The PALIMPSEST

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The PALIMPSEST

Peter T. Harstad, Director

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Charles Phillips, Editor

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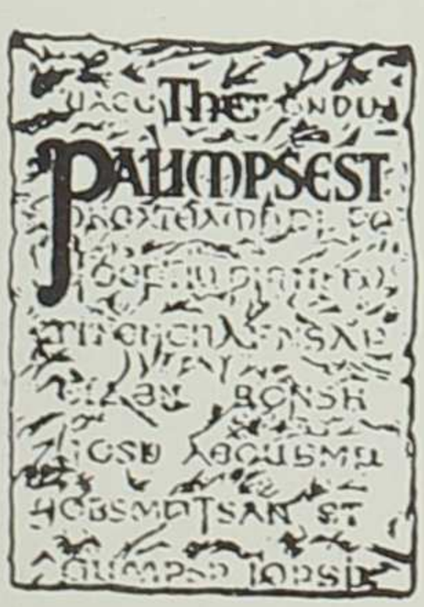
Cover: *A watercolor of a Sauk (left) and Mesquakie (right) by Karl Bodmer, painted in 1833 on Prince Alexander Philip Maximilian's celebrated journey up the Missouri. For a closer look at more of the priceless Bodmer watercolors see page 162. This issue the Society celebrates the Year of the Child by featuring two biographical articles, each concerned with an historic Iowan whose life was intimately intertwined with the welfare of children.*



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.

Women's Congress Convention, 1900 (courtesy Division of Historical Museum and Archives)

CORA BUSSEY HILLIS WOMAN OF VISION

by

Ginalie Swaim

It was another hot summer day in Des Moines. Young Cyrus Hillis sneaked out of the house, ran through the morning shadows, and down to the Des Moines River. His friends were already there, their feet squirming in the mud, their voices full of nervous excitement. The bridge looked higher than usual that morning, and far below, the spring rains had filled the river to the top of the banks. The current was dark and fast. After dares and double-dares, the first boy ventured out, inching his way along the siderails on hands and knees. He was a yard out when the next boy hoisted himself up to the rail. Then the third.

Back home, Cyrus's mother, Cora, sensed something was wrong. Checking his room, she found he was gone. All day she wondered where he'd gone off to. As darkness settled, wonder turned to worry. She sat up waiting, her thoughts returning to her own childhood and a haunting memory when she was 17 on an Eastern beach. The undertow had swept a young girl out beyond her depth. Finally, the girl had been pulled to shore, blue and swollen, and laid on the sand. Cora had wiped the sand from her face while rescuers revived her.

Eventually Cyrus came home. Cora was relieved, but she couldn't take her mind off of it. Every summer there were drownings in the river. Boys will be boys and Iowa summers could be miserably hot, Cora decided, so it was time to do something.

That summer—1894—Des Moines watched as 36-year-old Cora Bussey Hillis set out to create a safe public swimming facility for the children of Des Moines. She campaigned for building funds, enlisted the support of the press, and rounded up a huge supply of rental bathing suits for poor children. The bathhouse on the river was a success, judging from the 4,000 who dashed in and out that first week.

It was a simple, sane idea, one that Des Moines could be proud of. The citizens sat back, relieved, watching their children splash safely in a supervised swimming area. But Cora could not sit back. She knew that children needed more than a bathhouse. In the years to come she would become their spokesperson. She would prod legislators to pass more humane child welfare laws, teach parents how to create healthy, stimulating home environments, and inspire educators to establish a major research center for the study of children. Nationally she would win respect and prominence. And yet, in her own home, she would suffer incredible personal losses that would weaken her health but strengthen her resolve to improve the lot of the child.

Born in Bloomfield, Iowa in 1858, Cora and her parents, Cyrus and Ellen Bussey, moved to New Orleans after the Civil War. Her father was successful in business and sent her to a private girls' school run by the niece of Jefferson Davis. As the daughter of a Union brigadier general, Cora won friends slowly. But, like her classmates at the Sylvester Larned Institute, she grew to fit their image. She adored fancy gowns, read volumes of Sir Walter Scott, and played croquet under the magnolias. She observed her friends' flirtations, wryly recording each episode in her journal:

> Then the indignation within her broke its bonds. . . . I felt that I was "de trop" but could not reasonably leave them alone together. He emphatically denied ever having spoken of her save as a most prized friend. He said that he would as soon think of blaspheming his mother as of her. . . . I enjoyed their quarrel exceedingly. Tea was announced and after that an hour more of dispute.

Of her own flirtations less is recorded. She hoped to find a man who would "weigh the great things of the world," a noble man, be-

Isaac Lea Hillis

cause she considered herself, matter-of-factly, "worthy of a great good man. I feel within myself a power undeveloped which in future years shall command homage for me. I have a delicate sensibility. Some things which I see little affect others—give me actual pain."

Cora's two-year diary when she was 17 and 18 shifts between detached, objective observations of society's trappings and subjective, over-descriptive adolescent sighs, a polarity that shows up in her writing all her life. Traveling to the northeastern coastal cities with her family, she dismisses Yale University as a "line of dusty, rusty, dingy, dirty four story ordinary red brick buildings with an old forlorn looking chapel in the middle." She writes off her friend's fiance as "a foppish conceited little fellow who parts his yellow hair in the middle and looks dissipated." She learned to expect eloquence from the pulpit, and was disappointed when ministers delivered weak sermons. Indolence she labeled her major weakness, but the Southern leisure class did not offer her much of a challenge to change her ways.

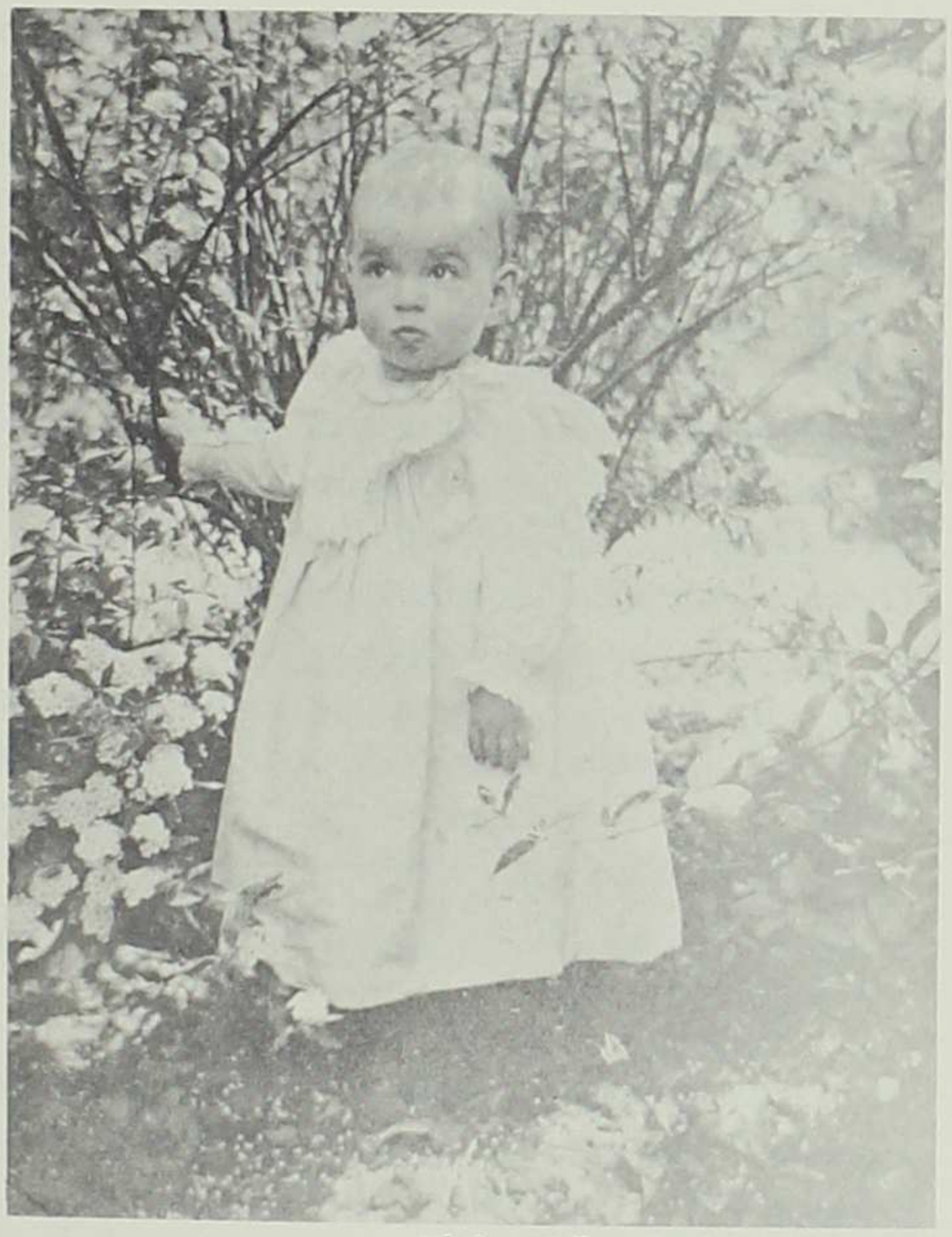
In Isaac Hillis, a young lawyer she met on a family vacation in Keokuk, Iowa, she found her noble man, and married him in December, 1880 after a long engagement. Cora and Isaac moved to Kansas City, only to be called back when her mother was struck ill with Bright's Disease. In less than a year Ellen Bussey died, leaving invalid sister Laura—"Lollie"—in Cora's hands to raise. That same year General Bussey lost most of his fortune in a business venture.

After their first child Ellen was born in 1883, Isaac and Cora, Ellen and Lollie moved to Des Moines, where he was an attorney and an abstractor. Cyrus was born, and then Philip. Cora settled into her role as wife and mother. But she could not confine her energies only to her children and home. Needing the stimulus of society as well as the warmth of home, she helped incorporate the Des Moines Women's Club in 1887 and raised funds by lecturing on the fine arts at teas held in her home.

The family moved to a bigger house, then to another after fire destroyed that one. By the mid-1890s, they had settled into a large Victorian house on the north edge of town—at 1625 Sixth Avenue. Within the next 30 years, a flood of letters bearing that return address would awaken Iowa to its greatest resource—children.

About this time—early in 1893—Cora and the three children set out by train to visit Isaac's parents in California. In late April they headed back home, full of new experiences and ideas. But tragedy awaited. Philip, nearly two, contracted meningitis. Near Denver the train wrecked and the child was thrown from the berth. Baby Philip came back to Iowa in a coffin.

Several months later Isaac was born, and



Philip Hillis; died Spring, 1893

Cora Bussey Hillis

Cora's heartache eased a bit. She poured her energies—what were left after mothering three children and Lollie—into the women's club, the bathhouse, and a rose parade in Des Moines, which she modeled after the Ventura Floral Parade in California. She began to write, selling stories to *Midland Monthly* and a regular column to *Iowa Homestead.* Her days were busy, full of tender mothering and good-hearted civic responsibilities, but she lacked a central focus, a cause.

Then, in 1898, a batch of news stories and cartoons from Eastern papers arrived at Cora's door. General Bussey, now prominent in the Republican Party in Washington, D.C. had clipped them out for his daughter, thinking she might be interested in this event called a "mother's congress." She was.

Sifting through the journalists' sarcasm and ridicule, Cora found an idea that struck home: "to save the race through the child." Perhaps here was a purpose that would answer her sense of loss over Philip's death. She read on: "We aim to substitute enlightenment for ignorance in regard to maternity—to make of every household a home by educating the fathers and mothers in true parenthood by bettering the conditions of the home, multiplying its pleasures and creating more ideal surroundings for the children."

Cora was intrigued. She convinced her editor at *Iowa Homestead* to send her to cover the next National Mothers' Congress in 1899. She served as the delegate from the Iowa Child Study Society, a group of about 200 members who at that time were distributing educational pamphlets to teachers. At the University of Iowa two professors were beginning psychological investigations of children. And H.E. Kratz, president of the Child Study Society and superintendent of Sioux City Public Schools, wrote her, "There is a willingness to listen to

discussions of this kind, and on the whole, the outlook for advanced work on Child Study is very encouraging."

Cora set out for Washington in February. On the 13th, the day before the Congress was to convene, 35 inches of snow fell on Washington. While the blizzard slowed other delegates and postponed the conference until February 16, it didn't stop Cora. On the morning of the 14th she was the first delegate to arrive.

During that week, Cora became close to Mrs. Theodore Birney, who, with Mrs. Phoebe A. Hearst, "a millionairess of most generous impulses," had founded the congress three years earlier. Midweek Cora overheard Mrs. Birney and another board member discussing proposed sites for the next congress. The women considered Kansas City, Chicago, Denver, San Francisco. To Cora, the choice was obvious: Des Moines.

That day Cora wired the board an invitation from the mayor of Des Moines to hold the next congress there. Then she wired the mayor to tell him what he had just done. She asked for backing of her idea from the Des Moines Women's Club and got it. The Congress ended in a few days. Having done what she could in Washington, Cora set to work back home, gathering letters of invitation from prominent Iowans and literature describing Des Moines's hospitality. These she forwarded on to Washington.

Sixteen cities in the western half of the United States were competing for the congress. But Cora and her hometown won. By early April Mrs. Birney wired her announcing Des Moines as the next site. The press was jubiliant, calling it the "most interesting national convention of modern times" and "a triumph for the most wide-awake city in the west." The congress would draw three times as many visitors to Des Moines as any Chautauqua had, they predicted, and a good deal of money. And all the credit went to Cora, "one of the brainiest and original of Iowa women." Cora had given Des Moines another reason to be proud of itself.

