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The

PALIMPSEST

Adrian D. Anderson, Executive Director

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Mary K. Fredericksen, Editor

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Covers: *(front) A detail of Marion Mahony Griffin's 1912 perspective rendering of the plan for Walter Burley Griffin's Rock Crest-Rock Glen development, Mason City, Iowa. The delicate work—lithograph and gouache on green satin—offers an idea of the general setting for the residential development and the location of some of the houses. The Blythe house appears in the center of the drawing, with the Melson house across Willow Creek in the upper right corner, and the Page house in the lower left corner. (courtesy of the Collection of The Art Institute of Chicago, Department of Architecture); (back) Walter Burley Griffin's plans for James E. Blythe's Rock Glen house. (courtesy of Mary and Leigh Block Gallery, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois)*

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.

Corn Huskers and Master Farmers:

Henry A. Wallace and the Merchandising of Iowa Agriculture

by Richard S. Kirkendall

Richard S. Kirkendall was the featured speaker at the State Historical Society's 1983 Annual Banquet. The following article was prepared for that event, and it is with a great deal of pleasure that I am able to publish it in this issue of the Palimpsest.

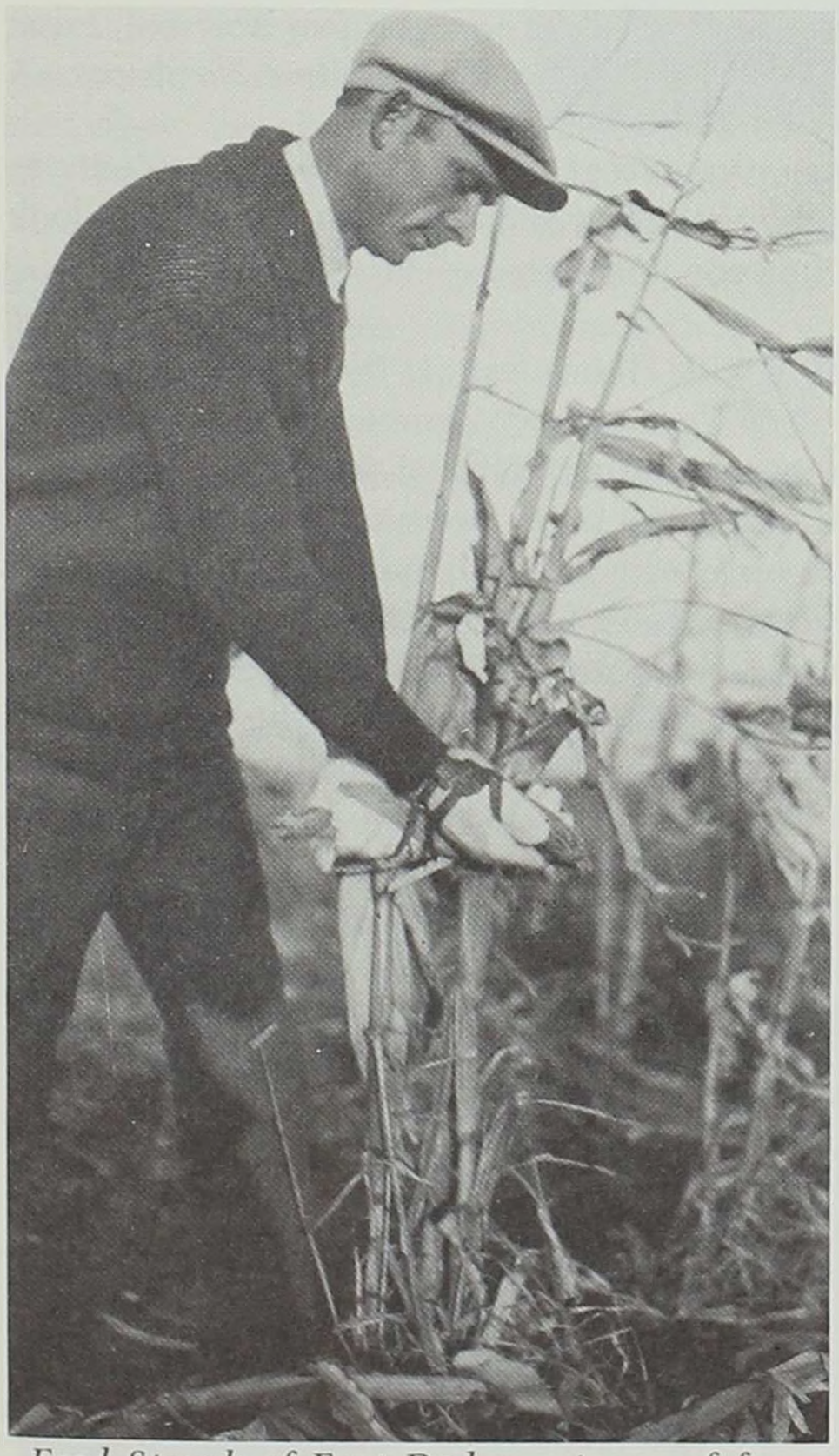
—Ed.

