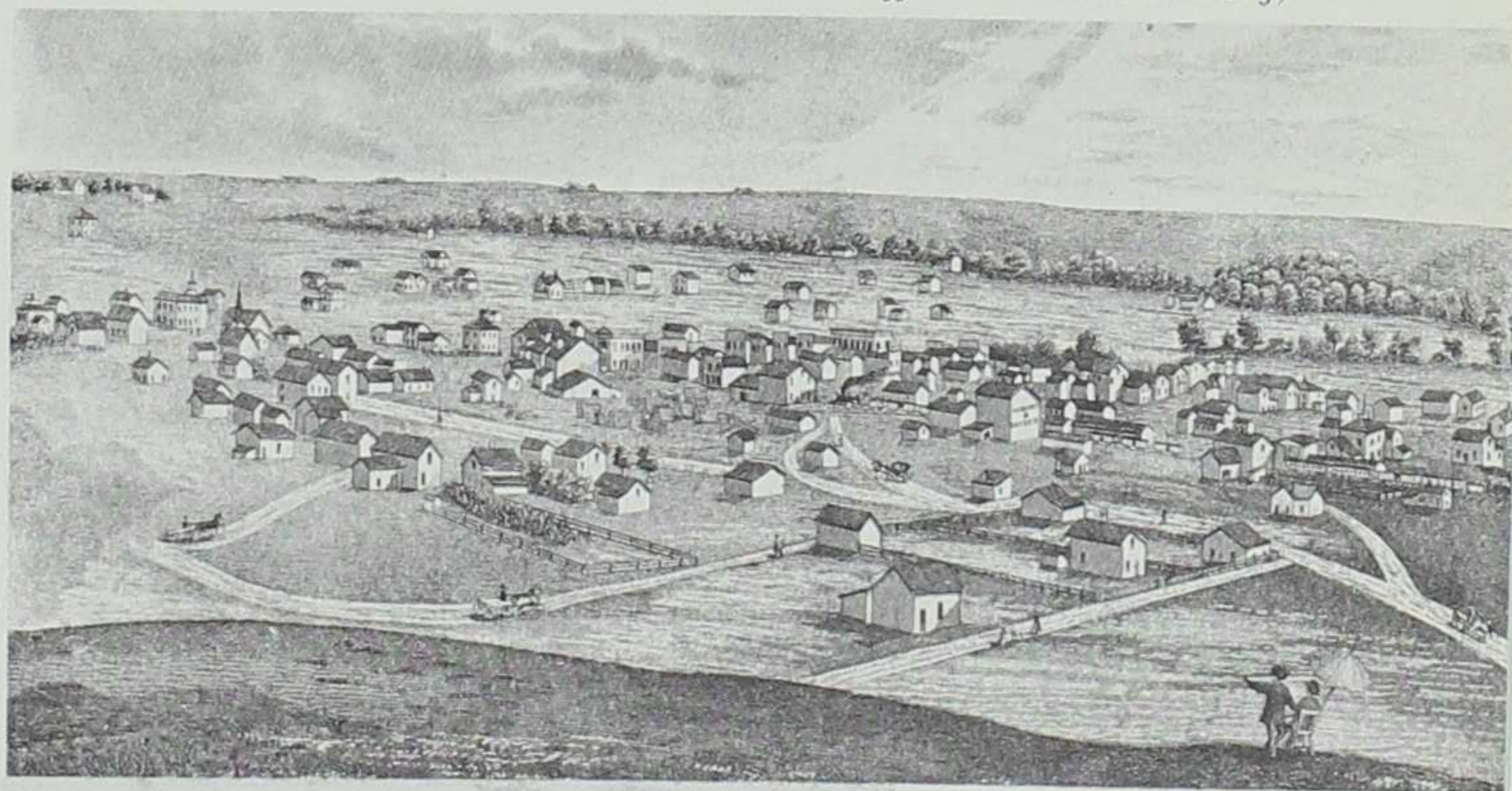


William Williams, creator of these views of Bloomington, Burlington, and Davenport, was not an artist. Most of his life was spent first in the military, then as a merchant and politician. Visiting Iowa in 1849, he kept a diary and sketched a number of illustrations on its pages. He also made a sketch of Fort Dodge in 1852 (below). He was the founder of that town, its first mayor, and its leading citizen till his death in 1874. Although done by an amateur, from an historical perspective these sketches compare favorably with other early views of Iowa towns. It is interesting to compare Williams' Fort Dodge sketch with that of B.R.T. Davis opposite it (below) done in 1869. Davis' romanticism is a far cry from Williams' spare and utilitarian sketch. (courtesy Division of Historical Museum and Archives)