Now that she had won the congress she had to produce the Iowa delegates, and so set out to organize mothers' clubs across the state. She didn't expect it to be easy. Years later she recalled, "Here was I, bidden to preach a new gospel to a state full of mothers, the majority of whom really believed they already knew all there was to be known about child-care." Everywhere she announced that

> the coming of the Congress to Des Moines means that for the coming year we will be the center of interest to all the educators, professors and club people of the country. The attention of people in all the colleges and schools will be turned towards us, and the thought of all the great intellectual minds will be given to the city. It will give Des Moines more prominent advertising than any city of the west has ever had before.

Through a pyramid structure, Cora, as state regent, appointed county regents who appointed regents in each town to form clubs. Hints for setting up clubs, enlisting the interest of fathers, and coordinating with teachers were mailed out, and programs and reading lists prepared. "There was not a penny to buy stamps, and I could give little beside myself and my personal allowance and what I could raise by personal effort. Yet the work prospered," she wrote. "I tell all this to you who are working to encourage you to forget yourselves in your work—your limitations—your fatigue and discouragement over slow results. Keep before you only the righteousness of the cause and its ultimate success."

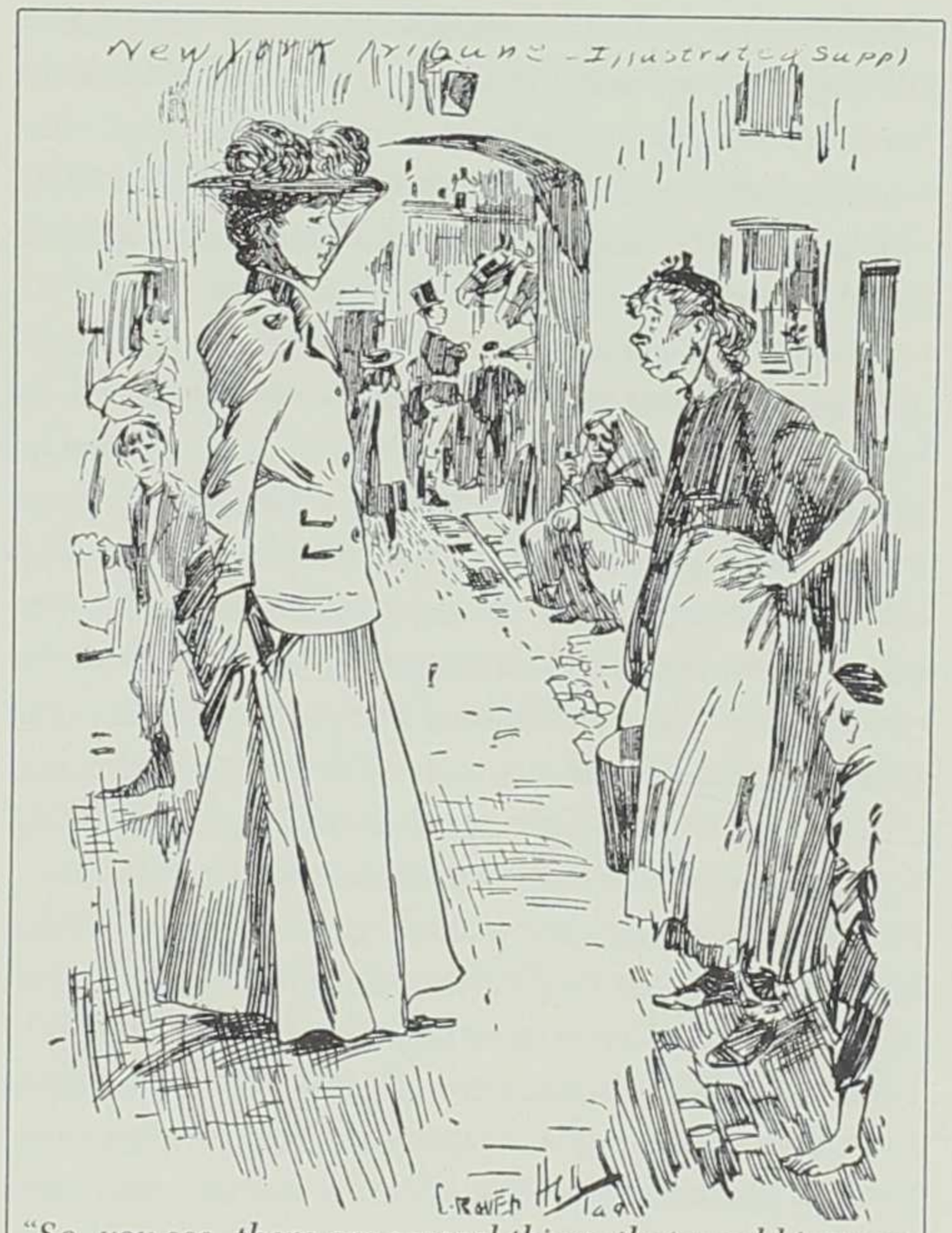
She cautioned women not to create a club for the sake of having a club, but to help parents and teachers in need, to improve conditions in the schools, to provide for neglected and delinquent children—in short, to focus on children. Clubs sprang up across the state, generally after her encouraging visits, and took on various projects. Some provided clothes for needy children; some made sanitation inspections at the schools. A rural club obtained a covered

vehicle to transport young children to the one-room schoolhouse; others dealt with temperance. Clubs instructed girls in home economics, boys in manual labor skills, and impoverished mothers in the healthiest and easiest ways to care for house and family.

When the National Congress opened in Des Moines May 21, 1900, Iowa boasted 644 mothers' clubs (under various names) representing 21,200 members. The Des Moines auditorium had a capacity of 4,500 and in some daytime sessions speeches were repeated to overflow audiences in the YMCA. Hotels were booked up and Des Moines families hosted delegates in their homes.

Civic pride and anticipated profits must have generated the overwhelming support that the press had given the congress in the previous year. For when the congress actually convened, the press reacted with confusion and complaint to the issue—a congress of *mothers*. It must have been a confusing, threatening redefinition of an age-old social role, and many were not yet clear what it meant.

Ever since the Industrial Revolution had pulled more women into factory labor forces, and the development of "domestic machinery" had reduced the workload of the housewife, women were growing aware that they could participate more in the daily goings-on of society, instead of being cloistered in the home. But tradition was strong and Iowa was largely rural. Granted, Susan B. Anthony and Iowa's own Carrie Chapman Catt had their followings in the state, but women were still 20 years away from winning the right to vote. And now 3,000 mothers were descending on Des Moines, for what purpose? One paper reassured that the meeting "was not made up of ancient maiden ladies who wanted to vote, and women with double chins who demanded equal rights and all the seats in the cars. With few exceptions the delegates were wives or mothers or both, who consider it enough to devote themselves to the business of running things in a satisfactory way at home, leaving politics and mercantile affairs generally to their husbands and sons."



"So, you see, there are several things that would interest you, and I'm sure you would enjoy yourself very much. Now, can I persuade you to come to our next Mother's Meeting?"

"Well, yer leddyship, you're very kind; but I was never a Society woman!"

Perhaps these women would not upset the vote or close the saloons, but to many the congress was still a "useless expenditure of money and lavendar perfume." The Council Bluffs *Nonpareil* refused to take the congress seriously, reporting:

> Opening day Mothers' Congress—pink roses—prayer—pink and blue ribbons—address of welcome—white organdy with lace insertions and pink satin ribbons—. . . health as influenced by dress—marguerites with pink frosting—child study a leading science—fawn colored novelty cloth, embroidered in white silk, yoke of white mousseline and jet— . . . elevating home life—black lace over grey silk bodice—music by the mandolin club—all permanent improvement of the race must come through the mothers.

A New York *Tribune* cartoon titled "Mother's Congress" portrayed a haggard, ragged mother in the slums replying to a well-dressed matron's invitation to join a club: "Well, yer [ladyship], you're very kind; but I was never a Society woman!"

Several newspapers applauded the concept of the congress and assumed the delegates to be as intelligent and competent as any group of professional men brought together, but others accused mothers of abandoning children and husbands at home so they could attend a national tea party. One paper conceded that the congress "has a mission if nothing more is done than to call a halt on the new woman who has invaded every occupation except breaking prairie, and they say she does that in Kansas."

Inside at the congress, speakers and delegates, too, were dealing with this conflict of tradition and new roles for women. Mrs. Birney clarified the congress's stand that women should realize the opportunities of domestic life when considering other careers, and that the goal was to "keep women with families of children from falling behind the times, getting 'rusty' and growing old before their time. The central object of the whole organization is the child."

The delegates were choosing motherhood, but in the 20th century it was to be an informed, carefully-examined decision. One speaker traced back the cultural values attributed to women—delicacy, weakness, and dependence—and studied the paradox of the holiness of motherhood and the impurity of actual pregnancy and birth. It was time to discard stereotyped assessments of male and female roles. When Professor Oscar Chrisman, a speaker from Kansas State Normal School, maintained that men never love and women never reason, that women dress for sexual attraction and that they should be educated mainly for motherhood, his remarks were followed by choruses of hisses and delegates demanding the floor to refute his statements.

The congress was breaking new ground, asking that parenting be recognized as a profession that demands creativity, responsibility and committment, and that women, as primary caretakers of the nation's children, had just as much need and just as much right to come together for educational, social, or political goals as did any other profession.

Cora declared the opening day of the congress to be the proudest day of her life. On the closing day, she was unanimously elected president of the newly formed Iowa Congress of Mothers and lost no time in turning her ideas into realities by inspiring and organizing the women of Iowa. Soon after a free children's ward was set up in Des Moines's Iowa Methodist Hospital. Through the Penny Saving System, Des Moines schoolchildren learned to save money—nearly $2,500 in four months in a city-wide account, in fact. Sewing circles were mobilized to help flood victims or truant children who needed clothes.

Meanwhile, despite meager finances, Cora prepared for the 1902 Iowa congress, focusing on an issue introduced in the final speeches at the last congress—legislation creating juvenile courts. Cora had been corresponding with other states which had passed similar bills, and in the 1901 *Suggestions,* the publication of the congress, she quoted extensively the Honorable Harvey B. Hurd. Hurd had coauthored with Lucy Flower the Juvenile Court Act of Illinois, the first state to pass such a law. Before juvenile courts were established, children had been dragged through the long legal process as adults—detained in police stations and jails, tried as adults, and often sent to prisons. There they had received "an education sufficient to have made them pretty well-posted criminals by the time they got out," wrote Chicago juvenile court judge Richard S. Tuthill. A juvenile court system, on the other hand, would provide separate courts, deten-

tion homes, and probation officers. Hurd argued that it was the state's duty to act as *parens patriae* for neglected children. Mature judgment could not be expected of a child, nor should he be punished as harshly as an adult.

When the 1902 Iowa Congress of Mothers convened, Cora led the 200 delegates to the Capitol. During short recesses she addressed the house and senate, giving notice that "Two years hence we will present a juvenile court and probation law, and earnestly request the legislators to study the literature of the movement as it appears in the current press."

Within those next two years Cora generated a lot of press. About her hometown she discovered

> In Des Moines we have a miserable system of taking care of these little folks. The only place for the detention of these young people is one small room, the most of which is cut up into pigeon holes just large enough for a cot and a chair. In these the children sleep and during the day are all allowed to mingle in the small remaining space. The contaminating influence of a few bad boys in this cage with a number of little girls can readily be realized. There have been as many as thirty there at once. These children are fed but black coffee with bread and molasses with soup for dinner.

She urged ministers to sermonize on the issue. Support from labor unions, civic clubs, welfare groups, and professionals poured in. In December she presided over a symposium at the YMCA, quoting Judge Tuthill: "Heretofore the state has only given the policeman with his club, police cells, jails and prisons to children, who, before they knew what crime really was, committed some act which in an adult would be a crime; punished them for it, and threw them into constant companionship with mature criminals where their delinquency speedily developed into criminality." Judge Gifford L. Robinson of the State Board of Control brought the issue home, stating that 20% of Iowa convicts were under age 20 and 90% from the poorer classes.

The next month Judge Ben B. Lindsey came into the picture. The 34-year-old judge of juvenile court in Denver was known for both his enthusiastic, eloquent speeches and for his successful system. He claimed that only nine out of 359 first offenders came back through his courtroom on a second offense. Other states with juvenile courts claimed similar success rates.