Fifty years ago, Henry A. Wallace became secretary of agriculture, an event worthy of note by people interested in the history of the state for this Iowan became one of the most important occupants of that high office, surely the one with the biggest impact on the state and nation. One point that deserves attention, however obvious it is, is that the philosophical outlook he brought to his tasks in 1933 had been largely shaped by his experiences in Iowa. Two lively events that he sponsored as editor of *Wallaces' Farmer*, the corn husking contest and the Master Farmer program, just as well as his more weighty proposals on farm policy, support important generalizations about that outlook: Wallace strongly believed that farming and rural life were of great importance to the nation's welfare; he feared the direction of population movements in the state and the nation, and he designed and promoted proposals and programs to check the decline of the rural population. During his years as editor, which ran from 1921 to 1933, a period of crisis in Iowa's agricultural history, he gave these contests to the state, hoping they would work against a population trend that, in his view, threatened the quality, even the survival, of American life.

Wallace wrote frequently of the declining farm population and its meaning for the future. If present trends continued, he predicted in 1929, the United States would soon have "about twenty-five million people living on the land and a hundred and fifty million people living in the towns and cities." While such a mix might have some benefits, it would be highly unstable and seemed certain to have only a short life, in part because a nation with such an unbalanced population would surely blunder badly in handling its food problems. "After people in the towns have been more than a generation away from the farm they lose all sympathy with the farmer and all knowledge of his situation," Wallace maintained. "Such a situation is full of peril, once the prices of food begin to soar, as they inevitably will some day."

Although not greatly alarmed by the existing population mix in the state, Wallace did worry about the kind of civilization toward which it was moving. Iowa shared in the nationwide trend. Its rural population had dropped from a high of 1,255,000 in 1900 to 1,019,000 in 1925, a fall of more than 200,000, while its urban population had grown from 975,000 to 1,401,000, an increase of over 425,000. The balance had tipped toward the city, but not seriously so. Yet what lay ahead? "How big a population can we maintain in the cities of Iowa?" he asked in 1926. "How far can we go in the direction of making farms merely places where men work efficiently rather than homes for families?"

The quality as well as the quantity of rural people concerned him, and that concern focused his attention on the decisions made by rural boys as they approached their adult years. He recognized that some must leave the farms for about 17,000 babies were born on Iowa's farms each year while only about 7,000 rural people died and the extra 10,000 could not be used to advantage on the farm, but he hoped that the most intelligent boys would enter farming and that the less intelligent would be the ones who moved to the cities. "We can spare a few of our farm boys to become doctors, lawyers, editors, etc., and a larger number to work in the factories, machine shops and garages," he advised in 1928. "The farm boys we want to hold on the farm are those who have real common sense and intelligence, a love of their fellowman and a vision of building up a fine community and a fine national civilization based on agriculture." By the time he offered this advice, he had designed two contests to influence those boys.



Fred Stanek of Fort Dodge, winner of four national corn husking championships, hard at work during the 1925 Iowa meet. (courtesy Herb Plambeck)

In 1921 his father had moved to Washington, D.C., to become secretary of agriculture, and H.A. had taken on the editorial responsibilities for the family newspaper. Soon he began to promote a corn husking contest. Local contests had been held earlier, but he advocated a state championship. A desire to test the skeptical notions of an opinionated farmer with whom he liked to visit supplied the initial stimulus, but Wallace quickly saw other values that could be served. At first he emphasized increased efficiency as the goal. Farmers spent a great amount of time husking corn, yet improvements had come slowly and opinion was divided on the best husking tool, the "peg" or the "hook."

