# The PALIMPSEST

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# The PALIMPSEST



Peter T. Harstad, Director

VOLUME 60 NUMBER 2 MARCH/APRIL 1979

Charles Phillips, Editor

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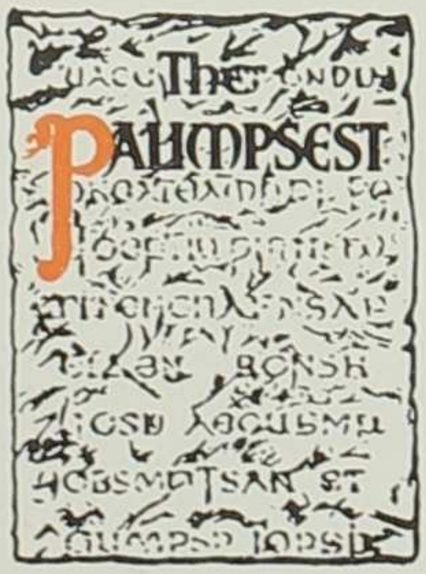
Cover: *Susan Thompson Good's watercolor of a typical farmhouse kitchen, 1883-98. For a closer look at farmhouse interiors see page 34.*




## *The Meaning of the Palimpsest*

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete, and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.


*Parlor, 1883-98*

# Interior Life
## An Iowa Farmhouse in the Late-1800's

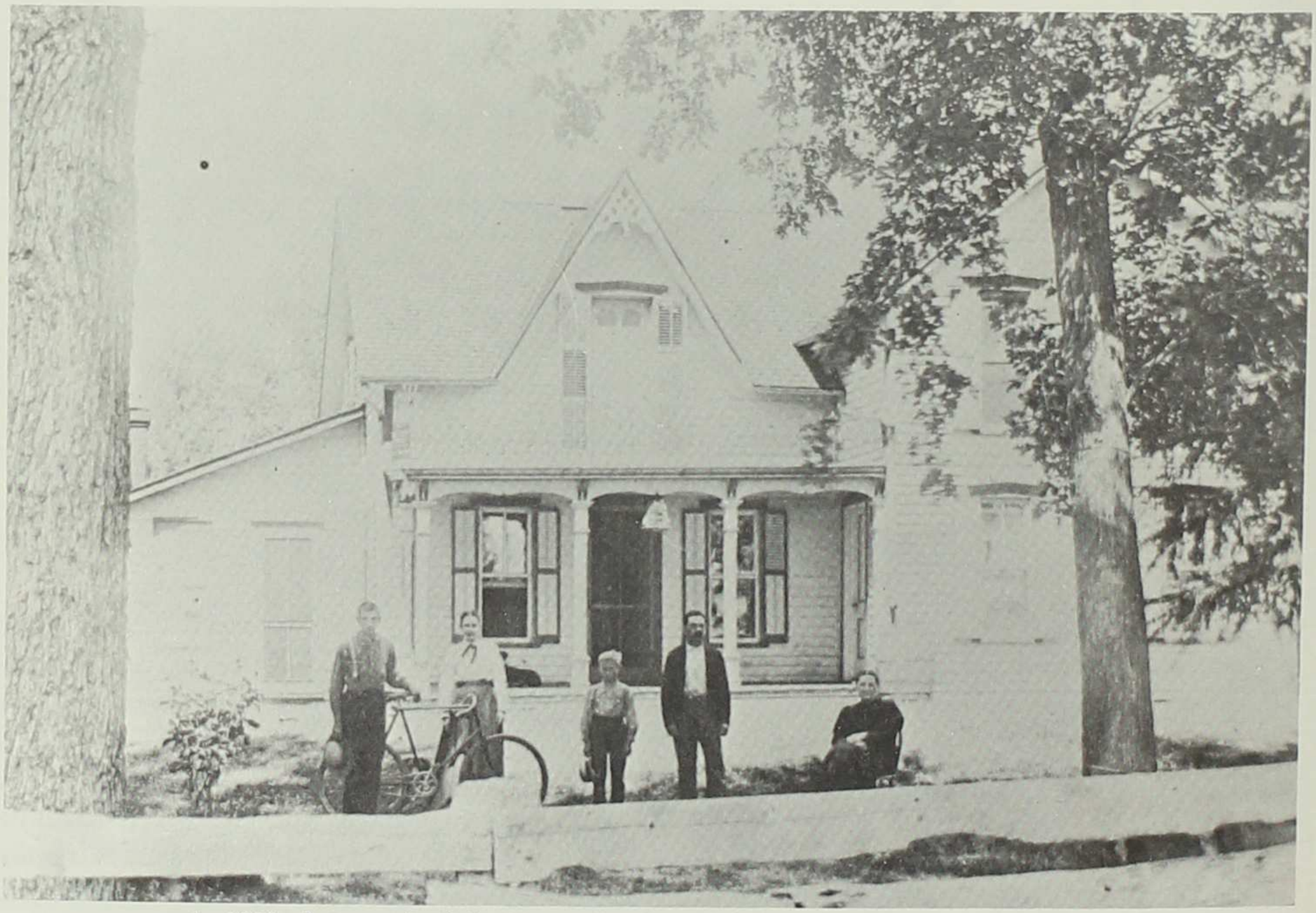
text and illustration
by
Susan Thompson Good

Reconstructing the history of an old Iowa farmhouse is like putting together a big jigsaw puzzle. And the first step is finding the pieces. You search through dusty county records, abstracts, and wills to find some of them. If you are lucky, you might be able to locate and talk to persons who lived in or visited the house. In magazines, builder's guides, and interior design books you find still more of the puzzle's pieces, and when these are added to the house as it stands today, the puzzle is finished. It is a picture of the house a typical Iowa farm family called home in the late 1800s.

The old farmhouse I moved into, in Pilot Mound Township, Boone County, was just such a puzzle. As I became familiar with the neighborhood, noting houses similar to mine, I began to look for the pieces and put them together. I found the first in the *History of Boone County — 1800:* Edward and Sarah Meyers built the house soon after the Civil War. In an 1898 photograph the Meyers family stands in front of their home. (Edward was nearly 70 then, and he died the next year.) Here I had my first glimpse of how the house looked almost a century ago. I interviewed Mrs. Grace Davis, great-granddaughter of Edward and Sarah Meyers, who remembered and talked about the house and some of its furnishings. Former occupants Emma Lind and Herschel and Mildred Davis told me more. As the hours spent in libraries, the county courthouse, and neighboring post-Civil War homes accumulated, I began to feel close to Sarah and Edward Meyers, as if they were friends long absent. They had spent so many years of their lives in my house.

Born in Pennsylvania in 1828, Edward Meyers worked as a blacksmith and an ax-maker until he moved to Illinois. There he married Sarah Erdman and became a farmer and a father. He fought in the Civil War as an Illinois infantryman in 1865. After the war ended, Meyers traveled from Illinois to Iowa by covered wagon, where he selected the southeast corner of a good Iowa farm on which to build his house. About a mile north of the house-site was what the early settlers assumed to be an Indian burial mound; hence the name of the township — Pilot Mound — established in 1858.

Meyers probably started building his house when he arrived in Iowa, in 1866 or the following year. Although the land was not deeded to him until 1873, as a homesteader he was required to live on his claim and improve or build



*An 1898 photograph of the Meyers family and farmhouse (courtesy of the author)*

on it in order to obtain title. Sarah likely accompanied Edward to Iowa since she became pregnant with their fourth child near the end of 1866. If she and the three children did not come with him in the covered wagon, they probably arrived shortly thereafter, and thus the building of the first section of the old farmhouse was spurred on by the coming winter.

The original structure was probably quite small, but within ten to 15 years, two additions were made. Certain architectural details substantiate this speculation. Separate cellars are located under the addition and the original structure. The common wall between the two cellars still has a glass window, indicating that it was once an outside wall. Upstairs in the addition the floor level and the ceiling height are different than in the original part. The kitchen wing probably started as a dirt-floor lean-to for firewood. Expanding over the years, the house changed symmetry and mass, responding to the family's needs and means.

The way the Meyers house grew was typical of post-Civil War house construction in Pilot Mound. The 1896 township plat marks 105 dwellings, of which 27 are still standing. Stylistic comparisons suggest that 21 of those standing were built during the Civil War or within ten years after. Families often built houses one-and-a-half stories high rather than two, because they retained heat better in the winter, and because the lower walls were less expensive. Such a house was well suited to a farmer's income, skills, and needs. It is difficult to find

the pure form of any one architectural style in these farmhouses. What you find are adaptations of a number of styles.

As builder's guide books such as Andrew Jackson Downing's *Architecture of Country Houses* reached the rural population, the houses described sprang up across the Iowa countryside. The introduction of balloon-frame construction meant greater speed and economy and fewer demands on a set building form. Balloon-frame building used light-dimension lumber nailed together, as opposed to the mortise-and-tenon and pegged connections of earlier buildings. Builders took lumber for their clapboard homes from woods native to the homestead. The beams, joists, and studs of the Meyers house are walnut and hard elm, and one staircase is made of solid walnut. Small rocks, brick and mortar, and boulders as large as a yard in diameter comprise the foundation.

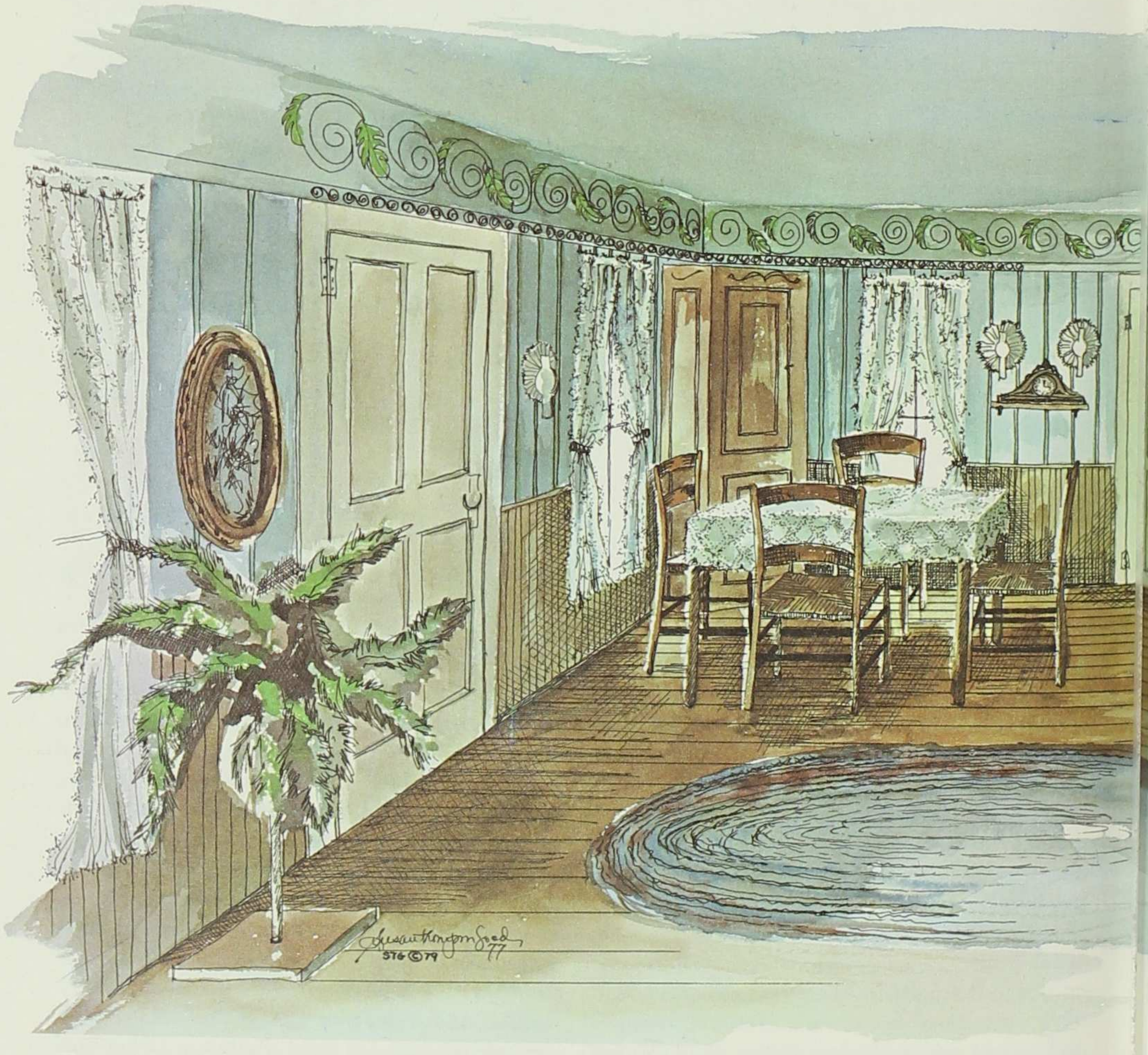
Popular revival styles spread rapidly — and were adapted to the means and needs of the population. The steeply-pitched gable intercepting the roof plane on the front facade, for example, shows the influence of the American Gothic Revival style on eight of the post-Civil War houses in the township, including the Meyers house. Gables on two other houses are less steeply-pitched, perhaps an indication that the style was fading out by the time they were built.

These steep gables accentuated a door, window, or set of windows. Window size and placement were similar in the Pilot Mound homes, with sash windows of four panes, like those in the Meyers house, the most common. But the earliest sections on some houses often had eight- or even 12-paned windows, probably because at the time smaller pieces of glass were cheaper and easier to get. Home builders disturbed the symmetrical placement of windows when they built a new wing or added more windows. The exterior shutters common to 19th-century rural homes were both ornamental and functional.

The Iowa climate played a big role in determining how the builders oriented their houses. Informal or utility entrances always faced south or east. On the Meyers house, utility entrances off the kitchen wing opened to the south and the north, the south providing a warmer approach to the winter outside, but the north providing immediate access to farm buildings. The front of the house faced south, with two formal entrances leading into the dining room and the parlor.

Porches served important functional and social purposes for the post-Civil War dwellings. Most of the house plans followed an "L" or "T" shape, with the porch located at the leg of the "L" or "T." Several houses had two porches. As soon as the farmer met basic needs, the family sought to express its interest in "styles." Family members chose ornamental millwork or gingerbread from the catalogs, and added them — perhaps in several stages as time and money permitted. They generally added most of their ornamentation, like turnings and scrollwork, to the porch. The iron railings around the edge of a porch roof, like those on the Meyers home, may have served both functional and aesthetic purposes, since mattresses and other bedding were often aired on the porch roof. By the late 1800s the typical farmhouse, beginning as a one-and-a-half story, four-room home, had grown to include a one-story kitchen wing and another major addition of four or five new rooms. As the decades passed, the home builders added exterior ornamentation. The final result was a house that provided more space for a growing family and pleased the owner's aesthetic sense.

While the exterior of the house may tell us how the farm family adapted popular styles to its pocketbook, the interior of the house hints at the family's changing needs. A floor plan was never really planned at all. It just happened — as the family grew and as its way of life changed.



Downstairs, the original core of the house generally consisted of one large room and one or two small rooms serving as a pantry and a bedroom. Upstairs was a large sleeping room. All other activities — cooking, eating, visiting, relaxing, working — took place in the large room downstairs. As the family expanded, so did the house. A lean-to kitchen was added, new bedrooms and a new living area were built on, and the original living room perhaps became a dining room. Such gradual, unplanned growth often sacrificed privacy, since access to one room meant walking through another. Hallways were rare.