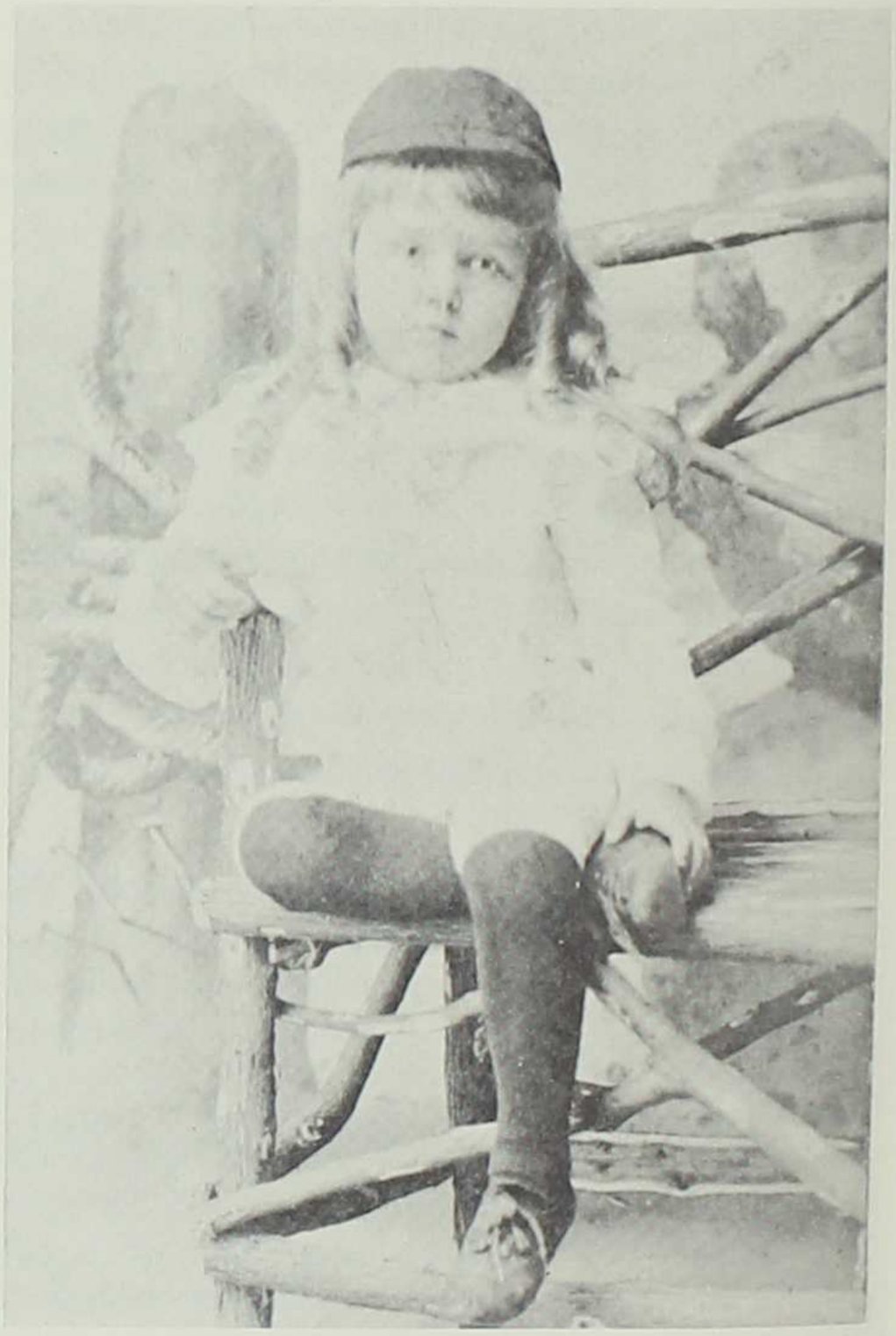
By February 3, the bill had been drafted by Cora and Chester C. Cole, a former Iowa chief justice and then dean of the Drake Law School. The bill called for a juvenile court in every county for children under 16. It created probation officers and detention homes. It forbade the confinement of children with adults. In April, after modifications, the bill passed both houses unanimously, perhaps because there were no appropriations for probation officers or detention homes. These funds would have to come later. It was a predestined victory, but Cora had worked hard to point out the obvious need and to prick the conscience of Iowa. Later she would analyze what she had undertaken—"to try to overturn a century old system of Jurisprudence; introduce juvenile courts, and compel reluctant judges to turn from the business of safeguarding the almightly dollar long enough to save some little immortal child. I must do all this and yet be, in my own home, the kind of mother whose children would reflect honor on herself and her home."

But tragedy seemed to hover over Cora's home. She had searched her heart for some divine reason when her sister Lollie died while visiting relatives in Alabama. Cora had written her cousin Florence:

> I think I know how a wild bird must feel when it beats its wings against the fatal bars which shut it in. I have beaten against the bars until my heart is sore and my spirit is broke. They say "He doeth all things well," but I do not understand. I never yet saw the *well* in Mama's case, nor do I see it in Lollie's. I suppose I am wicked but I can't be reconciled and I won't be a hypocrite and say I am when every atom in me rebels at being robbed of Mother, my lovely boy and the only sister I have. You see I am in a bad way.

It was not over. In early August, 1903, eight

months before her legislative victory for the children of Iowa, Cora's nine-year-old son Isaac died of a ruptured appendix.



Isaac Hillis, Jr.; died August 7, 1903

In 1904 Cora began speaking at county Farmers' Institutes. Her speeches, titled "A Field Worth Cultivating," "Seed Worth Sowing," or "Child Culture Vs. Corn Culture," were slated between talks on fencing, manuring fields, and breeding hogs. She urged Iowa farmers to give as much care and attention to their children as to their crops and livestock, a theme Iowa would hear again. Children must not be neglected "in father's passion for adding farm to farm or the mother's housekeeping fury." Wrote a rural newspaper, "She succeeded in taking the attention of the farmer for the time from corn, cattle, hogs, and rotation of crops and centered it upon the home, the boy, and the tired mother." Eventually she helped organize a woman's department within the institutes for greater integration of home and farm.

In October, 1906 she resigned as president of the Iowa Congress of Mothers, but she continued to give her energies and talents to the organization, later holding national office, as it evolved into the Congress of Parent-Teachers Associations.

There is a pause here in Cora's public life. One hopes she finally took time to rest, to cook her superb Creole dishes, to develop prints in her darkroom, or to feel the solid satisfaction of working with wood and simple tools. Surely she deserved such pleasures. The house sparkled as the Christmas of 1906 approached. But then eight-year-old Doris came home ill from school, where she had been exposed to scarlet fever and diptheria. Ellen, the eldest child, also caught the fever. On Christmas Eve Cyrus carried his little sister downstairs to see the tree and the presents. On the night of New Year's Day, Doris died.

Cora nursed Ellen back to health, but the emotional and physical drain were tremendous. She could not recover from this fourth tragedy. For months, decimated with grief, she sought seclusion.

Cora gradually picked up her causes again, carrying them to more Farmers' Institutes, to mothers' congresses, to President Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission on which she served, to Des Moines citizens for city beautification plans. The winter of 1909-10 she headed south for New Orleans, where friends and family and nights out at the opera house made her feel 25 again, instead of twice that age. And packed along with the fancy gowns and jewels she loved, she brought her favorite causes, speaking on child welfare and

Doris Hillis; died January 1, 1906

Cora Bussey Hillis, shortly after her daughter's death in 1906

helping to establish a night school for the poor children of New Orleans.

But there were always more setbacks. A year later surgeons at the Mayo Clinic discovered and removed a blood clot in her throat and her recovery lasted several months. Illness was not new to Cora. In her letters she often mentioned she was unwell, but seldom gave details. Migraine headaches often forced her to bed, but unexpected company or a suggested outing would get her back up again. Surely her health suffered from the public demands and family tragedies of these years, but in some sense she thrived on work and on challenge. She traveled across Iowa inspiring and instructing, still managing to spend more time with family than did her socialite friends out playing progressive euchre.

Her stamina and will must have been remarkable. Certainly her intuitive powers were. Cora's family grew used to watching her hunches come true. One morning she awoke from her dreams to tell her family of a terrible disaster at sea, and detailed vividly the chaos on deck as passengers and lifeboats went overboard. Later the news reports came in of the sinking of the "unsinkable" Titanic.

She worked to pass a Vital Statistics Bill in the Iowa Legislature in late 1912. Accurate registration of birth and death information was one of the first steps needed to reduce the incredibly high infant mortality rates in the United States. But the bill never got beyond the Appropriations Committee. Senator Thomas H. Smith wrote to Cora, "They wanted to save the little appropriation required that

they might invest it in hog serum or in some other way add to the health and comfort of cattle and hogs." It was becoming an old and grating song to Cora, this choice of livestock welfare over child welfare.

But Iowa needed statistics, and if the lawmakers wouldn't provide the means, someone else had to. The Des Moines Child Welfare Association was formed as a branch of the Department of Public Safety. As the Baby Saving Campaign took shape, committees were appointed to handle birth registration (thus registering over 90% of Des Moines's births in one year), free ice and pure milk distribution, visiting nurses, and Cora's project, the fresh air camp.

Cora secured the finances to set up the camp—including a large screened nursery—at Good Park and supervised the camp the second month. Besides lecturing on packing nutritious lunches, discarding patent medicines and whiskey as colic cures, avoiding loan sharks, and bathing and feeding children, Cora and the nurse rocked babies while the mothers slept undisturbed for the first time in years. Temperatures hovered around 100 the summer of 1913, but 117 mothers and children left the camp revived and educated. Cora left the camp bitter and angry. "Whatever good was done to a family by a rest at the camp would be quickly undone if they returned to the house from which they came . . . crowded two and three to a lot, treeless, sun baked, near undrained ponds, filthy outhouses. . . . " She surveyed over half the realtors in Des Moines and found only two decent homes available for fair rents. Some of the landlords of the most deplorable homes were Des Moines wealthiest men. This time all of Des Moines was not so proud of itself.

By the next year, an idea that Cora had carried with her for years, keeping it glowing like a coal on a cold hearth, finally burst into flame and consumed all of her energies and the imagination of countless Iowans.

The story had started when Cora was 12. Lollie, then two, had contracted a serious spinal disease. For years her parents had searched for doctors who could cure her. They had prescribed several different treatments, but their diagnoses had all been equally grim. When Cora's mother died, the bride of only a few weeks had carried on the search. No two doctors agreed and yet they all warned Cora that her sister, at best, would be bedridden for life. Cora rejected this, and in the house on Sixth Avenue, she had set out to educate Lollie in moments when the invalid was strong enough to study. Lollie and Cora had proven the doctors wrong when Lollie completed high school and entered a local college at age 17. Along with Cora's growing distrust of the medical profession's ability to adequately deal with Lollie, she developed related doubts as she raised her own children. "I waded through oceans of stale textbook theory, written largely, I fancy, by bachelor professors or elderly teachers, with no actual personal contact with youth," she wrote later. "I discovered there was no well defined science of child rearing, no accepted standards on which all might agree. I found that all knowledge of the child was theoretical and most advice experimental."

More was known about the development of a dog or a cow than about a child's growth. And, particularly in Iowa, applied science had helped farmers produce superior crops and livestock and meet every problem with well-researched solutions. In fact, at the Pan-American Exposition in 1901 Iowa claimed 285 of the 289 agricultural prizes awarded.

But as Iowa's farm products picked up more blue ribbons and Cora immersed herself into child welfare work, the number of citizens in institutions cried bitterly to her. She answered back, sometimes with moving eloquence, other times with hard statistics and cost analyses. Could not applied science based on the study of the normal child result in a de-

pendable science of child-rearing, so that some of these cases in the asylums and jails might have been prevented? Cora was sure of it, but it would be years before she would find others who were as convinced as she.

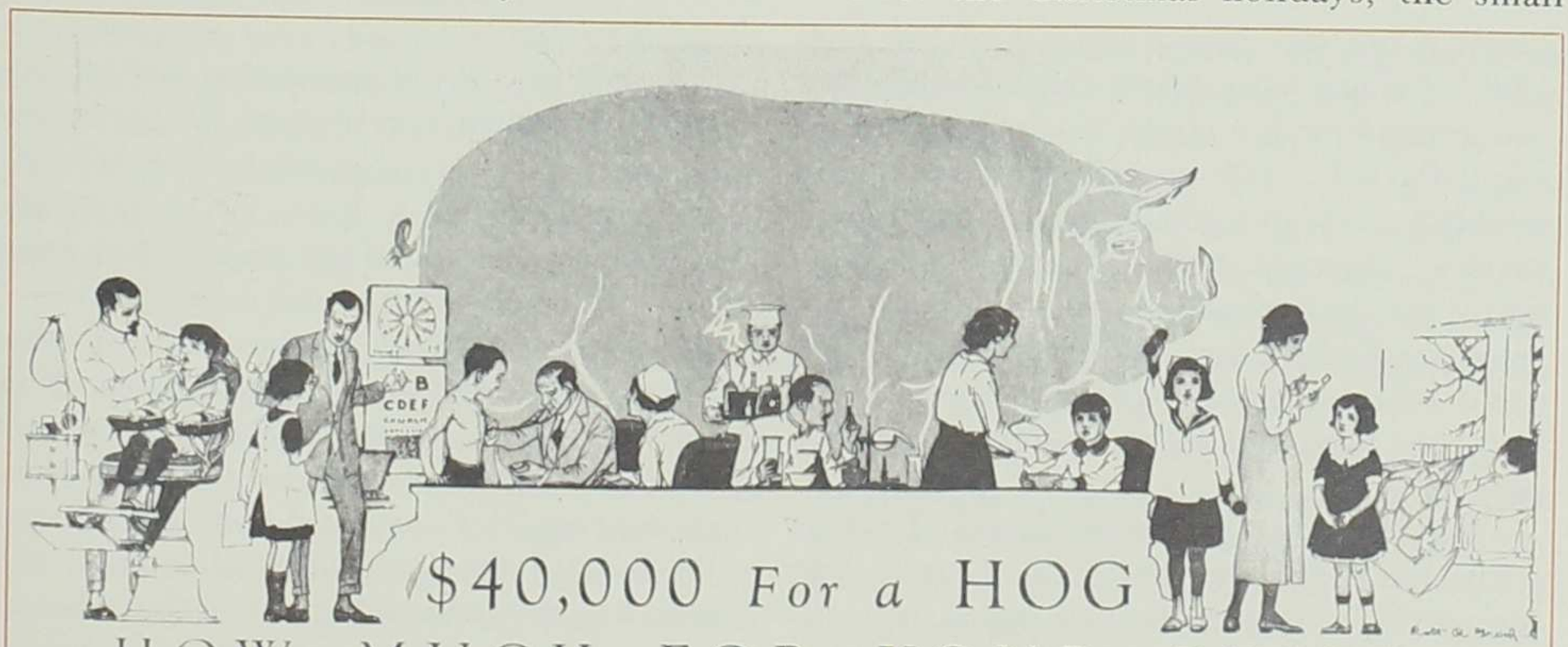
Late in 1901 Cora approached the president of Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts at Ames with her idea. She described the problem and outlined the solution: scientific investigation of everything related to child life. President Beardsheer thought it over, but told Cora that while the idea was sound, it was too new. There were neither the trained workers nor the money. A visit to the next president at Ames a few years later was again fruitless. Meanwhile Cora took every opportunity to educate the public. In every speech she stressed that children as well as hogs and cattle should benefit from applied science.

In 1908 she turned towards Iowa City. State University of Iowa President George E. MacLean listened so attentively that, as she spoke the familiar words, the idea took on the form of a research station, a laboratory where normal children would be studied extensively. MacLean's interest was sincere, but so was the University's need for a $150,000 state appropriation for a women's dormitory. But now MacLean, too, started speaking publicly of the idea.