Writing during what has often been called the "golden age of spectator sports," Wallace made use of enthusiasm for sports to generate interest in his proposal. "If the spirit of athletic contests could be applied to corn husking, it is probable that we should soon become much more efficient," he predicted. "We believe that a genuinely good corn husker is entitled to more fame than the man who made the touchdown for Iowa against Yale University." Making such an appeal and offering a prize of $50 to the winner, he urged Iowa farm men and boys to enter the contest.

Elaborating on this theme of the rewards that farmers deserved, the farm editor called attention to what he regarded as a good practice in the new Soviet Union. There, Lenin was

The contestants and crowd ready for the start of the 1926 Linn County corn husking contest, held at Marion, Iowa. (courtesy Herb Plambeck)

making "economic heroes" out of men who increased production spectacularly. "What most of us want more than anything else," Wallace assumed, "is to stand well in the eyes of the community, and it is fitting that those men who contribute most to the community's welfare should gain the most prestige." Thus, he proposed that the United States should recognize economic heroes. Aware that men such as Edison and Ford had already achieved such status, he wanted to recognize "men who have added greatly to the productive power of the community by doing things unusually well with their hands," such as husking over 130 bushels in a day. "We in the United States are too prone to give praise and wide publicity to athletic heroes and at the same time overlook the economic heroes," he concluded.

With Henry writing the article, *Wallaces' Farmer* gave prominent, full-page coverage to the outcome of the first contest. He divided the prize between two contestants: Louis Curley of Lee County and John E. Pederson of Iowa County. Curley was recognized as the champion for he had husked at the fastest rate, but Pederson shared in the prize money for he had husked the largest number of bushels. Functioning like a sportswriter, Wallace described the physical makeup of the contes-

Corn huskers and spectators return from the field and await the final results, possibly on the occasion of the 1926 Iowa meet. (courtesy Herb Plambeck)

tants and the tools they used. (Both used hooks.) And he challenged "any two football players from Iowa University's championship football team" to try "to husk as much corn in a day as Louis Curley can husk by himself." Curley was a farmer, a tenant farmer, but Pederson was not. He was a baseball umpire! "He umpires games between the country town teams of the state during the summer and when fall comes on, husks corn," Wallace reported.

By fall 1923 interest in the contest had grown. Farm Bureaus were involved, holding township and county contests; *Wallaces' Farmer* increased the prize money to $100 for first place, and about 1,000 spectators watched the eighty-minute final near Des Moines. Greater efficiency continued to be held up as a goal; so were recognition and prestige. And Wallace repeated the comparison with sports, expressing hope that soon "Iowa's champion corn husker will have more favorable publicity than the star football player or the crack hurdler at the university."

This time, John Rickelman of Lee County emerged as the victor, using the thumb hook. "Curley displayed splendid sportsmanship," Wallace reported proudly. "He had been 'off feed' for several days and was 'all in' at the close. Just the same he took his disappointment like a man and was among the first to congratulate his neighbor." After describing the physical and personal characteristics of the top finishers, Wallace turned to their techniques:

> *All the men used about the same style of husking except Rickelman. Rickelman [had] an unusually powerful grip and instead of turning his left hand over with the thumb down so as to elevate the ear he [had] his thumb up. . . . We hope in the future to get more definite comparisons of the Rickelman and the standard type of hook husking. The question is, can a man less powerful than Rickelman use a method demanding such a strong grip in the left hand?*

A week later, Wallace reported that the Iowa champion had defeated a challenger from Illinois backed by a Chicago manufacturer of husking hooks. The challenger had, according to Wallace's description, "a free and easy, rhythmical swing which [made] his husking rather prettier to watch than the Rickelman husking." The Iowan won a total of $150 in the two contests, but the farm editor believed he had "returned to the state of Iowa value far greater than this. Thousands of powerful huskers will adopt his method and thus increase their ability five or ten bushels per day." They would be helped by films made of the contests.

By the mid-1920s Wallace had even more in mind than greater efficiency and prestige. He hoped that farmers would develop a "feeling of workmanship" in husking and other farm activities. "Pride in our work," he wrote, "will help us to live more pleasantly thru the hard years until production is finally readjusted and farm products are again selling as high as they should." Pride in farming might, in other words, counteract the pressure from low farm prices to move to town.