A good eye for structural contrasts and different carpentry techniques can help date when and how the interior of the house changed. But to recreate the actual rooms — to

*Dining room, 1883-98*

sense the color, texture, warmth, light and space — demands more than observation. My watercolors grew out of interviews with former occupants, research in late 19th-century interior design, and my own attempts to imagine the probable interior settings in the Meyers home of 1883-98.

In the Meyers' original structure, Sarah cooked the meals and her family ate them in the same room — the only sizable downstairs room. The lean-to kitchen, added later, would not have been the bright, spacious hub of family activity we now think of as a typical farmhouse kitchen. As my watercolor shows, the Meyers kitchen was simple and utilitarian, measuring a long and narrow nine by 16 feet (see cover).

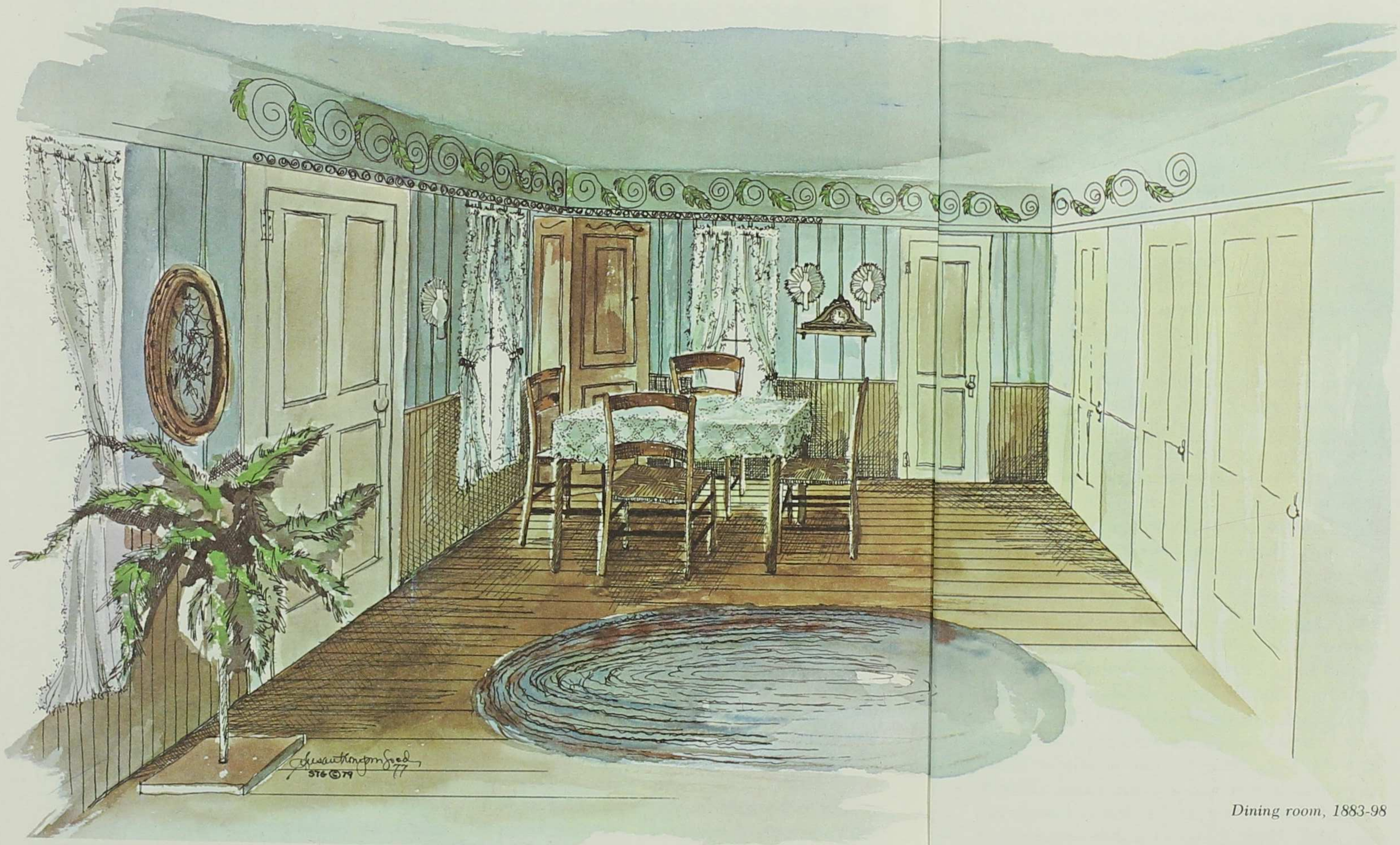
Although doors or windows on three sides of the kitchen provided more than adequate ventilation, lingering cooking odors were an ever-present problem. The walls were plastered and painted, so grease and soot could be scrubbed off easily. The kitchen floor was undoubtedly built of the same five-and-one-half inch hardwood boards found in the other rooms of the house. Upkeep involved periodic scrubbing, oiling, and waxing.

The only available source of heat was the cookstove, fueled by the woodbox nearby. During the winter months the cookstove was moved into the dining room to keep the water in the reservoir from freezing. The various occupants of the house continued this practice into the 1920s.

The pantry off the dining room was used for cold food storage and kitchen supplies. With its window on the north side and the door normally closed, the pantry must have been quite cool. If the late 19th-century homemaker had an icebox, it was generally not located in the kitchen but adjacent to it in a pantry. But if Sarah Meyers owned an icebox, it probably would not have fit into her small pantry.

The four-spindle chairs with stretchers, known as rodbacks or kitchen chairs, and the simple table might have been made by a local joiner from woods on the homestead. This type of chair — often of pine — was also manufactured in Des Moines, Iowa around 1875.

The pine dough tray in the far corner of the kitchen was typical of the dough boxes found in



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farmhouses before the turn of the century. Dough was stored inside the box and kneaded on the outside. If the dough box had legs, they were often lathe-turned and angled out from the tray to provide firm support for the farm wife's vigorous kneading.

Kitchen furniture was made to be useful and, as the cabinet on the north wall of my painting shows, it often lacked distinguishing features. Cupboards, like the one here, rested on the floor, and were sometimes called jelly or jam cupboards or servers. Made from pine, maple, cherry, or other local woods, the surface was used for food preparation. Cooking utensils and other supplies might have been stored inside or in the corner cabinet in the dining room. Flour bins, dry sinks, and pie safes were also popular in farm kitchens, but the size of Sarah Meyers' kitchen probably limited her to only one or two of these.

The furnishings and treatment of the dining room (p. 38), a center of family meals and entertainment, were more sophisticated than those of the stark kitchen. By 20th-century standards, however, they would still be considered simplistic and utilitarian. If she had time, Sarah may well have gotten the idea of wallpaper friezes or borders from leafing through issues of the 1890s *House Beautiful*. The friezes were designed to accentuate high ceilings, rather than low ceilings like the Meyers', but they nevertheless used such a border in their home.

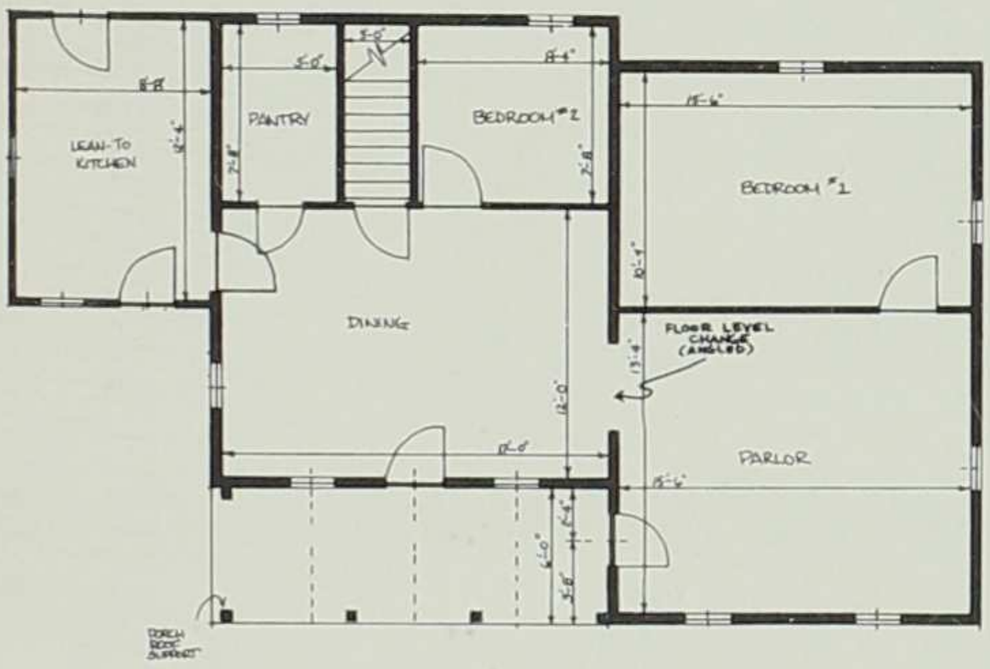
The wallpapers I chose to paint stylistically represent some motifs of the period. Stripes were popular in dining rooms, and borders often combined swirls or scrolls with leaf forms. Against the wallpaper, Sarah hung an oval-framed painting and a clock on a shelf. Edward Meyers later listed these two items in his will, so they were probably of value to the family.

Another common wall treatment in post-Civil War houses was wainscoting. Wainscoting was a wood paneling brought from the floor to a height of two or three feet, often separated from the wallpaper or painted plaster by a light wood molding. If the paneling was of a fine wood, it may have been oiled or varnished, but often the wainscoting was painted to harmonize with the wall above it. Frequently used in kitchens and dining rooms, wainscoting was less monotonous than an entire room of floor-to-ceiling wallpaper. It protected the wall "from contact with chairs and careless fingers, which generally disfigure delicately tinted paper-hangings," according to Charles Eastlake in *Hints on Household Taste*, 1898.

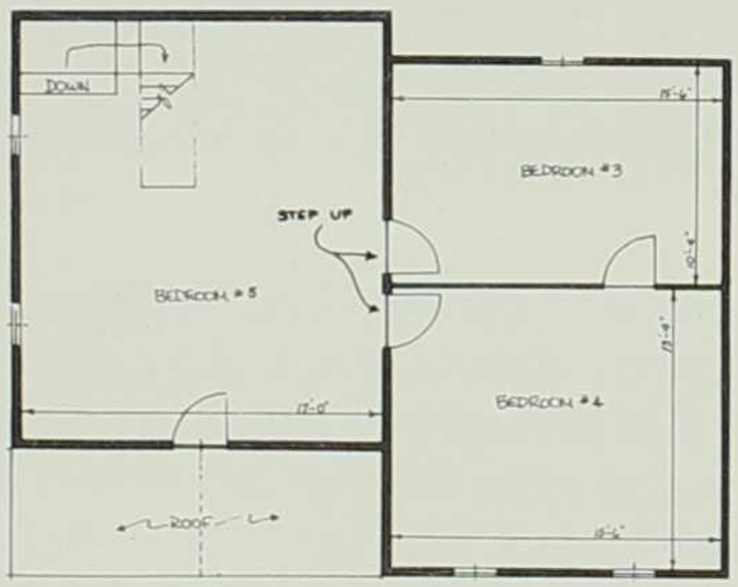
The dining table and chairs might have been made by a local joiner, but more likely they were mass-produced and purchased through a mail order catalog. Meyers' black walnut table with four leaves had slightly turned or tapered legs, in keeping with the current style. The chairs shown, with tapered legs, may have been part of the walnut set. The Hitchcock style, a two-slat chair of maple and birch with a rush seat, dates from about 1840-60. Sarah Meyers or a relative probably made the linen tablecloth and rag rug. The simple corner cupboard was straight-lined and possibly built of pine or walnut. Constructed locally or purchased from a catalog, such pieces often had glass fronts for displaying dishes. Others were even simpler, with open shelves.

Oil lamps hung on the walls to provide light at night, but during the day muslin or Swiss lace curtains, common in every room, allowed much light to enter. In *The House Comfortable*, 1892, Agnes Bailey Ormsbee commented that, "Few rooms are well-lighted enough to bear dark heavy curtains, and the general use of these, except in rooms exposed to severe winds, gives a gloomy, morose effect to the home." Certainly the massive swags and valances of the Victorian drapes of the period that hung in the well-to-do urban homes were more energy-conserving in the winter. But the tall, narrow windows of a farmhouse demanded a window treatment less ponderous, and the

Swiss lace curtains, in which a few well-defined patterns were worked in a sturdy cotton thread, added the finished look these small, sparsely-furnished rooms needed.




FIRST FLOOR




SECOND FLOOR

*Meyers farmhouse floor plan (courtesy of the author)*

Adjacent to the dining room is an unusually small bedroom — approximately eight by seven feet (p. 47, top). If Edward Meyers ever hired a farm hand from time to time, this small bedroom may have served as his private quarters. Nineteenth-century farm families often provided room and board to hired hands. It is also possible that the room belonged to Daniel, the youngest child, born in 1878. The room I imagined and painted is the child's bedroom.

Because this room was visible from the dining room, Sarah Meyers probably took special care to make it attractive, perhaps by choosing a delicately printed blue-green wallpaper and a corresponding border. The crib was typical of many types of spool furniture made from 1815 to 1880. Spool turnings were used to make the legs and side spindles of the crib. Midwestern spool furniture was made from maple, walnut, cherry, cottonwood, poplar, and occasionally, mahogany. Sometimes these woods were given a natural finish, but the soft woods were usually painted. Kept under the crib for storage, the small chest was painted in feathered shell-like patterns of vivid green, brown, red, and yellow.