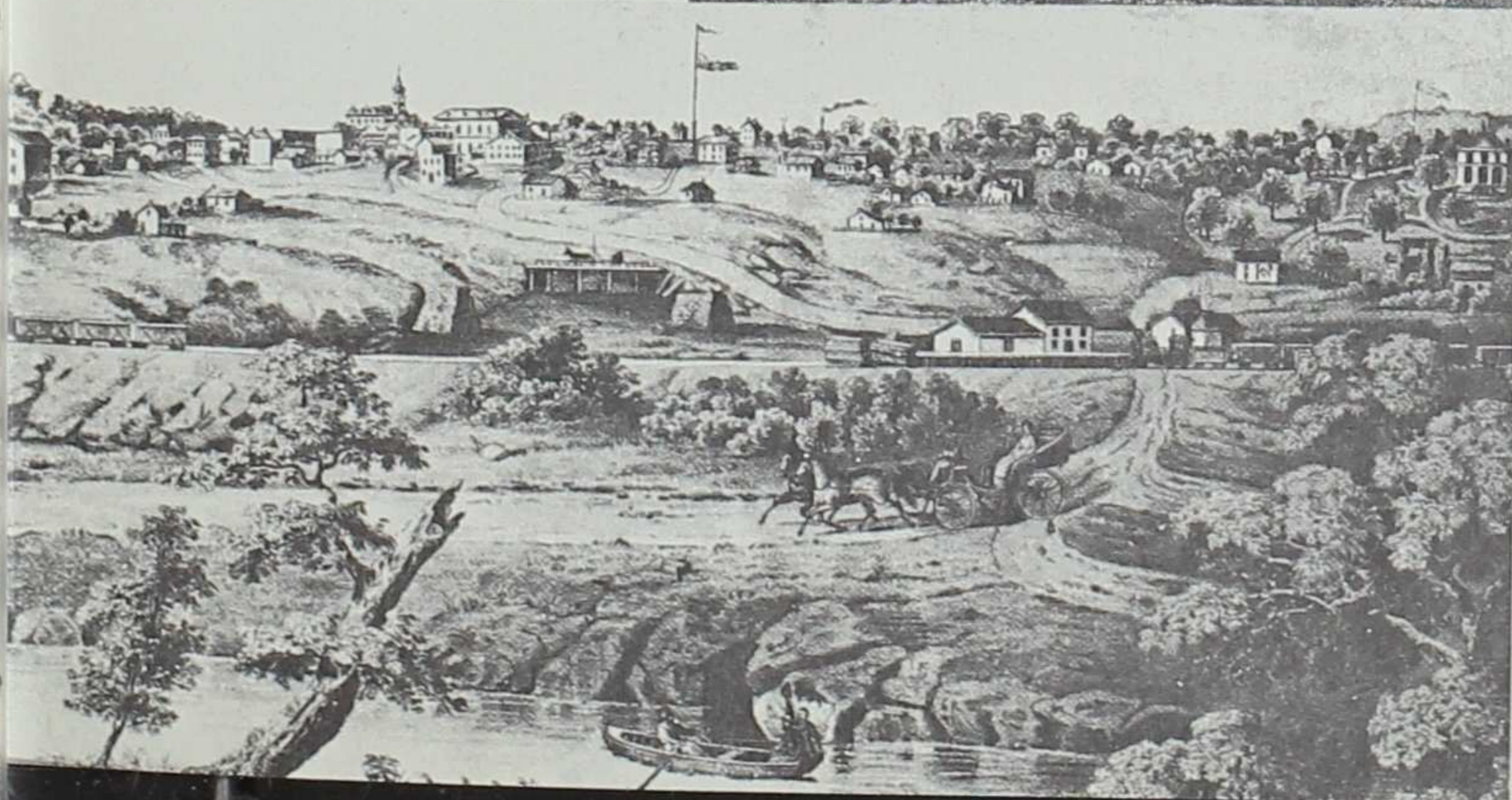




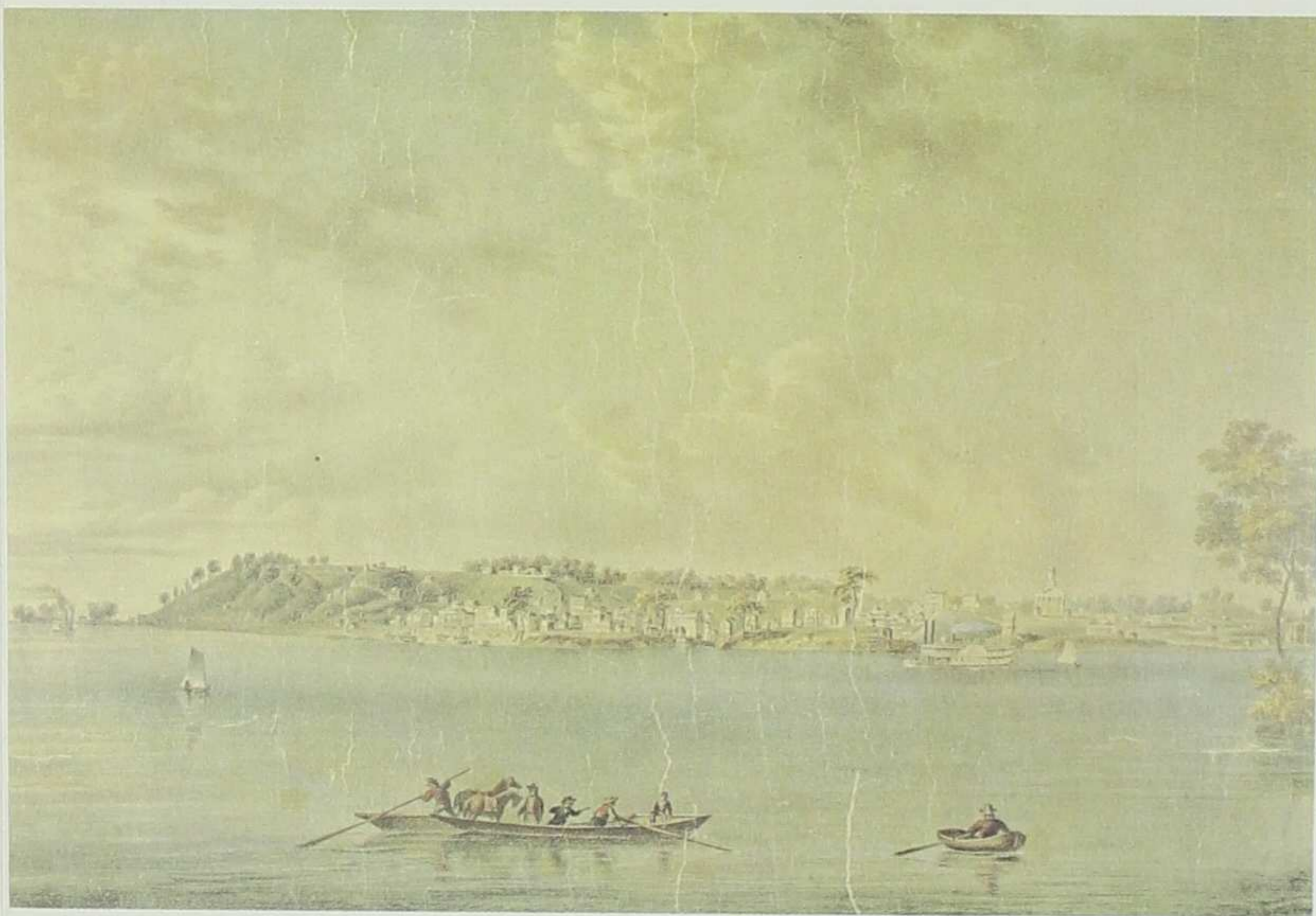
An 1849 pencil sketch of Council Bluffs by George Simons (courtesy Council Bluffs Free Public Library)



Cherokee (from Andreas Atlas)