While the next University president told her she could help most by procuring a set of chimes for the campanile, Cora persisted, watching as public opinion crystallized. Later she wrote, "A great poet has said: Men get opinions as boys learn to spell, by re-iteration chiefly. And I re-iterated endlessly. I developed an amusing facility in directing discussion to child-welfare channels."

In 1914 she approached her fifth University president, Thomas Macbride. He listened and replied: "I believe we can do something along this line." He directed her to Dr. Carl Seashore, Dean of the Graduate College, who adopted the idea and appointed a faculty child-welfare committee to develop working plans. As state chairman, Cora organized support.

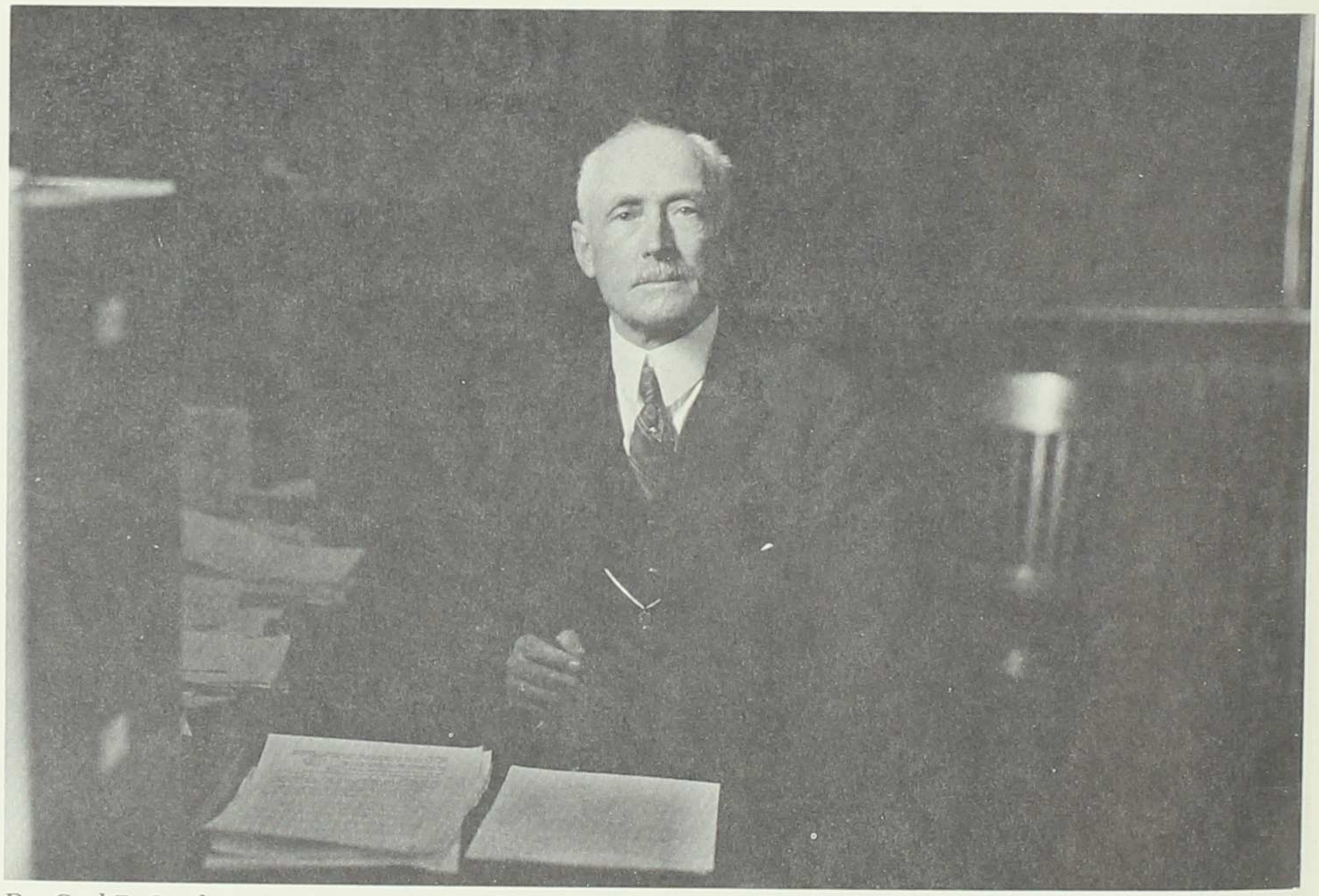
Over the Christmas holidays, the small



$40,000 *For a* HOG
HOW MUCH FOR YOUR CHILD?

The State of Iowa spends money to raise normal children. How about your State? This is the story of the Iowa Child Welfare Research Station

BY DR. BIRD T. BALDWIN, DIRECTOR, and ANNE O'HAGAN for THE DELINEATOR



Dr. Carl E. Seashore (courtesy Special Collections, The University of Iowa Libraries)

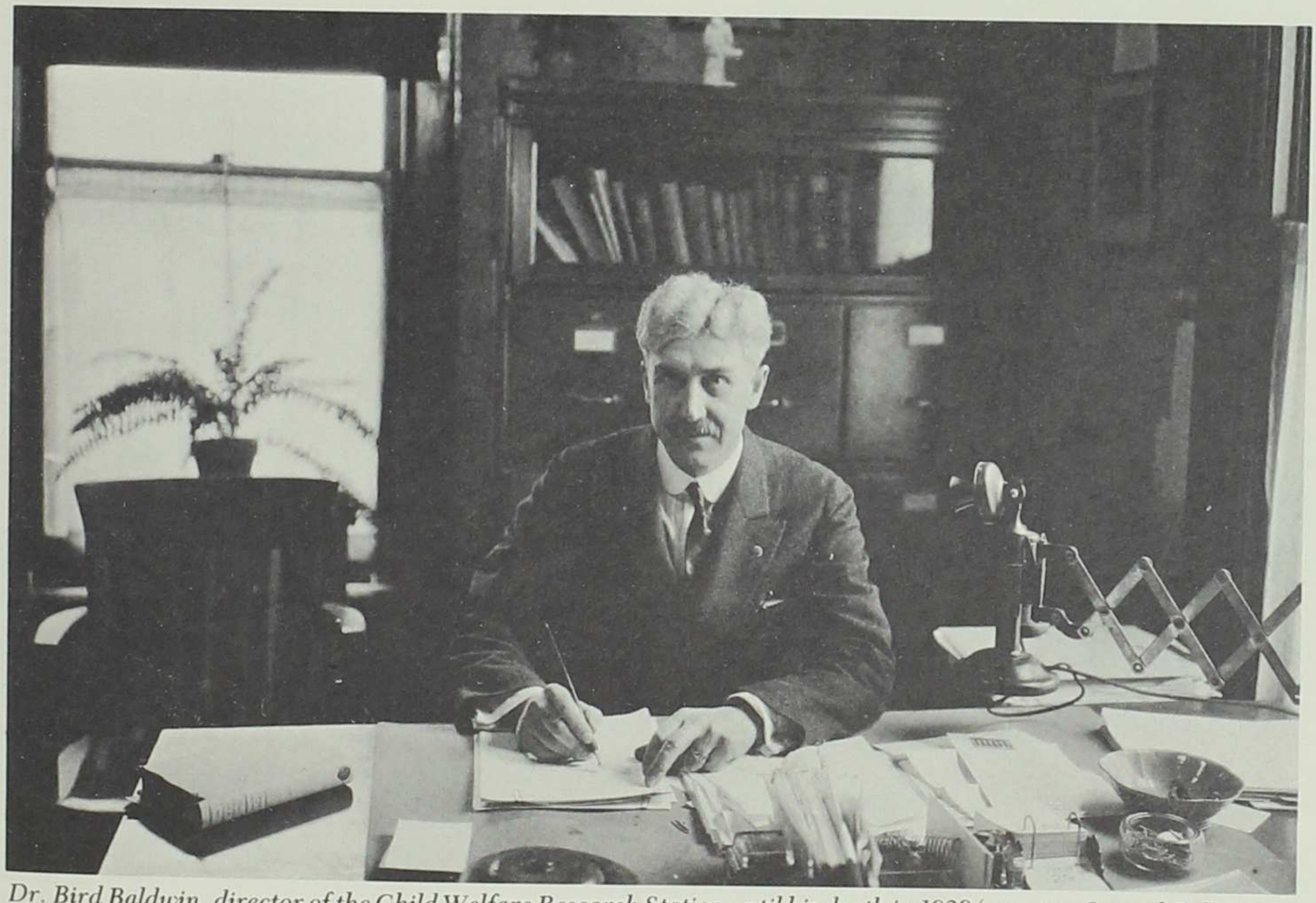
group (Cora was now president of the Iowa Child-Welfare Association) churned out plans and letters from her house. As drafted, the bill asked for a $50,000 annual appropriation to establish a research station as part of the University. Through study, it would establish norms for every phase of early childhood, develop methods of care and treatment to bring about balanced growth and correction of defects, and disseminate this information to Iowa parents.

Years of contacts with individuals and groups across the state were paying off. Cora had no computerized mailing lists or major expenditures, but she organized her support. Within eight days every major group in the state—political groups, labor unions, Parent-Teachers Associations, professional and fraternal bodies, the clergy, to name but a few—had been instructed to flood the legislators with mail. And flood they did.

The bill was out of committee and passage looked promising, even though the appropriation requested had been slashed to $25,000. Suddenly Cora had to leave for Washington. Her father was dying of pneumonia. She came home two weeks later to more bad news.

During her absence another bill had come up. It appeared that the sheep of Iowa needed a barn for their ten-day stay at the state fair each year, and this barn would cost $25,000. Well, Iowa was proud of her sheep and her state fair, all right, and what a chance to show them off. There was only so much money, after all, and Iowans didn't need an extravagant bunch of scientists telling them how to raise their children. The sheep won.

Representative Moore of Guthrie was not alone in railing against the so-called "economy advocates" of the House: "You cut out publica-



Dr. Bird Baldwin, director of the Child Welfare Research Station until his death in 1928 (courtesy Special Collections, The University of Iowa Libraries)

tion clauses to save a few cents, you kick against every little appropriation that comes along, you forget the interests of the children, you forget the interest of advancement in order to save a little money, then turn and put the whole business into a sheep barn."

As 1917 approached, Cora restocked her arsenal for the next general assembly. This year she found even more support. A bad fall had confined her to bed for five weeks, so she set up headquarters in her bedroom. Within two weeks she had the support of 30 state organizations representing half-a-million Iowans. Other states were considering the idea of studying child life, and Cora feared that her talented professors at Iowa would be pulled away. There could be no more waiting.

She told the state the money was an investment, not an expenditure. In nine years Iowa had spent 18 million dollars on the thousands of citizens in state institutions. If only four children per year per county were helped by the work of the station so as to not to become delinquent or defective wards of the state, the money saved would pay for the station. If only ten children per county were helped to make their grades, the money saved in repeated education would again cover the cost.

To Governor Harding she claimed the requested appropriation was impossible to reject: "The amount asked is so small—in a state like Iowa—the price of a postage stamp per capita, three puffs of a good cigar, half a glass of milk, half of a good apple, one third of an orange—two sticks of chewing gum—such a trifle per capita that is good politics as well as good business sense."

She appealed to state pride: "The eyes of the educational world are on Iowa." She reiterated

On the lawn at the Child Welfare Research Station (courtesy Special Collections, The University of Iowa Libraries)

points she had made in a letter to legislators two years earlier where she had not minced words: "Defeat of the Child's Welfare Bill will mean the death warrant to hundreds of Iowa's babies and a life-long handicap through neglect of curable preventable defects to many of Iowa boys and girls . . . are you willing to assume such a terrible responsibility?"

The bill stalled in a House committee, so Cora hobbled to the state house on crutches to get it reported out that day and passed a few days later. But in the Senate the bill faced the opposition of eleven members of the Appropriations Committee. W.A. Jessup, now president at the University and a strong supporter of the bill, was giving up hope. Cora went back to Sixth Avenue to do her homework,

> to study those eleven men. Two were democrats and Catholics, somewhat aloof from the majority. One was a pessimist, two were old fogies of limited education and narrow outlook. One firmly believed that instinct could teach any mother how to care for her children. "It was nature's plan." he argued, "A cat could care for her kitten, a mother should be able to care for her child." Each of the others had some particular bias which it took time to unravel. I never personally spoke to any of these gentlemen, but I know that for ten days thereafter, they had many calls and letters from unexpected sources, from the Bishop of the Diocese to the mother of ten, doctors, members of the Board of Control and state officials. Still no action was taken.

Then World War I was declared. The research station bill was apparently "put to sleep" in committee. State expenditures were directed toward preparing for the war. All across the nation, America's best lined up outside recruitment offices, and appalling numbers were turned away after the physical exams. Many of the physical handicaps reported stemmed from childhood and poor upbringing.

One morning Cora seized on the *Des Moines Register* headlines announcing that 209 of 250 boys had failed their physicals the previous day. By noon every legislator in both houses found on his desk a letter suggesting that the mothers of these 209 "rejected young patriots" no doubt had raised them by tradition and instinct, and that a little well-distributed scientific guidance on child-raising 30 years ago might have put America in a better position

now to defend democracy.

The bill passed. Cora's greatest dream and most difficult challenge was a reality. She wrote to Seashore, "For a time I shall feel lost. In putting away some of my material the thought came, this is like putting away the clothes of the child I had lost, so much a part of me has been this work."

Cora trusted deeply in science and so she left the research up to the staff at the station. But she remained in constant touch with Seashore and Dr. Bird Baldwin, the director. Like the proud mother of a child genius, she was determined that the research station should gain national prominence and leadership, and yet remain at the service of the Iowans who had produced and paid for it. Since then, the Iowa Child-Welfare Research Station has been renamed the Institute of Child Behavior and Development, but it has remained true to its original purposes, listing over 2,000 publications and major research breakthroughs concerning physical growth rates, factors affecting children's I.Q.'s, speech retraining for cerebral palsied children, and teacher discipline.