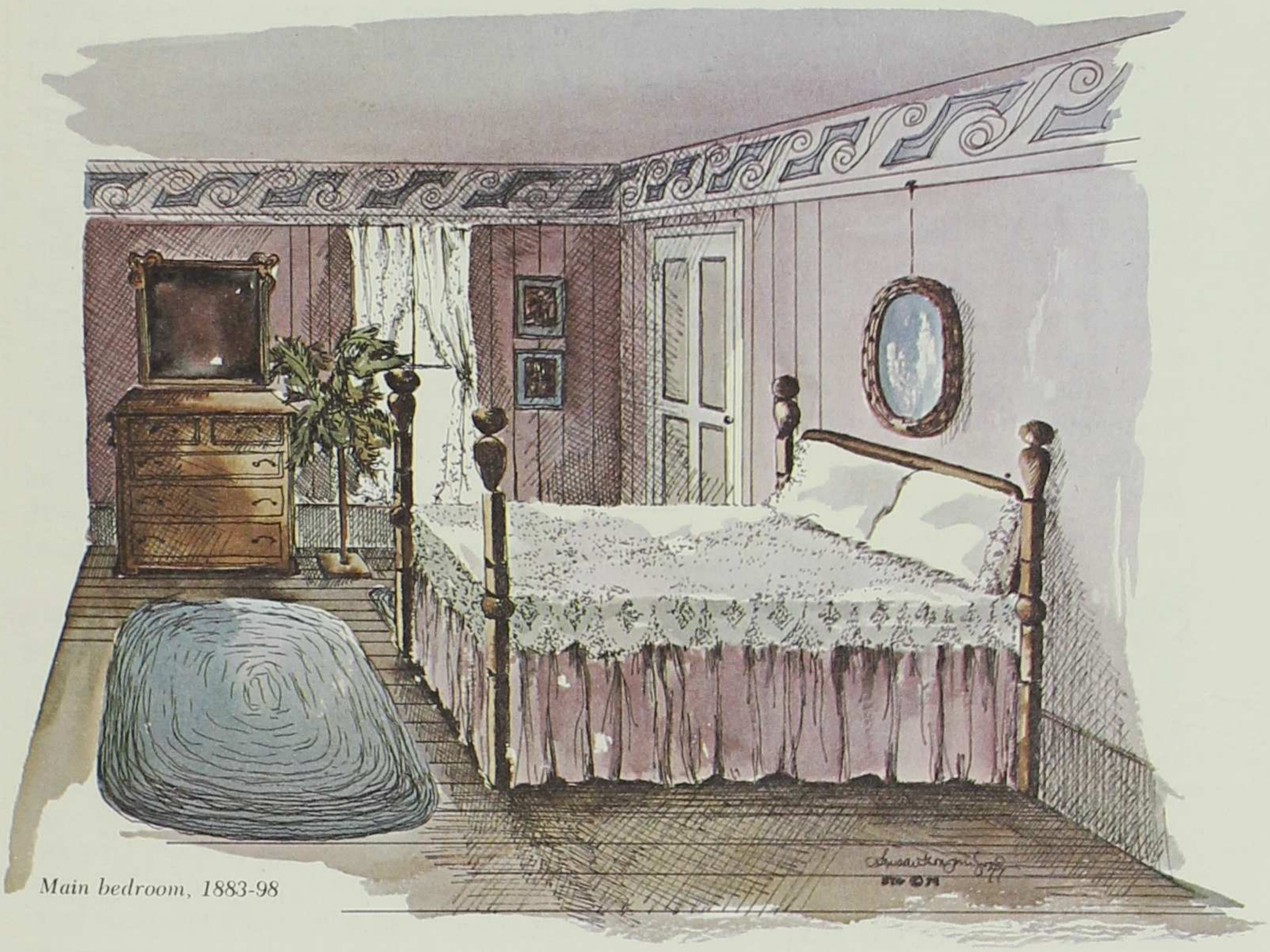
Lacking inside bathrooms, the homeowners had to contrive other acceptable facilities. Bedrooms were generally equipped with washstands for soap and water, and a large, covered chamber pot was kept there or under the bed. The towel-bar washstand shown here closely resembles stands made by formal cabinetmakers of the 18th century. Painted or unpainted, made of pine, poplar, or whatever was available, this one was probably made in the Midwest in 1874. Placed at each side of the stand, the towel-bar was both decorative and functional. The top of this stand was similar to the one-drawer variety, although the bottom resembled the Victorian chest-of-drawers in its hardware and the notched sides forming the legs.

*Parlor, 1883-98*

When guests came to call at the Meyers farm, they were proudly ushered into the parlor (pp. 34 and 42). This room, reserved for visiting, featured the most sophisticated interior components the family could afford. Sunlight filtered in through the Swiss lace curtains in the south and east windows. The room needed ample lighting, since the popular Victorian wall colors were dark and tended to decrease the apparent size of the room. A typical parlor wallpaper is shown here — stylized leaves and grapes in the dark values of blue-green, green, and red-violet.

Wallpaper was the preferred wall treatment, although painted walls, often used in kitchens, were easier to keep clean. Fashion dictated what patterns should be used in what rooms. Striped papers were appropriate for dining rooms, and possibly some bedrooms, but the bold patterns of leaves — "ivy, maple, crawfoot, oak, and fig leaves" — were intended for the parlor and bedrooms, according to Eastlake. Rooms with small-scale furnishings or much bric-a-brac required background wallpaper, rather than patterns distractingly decorative in themselves. Although common in the Victorian period, the tapestry and flocked papers were not likely found in the more utilitarian farmhouses.

If the Meyers owned any furniture bought in



*Main bedroom, 1883-98*

fancy Victorian furniture shops, the parlor would have been the place to display it. They did own a settee similar to the one shown here — an Empire settee of carved walnut, upholstered in a deep rose fabric, possibly brocade. Rocking chairs were common parlor furnishings. Popular styles of the period 1860-80 were the Gooseneck, Fiddleback, the platform, and the Victorian caned rocker. A Victorian fancy chair might also have been chosen (p. 42). Quite simple in line, it was painted black with gold leaf designs, bamboo turnings, a caned seat, and a birdcage back. A style popular between 1840-80, such a chair might have been brought from Illinois by the Meyers to their new life in Iowa. A typical example of 19th-century spool furniture is the spool table in the west end of the room. Spool furniture evolved as factories stopped slicing and drilling holes in the turned lengths of wood for buttons and started using the uncut sections for furniture legs.

Another chair chosen for the parlor could have been the ladder-back (see p. 34). This double-stretchered chair had legs with shaped feet, a feature typical of those made in the Midwest. The arms curved gently and the seat was made of rush. As the ladder-back style became characteristic of the country furniture maker, the back of the chair gradually lowered.

After the mid-19th century, most ladder-backs had only two slats and no turnings at all. The curly-maple slant-front desk was probably of rural origin, because of the turned legs and hardware. The 19th-century slant-front desk followed the same general style as 18th-century desks, except that the inside became plainer and the small drawers and dividers lacked decorative carpentry.

The parlor was the Meyers' best room. They lighted it with oil lamps and homemade candles. They heated it with a stove centered against the north wall. They played gay tunes on a pump organ they kept mostly for entertaining the guests for whom the room was furnished.

Sarah and Edward's bedroom was adjacent to the parlor (p. 43). Long and narrow, its atmosphere undoubtedly was the most cheerful of all the bedrooms because of windows on two sides. They probably spent considerable time choosing the furnishings and deciding on the treatments for this room because it was visible from the parlor. By comparison, they probably treated the children's bedrooms upstairs — separate from the living and entertainment areas of the home — much more simply.

The advent of mass production, with its standardized construction methods, changed the style of beds and all other furniture. Two standard, mass-produced beds were the high-post and the low-post. Most country home owners chose the low-post, because it was cheaper and would fit well in the one-and-a-half story home, whose ceilings were too low and slanted to accommodate the high-post bed. The bed shown here had shaped knobs on the posts of the headboard and footboard, representing a variation of the cannonball bed. A popular style in farmhouses after 1830, the bed might have been constructed of maple, butternut, or ash cut from the homestead, with different parts made of different woods. Slats may have supported the mattress, although lacings or ropes were still used as late as 1900. Sarah's touch possibly extended to a hand-crocheted bedspread and pillow sham. Dust ruffles were made of various fabrics, from a finer damask to a less expensive cotton.

Bedroom closets were absent from 19th-century farmhouses, so clothing and blankets were stored in trunks tucked away under the beds or in larger chests. Frequently made of pine, oak, or maple, these Victorian country chests usually had four drawers with the smallest at the top. Wooden knobs with cast iron keyholes were standard, although more decorative metal pulls were introduced near the end of the century. A wood-framed mirror with modest carving at the top and bottom topped the chest illustrated here.

The walls are papered in a delicate stripe of a high value mauve and a wide, stylized border of mauve and dusty blue. As in the other rooms, homemade area rag rugs covered the hardwood floor. Floor boards of the post-Civil War farmhouses were frequently five-and-one-half or six inches wide, although narrower boards show up in newer additions. Agnes Bailey Ormsbee advised in *The House Comfortable:* "The most healthful flooring is the hardwood, or its hum-

### Note on Sources

The principal sources for this article are Andrew Jackson Downing's *Architecture of Country Houses* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1866); Henry J. Kauffman's *The American Farmhouse* (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1975); Ralph and Terry Kovel's *American Country Furniture 1780-1875* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1965); and Marcus Whiffen's *American Architecture Since 1780* (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1969). Much information about the Meyers house was gathered in interviews with Grace Davis, Herschel and Mildred Davis, Emma Lind, and Pauline Thorngren. In studying similar post-Civil War farmhouses in Pilot Mound Township, the author also interviewed Roy and Caroline Caldwell, Marvin and Mabel Crouch, Dale Fairchild, Gladys Johnson, Bert and Florence Lundberg, Lieuvern Pearson, and Bessie Zunkel. A fully annotated version of this article is on file at the Division of the State Historical Society in Iowa City.

bler relation the painted or stained floor. They do not get full of dust and moths, and are readily cleaned. They remove the heaviest load from the semi-annual housecleaning, while after contagious illness they do not need special fumigating."

The addition provided two new bedrooms upstairs for William, Lydia, Mary, and Henry, the four oldest children. However, they could reach neither without going through the original bedroom at the top of the stairs. The arrangement's lack of privacy resulted directly from the haphazard development of the house, from its being built in increments, according to necessity, rather than by plan.

With its only window facing north, the north bedroom (p. 46) received little light. The walls of this room were originally a low value green. They may have been painted this color, or, in keeping with a common practice, the plaster may have been saturated with the color and then applied to the walls. Dull green, gray, blue, and mauve were common. Due to the inexperienced application of the plaster, probably by the Meyers themselves, the wall surface was very rough and the plane unlevel.

Probably an heirloom, the pine chest located on the south wall of the room, used for blanket storage and sometimes called a dower chest, was typical of those made about 1830. Perhaps the Meyers brought it with them when they traveled to Iowa. The styling was reminiscent of earlier Chippendale chests. The lid, which overhung the top, was usually attached by a wrought-iron hinge. A single wide board made up each side, and the joints were dovetailed. The keyhole in the center of the chest required a metal inset. This type of chest had no drawers, but on the inside a till could be moved from side to side. The base was plain or simply scalloped. The earlier chests in this style had ball feet; the later ones had the bracketed feet of the Chippendale style.

The one-drawer spool table against the north wall of the room was a piece often used in a bedroom or living room. Generally, the earlier spool-turned pieces of 1815-40 had glass pulls. The metal hardware on this one suggests that the pull was probably a replacement. The small day bed was another variation of the cannonball bed.

The south bedroom (p. 47, bottom) faced the front of the house, and its two windows on the south provided a satisfactory amount of light. The most prominent piece of furniture in the room was the bed, a version of the Jenny Lind style. Meyers' spool-turned bed had rounded corners at the headboard and footboard, dating it after 1850. This feature distinguished it from the true Jenny Lind, which had sharp corners.

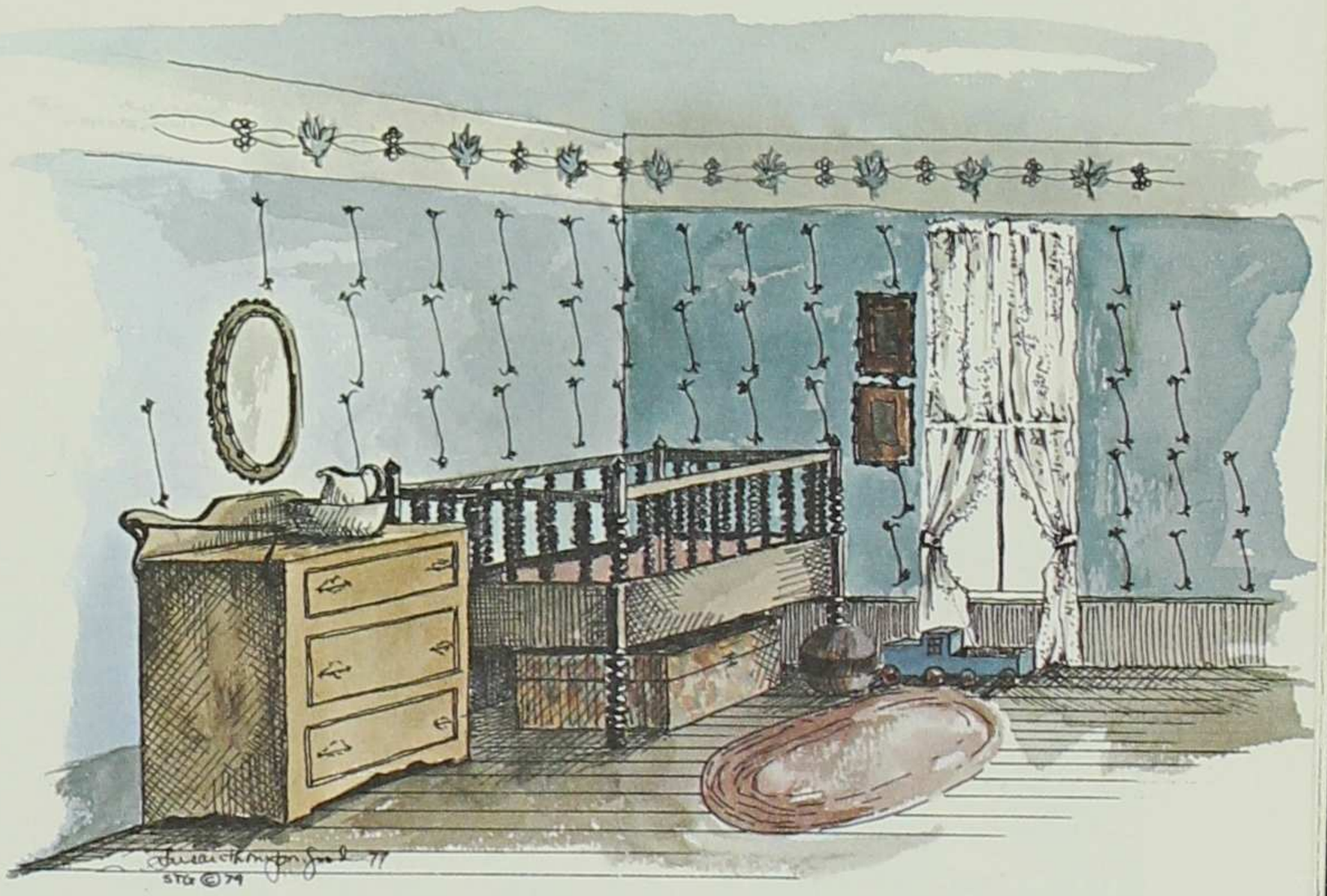
Immigrants on their ocean voyages to America often used trunks like the one at the foot of the bed, and then turned them into storage space in their new homes. The towel-bar washstand in this room was made after 1850. The shelf held the bowl and pitcher, and the drawer below held towels. The wooden knob on the bedside spool table dates this piece later than the nearly identical one in the north bedroom.

The plain wooden knobs, simple lines, elaborately cut apron, and local wood of the chest-of-drawers indicates it was made by a country furniture maker or joiner. Before the mail order catalogs offering low-priced, mass-produced pieces reached the farmer, his furnishings were often dependent on the skill and tools of the local joiner. The more elaborately equipped furniture maker might have had a foot-powered lathe with which to turn maple bed posts and walnut or cherry table legs.