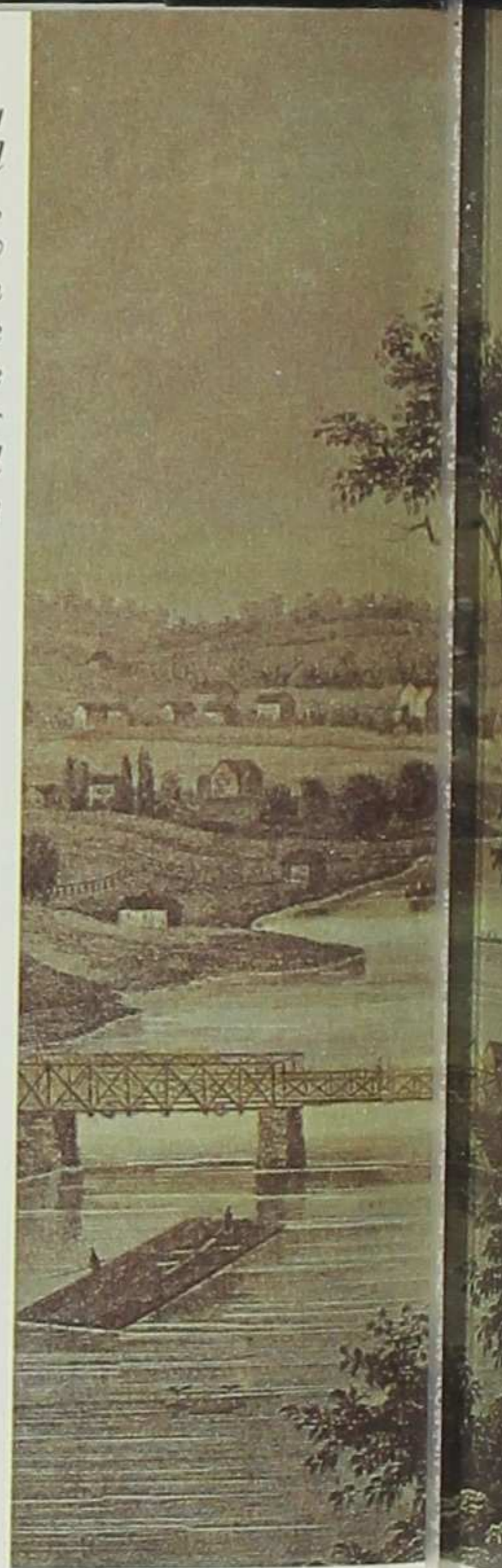


A hand-colored lithograph of Dubuque published by Herrmann J. Meyer in New York. It resembles several others printed in the book *The United States Illustrated*, edited by Charles A. Dana in 1855. The Davenport view by L.C. Turner and the Burlington view by J.M. Peck can both be seen (along with another view of Dubuque) in the March/April 1978 issue of *The Palimpsest*. This example is number DCCLXXIV, presumably because it is number 774 in a series. All these views are similar in style and reminiscent of the "Hudson River School." (courtesy Wayne Norman)



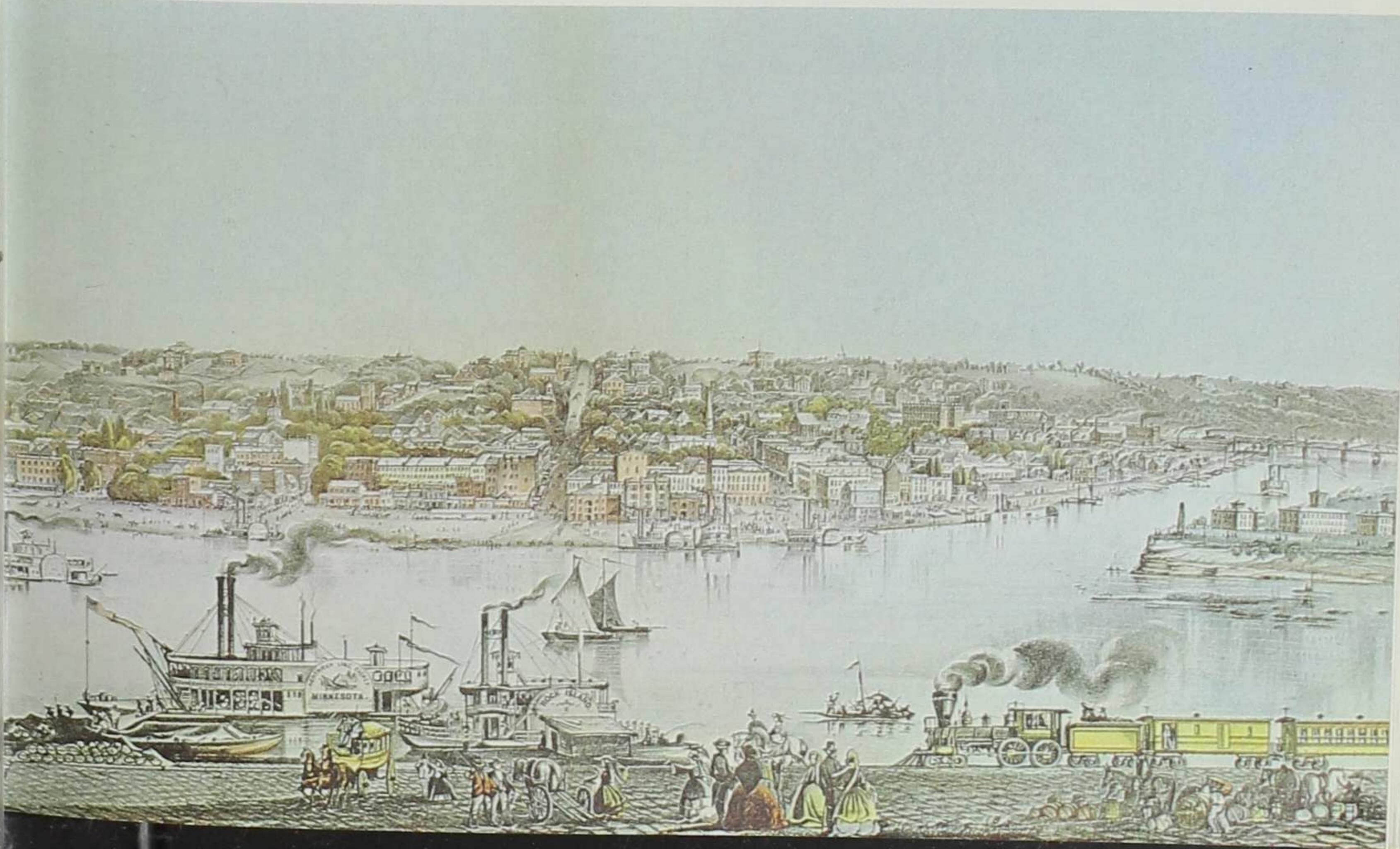
A painting of Muscatine in 1845 by J.C. Wild (courtesy Musser Public Library)

A painting of Fort Armstrong in 1845 by J.C. Wild (courtesy Putnam Museum)