The research station got off to a fitful start as the war pulled away some of the staff. But to Cora this only underlined the necessity of child study. All over the world nations were taking inventory of their natural resources, gearing up factories, and conserving materials. But Cora believed children were a nation's greatest natural resource and she demanded that they be raised to reach their potential: quality American citizens ready to lead the world in pursuit of a lasting peace. Towards this goal, she proposed to Herbert Hoover and President Woodrow Wilson a nation-wide survey for outstanding youth, physical and mental measurements of all American children, and compulsory feeding and housing standards. The scope of her proposition was so broad and the product so nebulous that it seemed only a vision, her usual persuasive eloquence lost in her eagerness to reconstruct her country and her world after the chaos of the Great War.

Cora turned 60 in 1918, the year of her husband's death. She wrote President Wilson offering to serve at home or abroad to carry out her proposals. This plan never took shape, but in the next six years as she traveled widely serving on national commissions and boards, she was her own ambassador. The juvenile bill and the research station were her credentials, and her eloquence still moved people to action. A sidetrip after a 1920 Dallas convention took her to the inaugural ceremonies of President Alvaro Obregon in Mexico. Seated next to Mrs. Obregon during a dinner, Cora talked of her life work. Within two months Mexico held its first conference on child welfare.

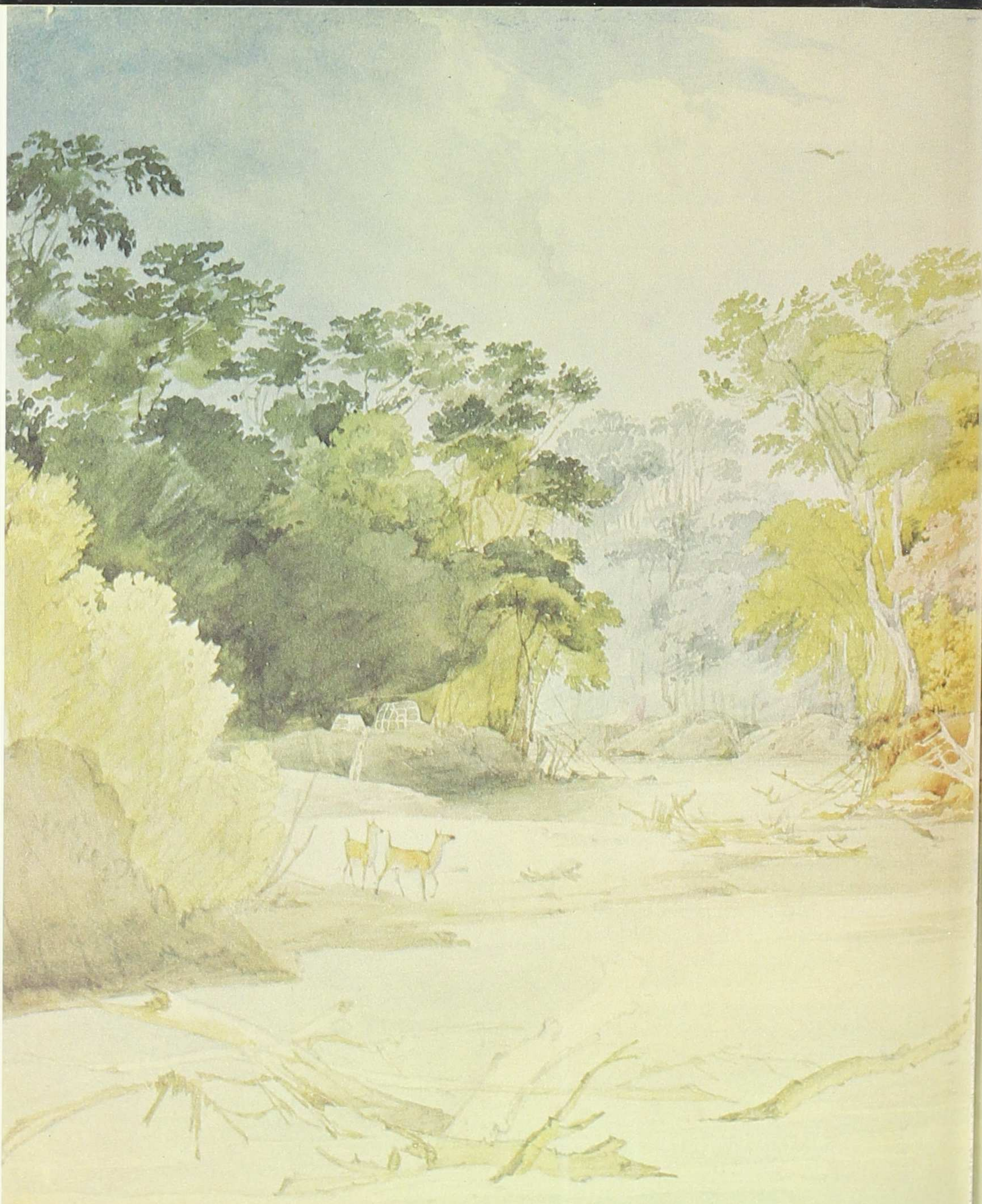
In the summer of 1924, while vacationing in Minnesota with her son Cyrus, the steering gear on the car broke and they crashed into another car. Cora was killed.

Friends and colleagues were stunned with the grief and sorrow that had devastated Cora again and again when her three children and sister Lollie died. "Our hearts are burdened with the needless suffering in the world, with the cry for help from the countless thousands of victims of *preventable* maladies and sorrows," she had written. "In the watches of the night we have thought of it all . . ."

Cora's sensitivities were acute and her visions reached beyond her own life and beyond Des Moines, Iowa to a "regeneration of the race through enlightened parenthood." And yet the list of her concrete achievements in child welfare is the result of tempering these visions with a political shrewdness, a respect for facts, and exhausting years of hard work. □

Note on Sources

The major source for this article was the Cora Bussey Hillis Papers in the Manuscript Collection of the State Historical Society. The papers had been gathered, arranged, and donated to the Society by Hazel Hillis Modine, who married Cora's son Cyrus in 1928, three years after Cora's death. Also helpful were articles written by Mrs. Modine about Cora's work: "Securing the Juvenile Court Law in Iowa," *Annals of Iowa*, January, 1942; "The Formative Years, 1900-1950," *The First Fifty Years* (Iowa Congress of Parents and Teachers, 1950); and an unpublished paper written in 1975.

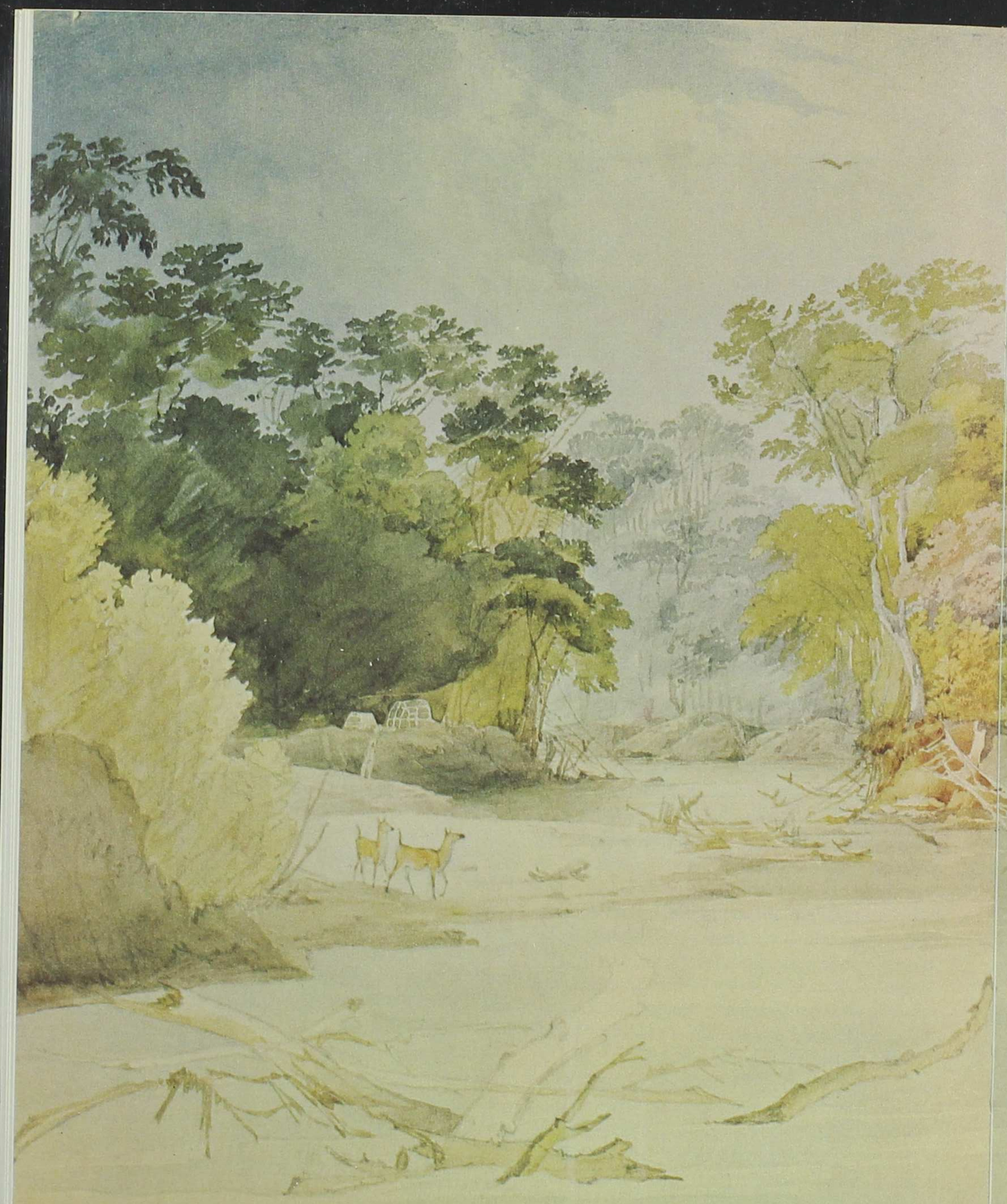


The Missouri, with Nodaway Island, April 25, 1833 by Karl Bodmer (courtesy Joslyn Art Museum and the Northern Natural Gas Company of Omaha)

Maximilian's Missouri, 1833-34

In 1833 the Prussian nobleman and established naturalist and ethnologist Alexander Philip Maxmilian, Prince of Wied, took a year-long journey up the Missouri from St. Louis along the Iowa-Nebraska border to the upper reaches of the river to study Indian tribes in the wilds of the American Plains. A student of the eminent German naturalist Alexander von Humbolt, Maximilian had spent two years in the jungles of Brazil following his service in the Napoleonic Wars. There he had sketched the Brazilian aborigines and made notes on their customs, returning home to publish the book that had made his reputation, *Reise nach Brasilien in den Jahren 1815 bis 1817*. He had similar plans for his trip to North America—he would keep a travel journal with detailed notes on the habits of the North American tribes; he would gather and transport back what artifacts he could; he would have sketches made of everything on the spot; and when he returned he would write and publish another book to rival his first in hard scientific interest and in public appeal.

Toward that end, he hired a young German artist named Karl Bodmer to make the trip with him and sketch the Indians, the landscape, the American scene. Born near Zurich in 1809, Bodmer had first learned his craft at the knee of his Uncle Johann Jakob Meyer, before going on to study Art and engraving in Paris. In 1832, he and his brother, also an artist, began a sketching tour of their native Germany, and it was on that tour, at Coblenz near Wied, that Bodmer



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Evening bivouac of the travellers on the Missouri, summer of 1833 by Karl Bodmer (courtesy Joslyn Art Museum and the Northern Natural Gas Company of Omaha)

met Maximilian. A year later, the youth found himself on the edge of the American frontier, sketching furiously the animal life, the land, and the men around him amidst the raging of the Missouri River, the pounding of Midwestern weather, and the savagery of Pioneer-Trader-Indian relations.

He worked in water-color on heavy sketching paper, usually between 9″ × 11″ and 12″ × 18″, in whatever accommodations he could find. While Bodmer painted, Maximilian interviewed Indian and fur trader alike, took notes on all he saw and heard, and supervised the gathering and labeling of artifacts and plant specimens. By the time they were finished, they had a boat-load of paintings and pipes and leatherwork, as well as two nearly trained bears. They lost many of the artifacts on the return trip, but the bears and the paintings survived. Back in Europe, Maximilian turned his notes into a book and Bodmer his watercolors into dramatic aguatints to illustrate *Reise in das Innere Nord-America in den Jahren 1832 bis 1834*. The full text can be found

A Beaver Lodge on the Missouri, July 17, 1833 by Karl Bodmer (courtesy Joslyn Art Museum and the Northern Natural Gas Company of Omaha)

in English in Reuben Gold Thwaites' *Early American Travels*, volumes XXII through XXIV; much of the text, many of the water colors, and a few of the aquatints can be found in Davis Thomas and Karin Ronnefeldt's *People of the First Man: Life Among the Plains Indians in Their Final Days of Glory* (E.P. Dutton: New York, 1976); an extensive collection of the watercolors, owned by the Northern Natural Gas Company, is housed at the Joslyn Museum in Omaha.

After Maximilian had finished his book, he stored Bodmer's watercolors and pencil sketches, along with his field notes, at his estate on the Rhine, where they were forgotten for over a hundred years. They were discovered in the early 1950s at the Wied estate as the result of serious inquiries about their possible existence by Dr. Stanley Pargellis of the Newberry Library in Chicago, German scholar Dr. Joseph Roeder, and Prince Karl Viktor, Maximilian's great, great, grandnephew. In 1962 the Northern Natural Gas Company of Omaha bought the Maximilian-Bodmer Collection, as a public service, and assigned it to the Joslyn Art Museum for study and display. There, today, the lucky visitor can see the exquisite work by Bodmer that together with Maximilian's notes and the published writing and aquatints constitute an early record of trans-Mississippi exploration considered second in importance only to the journals of Lewis and Clark.