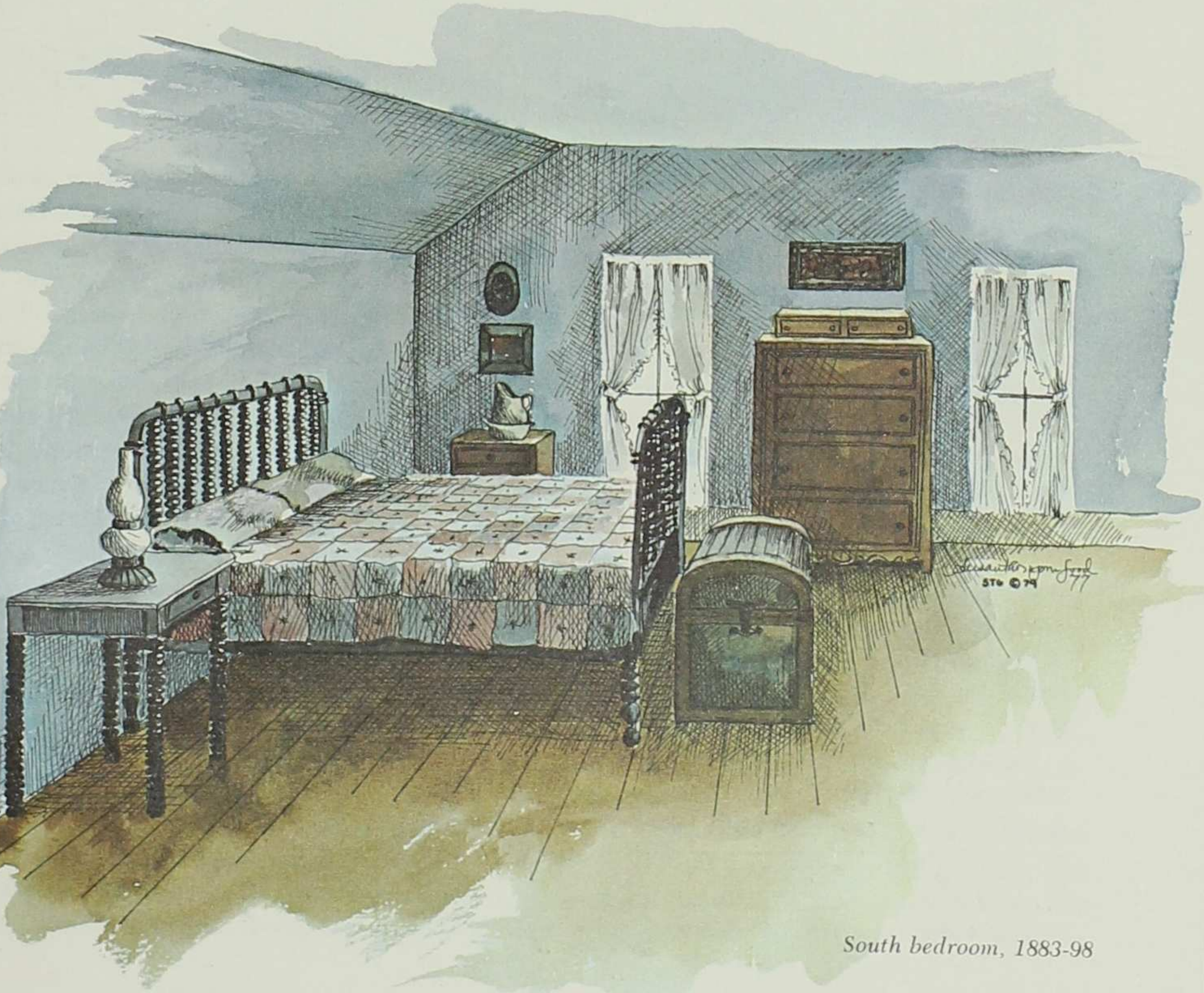
The third bedroom upstairs was part of the original structure. By far the largest room in the house, it measures 17 by 21 feet. But the story-and-a-half construction and the gable over the front porch meant a ceiling interrupted by slopes and angles.

Sarah and Edward Meyers raised their five children, their crops, and their livestock a century ago on "180 acres of improved land, nicely fenced." A century of change in America immeasurably complicates our efforts to know this family whose modest prosperity was reflected in their clapboard house in Pilot Mound Township. But the heritage of Iowa centers around families like the Meyers. As more old homesteads are leveled to increase tilled land, more of our heritage is plowed under. The beauty and fascination of studying 19th-century farmhouses is that the architecture and design relate directly to the needs and means of the former inhabitants. The form taken by post-Civil War farmhouses in Pilot Mound Township was, in part, determined by climate, by the availability of materials, and by the level of technology. But more importantly, the form of these structures tells us much about the life these families led — their needs, their hopes, their visions. □

*North bedroom, 1883-98*

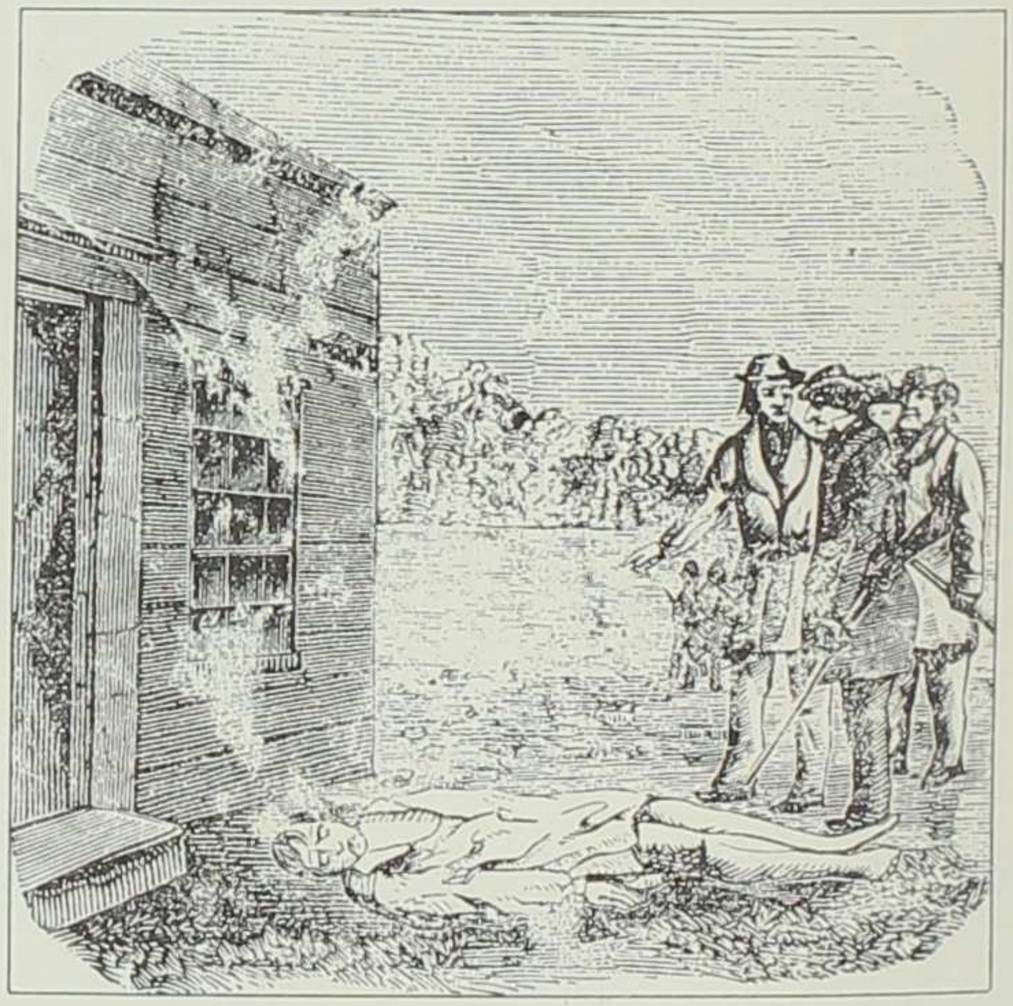


*Child's bedroom, 1883-98*



*South bedroom, 1883-98*

# THE HODGES HANGING



The single-room cabin lay on the outskirts of West Point, Lee County, Iowa, 25 miles from Nauvoo, Illinois. John Miller (Johannes Mueller), a middle-aged German Mennonite preacher, and his family had moved there from Ohio only a short while before. Intending to establish a Mennonite church at West Point, Miller had taken the cabin temporarily, while he looked around for a "good farm." He offered to pay cash for the land during his inquiries, and soon the rumor spread locally that he kept a considerable sum on hand at the cabin. Early in May he held a meeting with area Mennonites, but before he could get to the business of building his flock, before he found his farm and established his congregation, he was murdered.

On May 10, 1845, three men broke into the cabin where Miller and his wife, his two daughters and their husbands Henry Leisi and Jacob Risser slept. Mrs. Miller awoke to the sound and sight of the break-in — men carrying guns and clubs, their faces blackened in disguise, a single lantern held high. She shook her husband, and one of the men clubbed him. Another lashed out at Leisi. The third stood at Risser's bed, holding his gun on its occupants. Miller leaped from his bed and went for his own gun. He and his attackers fought, and Leisi came to his aid. A revolver went off. Shot, savagely cut and beaten, Leisi crumpled to the floor. The three assailants fled, and Miller chased after them, gun in hand.

Jacob Risser, out of the bed now, followed close on his father-in-law's heels until he reached the cabin's door, where he was shot at and missed by one of the intruders. When he got outside, the three men were gone, leaving Miller in their wake bleeding — dying — from a stab wound in the chest.

Risser ran for help to the nearest neighbors half a mile away. By early morning Dr. Holmes and James L. Estis, Lee County sheriff,

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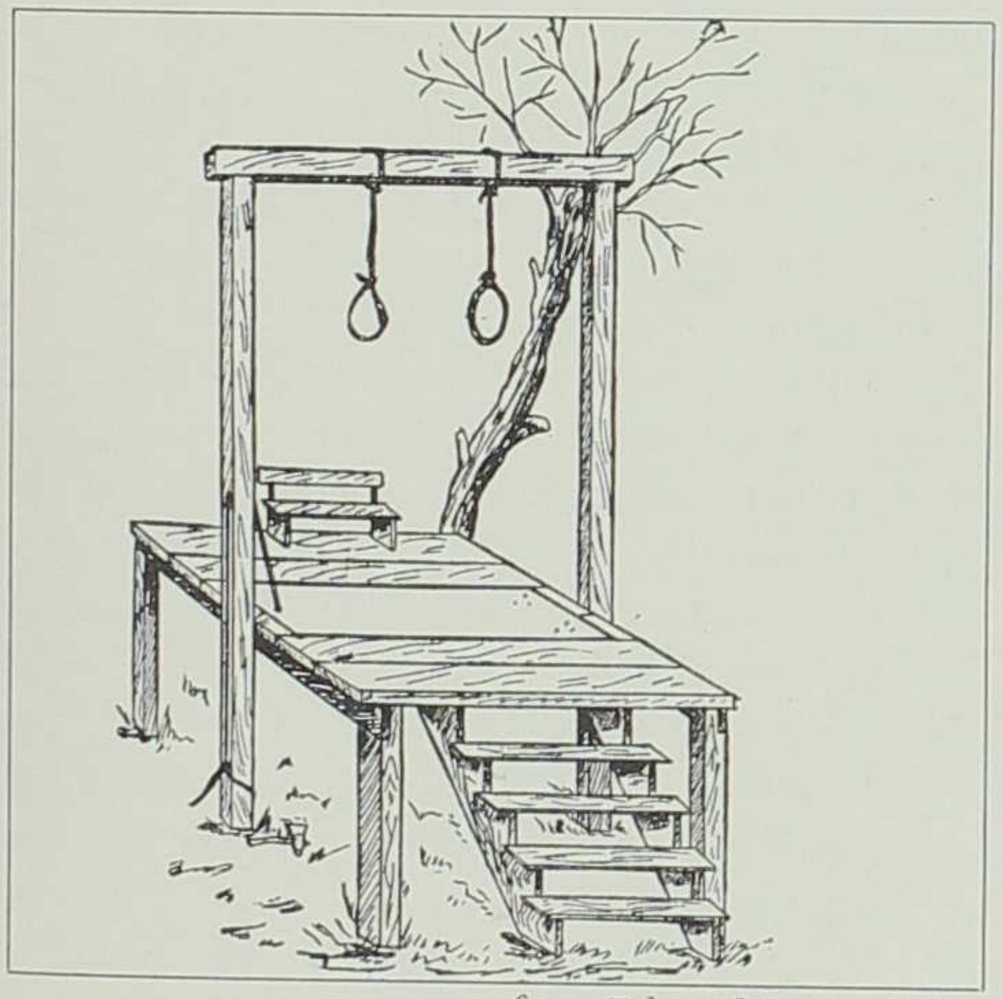
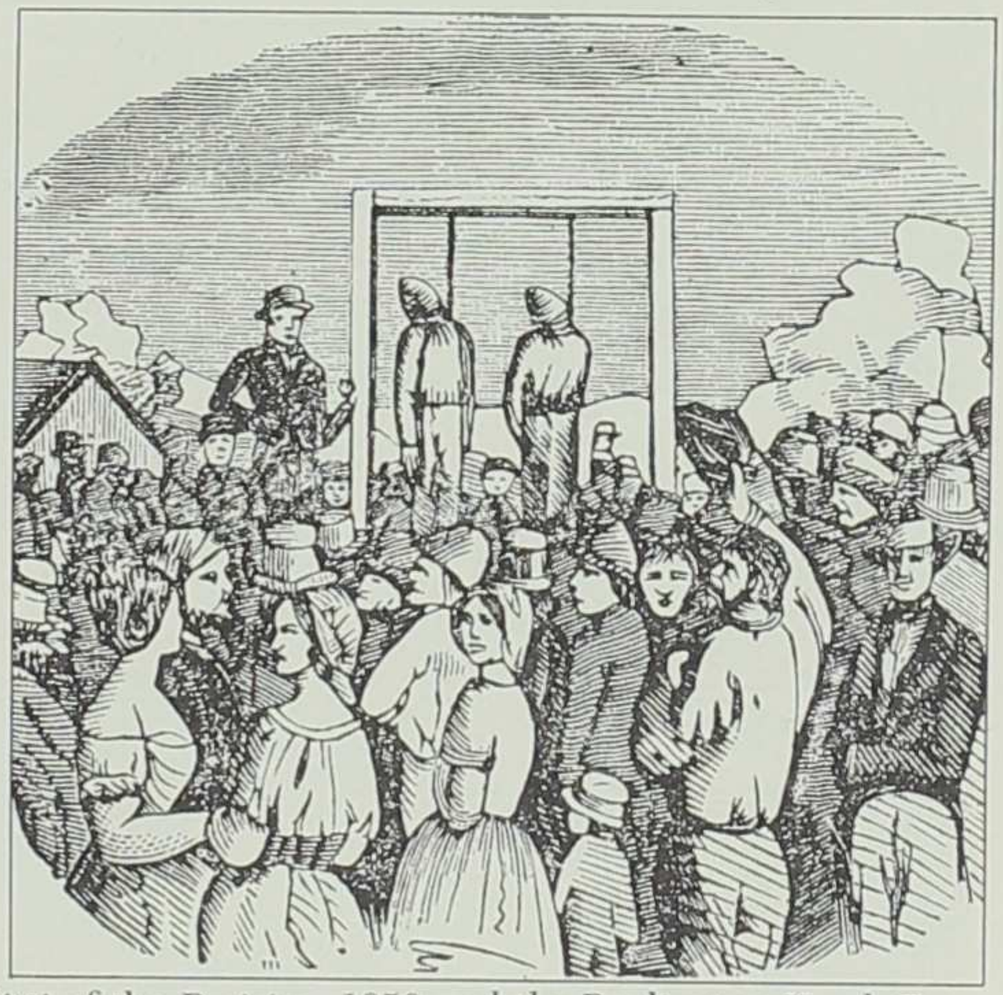
BY BARBARA HOWARD
JUNIA BRABY





*from Edward Bonney's* Banditti of the Prairies, *1856 and the* Burlington Hawk-Eye

reached the cabin. They found Miller dead and Leisi critically wounded. Dr. Holmes removed a bullet from Leisi's chest, near the shoulder blades, but the man was riddled with stab wounds from both a large, heavy knife, and a very sharp one with a half-inch blade. He died three weeks and two hours later.