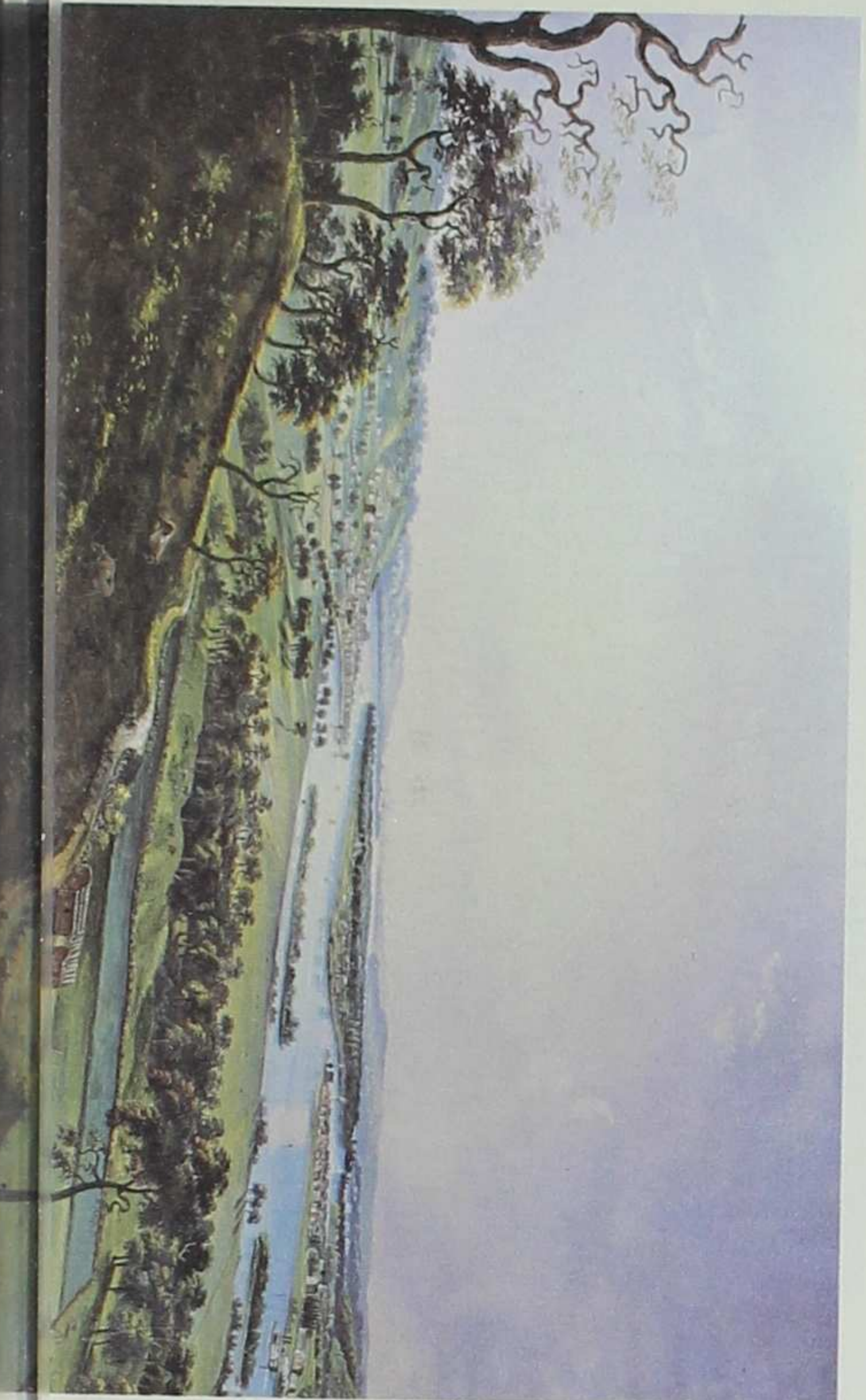
Davenport in 1866 by A. Hageboeck (courtesy Putnam Museum)



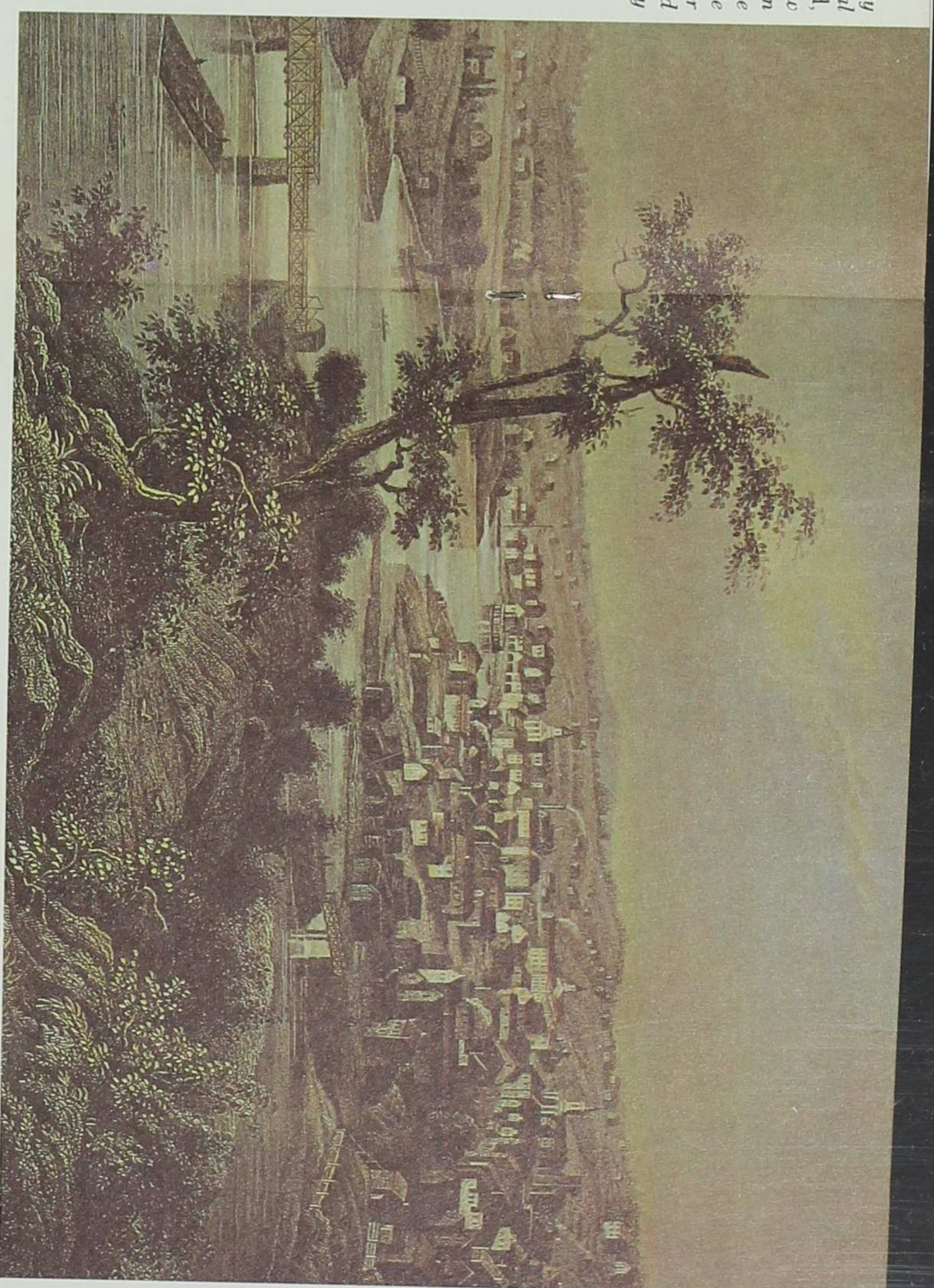
A hand-colored lithograph of Dubuque published by Hermann J. Meyer in New York. It resembles several others printed in the book *The United States Illustrated*, edited by Charles A. Dana in 1855. The Davenport view by L. C. Turner and the Burlington view by J. M. Peck can both be seen (along with another view of Dubuque) in the March/April 1978 issue of *The Palimpsest*. This example is number DGCCLXXIV, presumably because it is number 774 in a series. All these views are similar in style and reminiscent of the "Hudson River School." (courtesy Wayne Norman)