We would like to thank officials of Northern Natural Gas and of the Joslyn for allowing us to visit and photograph the Bodmer works that appear here. The collection at the Joslyn is extensive. Many of the works have now been published in the Thomas and Ronnefeldt book mentioned above and some have been published in museum catalogues and specialized publications. Several here do not appear in Thomas and Ronnefeldt and are for the first time made available to a general Iowa audience.

—C.P.

The Bellvue Agency, 1833 by Karl Bodmer (courtesy Joslyn Art Museum and the Northern Natural Gas Company of Omaha)

The White Castles on the Missouri, 1833 by Karl Bodmer (courtesy Joslyn Art Museum and the Northern Natural Gas Company of Omaha)

View of the mouth of the Big Sioux River, May 8, 1833 by Karl Bodmer (courtesy Joslyn Art Museum and the Northern Natural Gas Company of Omaha)

(courtesy The Children's Aid Society, New York)

THE ORPHAN'S FRIEND

Charles Collins Townsend and The Orphans' Home of Industry

by
Marcelia C. Fisher

An old prairie with its western edge ending in a steep ravine once lay between Dubuque Street and Prairie du Chien road, near Whiting Avenue and the neighborhood of Oaklawn Avenue and Samuel Drive in Iowa City. Here on flat farmland to the east and south lived hundreds of outcast, destitute children from the streets and slums of New York City—*The New York Times* estimates 500 in all. Between 1854 and 1868 "The Orphans' Home of Industry" was run by a zealous, usually penniless Episcopal missionary from Connecticut—Charles Collins Townsend—amidst controversy and community disaprobation, and beset by continual financial difficulty. Until placed in Iowa homes, the children helped Townsend and his staff till the soil, tend the cows and chickens, give concerts to raise money and, generally, "did well." The few who didn't do well frightened Iowa Citians and nearby townspeople into thinking an invasion of the "criminal class" was taking place on Iowa's serene farmlands.

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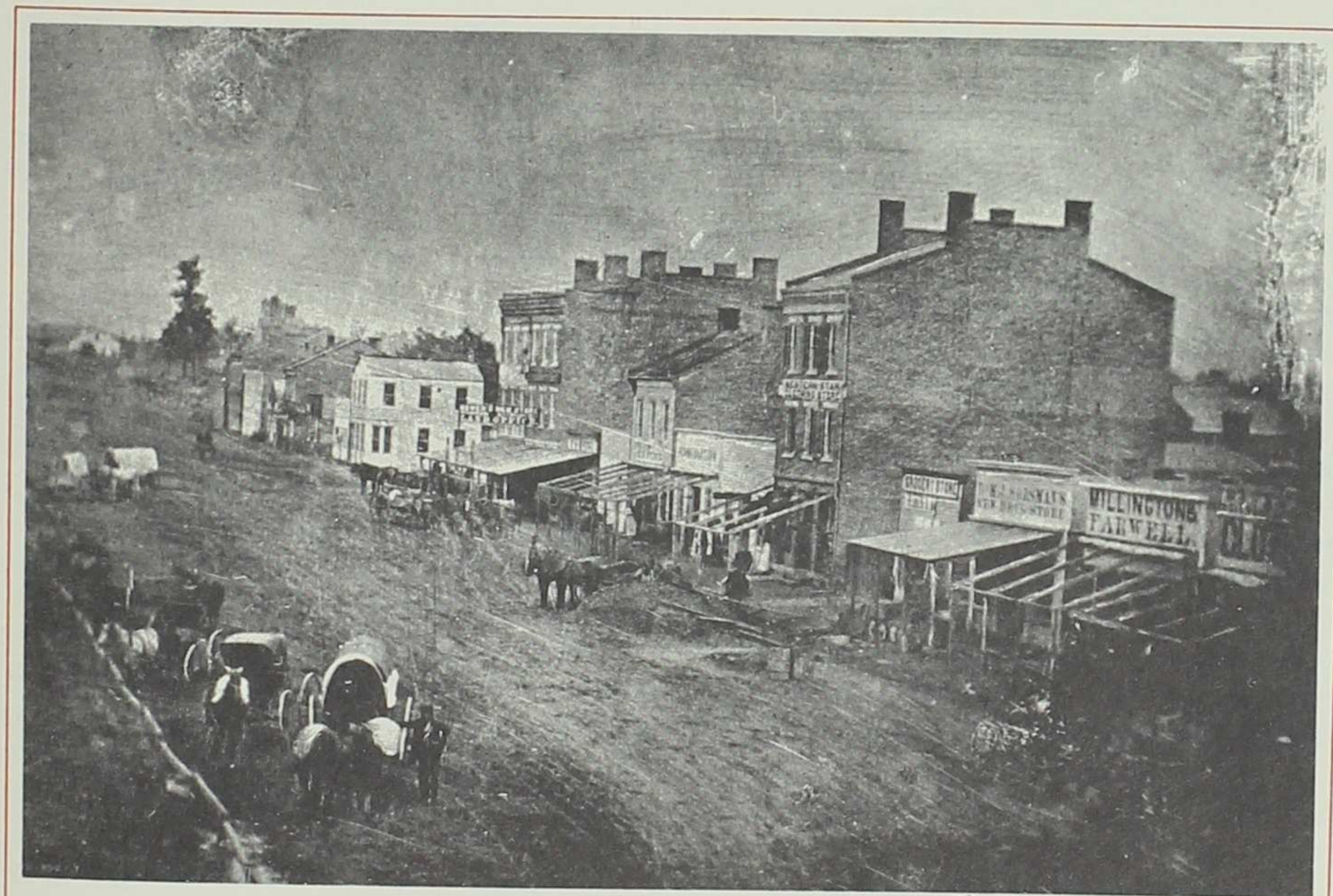
Today, paths beaten by generations of feet into flat brown clay ribbons zigzag upward from the ravine to the present Shimek schoolhouse on the bluff above. On this upper level in 1890 the Samuel Whiting family had corn fields and pastureage for their cows. Plows turned up Indian arrowheads, axes and spear points, and the present Sam Whiting says there was an Indian campground nearby and Indian graves on Ridge Road. Later still a dance hall stood south of the school. On the lower level the Whiting red-brick farmstead still stands on the avenue named for the former Fayette County, Iowa settler. Redheaded woodpeckers flash by in branches of oak, ash, walnut and hickory still growing in the neighborhood, mixed with new timber and brush. But where was the orphans' well? Mr. Whiting guesses it is now under Oaklawn Avenue. The well, the farm home, and the waifs themselves are gone. But what remains of Townsend's plan in Iowa—from its beginning through its ragged execution to its faltering conclusion—can be traced more surely in his own writings, in church and court records, in editorials and angry letters. This story of a well-meaning enterprise destroyed by mistrust in the community leaves its central character, a man at once respected, reviled and misunderstood in his own time, a confusing figure.

Charles C. Townsend (also C.C. Townsend) was born in Hebron, Connecticut, December 25, 1808, the son of John and Isabella (Chapman) Townsend. At 17, he set out on foot for Hartford, Connecticut, 18 miles away, to become a clerk in the store at Front and Bridge Streets run by his life-long friend, Samuel Barber. Sometime later, Samuel, at his own expense, sent Townsend to nearby Manchester to attend Preparatory School there. Returning to Hartford after his studies, Townsend entered Washington College (later Trinity), founded in 1828. In 1835 he entered the theological department of Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio, and graduated in 1838. The same year he was ordained to the Diaconate by Bishop Charles P. McIlvane and assigned his first missionary post at Ashtabula, Ohio. Townsend spent the next 14 years doing missionary work in Kentucky and on what he called "the furious frontier" of Arkansas.

In the mid-1800s the professional missionary had to be a jack-of-all-trades. His work included everything from locating and reporting on scattered Episcopalians, to teaching at mission schools, to organizing congregations and performing the duties of a regular minister. The missionary's relation to the official church organization was loosely defined, as was the means by which the missionary was paid.

Charles Townsend was no exception. He continued with missionary work in Kentucky, observing the church's efforts to deal with religious instruction for the slaves, and formulating plans to start his own religious school. He managed to get a "neat, whitewashed log school room" built in 1845 before moving on to Fort Smith, Arkansas, to organize Episcopalians on the frontier into a Congregation and to do some missionary work with the Indians. Shocked by the treatment of the Five Civilized Tribes, who had already undergone their famous removal from the Southeastern states along the "Trail of Tears," he and his wife began teaching nine orphans, including Cherokee girls, in his "hired house." He also made visits to black slaves.

His time in Arkansas was one of spiritual and physical trial. Sectarian battles led to "virulent opposition . . . against the church during a season of religious excitement." He fell ill. A fire destroyed the meeting room for the church at the Fort, dispiriting the congregation already torn by dissension over where to locate the future chapel. Townsend had initiated plans for the chapel and a Mission school with his own money and tried to secure the Bishop's permission to solicit funds for them. Given the ar-



Clinton Street, Iowa City, 1853

gumentative nature of the parishioners, the Bishop denied permission, but did agree to allow Townsend to travel east to visit friends and ask their aid. Before Townsend left he convinced the government to allow him to use the garrison grounds for a "chapel" but by the time he returned the congregation was caught by a "fearful visitation"—cholera. Though services were continued in "a room," few attended and the arguments began again—some of the parishioners opposed using the garrison grounds, demanding a brick church in town "suited to their taste," a church for which they seemed reluctant to pay.

Townsend lost patience. He sold off "all his little property" to the warden to whom he owed his largest debt, asked to be relieved of his duties, and moved further north into a log cabin he thought a good location for a boarding school and conducive to missionary work. But once again, he could not raise contributions to build a permanent church and school. Frustrated by failure, his health challenged, he began to look for other work. When the Missionary Association for the West offered him a post in Iowa, he took it and immediately set out on horseback in the winter of 1852, leaving behind his family and his meager possessions in the mountains "at our only home on earth."

Just outside of Iowa City, Townsend met the Stephen Maynards, formerly of Ohio, and spent the night at their farm. In years to come, their paths would cross many times. The next day he plunged into a snow storm and "took the prairie route to Iowa City while the snow drifted so furiously that . . . man [and] horse could scarcely keep the road. Before dark, however, this beautiful city rose to view reposing on its eminence, like an encampment; and what appeared in the distance, like

whitened tents, proved to be the stone Capitol with its white dome, and a cluster of 7 or 8 churches. With thanksgiving to God, we crossed the intervening Iowa, and drove up the hill to this City of Churches; a cheerful resting place after a cheerless journey."

Townsend spent his first days in Iowa City conducting a service in the borrowed Methodist Church, another in Dr. Reynolds' school room. It was intensely cold, between four and eight degrees below zero—unfavorable weather to search for Episcopalians. But he found eight communicants and seven families, more than 30 individuals in town. The Sunday school, he said, went into operation with 12 pupils and three teachers. Alms of the communion service went toward the funds of the Missionary Association for the West. He noted the population of Iowa City as nearly 2,000 and its churches as Presbyterian, old and new school; Methodists, Protestant and Radical; Baptists; Universalists; Roman Catholic; but no Protestant Episcopal church.

Next, Townsend went to Cedar Rapids to look over his new "field," discovering there an Episcopal community organized enough to have dug a basement ready for framing a Gothic style structure already named Grace Church. In his letters home he carefully notes the size and growth of the congregation and the inadequacy of the space available, as well as describing his first taste of real midwest winter:

> I am as comfortable as I could expect to be so near the polar regions. I have a warm room in a brick building three stories high (in N.Y. style) and a good pile of wood. This I cut & split myself for exercise. I study and sleep in this room, and take my meals in the family of my Senior Warden Hon. Judge Greene. Sometimes these north western blasts make this tall building tremble and once my chair shook under me as with an earthquake. The climate is variable.

Despite the weather, Townsend was happy. He had found a group of communicants willing to work for a permanent church, and he had a new iron in the fire besides. The first issue of his *Annals of a Western Missionary* came from the press of Finch & McCabe, Cedar Rapids, in February of 1853. Containing news from the western missionary field, church statistics, names of subscribers and donors of money, the *Annals* was to sustain his work for many hard years. He also continued teaching school and traveling to nearby settlements with his "faithful missionary horse." Following the missionary pattern of maintaining only loosely held ties with a given parish until the arrival of an officially called minister, he returned to the "City of Churches" requesting a post in Iowa City from a visiting representative of the Missionary Association. It was granted.

Setting into a daily routine, Townsend arose at 4 A.M., read the Bible in Greek and Hebrew, wrote his *Annals*, taught school until 5 P.M., made pastoral calls and studied until 10 P.M. On visits to outlying farms he enjoyed seeing Iowa's "undulating prairies of living green . . . fields of corn, wheat and oats, and orchards of choice fruits."

In the spring of 1853 he helped organize the parish of Trinity Episcopal Church, and with Maynard and other delegates arranged for the parish to be "canonically connected" to the Iowa diocese which was meeting for its first convention on August 17 at Muscatine. In the fall, the Iowa City church vestry moved to establish their church on a permanent basis and invited Townsend to be pastor at Trinity for a salary of $500 a year. They requested that he solicit money in the East, pledging themselves to "sustain any plan which our pastor with our Eastern benefactors may adopt for the establishment, in the vicinity of this City, of an Home of Industry or Mission Farm and School, for the benefit of poor and friendless children." A similar request was made of him by Episcopal communicants in Washington, Iowa.

So once again Townsend planned to travel East—this time to raise money for an orphanage and for two churches. However, he went to Arkansas first, perhaps to collect the wife and family he left there. Waiting out the winter and

the arrival of a riverboat to the East, he built a log schoolhouse and wrote a pamphlet about his plans for "The Iowa City Home of Industry, or Orphans' Home." In early May he was back in Iowa City where his notes entered in Trinity church's Register show two subscriptions of $500 each for the building of a church, and an increase in the number of communicants. In the summer he left for New York.