There seemed to be no mystery about the murders. The motive, everyone agreed, was robbery, and the survivors identified two of the men who had killed their husbands and father as William and Stephen Hodges. The Hodges family was Mormon, followers of Joseph Smith since the late 1830s. There was reason to suspect that they were Danites, a secret group whose twofold purpose was to protect the Mormon church from outside hostility and internal dissent. A covert organization with a membership alluded to only by others and rarely, if ever, by the actual members, the Danites were reputed to be one of several frontier groups — "gangs" might be closer — that ranged over the countryside robbing, assaulting, and murdering the local citizenry. Some of the bands were highly organized, while others were no more than a few drifters and desperate men. The Danites, an established band, was the more chilling for venting its malevolence with religious fervor.

The local populace had grown increasingly hostile to the Mormons since the fall of 1844. Leader Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were assassinated by a mob on June 27 of that year. Though the shock of their murder reduced the antagonism briefly, as Robert Flanders notes in *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi,* this "apparent detente in Mormon-gentile affairs . . . proved temporary." The antagonism grew to extremes, became feverish, intense.

The Hodgeses were not only Mormons, and suspected Danites, but they were linked to the scene of the crime by three bludgeons and a cap left behind. Edward Bonney, a private detec-

tive, identified the cap as belonging to William Hodges. Suspected as terrorists, professing a religion of strange beliefs and peculiar practices, identified by eyewitnesses, and linked to the killings by physical evidence, the Hodges brothers were arrested and indicted. D.M. Repshire, constable at Nauvoo, arrested William and Stephen Hodges at the home of their brother Amos on May 13, 1845. The third accused man, Thomas Brown, escaped capture and subsequent indictment.

Following their arrest, the three Hodges brothers were taken to the Iowa penitentiary at Fort Madison. Amos was released with no charges against him, and the two others were indicted by the grand jury and returned to jail. Throughout the events that followed, Stephen and William protested their innocence and began to claim the only reason they were being tried was that they were Mormons.

On May 15, 1845 — the day they were indicted — the following appeared in *Times and Seasons*, the official Mormon paper in Nauvoo:

> Perhaps we ought to explain our figure of "putting out fires as soon as discovered." By this we mean bad members at home or abroad: those that keep not the commandments of the Lord: grumblers — whiners — adulterers — transgressors; cutting them off is our salvation . . . Since the church began to purify itself the power of God has been manifest. The saints abide, counsel and prosper.

There may be a connection between this statement and the forthcoming denial by the church that the Hodges were Mormon. At any rate, by May 21 the following disclaimer would appear in the *Nauvoo Neighbor:*

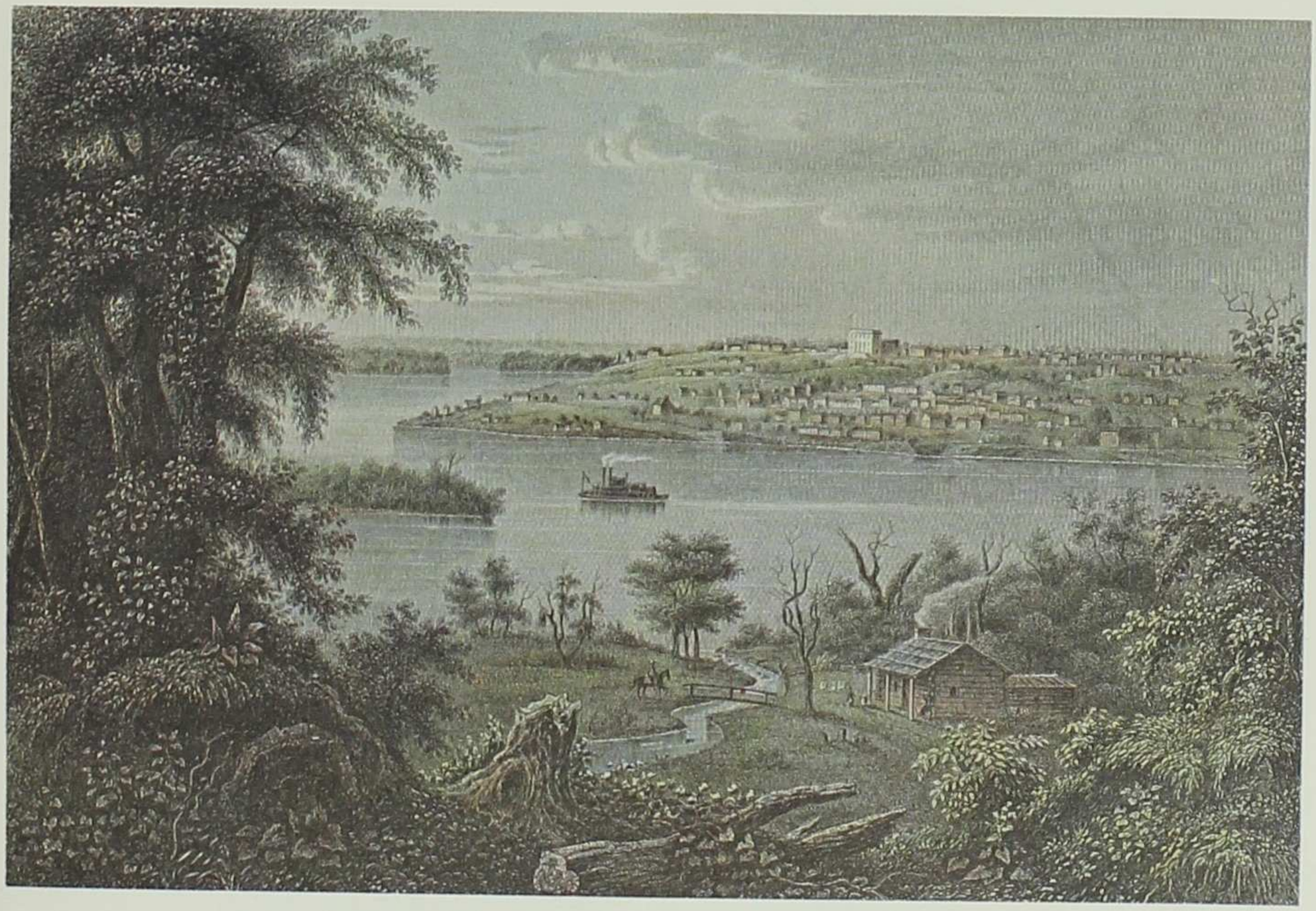
> We always have and always will help honest men to execute the laws and bring the offenders to justice. Let it be known throughout the land that THESE TWO YOUNG HODGES ARE NOT MORMONS, NOR NEVER WERE.

Feelings around Nauvoo exploded. Part of the increasing violence that terrified the population, the case fed rumors about "secret terrorist groups" that had been growing in proportion to the crime rate. Local law officers and government officials tried to ease the tension by pointing out that the Mormons alone could hardly be responsible for all the trouble in the territory, but sentiment against the exclusive and arrogant community was too strong. The regional press reflected the sentiment, and those working anxiously for the Mormons' removal in the hopes of ending the violence that accompanied their stay could find solace in the attitudes expressed by newspapers such as the *Sangamo Journal* and the *Burlington Hawk-Eye*. These ranged from reasonable tolerance to a demand for complete annihilation. In such an atmosphere, it is not surprising the *Nauvoo Neighbor*'s protestation that the Hodgeses were not even Mormons was scarcely noticed.

Whatever the relationship of the Hodges brothers to the Mormon church, the Nauvoo community could not escape being linked to them. Recognizing the intense anti-Mormon feelings around West Point, their attorneys called for a change of venue. Granted, the change placed the brothers in jail at Burlington, Des Moines County, where the trial was held.

They were moved from Fort Madison by the steam ferry *New Purchase*. According to the *Burlington Hawk-Eye* "a vast crowd assembled at [the] landing on Monday" to witness their arrival. Sheriff Estis and Warden Guthrie gave the prisoners, in shackles, over to the care of Sheriff McKinney, who placed them in Burlington's old jail on the North Hill Public Square. Defense attorneys Hall and Mills, working to obtain witnesses and seeking evidence, unsuccessfully attempted to postpone the trial.

On Monday, June 17, the jury was impaneled and the trial — held in the Methodist church — began on Tuesday. During the trial, things became suddenly less clear



*A hand-colored lithograph of Nauvoo,* ca. *1850*

cut, and the brothers' cry that they were scapegoats started to take on some substance. There was hardly any question that Miller and Leisi had been murdered by someone — Dr. Holmes's description of the grisly scene left no room for doubt:

> I . . . found old man Miller lying out of doors, he was dead; probed the wound in the breast; could not touch the bottom of the wound with a probe; I think the wound would have gone through the body of an ordinary person. Miller was a man of deep chest, found wound on his forehead and on probing it, found the skull grated on probe, from which I judge that it was slightly fractured. I think the death was caused by the stab wound in the breast . . . There was much blood on the ground, on the door . . . and the walls of the house.

But the rest of it — what had happened at the hands of whom — became questionable. Mrs. Risser, who had testified that she saw Stephen Hodges in the dimly-lit room and had identified him when he was brought to her home after arrest, identified him again at the trial. But she also admitted "the lights went out shortly after I awoke." Mrs. Miller, too, identified the Hodges brothers, particularly Stephen, but during cross-examination she admitted their blackened faces made the intruders difficult to recognize. "There was much confusion," she said, "and the whole did not last two minutes."

Sheriff Estis testified he had looked for footprints as soon as he arrived at the cabin on the morning after the murder, and he followed such tracks as he found eleven miles to Montrose:

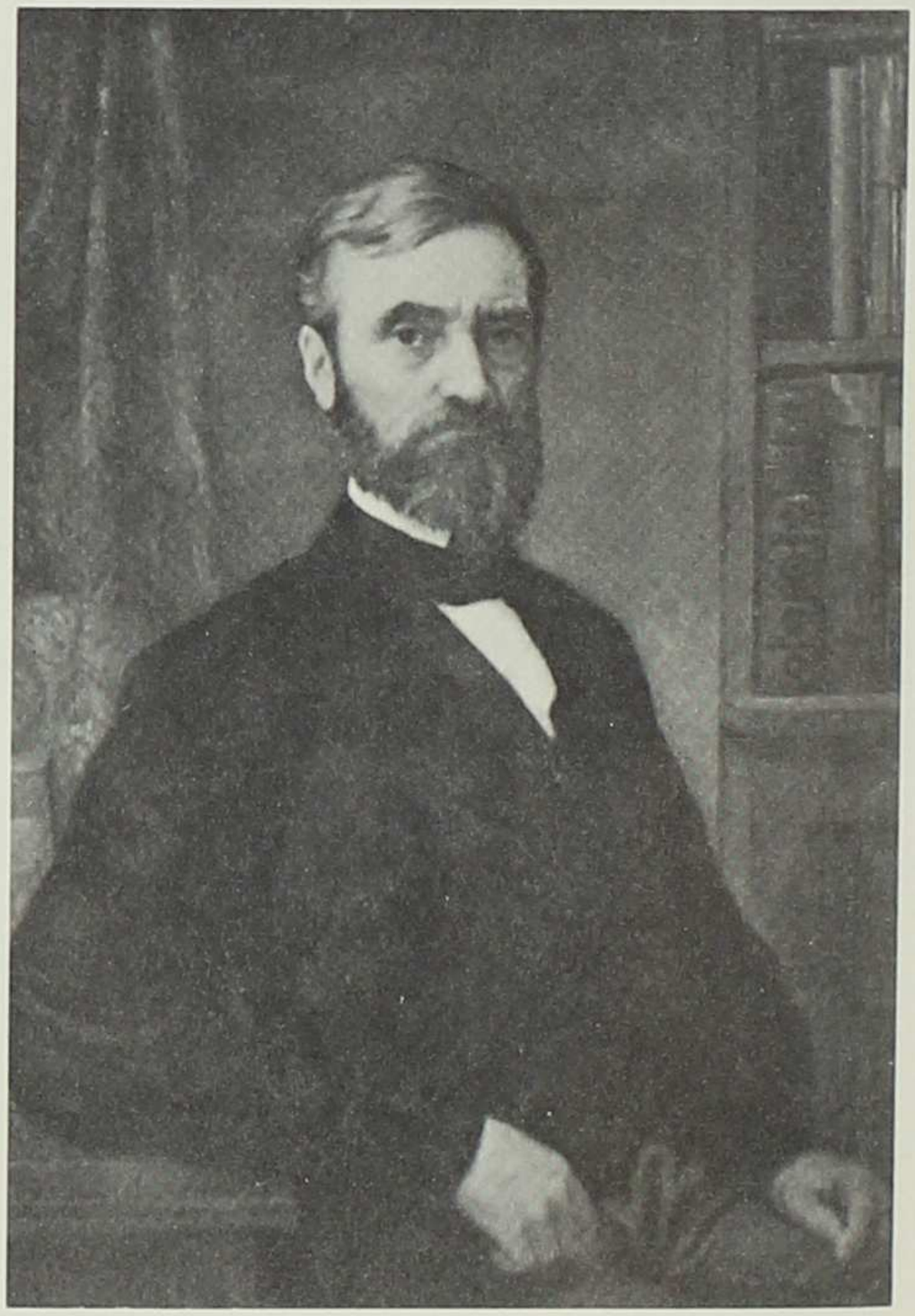
> I saw the tracks of Stephen Hodges in Nauvoo and com-

pared it with the tracks leading from Leisi's; I judged it was made by the same boot; he was there in custody; I had showed Col. Patterson the tracks I had traced in Montrose; I saw Stephen Hodges in custody of officers in Nauvoo, as he was walking in the dust of the street. I measured the tracks leading to Montrose but lost the measure; I did not measure the track in Nauvoo; saw tracks in West Point; I think them the same. There are no public roads near Miller's house; it is in the woods, the place where I first found these tracks was the road from the lower crossing of Devil Creek.

Fortunately for the State, there was more linking the Hodgeses to the murder scene than the tracks Sheriff Estis found somewhere else and followed.

The cap identified by Edward Bonney as belonging to William Hodges was introduced into evidence following the Sheriff's testimony. But Bonney was more a bounty hunter than a private detective, and he was an admitted counterfeiter and horse thief, keeping company with the known criminal element in the Iowa river town. Some writers implicitly, and contemporary associates explicitly, attest to Bonney's involvement in marauding gangs and even his indictment once for murder. (Bonney, however, in his book *Banditti of the Prairies*, published in 1856, defends his actions and sincerely argues that he believed the Hodges brothers were guilty.)

The most incriminating evidence came from neither the survivors nor Bonney, but from Miller's neighbors who were also acquaintances of the Hodgeses — Peter Munjar, Thomas Munjar, Armstrong Walker, and John Walker. These men spoke of seeing the brothers, along with Thomas Brown, in the area. They remembered the cap as being similar to the one found at the scene of the crime. John Walker probably gave the most incriminating evidence of anyone. He mentioned that Stephen had been previously accused of robbery. He reported a conversation with William Hodges that suggested the two were part of a gang of thugs including their brothers Ervine and Amos Hodges. Walker told the jury



*Judge Charles Mason*

that William had been extremely interested in any neighbor who might have large sums of money. And he said William had threatened him if he ever repeated any of the conversation about the gang:

> William . . . asked me to join the company and I refused; He said if I ever told about the gang etc. he would take my life or have someone kill me. I first told of it about two weeks ago to Dr. Sala and others . . . Dr. Sala and Mr. Barton came to me and said the citizens thought I know something about the murder, that I would not tell; said citizens would raise a mob and take me if I did not.