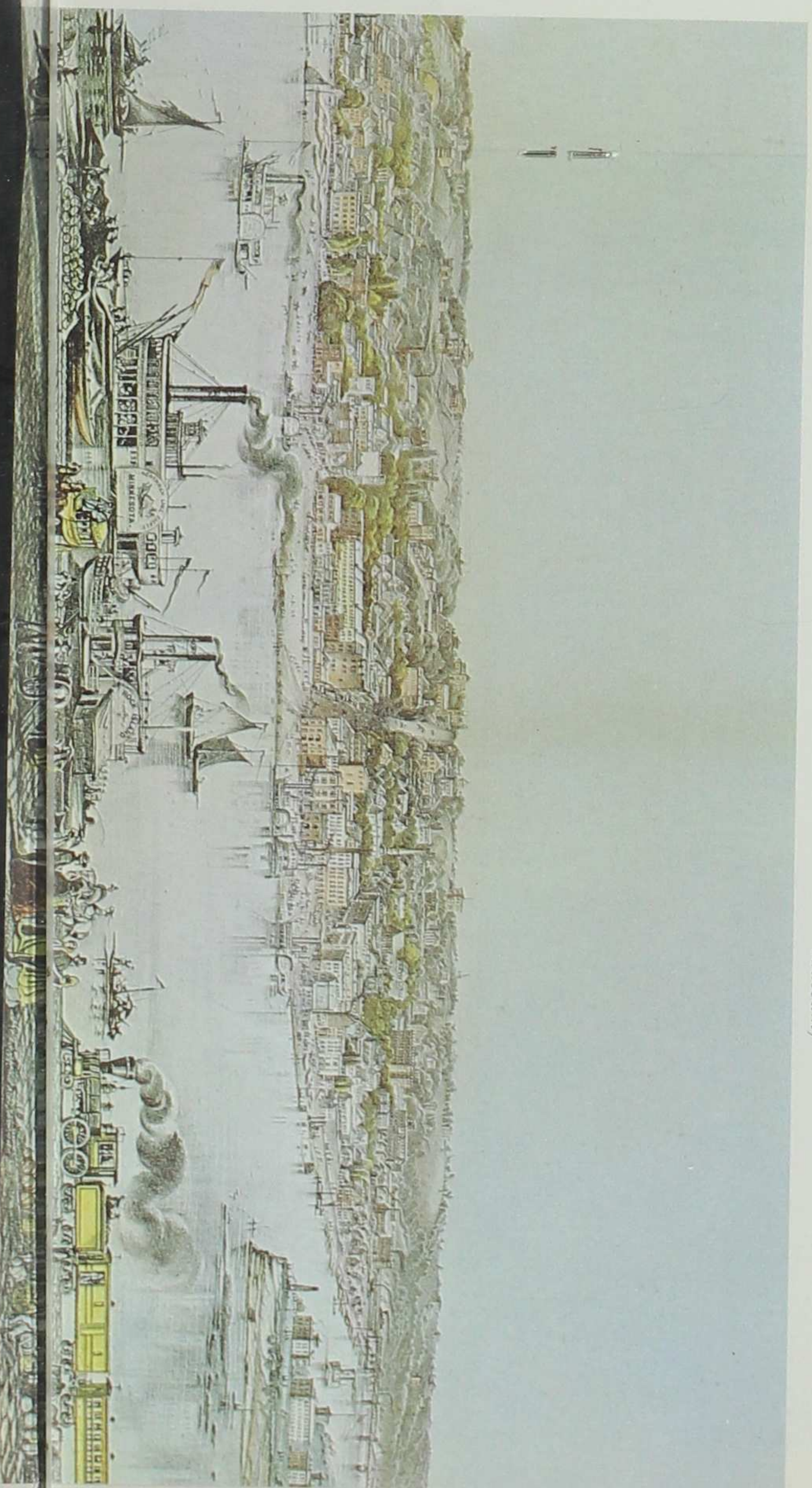
A painting of Muscatine in 1845 by J. C. Wild (courtesy Musser Public Library)