With the journalist supplying much of the leadership, the contest continued to develop and grow. Rules and procedures were clarified, elaborated, and improved. Counties held qualifying events, with impressive performances in them becoming the chief way of getting into the state event, in which the number of participants was kept small. Many organizations got involved in the staging of the contests, and public interest grew. Attendance at the state meet reached nearly 20,000 by 1930. Illinois and Nebraska, later Minnesota, Indiana, Missouri, and Kansas, introduced state contests of their own, enabling a Midwest championship to be held, beginning in 1924. Fred Stanek of Webster County, Iowa, won the first Midwest championship, and he was champ again in 1926, 1927, and 1930. In 1931, 60,000 attended what was by then called the national

championship. It was held in Grundy County, Iowa.

Wallace was ecstatic! "Probably never before in the history of the corn belt have so many strictly farm folks been gathered together on one farm," he exclaimed. He hoped that future organizers would "line up extensive experiments with fertilizers, different varieties, different kinds of machinery, and a dozen other things of that sort, so that the crowd can have the advantage of learning something in compensation for the gasoline and time spent in going to the contest." He warned that the crowd would become so large that the huskers "will not be able to husk at all." Nevertheless, he was very pleased with what had been accomplished: "There were twice as many people there as had ever attended a football game in Iowa, more than ever [had] been gathered in a similar area at the state fair, and yet there was less confusion and infinitely less rowdiness than you find in a crowd of a few thousand coming out of a hall in Chicago." He obviously found a corn husking contest superior to a football game, and rural folk superior to city people.

Throughout the early years of the contest, Wallace supplied elaborate coverage. He described the huskers and performances rather like a sports commentator portraying a boxer, a baseball batter, a golfer, or a runner (or a race horse). "Fred [Stanek] is the most powerful and at the same time the most graceful man I have ever seen husk," he wrote in a typical description. "Harmon, the new champion, looks something like Red Grange," he observed in 1928. He evaluated the different types of hooks and pegs that were used. He explained the differences in output from man to man and event to event. "Balko was probably the best husker, altho the breaks of the game gave the decision to Welch," he commented on one contest. "Welch was harvesting in Land No. 3, not far from the barn, where

Spectators closely followed the huskers' progress through the field, as the tight gathering around E.H. Hendricks, Grundy County, illustrates in this 1931 contest photograph. (courtesy Herb Plambeck)

more manure had evidently been spread, and where the ears averaged around 155 to the 100 pounds, whereas Balko was harvesting in Land No. 12, farther away from the barn, where the ears were running better than 170 to the 100 pounds." He also offered advice as to ways of improving performances, suggesting, for example, that all one husker needed to do was "to leave a little less corn behind him in the field, and he will be one of the leading contesters for [the] state championship in another year" and that "while it is disastrous to leave behind many ears which are more than six ounces in weight, it is a mistake to pull the husks off too carefully." And he displayed intense interest in how Iowa did in competition with its neighbors.

Like many other sportwriters, Wallace held up the champions as men to be imitated for their moral qualities. As he wrote of one Mid-