Another witness for the prosecution — A.K. Drollinger — testified that not only had he seen weapons in the possession of the Hodgeses and Brown, but that he could con-

firm the cap belonged to Stephen.

The somewhat contradictory testimony of Repshire and the other men who had arrested the brothers followed. Repshire claimed the Hodgeses had resisted arrest, but that "searching them" he "found no arms on them and found none afterwards." That was Monday night. The accompanying officer, a certain D. Davis, testified that he "saw them searched on Tuesday evening, the bright pistol was taken from Stephen, the smaller pistol and bowie knife from Amos, the morning before saw William Hodges with the smaller pistol." Other witnesses — Scott, Stewart, and Belknap — testified they had seen the brothers in possession of knives, pistols, or both at one time or another. In fact, much of the late testimony called by the prosecution indicated the brothers were often armed with knives of various sizes and with guns.

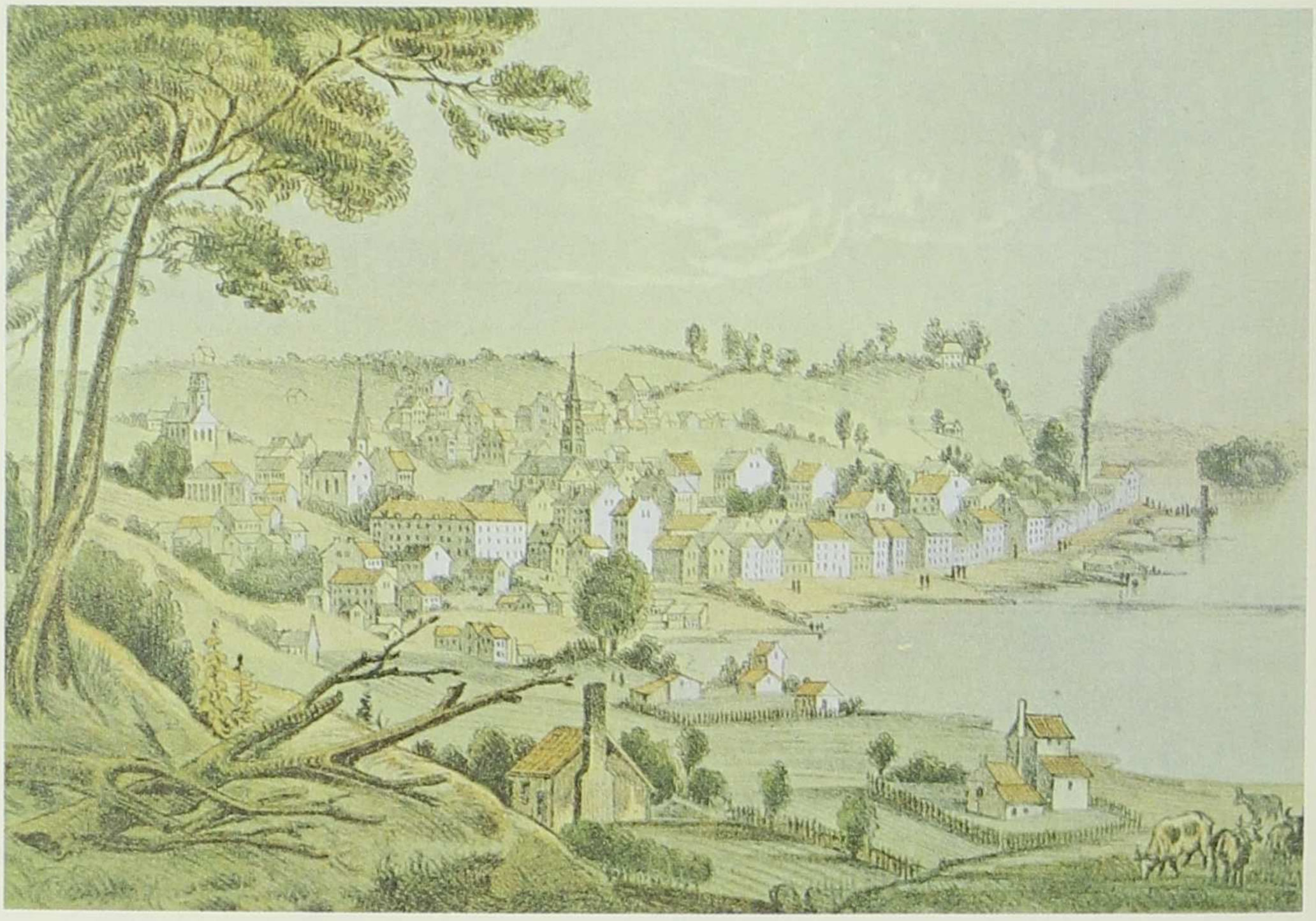
The prosecution also attempted to offer as evidence the dying declaration of Leisi to his wife and his physician that the prisoners were the killers, but the court refused to allow the testimony to go to the jury.

Testimony on behalf of the defendants consisted of several witnesses claiming they had seen the young men in Nauvoo on the night of the crime. Emmaline Hodges, sister of the accused, declared she had made a cap for her younger brother similar to the one found at the scene of the murder, but that the cap had been burned before she moved from Nauvoo some months earlier. Here, as with testimony for the prosecution there were contradictions and conflicting accounts. Running through the testimony the question of Mormonism and its role in the crime was raised in a number of ways, regardless of its relevance to the Hodgeses' guilt.

The jury left the courtroom at 9 p.m. Saturday night to decide on a verdict. By Sunday morning they had reached one, and a crowd — attracted by the trial and the anti-Mormon sentiment that ran throughout the territory — filled the courtroom. The assembly waited silently, in anticipation, as the jury foreman handed the verdict to the clerk. When he read: "We, the Jury, find William and Stephen Hodges GUILTY of murder," the spectators burst into applause. The brothers sat motionless, expressionless, among the assembly in the Methodist church.

An even larger crowd assembled to hear Judge Mason's sentencing. Given the opportunity to account for himself, William Hodges said, "I have nothing more to say except that I am innocent of the charge; I have had the benefit of a fair trial by a Jury of my country — I have been found guilty and I am prepared to submit myself to my fate." Stephen, too, claimed his innocence.

Judge Mason, with "deep and visible emotion," sentenced the two men. He described the nature of their crime as a "murder . . . which in point of atrocity, may almost be said to be unparalleled in the annals of crime." "You have," he told them ". . . invaded the sacred fountains of life . . . cut off in bloom and maturity of manhood two of their chief supports, drenching their hearth with their life's blood." He laid the burden of the territorial violence at their feet, associating them with the "feeling of apprehension and insecurity . . . communicated to every cottage throughout the country." Consequently, he told them, the law would "apply all there is of remedy within its reach." Talking of his own reluctance to pass the dread sentence of death and "become one of the instruments by which the lives of two human beings are about to be extinguished," he directed them to seek for pardon in the only place they might find it — in "none but your God" — and he urged them to use their last days to repent of their misdeeds. Finally, he ordered that "William and Stephen Hodges be taken from this place to the jail of the County of Des Moines, there to remain until Tuesday,



*Henry Lewis' hand-colored lithograph of Burlington, 1841*

the 15th day of July next, that on that day you will be taken by the proper officer of this County to some convenient place within the same, and there, between the hours of 10 o'clock a.m. and 4 o'clock p.m. that you may be hung by the neck until you are dead; and may God have mercy upon you."

It was the first legal hanging in Des Moines County. Hangings were public events, macabre social affairs featuring music, hymn-singing, speeches, picnics — a kind of communal expiation with a festive air. The fact that it was the first and that it in some ways functioned as retribution against the Mormons, who still denied connection with the Hodgeses, brought out the crowds.

Spectators filled the "convenient place" a hundred yards west of the railroad on Mount Pleasant Street. At the foot of the gallows they jostled for position, each eager for the best view of the hanging. July 15 was a bright warm Tuesday, and the crowd came from all over, from Bloomington and other spots in Illinois, from Fort Madison, from Nauvoo, on the steamers *Mermaid* and *Schokoquan*, on the ferry *Caroline*. Sheriff John McKinney looked toward the event with dread. "I wish I had not to do it," he said, according to the *Burlington Hawk-Eye*. "I would rather than fifty dollars someone else had the job."

At noon Col. George Temple and several companies of riflemen arrived at the jail. Soon, the shackled prisoners, dressed in their shrouds, climbed onto the wagon Temple

brought. Seated on their coffins, they were escorted to the gallows accompanied by a band playing solemn tunes. Sheriff McKinney, his deputy and brother Smith McKinney, Rev. Mr. White of the Cumberland Presbyterian, Rev. Mr. Coleman of the Methodist, Rev. Bishop Loras of the Catholic, and Rev. Mr. Hutchinson of the Congregational churches all sat on the platform along with the two doomed men and a friend who had that day arrived in town.

The many reverends prayed, the crowd sang hymns, and the brothers were allowed to speak. They accused the crowd of religious bigotry and passionately challenged the denials of the Mormon church. Stephen Hodges cried: "You are now putting two innocent men to an ignominious and shameful death. Hang us, we are Mormons!"

As the crowd watched, the two brothers stepped forward. William was the first. A noose was placed around his neck, and as the rope was hung round his brother, he seemed to be praying. Black hoods were drawn over their heads. A line holding up the hinged trapdoor — the drop — was all that stood between them and eternity.

The line was cut. The drop fell.

Years later, Mrs. Etna Mast, one of the crowd, would write: "I was only a little girl then, but I remember . . . for it was two or three weeks before I could banish the horrible scene from my mind." Stephen's neck broke instantly. He died without struggle. But William, whose feet touched an inclined plane as the trap fell, did not. He struggled in agony, drawing up his limbs, relaxing them, drawing them up again, his muscles twitching and his body contorting, until — ten minutes later — he died from strangulation.

The hanging, in some ways, is only the beginning of the story. Though the press showed little sympathy for the dead men, others felt some trepidation at the execution, not only for the cruelty of the punishment, but also at the possibility there might be virtue in the brothers' claim to martyrdom. One of the men who had been called to jury duty refused to serve because he objected to capital punishment. Judge Mason himself had his doubts and hesitations. "It is," he said as he reluctantly signed the death warrant, "a barbarous, uncivilized and unchristian mode of punishment for crime." He needed reassurance about the trial as well, and the defense attorneys accommodated him with a confidential letter stating that Lydia Hodges, wife of Amos, had refused to testify at the trial because she could not honestly say the men had been in Nauvoo. The defense attorneys felt the two men were guilty. The trial had been fair. But it, like the hanging, like the murder itself, had taken place in the nexus of violence and controversy that surrounded the Mormons and their stay at Nauvoo. Whether the Hodges brothers were guilty or innocent, their story is of a piece with that violence and its implications.

Thomas Brown, the third man accused in the murder, remained at large until he showed up at Mormon Winter Quarters across the Elk Horn River in western Iowa in the company of Return Jackson Redden, Orrin Porter Rockwell, and J.C. Little. Brown was later listed as "Nathaniel Thomas Brown" and was "apparently a church member in good standing until his death." He was killed by an unidentified man at Winter Quarters in 1848.

Again the shadow of Danite involvement appears. Brown accompanied the Hodges brothers on their travels around Nauvoo. He was seen with them near West Point where the murder took place. Brown's friendships with Orrin Porter Rockwell and Return Jackson Redden draws attention to the way legal counsel was secured for the brothers. Return Jackson Redden, along with Amos and Ervine Hodges, William F. Douther, W. Jenkins

Salisbury, and William Hickman, mortgaged property to raise $1,000 needed to hire Hall and Mills. Several of these men were known Danites: Hickman, Redden, and probably both Amos and Ervine Hodges. Salisbury, brother-in-law to Joseph Smith, the Latter Day Saint prophet, may have been a Danite. John C. Bennett, who commanded the Nauvoo Legion and had close contact with the militant extremists, wrote about the Hodges brothers' close friendship with William Hickman and Porter Rockwell, both of whom boasted of their role in the Danite organization.

John D. Lee, another self-proclaimed Danite, in his book, *The Mormon Menace,* said, "The members of this order were placed under the most sacred obligations that language could invent. They were sworn to stand by and sustain each other; sustain, protect, defend, and obey the leaders of the church under any and all circumstances unto death." Other information about the terrorist group surfaced in the 1838 court trial of Joseph Smith. Their militant zeal led the group to excesses. They often engaged in acts of "obtaining property from the gentiles" in the "disguise of women's clothing," earning the group the first name it was known by — The Daughters of Zion. The name "Danites" grew from a certain Mormon interpretation of scripture. This interpretation was picked up by Danite leader Sampson Avard, who repeated it in the following speech recorded in Joseph Smith's journal:

> Know ye not, brethren, that it soon will be your privilege to take your respective companies and go out on a scout on the borders of the settlements, and take to yourselves spoils of the goods of the ungodly Gentiles: for it is written, the riches of the Gentiles shall be consecrated to my people, the house of Israel; and thus you will waste away the Gentiles by robbing and plundering them of their property; and in this way we will build up the kingdom of God, and roll forth the little stone that Daniel saw cut out of the mountain without hands, and roll forth until it filled the whole earth. For this is the very way that God destines to build up His kingdom in the last days.

Though Avard was excommunicated from the church because of his excesses, the Danite group continued and, by 1845, appeared to be active in and around Nauvoo. Evidence suggests that Ervine Hodges, brother of the condemned men, spent much time in Danite forays, and the night following the sentencing of William and Stephen, *en route* from their trial to his home in Mechanicsville, he "was inhumanely murdered . . . about 35 rods west" of the office of the *Nauvoo Neighbor.*

Ervine's murder bore all the marks of Danite revenge. The *Neighbor* reported:

> Mr. Hodges was asked by the bystanders, before he died, if he KNEW WHO HAD STABBED HIM — He answered, "It was, as I supposed, my best friend." This was repeated four or five times, but he refused to give the name till he died.

He was assaulted, beaten with a club, and stabbed by what was probably a bowie knife.

Ervine's murderer was never caught. In his memoirs, Joseph Smith III recalled the murder: "As a boy in Nauvoo, I had known William Hickman by sight and remember that on the morning the body of Ervine Hodges was taken from where it had been murdered — on the lawn near the home of Brigham Young, by someone as yet unknown to justice — I had seen him in the curious crowd which followed the body to the Hodges home." William Hickman, one of the men who had raised funds for William and Stephen — and a close associate of Ervine — lived with a reputation as a Danite and a man of violence that followed him throughout his life.

Edward Bonney, the bounty hunter, accused the Mormon leadership of the murder of Ervine Hodges. So did John D. Lee, at whose home Brigham Young was guest the night of Ervine's death. Lee accused the guards outside the Brigham Young home. The cries of agony of the assaulted Ervine were heard by Brigham's

*"The Danite Chief" (Culver Pictures)*

wife in her home, yet were not acknowledged by those guards. Curiously enough in recording the events of the day in his journal, Young made no mention of the murder, nor is there any mention of the decision to remove the bodies of the Hodges brothers from the Saints' burying grounds a month later. Yet, other crimes in the territory during the year captured his attention and were noted.

Ervine Hodges was killed, but Amos Hodges simply disappeared. No records indicate what happened to the fourth Hodges brother. The only clue to his demise is found in a letter written to the *Sangamo Journal* of November 5, 1846. Dated September 24, 1846, it is from William Smith, who by this time had failed in his attempt to gain leadership of the church in Nauvoo and had become a follower of J.J. Strang, leader of a Mormon splinter group. Smith is scarcely an unbiased judge of the situation in Nauvoo. Removed from any pretension to power by Brigham Young and the Council of Twelve, he vented his hostility on Mormon leaders. Smith accused the Mormon hierarchy of supporting the "doctrine of secret murder to save the souls of men; as for instance the death of Irvin and Amos Hodges . . . Irvin Hodges was murdered within twelve feet of Brigham Young's door. Amos Hodge was murdered, it is said, between Montrose and Hashway, in Iowa, by Brigham Young's guard, who pretended at the time to escort him out of Nauvoo for his safety, under cover of women's clothes, who then pretended that he had run away."