He found that New Yorkers were more than willing to help him relieve the city of its hordes of vagabond urchins. Not far from his old friend Samuel Barber, Townsend became aware of the "murderous blocks" of tenements along streets choked with beggars, pickpockets, drunkards, thieves, rag-and-bone pickers, prostitutes, dogs, organ grinders and monkeys and "the aggressive and the depraved." At one notorious rogues' den on Laurens Street, "no drove of animals could pass by and keep its numbers intact." One small dark cellar housed 14 persons, men, women and children, the old and the young, without partitions, and one contemporary observer reported that "Two little newsboys slept one winter in the iron tube of the bridge at Harlem; two others made their bed in a burned out safe in Wall Street. Sometimes they ensconced themselves in the cabin of a ferry boat, and thus spent the night. Old boilers, barges, steps and, above all, steam gratings, were their favorite beds."

Even the wife of William B. Astor was not blind to her city's lower depths, subscribing to the newly-formed Children's Aid Society of New York. The precursor of the Society had been established in 1850 on Little Water Street by an Episcopalian named Pease. A few years later another Episcopalian, Archibald Russell, took the operation over and incorporated it in 1856 as The Children's Aid Society of New York. At about this time, Charles Loring Brace presented a plan to New York and Long Island business men whereby employers would arrange underground railways to transport their workers to and from homes outside the crowded city center. This idea proved unpopular because the excess population did not want to go.

Then the Labor Exchange of the Commissioners of Emigration said something might be accomplished by "a grand organized movement for transferring our unemployed labor to the West." But founders of the Children's Aid Society said the best idea of all was to send outcast children to "the farmer's home" because "the cultivators of the soil are in America our most solid and intelligent class. . . . " Circulars went out to city weeklies and rural papers with the result that hundreds of applications came pouring in "from farmers and mechanics all through the Union. . . .

"We formed little companies of emigrants, and, after thoroughly cleaning and clothing them, put them under a competant agent, and, first selecting a village where there was a call or opening for such a party, we dispatched them to the place. The farming community having been duly notified, there was usually a dense crowd of people at the station awaiting the arrival of the youthful travellers." One of the agents, E.P. Smith, describing his first trip to the West with a load of emigrants, said that in Detroit, the first stop, there were applications for 15 of his children, the applicants bearing recommendations for themselves from pastors and justices of the peace. "There was a rivalry among the boys to see which first could get a home in the country, and before Saturday they were all gone. Rev. Mr. O. took several home with him and nine of the smallest I accompanied to Chicago, and sent to Mr. Townsend, Iowa City," Mr. Smith said.

Like Pease, Russell, Brace, and Smith, Charles Townsend had his own plan for finding homes for New York's destitute children, a plan he spent the rest of his life trying to realize. As he would later report:

> We proposed a farm school, in Iowa, on a small scale, and, from the failure of promised cooperation, it became an

individual, private enterprise, dependent, under God, upon the industry of its inmates, and the charity of its friends.

Our first home was a rented farmhouse; and our outfit for an Iowa winter was bought on a year's credit at ten per cent. We, therefore, began in debt, with no compensation for Missionary services beyond the weekly contributions of a *winter* congregation!

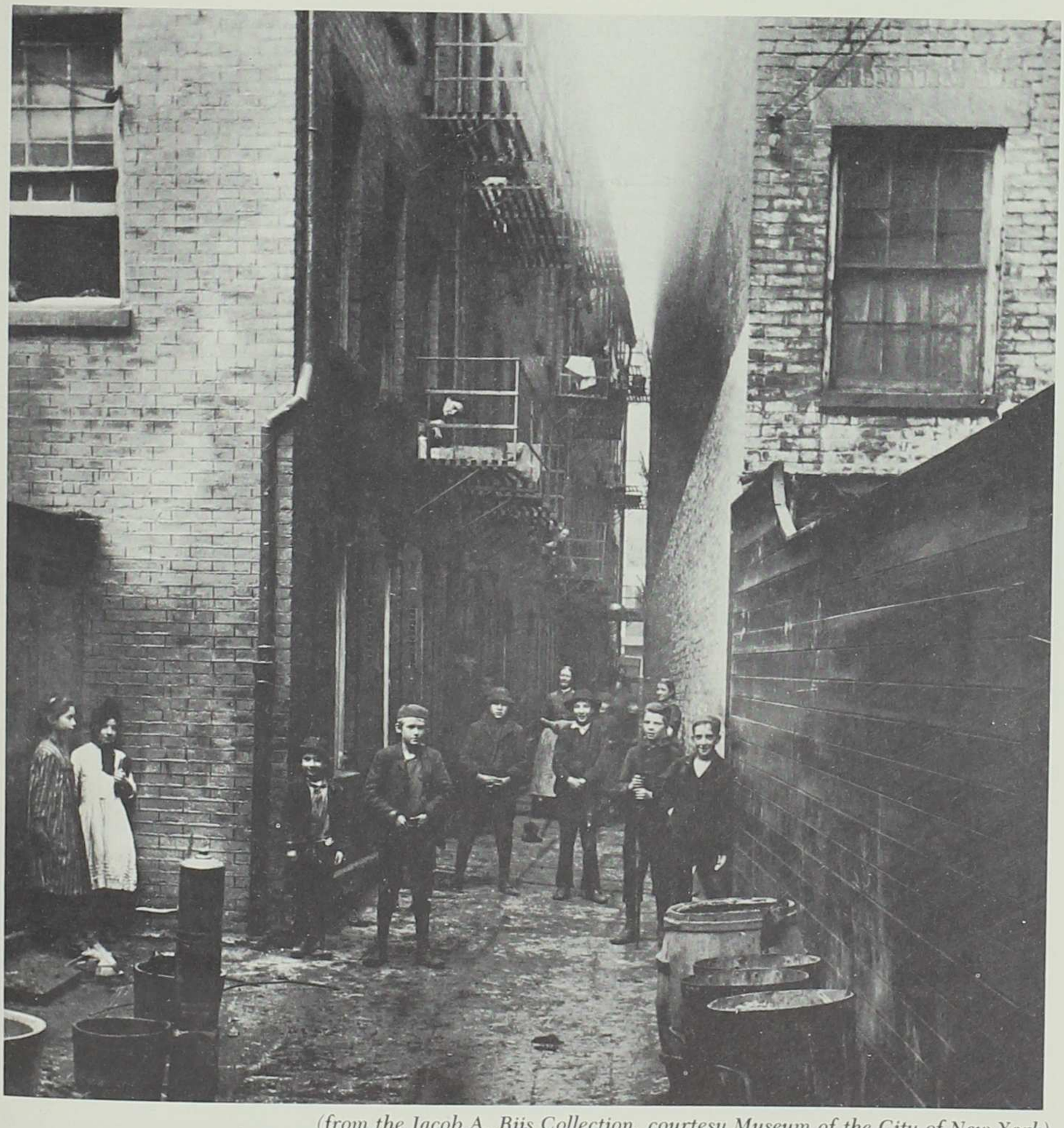
Townsend wrote biographical sketches of some of the first orphans he found in New York. "John," for example, was "found in a bake house; slept on some straw in a cart . . . will make an industrious farmer"; "George, in pitiful condition on the streets, now cultivates his own garden in Iowa and has a good home with a farmer"; "five older boys in good homes with farmers"; "Frances, found in the Sun building in New York City, now in a good home with the Stephen Maynards"; "Ellen, from Randall's Island, now an assistant housekeeper at The Home, and a teacher of the smaller children, hoping to go to the new Normal school in Iowa City"; "Mary, 16, from Fort Smith, going to school in Iowa City with lame Susan whose parents had died of cholera."

We do not know exactly when Townsend's first orphans arrived in Iowa City. Records show, however, that between June 1, 1854 and June 1, 1858, 50 boys, 43 girls, and 26 adults (some seeking employment) came to Iowa by emigrant train. Townsend's first group from the East was composed of nine boys, 13 girls, and four adults. During the first four years of his Iowa operation, the missionary noted, 12 young people learned to read; nine learned both to read and write; three were nearly ready to teach school; one boy died and was buried on The Home grounds; and three children and one adult were returned to the East. He said it cost about $10 to transport a child from New York City, including provisions. When a child was adopted into the community, the $10 was refunded.

Townsend paid for all of this through voluntary contributions from concerned individuals. He began to call himself the "proprietor" of The Home, churning out appeal after appeal for money, the gifts to be sent in care of "Saml. Barber, No. 79 Water-street, New-York; Robert Graffen, Pine-street, Philadelphia, or to C.C. Townsend, Iowa City, Iowa." Soon, seeing the need for a supervised children's House of Reception closer to the streets of New York, Townsend rented a house on the north side of Staten Island as an auxiliary to The Home in Iowa City. When that was promptly filled, he rented a second. All three, the two Houses of Reception and The Home were put under the same Board of Trustees. One of his Iowa assistants agreed to go to Staten Island with her husband to manage the houses. It was not until nine years after its founding that Townsend actually managed to incorporate The Home on January 5, 1863 under the official title "Orphans' Home of Industry, Iowa City, Iowa." Until that time, Stephen Maynard, the church's senior warden, and R.H. Sylvester, an Iowa City lawyer, served as trustees while Townsend shuttled back and forth to New York on the newly-established railroad.

Their job was not easy. Beset by financial difficulties, the entire enterprise fell under suspicion in the Iowa City community.

Even before the New York waifs began to arrive in Iowa City, a protest against them appeared in *The Davenport Gazette* of July 27, 1854. An angry reader feared that Townsend was turning the "Capital of Iowa" into "a kind of Botany Bay for the 'VAGRANT BOYS AND GIRLS OF OUR LARGE CITIES.' We have quite enough of that kind of material thrown in among us incidentally," the reader continued, "but to enter upon *the importation* of our eastern juvenile vagrants, of both sexes—thoroughly initiated as they are into all kinds of vice and steeped in every pollution—to run the chance of becoming centres of evil influences among us of the worst character, is a matter too grave to pass over in silence." The greatest fear was that the orphan home, a "moral pest-



(from the Jacob A. Riis Collection, courtesy Museum of the City of New York)

house," would fail, scattering its "inmates" around the city.

Rumors began to circulate about "paupers" being brought into the county, and about Townsend's Home failing because it was not formally part of a church organization. To counteract such rumors, Townsend prepared a pamphlet, "Notice and Testimonial" for presentation at a Christmas festival to be held in the Methodist Church following a Christmas service. Here Episcopalians, other townspeople, and the children would meet each other.

All went well on Christmas day. The orphans sang "sacred pieces" and were given gifts. Then Townsend explained that during the four

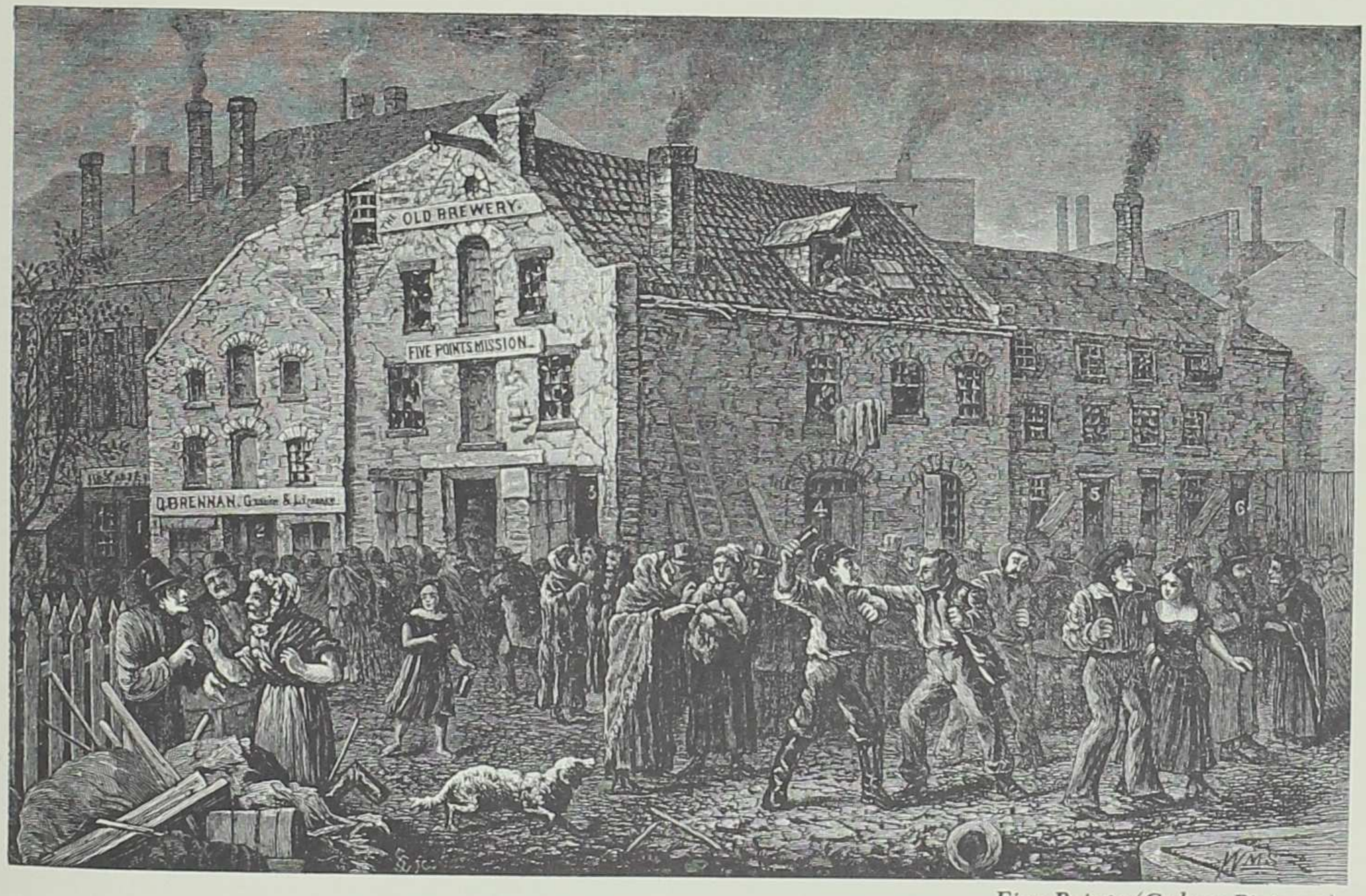
months of The Home's operation, 10 children and four adults had been resident there and that of these, three adults and six children had since found good homes in the vicinity. "Under such circumstances," Townsend said, "the members of the vestry have approved the appropriation by their Pastor of funds collected for the Chruch and parsonage, to the wants of the Orphans' Home during the present winter, and have resolved upon postponing their building operations until the ensuing summer." After witnessing the favorable appearance of the orphans at the Christmas exercises, and hearing Townsend's report, 15 persons of Trinity Episcopal parish signed a testimonial attesting to the fact that The Home was indeed under the auspices of a Church, and that with "its present economy and industry," its success should be assured.