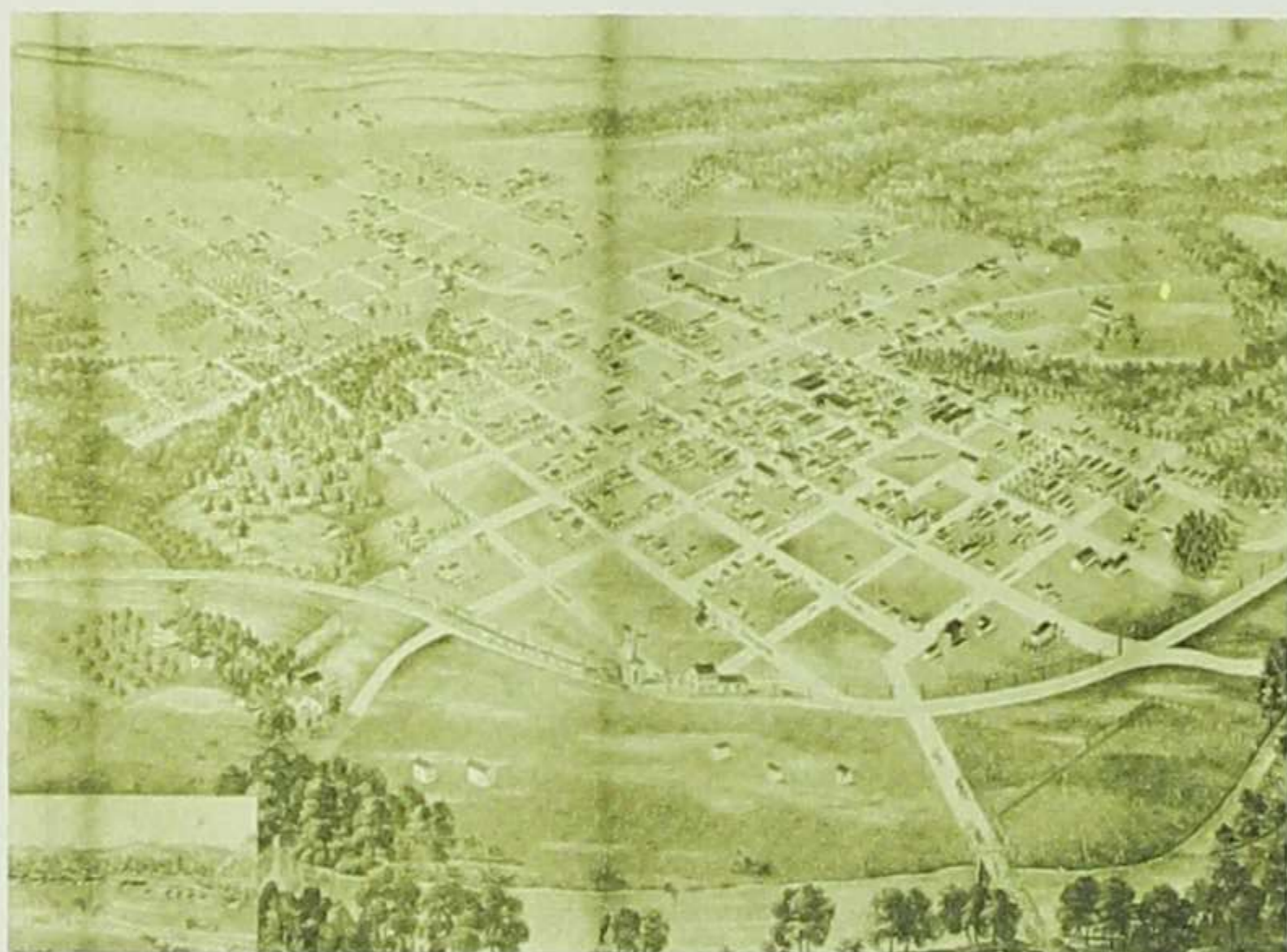


A painting of Fort Armstrong in 1845 by J. C. Wild (courtesy Putnam Museum)

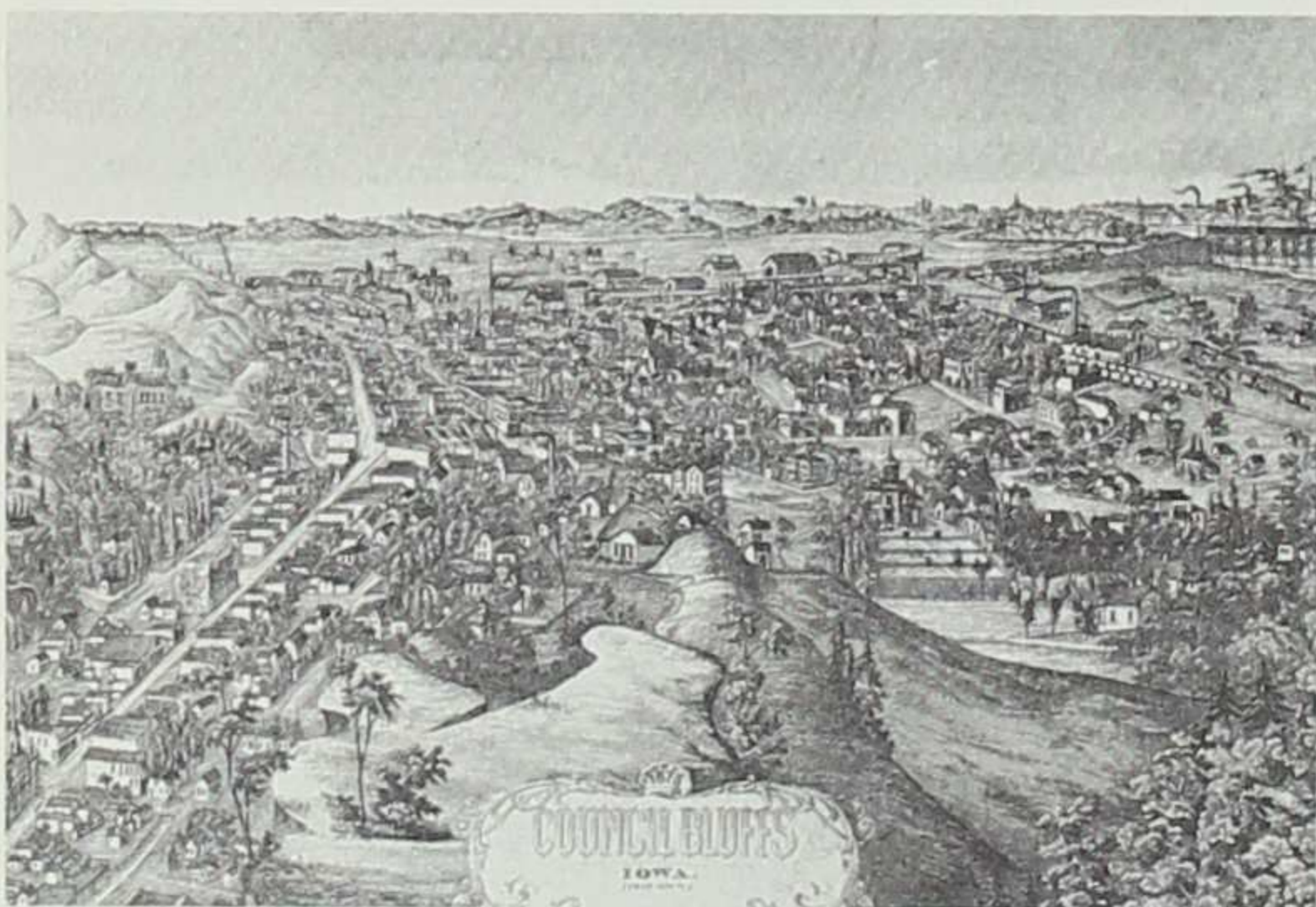


Davenport in 1866 by A. Hageboeck (courtesy Putnam Museum)