If, as William Smith suggested, Amos attempted to leave Nauvoo dressed in woman's attire, and was killed by those who accompanied him, this fits the pattern of Danite activity.

There is also no mention in Brigham Young's diary of the decision — noted in the July 23, 1845 edition of the *Nauvoo Neighbor* under the headline "Removal of the Hodges":

> By a unanimous vote of the citizens of Nauvoo, the HODGES are to be removed from the grave yard of the saints, to a place to be specially purchased for that purpose.

Following the threads of Danite activity leads to other surprises. On April 1, 1876 an item appeared in the *Burlington Hawk-Eye* telling of a find by workmen remodeling an old building in Burlington in March of that year. They discovered "in the tin scroll which surmounted the 'cap' at the head of the water spout a roll of manuscript" confirming the earlier rumor that "a man named A.F. Green was involved in a plot to rescue the Hodges and burn the city if necessary." The paper named several of the then prominent citizens of Burlington who had planned to help carry out the rescue. According to the article: "Among other papers was a commission from the Prophet Jo Smith dated in May, 1844, just before the latter was killed in the Carthage jail, written in parchment in red ink, fully empowering Green in the name of the church, to do a great many things which would now be regarded as unlawful." Shortly after the discovery, the manu-

script was given to the owner of the building and then mysteriously disappeared. No one was ever able to validate the authenticity of the find.

In 1910 an article appeared in the *Cedar Rapids Gazette* featuring an interview with Mrs. Mary Hines who claimed that her husband, dead for 16 years, belonged to a gang led by Edward Bonney. Mrs. Hines said her husband told her about the gang in detail after they read the Bonney book. According to the "account" of John Hines, Bonney was playing both sides of the gang game. He received money for turning in members of the gang while he ran the gang itself, since "a detective could never catch any of the gang for they would never talk with a stranger about any of the band." Mary Hines ended the interview with:

> My husband has been dead now about sixteen years and I know that what I now tell cannot hurt him. He told me he had made lots of money for Bonney at different times, but that is all past and gone. He was with the gang when they murdered Miller and Liecy and I understand they got a lot of money at that time.

When this article appeared in the *Gazette*, Marietta Walker, sister of the Hodges brothers, contacted Mrs. Hines who swore in an affidavit that her husband had exonerated William and Stephen.

> When I was reading the Bonney book, and came to the names of Stephen and William Hodges, he laughed and said, "Why they were a pack of fools, the Hodge boys were not there at all. I could tell them that much."
>
> I once heard Mr. Hines and George Vrooman, his nephew, have a quarrel at our house, in which they said that George W. Martin assisted Mr. Hines in the murder of Miller and Liecy, but I never heard them mention any third man.

Further information about the hanging appeared in the *Burlington Hawk-Eye* January 25, 1914. A letter was found in a trunk in a Burlington home written by a young woman who was a witness to the hanging 69 years before. This letter was accompanied by an article by Henry Smith who also reported from firsthand experience. Smith's account of the hanging is more elaborate than the contemporary newspaper accounts. He described the gallows, and a sketch appeared with his article. The young woman's letter itself does not name the brothers, but describes in vivid detail the event. The letter does mention that a man named Alfred Green was one of the people in the company who watched the hanging with her. Is Alfred Green the A.F. Green whose documents workmen found in the water spout in 1876?

The possibilities are fascinating, but they remain only possibilities. The huge Mormon colony at Nauvoo, like the frontier itself, has vanished into Iowa's history, leaving tantalizing traces of its troubled existence. What is clear is that the violence of the frontier and the violence accompanying the Mormon settlement were reciprocal. The Danite call to violence against the gentiles and the prejudicial atmosphere of the society that tried and hanged the Hodges brothers mirror each other. Not guilt and innocence, but group assault and communal retribution are the keys to the significance of their story, one that tells something of the roots of violence in our culture. □

### Note on Sources

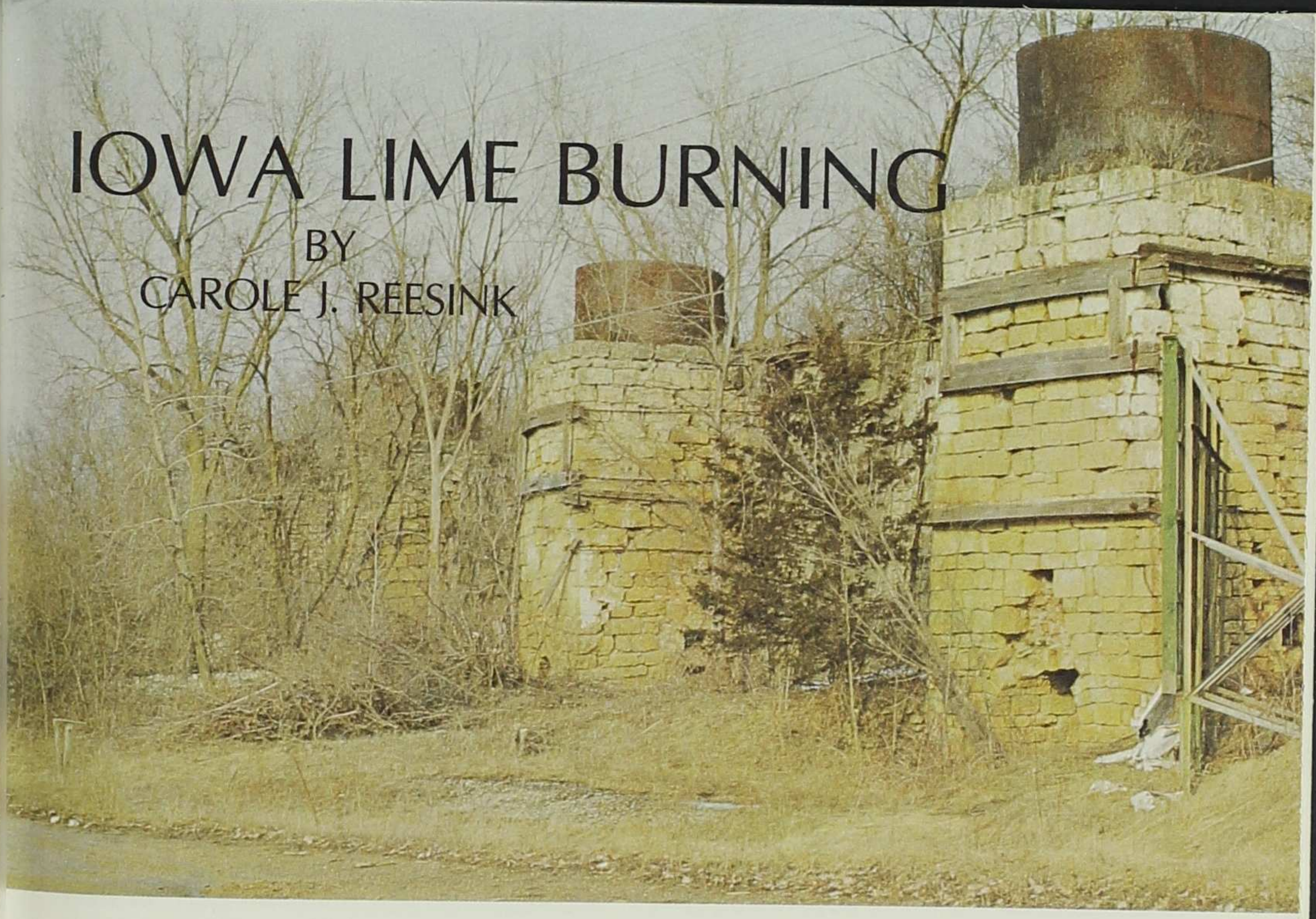
Much of the information for this article was obtained from accounts in issues of the *Burlington Hawk-Eye* published during the time of the trial and execution. The journal of Judge Charles Mason was also helpful as was the *Sangamo Journal* from the period.

Particular help was given by the Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Salt Lake City, Utah, which made available a copy of the Hancock County Book of Mortgages listing the names of the men who raised money for the defense attorneys. The Library-Archives of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Independence, Missouri also provided original documents including the affidavit of Mary Hines.

# IOWA LIME BURNING

BY

CAROLE J. REESINK



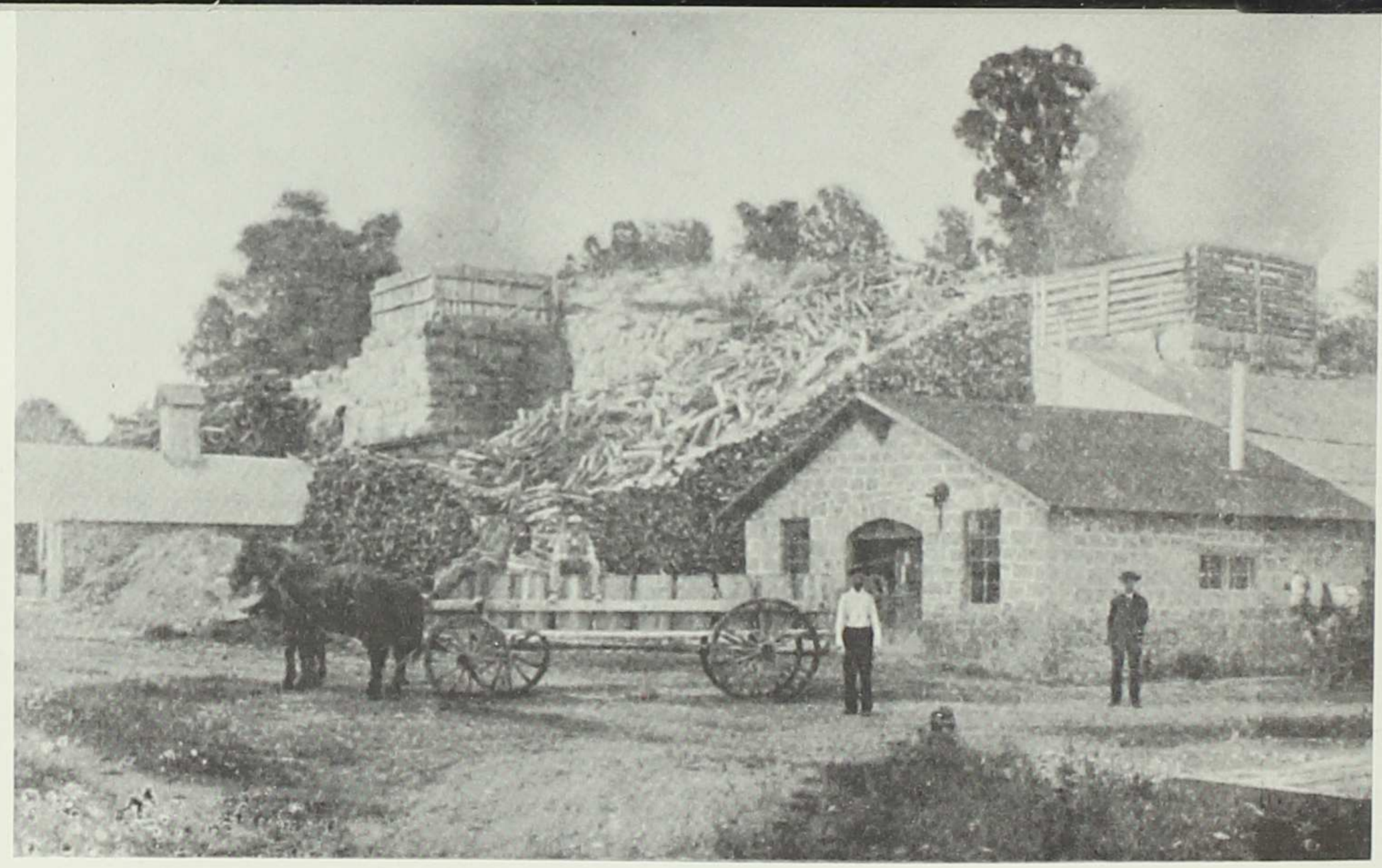
*The four remaining lime kilns at Hurstville (courtesy of the author)*

The yellowish brown bluffs on the east bank of the Maquoketa, like most bluffs bordering the streams and rivers in this section of Jackson County, contain a lime rock called dolomite. In the late 1800s, before the advent of the Portland Cement Company, burned lime was the major ingredient in the mortar used in constructing buildings and bridges. When the dolomite lime in Jackson and Cedar counties was discovered to burn purer and whiter than any lime then on the market, an industry grew up beneath the bluffs that became the Midwest's foremost supplier of lime. Two men, Alfred Hurst and Otis Joiner, were responsible for the growth of this industry. Both established lime plants in Iowa in the late 1800s and employed men who lived in the small company towns of Hurstville and Joinerville, and quarried, processed, and transported the lime by horse and wagon to the railroad.



Alfred Hurst was born in Brimsby, England in 1846. When he was six, he and his family immigrated to America, traveled up the Mississippi River by steamboat, and settled in Davenport, Iowa. Here Alfred's father — Abraham Hurst — found work as a bricklayer. In 1856 Abraham Hurst died, and nine-year-old Alfred went to work to help support the family. When the Civil War broke out, Alfred and his brother William enlisted in the transportation service of Mississippi, and during the next 19 months, Alfred fought at Paducah, Ft. Donelson, and Shiloh. He was captured once by the Confederate Army, but managed to escape and rejoin his unit.

After the war, Alfred worked for a short time on steamboats on the Upper Mississippi, then returned to Davenport where he learned the



*The Joiner Lime Works, ca. 1905, with O.W. Joiner standing center, and M.W. Joiner standing right (courtesy of the author)*

trade of brick and plaster masonry, a job he held until 1871. During his years as a mason, Alfred made extensive studies of the lime he used and decided he could improve the quality of mortar. When the railroad to Maquoketa, Jackson County was completed, he took a trip to this section of the county, searching for a lime rock of the Clinton and Niagara strata (now called Hopkinton Formation of the Silurian Age) which he knew from experience burned purer and whiter, and possessed more adhesive properties than any lime on the market.

The lime rock in the 60-foot ledges of the bluff along the South Fork of the Maquoketa was exactly what Alfred needed. He bought 30 acres of stone and timber land a little more than a mile north of Maquoketa at Sand Ridge, built a small, single kiln lime plant, and began quarrying the rock from the bluffs.

A section of New Oklahoma — as Hurst's quarry was called — on the east bank of the Maquoketa River shows that the Hurst lime beds contained several different layers of dolomite. There is a 15-foot ledge of decayed, yellowish brown dolomite, weathered into layers a few inches to three or four feet thick, containing *Cerionites, Crinoids,* and *Pentamerus* fossils. Below this stands a massive, 30-foot ledge of yellow dolomite imperfectly separated into layers six to eight feet thick, containing a slightly different fossil make-up: *Crinoids, Halysites, Favosites,* and numerous *Pentamerus.* Finally, at the base is a smaller, eight-foot ledge of buff-colored dolomite crowded with small individual rocks of *Pentamerus* oblongus.