A separate testimonial signed three days earlier by J.H. Morehead said that although he was ignorant of some of the facts relating to The Home, he was aware that Mr. Townsend was laboring unceasingly to support the children and that "his whole time and energy, physical as well as mental, appear to be devoted to the building up of the church in this place, and the furtherance of the Children's Aid Society. The Vestry of this Church have at all times been aware of the whereabouts of their Pastor. His life has been exemplary, and all his efforts characterized by sincerity. If these traits of character entitle one to aid, such aid should be rendered him." Townsend seems to have weathered the first onslaught of criticism, but significantly, in his subsequent reports to the Diocese, he made no further mention of the proposed Episcopal church to have been built that summer.

But the problems weren't over. They were merely beginning. On January 28, 1861 the County Board of Supervisors appointed H.H. Winchester to look into the situation of the poor in Johnson County. On June 3 the Committee reported to the Board. It had looked into the Orphans' Home of Industry, noting its history, the number of children present, the amount of property it possessed, and on the basis of Committee's report, the Board then passed the following resolution: "That the Rev. C.C. Townsend be required to give bonds suitably secured in a sum sufficient to indemnify the County against any loss it may sustain by supporting any of the orphan children of foundlings which he has brought or may hereafter bring into the county."

Behind the County Board's action lay the still unanswered questions of whether The Home had the support of the Church, of whether it was fiscally respectable, and of what would happen to the orphans and the community if The Home failed. A House of Reception Townsend had set up on the Delaware River in Pennsylvania had to be closed when he became ill. He made attempts to justify the closing in his reports to a Diocesan convention. Anyone reading the Journals from these conventions could easily assume that the Orphans' Home in Iowa City was under the control of the Diocese. But after the County Board's action, the Ninth Annual Diocesan Convention made it clear that The Home was not under its jurisdiction. On May 28 and 29, 1862 in Davenport the convention adopted a resolution saying that the Diocese had "no charge of, or connection with this Institution. By this action the convention intends to imply no reflection on the charitable and self-denying efforts of the Rev. Mr. Townsend." *The Iowa City Republican* published the resolution in full on Wednesday, June 4.

Nonetheless, life at The Home continued at a lively pace. By 1864 there were three component farms, buildings and acreages, lying roughly north and south of Whiting Avenue and between Dubuque Street and Prairie du Chien Road. Here 10 laborers, nine boys and four teams did the heavy work. Stacked near the buildings were 200 cords of wood, 2,000 posts, 500 rods of new fence, 1,000 feet of



Five Points (Culver Pictures)

lumber. Beyond lay fields of rye, wheat, corn, potatoes, buckwheat, sorghum. The corn sold for 80¢ a bushel, Townsend reported, oats 60¢, potatoes 80¢, flour $4.00 per 100 lbs., beef 6¢ a lb, and butter 22¢ a pound. He described the buildings, the school and chapel, the number of cattle, mules, yokes of steers, hogs, chickens, wagons and furniture. Over the years a mounting array of gifts had poured into The Home, including farm tools, casks of nails, bedsteads and cradles, quilts, hats and bonnets, food staples, and an umbrella. A special fund eventually produced a flock of 112 sheep, each of which the children named. In late December The Home acquired an infirmary for sick children arriving from the Staten Island House of Reception. Mrs. Townsend and a niece became "worn out and dangerously sick." For Mr. Townsend the care of 100 orphans in three farm homes, their "food, clothing, shoes, bedding and fires," was never a sinecure. "And, moreover, beside the general provision of the necessaries of life, there are many little nameless things which demand unceasing care; and in connection with this class of poor, neglected children, many nameless trials . . ."

As if these problems weren't enough, in October of 1865 a suit was filed against Townsend by a father of one of the children, accusing him of "enticing a child under 12 years of age." Though Townsend claimed that the charge "never had the slightest foundation in law or fact, and never had any merits whatever," the case was to dog him for more than three years, and fuel the flames of ill will in Iowa City. On January 3, 1866 the case came up again and was again continued. The $500 asked of him as a bond became a barrier, he said, to going East for needed funds. In the meantime he was obliged to borrow $1,000, and a note for $600 was due at the National Bank in Iowa City.

He made a plea in the January *Annals* for contributions. However, Johnson County district court records for May 19,1866 show that the indictment against Townsend was dismissed, the defendant discharged, and his bail exonerated. Returning to the East, Townsend again undertook fund-gathering visits to friends and Churches, including door-to-door appeals " . . . to beg we are not ashamed." In August he was ready with a company of 25 children for Iowa.

The father appealed the decision, getting the law suit reintroduced in 1868, and seeing it through to its final hearing on January 15, 1869 in district court. The judge found for the plaintiff, awarding the father $851.80 with interest.

Meanwhile, the situation around Townsend continued to deteriorate in Iowa City. Opposition to the children's presence had never really ceased, despite good reports of the orphans in farm homes, and their performance at concerts, at church, and in school. Townsend found himself dividing his time at The Home among answering letters, soliciting funds, replying to newspaper and local slanders, holding services in parishes as yet without pastors, and visiting "our children" previously placed in good homes. Dismayed, Townsend, in response to the slanders, on June 5, 1867 petitioned the Johnson County Board of Supervisors to appoint a committee "to visit the institution and investigate its affairs." Once again, he was to be disappointed. Trying to put on the best possible face, he wrote in his *Annals* that the Committee of three arrived and "expressed their approbation, and were pleased with their visit; so was the family. But alas! the influence [of] prejudice even upon well-meaning minds!" On June 7 the Committee reported to the Board, but despite the fact that, as Townsend notes, "one member of the committee was much interested in The Home, as he was an orphan himself, and had one of our children," the Board instructed the County Attorney to enjoin The Home from bringing any more children into the county.

Townsend immediately began trying to place the remaining orphans. He traveled to Des Moines, to Washington, to Cedar Rapids, to Keokuk, to Ottumwa, to Davenport, to Farmington until by July 1 he had reduced the population of The Home to 30 children. The beginning of the legal dissolution of The Home came on July 1, 1868 when Townsend conveyed to his wife Martha a quit-claim deed to the acreage. He then went back to New York City and engaged a man and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Robert W. Norris, to come as co-workers to The Home in Iowa City, and hired a female teacher for The House of Reception on Staten Island. "And now, in the good providence of God," he wrote, "after the labor and trials of about fifteen years in this work, I have a prospect of such cooperation as I have needed and sought after, and of less labor, responsibility, and opposition, and more prosperity, comfort and rest, than we have experienced during the lapse of these laborious years." He added that in the next number of the *Annals* he hoped to announce "a plan of reorganization of our whole enterprise." That same August, Townsend established the "Ragged School and Bread House," also called the "Soup House," at 127 Greenwich Street in New York. On October 20 and October 21 Martha Townsend and husband conveyed the land to Mr. and Mrs. Norris, David Simmons and Francis Knedlick. A sheriff's sale for The Home was held on November 12.

Writing some five months after the sale, *The Republican* in its issue of March 3, 1869 told the story of the final days of The Home in a few sentences. It said that after Townsend sent "a most excellent man and his wife out here, under false representations, to take charge of the institution, Mr. Norris and his wife found, as soon as they arrived, that they had been imposed upon, but here were children with none to care for them and they took charge and set to work, in conjunction with the county

authorities, to close the concern out to the best possible advantage to the children. Homes were found for most of them, some were sent back east at county expense, and a very few we believe remain as a county charge. The premises have been sold out by the sheriff on claimants' accounts, and the 'Orphans' Home near Iowa City' is practically closed up."

Back in New York, Townsend was overwhelmed by still more troubles. New suits were filed against him. On Friday, February 19, 1869 *The New York Evening Post* published an "expose" of Townsend's operations, including statements obtained from S.B. Halliday, then superintendent of the Five Points House of Industry, whose acquaintance with Townsend extended over a decade. The newspaper claimed that Townsend's Staten Island House of Reception had been closed "for some time since," despite the fact Townsend was still collecting funds. Neighbors reported to *The Post* that the house had never been run as a charity, that to the contrary, payment was asked for the children staying there. The New York Board of Health sent an inspector to the Greenwich street address who discovered that the children at "The Ragged School and Bread House" were not being cared for properly. Stuffed in small rooms, poorly dressed, unattended by any adult, some had diseases such as diphtheria and scarlet fever that were not being treated. Mr. Halliday wrote a letter to *The Post* saying that: "I have just seen and talked over with [Townsend] his whole affairs, and the disclosures from his own lips more than justify my first judgment of his utter unfitness for his self-constituted position." He summarized the history of Townsend's activities in Iowa beginning in 1854, mentioning Townsend's claim that 500 children were taken there from New York. He pointed out that Five Points and the Children's Aid Society were doing a more efficient job than Townsend in caring for the city's destitute children, and more cheaply. He mentioned the law suits and mortgages in Iowa, the suits for back wages filed by his teachers in New York. "With the question of Mr. Townsend's integrity I shall not meddle. Nor would I hold him alone responsible for the consequences of this sorrowful failure and its attendant mischiefs. Where are his trustees?" *The Post* story revealed that the three women teachers who were suing Townsend for back wages had given their cases to the Working Women's Protective Association. The women, two of whom were said to be from Iowa, won their cases.

In the midst of this hopeless wrangling, Charles C. Townsend died from an infection that grew out of a minor injury caused when a window sash fell on his hand. On Saturday February 27, *The Times* published his obituary saying he died the preceding Thursday, or February 25. He was buried at his birthplace in Hebron. A brief notice in *The Iowa City Republican* on March 17 did not mention the day, the place, nor the circumstances of his death. *The Cedar Rapids Times* of March 18 said he died at St. Luke's Hospital in New York on February 27 "penniless and alone." *The Times* said the investigation of the "Ragged School and Bread House" had come to an abrupt termination.

The question of Townsend's character naturally arises. Was he a profiteer callously abusing his public image as "the orphan's friend," or was he perhaps a misguided philanthropist who had neither the business sense nor the personality to fight widespread public disapproval and economic hardship? He was a missionary, a scholar, a writer, a believer in the possibility of human improvement—all things that require dedication to a higher law than that of making the daily dollar. Testimonials to his good intentions appear again and again throughout the long battles with Iowa City and the New York authorities, but early assessments of his character when he first arrived in Iowa City hint at an over-zealousness, an other-worldliness, an inflexibility that might explain much that later

Note on Sources

The primary sources for this article are contemporary newspaper accounts, Townsend's letters and *Annals of a Western Missionary*. Charles Loring Brace's *The Dangerous Class of New York, and Twenty Years Work Among Them* (New York: Wynkoop & Hallenbeck, 1872);and General Charles W. Irish's "Rev. C.C. Townsend," *Iowa Historical Record* (Jan 1897, Iowa State Historical Society) are among the secondary sources.

A longer, annovated version of this article is available at the State Historical Society.

happened to him and his enterprise. Living a life of genteel poverty, a life still possible shortly before and after the Civil War, perhaps he was simply displaced by history as it moved into the Gilded Age, with its callousness to the spiritual and its harsh business-dominated notions of character and value. The real measure of *his* character, however, should be the effect he had upon the orphans under his charge. For this assessment, perhaps we should turn to General Charles W. Irish, who knew Townsend as a missionary in the early 1850s and knew also something of his work with the orphans and the half-orphans: "I am glad to say that so far as my knowledge goes, the majority of the poor, friendless children, placed in Iowa homes by Mr. Townsend, grew up to be good and useful members of society, some even amassing a competence with which they entered successfully into business; and I recall instances where, with the means thus attained, parents long lost were hunted up and taken from public refuges, and made comfortable and happy for the remainder of their lives. On the other hand many of the waifs were found to be unworthy and soon became criminals. It was noted that these failures were among those who had attained several years of intimacy with the slum life of the great city where they were born, being in all cases the oldest children brought out from these haunts of vice. . . . As from the beginning of human society," he wrote, "failures have attracted more notice than have successes, so it was with Reverend Townsend's efforts . . ." □

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Compiled by Katherine Prunty

CONTRIBUTORS

Marcelia C. Fisher received her B.A. in English and Journalism from the University of Wisconsin, and after graduation worked for the *Milwaukee Journal*. She is presently living with her husband, Alton Fisher, in North Liberty and writing a narrative of her grandparents who operated a fleet of lumber carriers on the Great Lakes in the mid-1800s.

Currently working toward her M.F.A. in fiction and poetry at the University of Iowa, Katherine Prunty is an editorial assistant for the Palimpsest. She received her B.A. in English from Portland State University in 1978.

Raised on an Iowa farm, Ginalie Swaim received her B.A. in English at the University of Iowa in 1974. For the last year she has worked as an editorial assistant at the State Historical Society of Iowa. She lives in Iowa City with her husband, her two-year-old daughter, and her teen-age foster son.

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.