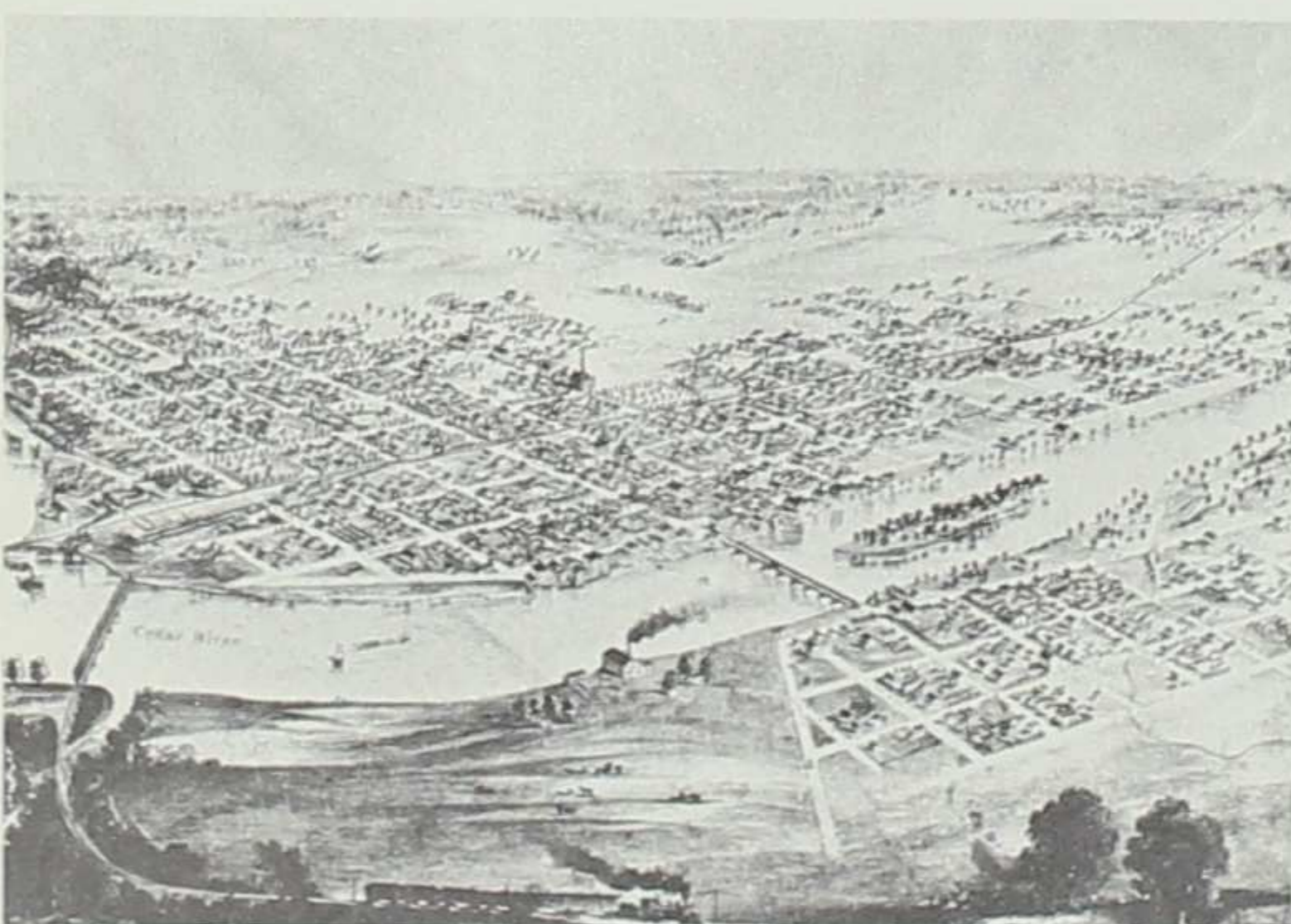




A commercial bird's-eye view of Fort Dodge (courtesy Fort Museum)



A commercial bird's-eye view of Council Bluffs (from Andreas Atlas)



A commercial bird's-eye view of Cedar Rapids (courtesy John Ely)



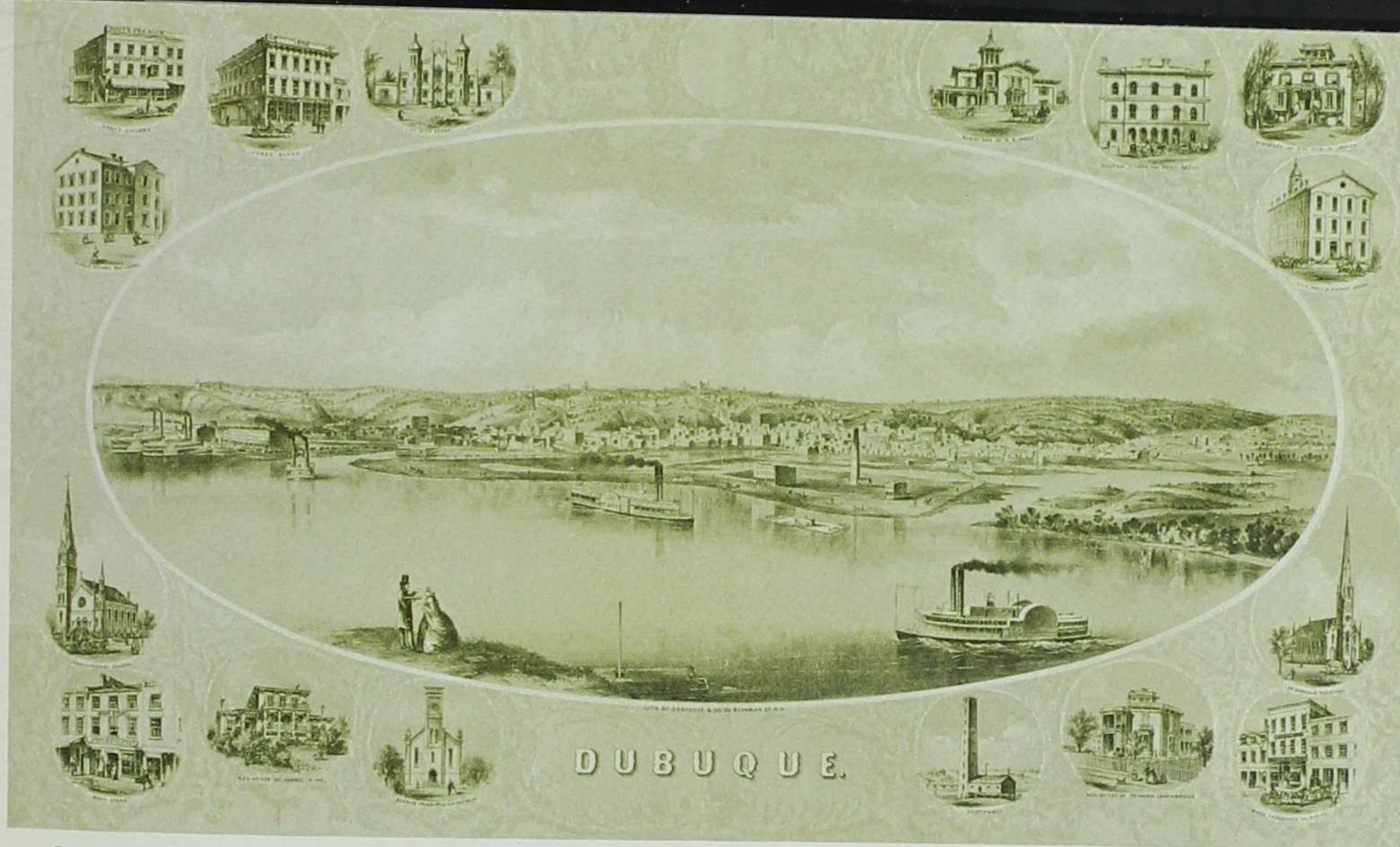
A commercial bird's-eye view of the vanished Lyons (courtesy Library of Congress)