Alfred's first kiln was a "pot" kiln, and in it he began burning lime on a small scale, first loading rocks into the kiln, then building a fire in the chamber. After the lime had burned, he extinguished the fire and unloaded the finished product. The pot kiln had its disadvantages — it produced only one batch of lime before it had to be unloaded, and the lime was discolored from its contact with the firewood. Nearly all of Alfred's first year's production, averaging 100 barrels a week (a barrel weighed about 140 lbs.) and totaling 3,200 barrels for the year, was consumed at home. Encouraged by the year's business, he built a "draw" kiln the second year. Unlike the pot kiln, the draw kiln

allowed for a continuous lime-burning process, and left the lime a pure white. Rock was loaded into the stack atop the kiln. It gradually filtered to the bottom, where it was removed and spread on a slab floor to cool before being packed into barrels for shipment. At the height of production, Alfred had four draw kilns operating and could produce 800 barrels of burned lime a day.

When Alfred's brother William joined him in the business, the firm had $75,000 invested, owned a large tract of farming and timber land — 820 acres — near the kilns, and employed 50 men at $1.50 a day, whose annual wage amounted to thousands of dollars.

Good quality lime requires a close control of temperature. The chemical formula of dolomite is Ca Mg $(CO_3)_2$ (with the ratio of Ca to Mg varying from sample to sample). Because of their like charge and size, calcium and magnesium can substitute for each other. When lime is burned in kilns to be prepared for mortar, carbon is given off as a gas, and magnesium and calcium oxide remain as the "burned lime." A temperature of 750° to 900° C is necessary for the dissociation of the lime, and because of extreme winter temperatures, this was not possible in Hurst's plant. Though the kilns did not run all year round, Hurst's employees were kept busy making barrels, sawing cord wood (a kiln used eight to ten cords of wood per day), and feeding the cattle during the winter.


Note on Sources

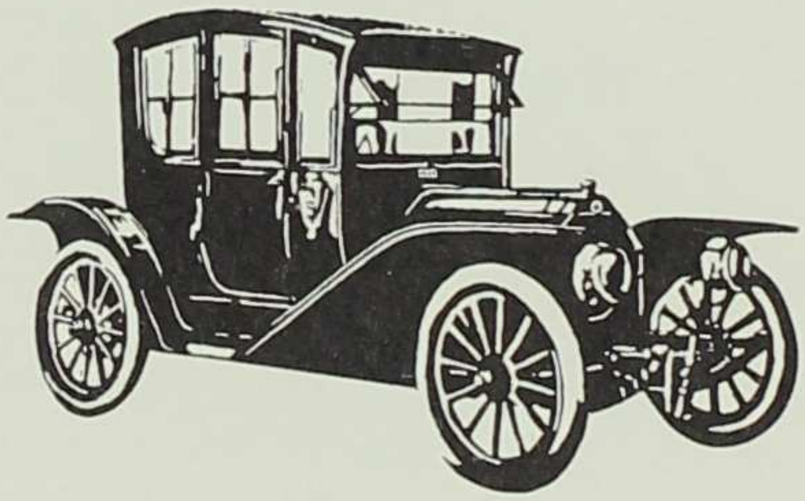
Sources for this article include two essays in the 1906 *Iowa Geological Survey Annual Report*, Vol. 17 (Des Moines: Iowa Geological Survey): S.W. Beyer's "Physical Test of Iowa Limes," and S.W. Beyer's and Ira A. Williams' "The Geology of Quarry Products." Also valuable were the *Portrait and Biographical Album of Jackson County* (Chicago: Chapman Brothers, 1889); Edwin C. Eckel's *Cements, Limes and Plasters* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1928); M.W. Joiner's "Lime Industry Made Maquoketa Famous" in the *Jackson Sentinel*, Vol. 100 (June, 1954); J.N. Rose's *Fossils and Rocks of Eastern Iowa: A Half Billion Years of Iowa History* (Iowa City: Iowa Geological Survey, 1967); and T.E. Savage's "Geology of Jackson County" in the *Iowa Geological Survey Annual Report*, Vol. 16 (Des Moines: Iowa Geological Survey, 1905). In addition, Melvin W. Joiner and Grace Holihan of Maquoketa, and Sarah Hurst Cooper of Iowa Falls provided valuable research assistance.


In 1888, Alfred organized the Maquoketa, Hurstville & Dubuque Railway Company and constructed a spur from Maquoketa to his lime works. This was made possible by Hurst's political affiliations, and greatly helped his business. Besides owning a prospering company, Alfred was a member of the board of supervisors and a state senator for eight years until 1894. Alfred Hurst purchased three more lime kilns from Poff and Nickerson who owned a plant at Pinhook, on the Maquoketa River about a mile west of Maquoketa. After his death in 1915, the lime plant continued operation for five years as a requisite of his will. The business, which had been doing poorly for some time, was discontinued in 1920.

Otis W. Joiner came to the Maquoketa area from the Lake George area in New York in the 1870s, attracted by the potential building boom. With his brother, he started a lumberyard in Maquoketa. They sold the lumberyard a few years later when Otis Joiner decided to go into the lime business. He purchased a tract of land about six miles west of Maquoketa, containing the same type of limestone Hurst used in his kilns, and constructed two draw kilns. His business was successful, and a small town — Joinerville — grew up around the plant. Like Hurst, Joiner hauled the burned lime to a nearby railroad, the Northwestern, where it was shipped throughout the Midwest.

The Joiner Lime Company closed down sometime between 1920 and 1930, and in the early 1950s road construction forced the demolition of the lime kilns. The rock, however, was discovered suitable for road work and a new quarry behind the site of the kilns was established. The only buildings still standing are the farm buildings once occupied by O.W. Joiner. The Hurstville works, except for the sheds that surrounded the kilns themselves (torn down because of their hazardous condition), still stand. □

# Motoring to a Wedding, 1910



## By Floyd M. Knupp

*Born in 1903 on a farm about six miles southeast of Dysart, in Benton County, Floyd M. Knupp attended Homer Township School #3 and graduated from the Dysart High School. After finishing coursework at Cedar Rapids Business College in 1924, Mr. Knupp worked as an underwriter for the Inter-Ocean Reinsurance Company – later called the American Reinsurance Company – until his retirement in 1968.*

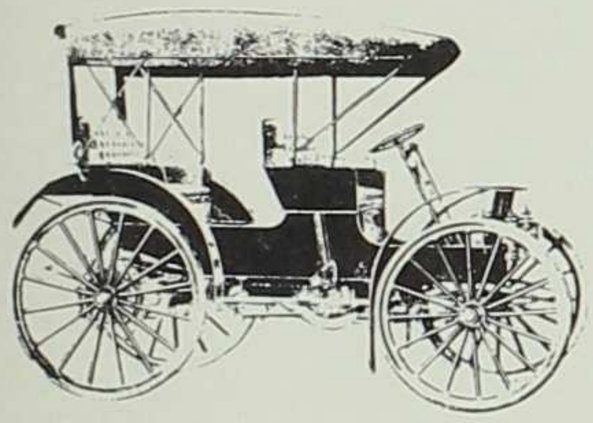
*A long-time Iowan with many memories, Mr. Knupp recounts here for us a trip he took as a very young boy, when the experience of a long automobile ride was fresher for most Americans, but no less frustrating.* – *Ed.*

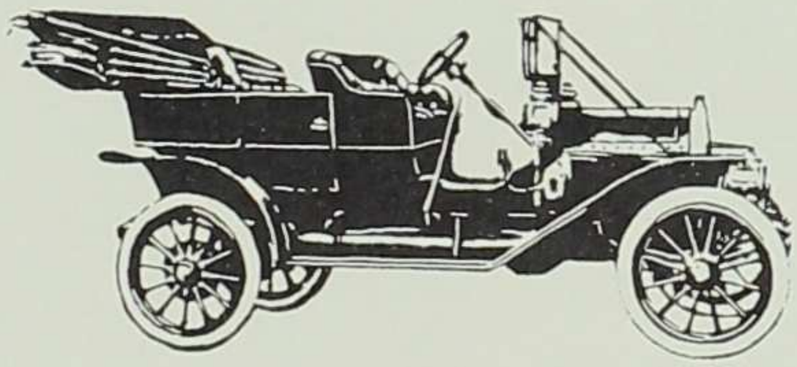
Uncle Noah Knupp was the last of the six brothers to be married. Except for Uncle Sam, who lived in the state of Washington, the brothers were determined to attend the wedding. Uncle Noah's marriage to Lily Bird was to take place at the bride's home in Moorland, Iowa — a small town a few miles southwest of Fort Dodge. The date was set for June, 1910.

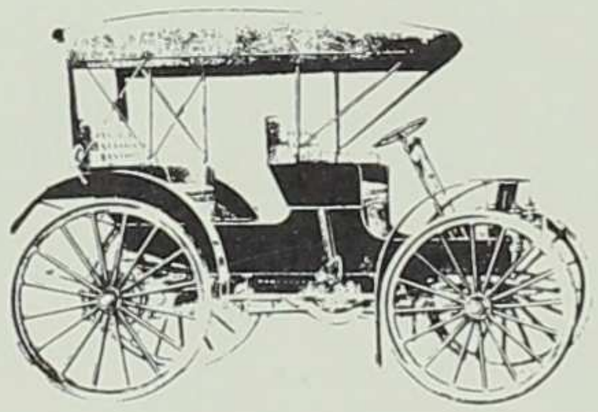
My dad — Lemon Knupp — lived on a farm six miles southeast of Dysart; Uncle Dan had an abstract office in Vinton; and Uncle Joe and Uncle Adam were farmers living southeast of Vinton. The brothers decided to make the trip to Moorland by automobile. We had a Regal, Uncle Dan had an EMF, and Joe and Adam had just purchased Internationals for the journey. These Internationals were nothing more than motorized buggies. They had buggy-size wheels with hard rubber on the rims, a dashboard in front with kerosene headlights, and a two-cylinder opposed engine under the seat with belt drive. Their top speed was probably 15 miles per hour on the level, and up to 20 miles per hour going down hill.

Uncle Dan agreed to be the navigator — keep in mind that there were no marked routes from town to town in those days, and all the roads were dirt and very dusty in the summertime. I imagine that Uncle Dan made up a list of the towns that we would go through, and would stop at each of them to find out how to get to the next town. His, of course, was the lead car, and at a corner where he thought we might be unsure which way to go, he would mark the correct turn by scattering confetti in the road. I remember getting out myself to help search for the telltale marks. The Internationals couldn't go as "fast" as the regular autos, so they brought up the rear.

I was about to turn seven years of age, and my brother Vernon was about 17. Uncle Dan had two sons in their teens, and the other uncles had one or maybe two children each, about







my age or younger. Since Joe and Adam had just bought their new Internationals, they asked a mechanic from Vinton, a Mr. Craig, to make the trip with them. My sister Amanda stayed at home to look after the farm.

As I recall, we left the farm about five o'clock in the morning. The first trouble developed in the hills northwest of Traer. The belts on the Internationals began to slip trying to negotiate the steep grades. However, this was easily taken care of by Mr. Craig, who picked up handfuls of dust from the road to throw on the belts.

Well, I suppose we stopped at every town we came to — for one reason or another. And probably we stopped a lot of times in between. Remember that there were no service stations in those days. Automobile repair centers were usually old livery barns, but cars didn't use much gasoline then. Of course, there were depots and cafes to stop at.

My mother agreed to change places with one of my aunts in the International. After we got back into our Regal I remember my mother saying that that would be the last switch, as the open International "buggies" were much more dusty and windy (no windshields), and the riding was rough. Shock absorbers hadn't been invented yet.

In the afternoon my brother had a small crisis as he encountered a short curve just before approaching a bridge. Back in those days, the spark and gas levers were on the steering column beneath the steering wheel and you had to reach through the wheel to get at them. As the auto entered the curve, Vern found his hand and fingers caught between the spark and gas levers and the spokes of the steering wheel, but, evidently, flesh and bones bent just enough to get the car over the bridge without a mishap.

Well, the hours slipped by quite fast, but the miles passed at a much slower pace. By eleven o'clock that night, we had gotten as far as Webster City, where we decided to go to a hotel. In the morning, I found myself lying out in the hall. I was understandably puzzled and asked my mother what I was doing there. She said that she had put me out in the hall because of all the bedbugs in the beds. But they really hadn't disturbed my sound sleep.

The next morning we drove over to Fort Dodge. Here we stopped so the men could go to the barbershop to get shaved and dressed for the wedding. I remember going into the barbershop, but I don't know where the women went to get dolled up — unless it was to a millinery store. I must add here that the proper attire for riding in an automobile in those days was a linen duster and a cap with goggles for the

men, and hats tied down with veils for the women — hardly what one would wear to a wedding!

The ceremony was to take place at noon, and here we were, still in Fort Dodge. The clock in the bride's living room was stopped at 12, but we were still over an hour late. The wedding went off in good shape: of course, my dad and several others cried. The lunch was served and we enjoyed it very much.

Uncle Noah had engaged a man with a car to come and pick up the bride and groom after the wedding. We all gave the couple a hearty send-off as they climbed into the car. But alas, when they were only a block down the street, that car coughed. It stopped dead. (When the car had arrived at the house, Mr. Craig had raised the hood and shut off the gasoline in the line.) The men went over and pushed the car with the laughing newlyweds inside around the streets of Moorland. The brothers said that they had come a long way to see them get married, and they were not going to let them get away so soon.

Uncle Noah phoned for a team and surrey to come get them. Just as the surrey was driving away, Mr. Craig jumped over the picket fence and grabbed the horses' bridles.

Foiled for the second time, they spent the evening with us in hilarious visiting. Finally, the bride and groom were permitted to leave on a train about midnight.

The next day, the four automobiles headed back home. Evidently nothing of much interest happened, because I don't recall anything about the return trip. Of course, by that time we were "seasoned travelers." We were quite fortunate not to have had any rain during the trip.

Although the distance traveled one way was less than 150 miles, it was at that time a big undertaking — almost like blazing a trail through the wilderness. Some newspapers carried the story of our trip, and it was even rumored that the story of the caravan appeared in at least one Chicago paper. □

# CONTRIBUTORS

SUSAN THOMPSON GOOD received a B.A. in related art and housing from the University of Iowa, Iowa City, and an M.A. in applied art from Iowa State University, Ames. A free-lance artist for several years, she has exhibited her watercolors in numerous solo and group shows throughout Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, and North Dakota. Ms. Good is a resident of Pilot Mound, Iowa and currently teaches watercolor and interior illustration at Iowa State University.

BARBARA HOWARD and JUNIA BRABY are collaborating on a book about Marietta Walker, sister of the Hodges brothers. Ms. Howard is an editor at Herald Publishing House in Independence, Missouri. She is a graduate of Graceland College and has taken graduate courses at St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Missouri. At the present time she is editing a book about children as part of the International Year of the Child. Ms. Braby is employed in the Archives of the RLDS Church, the Auditorium, Independence, Missouri. She holds a B.A. from Graceland College, Lamoni, Iowa and has taught in elementary and secondary schools in Iowa and New Mexico.

CAROLE J. REESINK grew up on a farm near Muscatine, Iowa. She received her undergraduate degree from Iowa Wesleyan College in 1967, an M.A. from the University of Northern Iowa in 1969, and a Ph.D. from the University of Iowa in 1976. She is currently an assistant professor in the Elementary Education Department at Bemidji State University, Bemidji, Minnesota.


*The State Historical Society of Iowa is a Division of the Iowa State Historical Department, a state agency created by the Sixty-fifth General Assembly. Along with the Society the Department includes a Division of Historical Museum and Archives (formerly Iowa Department of History and Archives) and a Division of Historic Preservation.*