Note On Sources

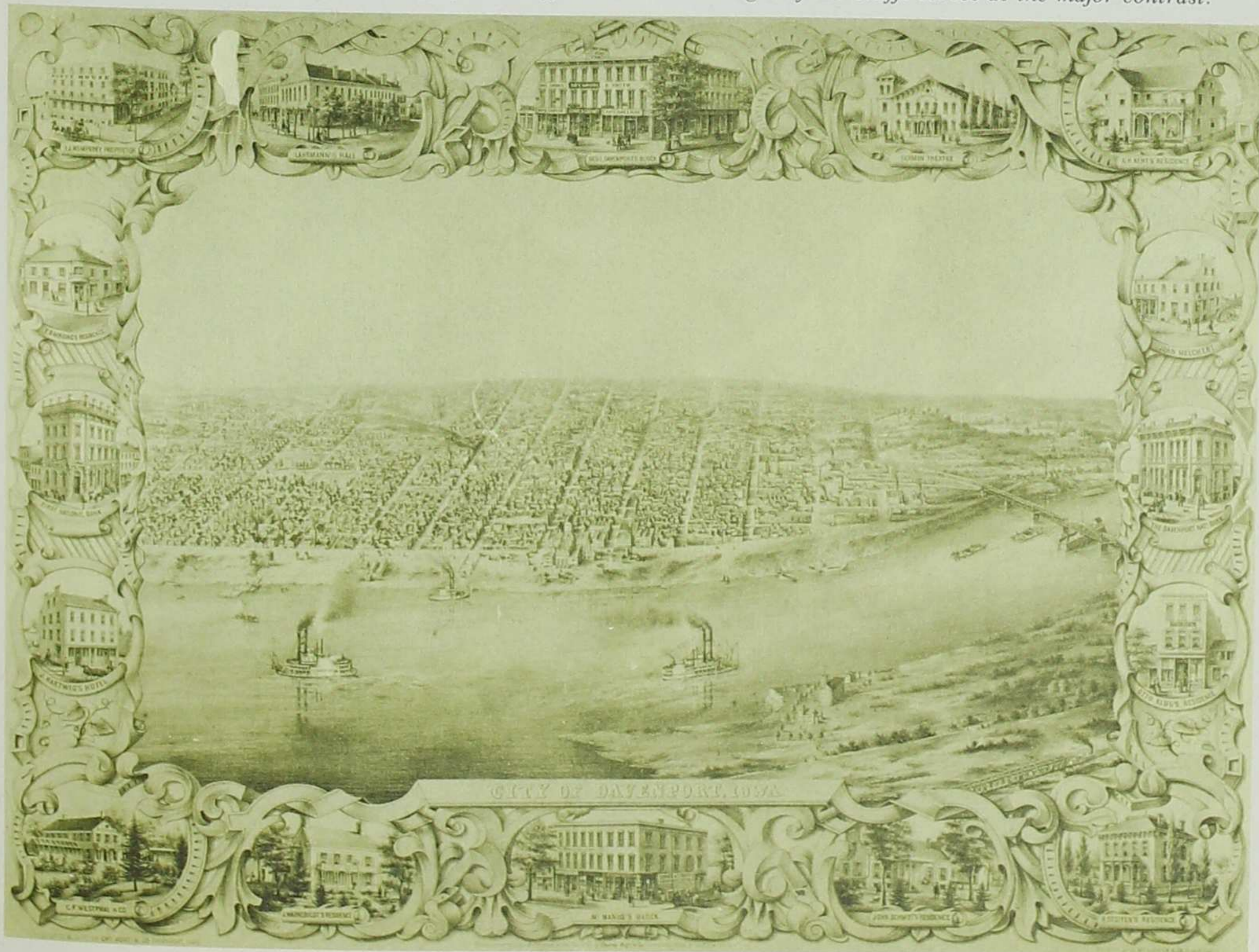
Most of the source materials about panoramic and bird's-eye views of towns focus on specific artists. Among the works of a general nature helpful in the research for this article were Larry Freeman, *Historical Prints of American Cities* (Watkins Glen, New York: Century House, 1952); John R. Hebert (comp.), *Panoramic Maps of Anglo-American Cities* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1974); *Historic City Plans and Views* (Ithaca, New York: Historic Urban Plans, 1975); John Francis McDermott, *The Lost Panoramas of the Mississippi* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958); *Mississippi Panorama* (St. Louis, Missouri: City Art Museum, 1949); and Perry T. Rathbone (ed.), *Westward the Way* (St. Louis, Missouri: City Art Museum, 1954). Two works about specific artists are Bertha L. Heilbron (ed.), *Making a Motion Picture in 1848* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Minnesota Historical Society, 1936); and John Francis McDermott, *Seth Eastman's Mississippi—A Lost Portfolio Recovered* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1973). A.T. Andreas, Henry Lewis, and J.C. Wild published books in the 19th century containing reproductions of their paintings and drawings. The work of William Williams, George Simons, J.C. Wild, and other 19th-century artists has also been published, though in periodical form. The work of Henry Lewis has been described in a variety of magazine articles. The best source of materials has been the original paintings, lithographs, and drawings found at the Putnam Museum, Davenport; the Ham House Museum of the Dubuque County Historical Society, Dubuque; the Cedar Falls Historical Society Museum, Cedar Falls; the Fort Museum, Fort Dodge; the Musser Public Library, Muscatine; the Free Public Library, Council Bluffs; the Sioux City Public Museum, Sioux City; the Linn County Heritage Society Heritage Room, Cedar Rapids Public Library; and materials held in private collections of John Ely of Cedar Rapids and Wayne Norman of Dubuque. A complete bibliography is available at the Division of the State Historical Society in Iowa City.



A commercial bird's-eye view of Cedar Falls (courtesy The Cedar Falls Historical Society Museum)



Compare this view of Dubuque by W.J. Gilbert in 1859 with Wild's 1855 view on the outside cover of this issue for an interesting difference in the treatment of topography. Gilbert saw the river as the dominant feature, while the actual representation of the town and its buildings are similar. Both include steamboats, numerous lumber mills, and a town filling the bottom land and creeping up the bluffs. The relative height of the bluffs serves as the major contrast.



(courtesy Putnam Museum)