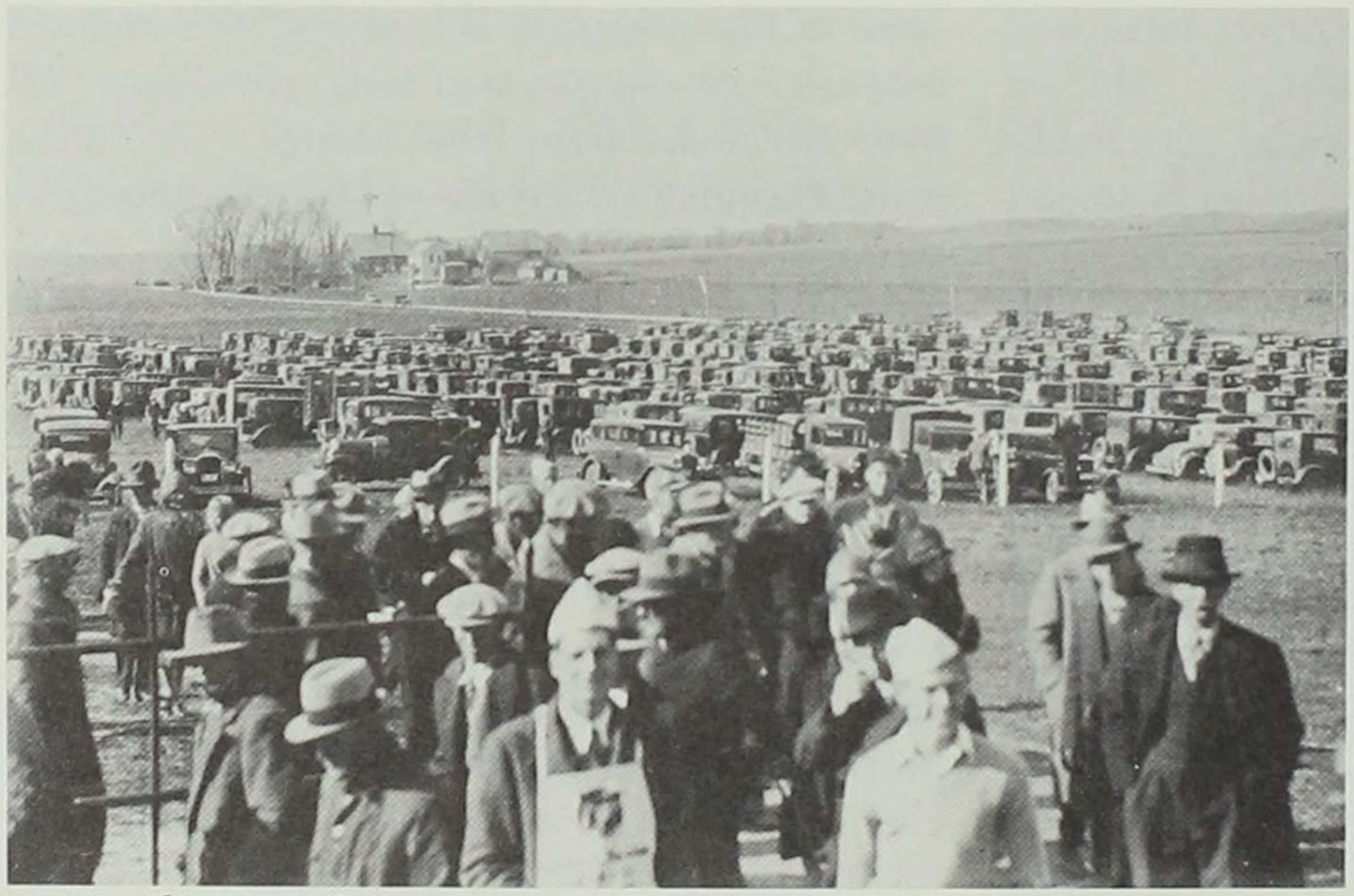
west winner: "He lives on his own farm and does not smoke, chew nor swear. . . . He is a good example to many other young corn huskers who seem to think that it is smart to smoke cigarettes and to use strong language."

The contest had, in Wallace's eyes, become even more than a way to reform the morals of young Iowans. He had come to see it as a means of combatting the population trends that troubled him. Thus, the rapidly growing interest in the event pleased him very much. In 1925 he had reported that Dazzy Vance, regarded by many as "the best pitcher at work in either of the big leagues," had been born and raised in rural Iowa, and he suggested that the problem was "to make the thousands of potential Dazzy Vances who are now growing up on the farms of the corn belt feel that they have a chance to win fame even tho they stay on the farm." Since the press paid almost no attention to unusual farm exploits, "our Dazzy Vances go where they are appreciated." Three years later, however, it seemed to Wallace that his contest had become "one of the accepted fall sports." It received extensive newspaper and radio coverage. "All over the corn belt," he wrote, ". . . folks waited around to hear the radio announcement of the winner of the national contest." Now, every boy who husked corn could "picture himself in a year or two competing before thousands for substantial prizes and for the distinction that today means as much as distinction in any field of athletics."

John P. Wallace, left, presenting the Wallaces' Farmer *trophy to Lee Carey of Marshall County, winner of the 1931 Iowa contest. (courtesy Herb Plambeck)*

Unlike baseball, however, the life of the contest was threatened by technological change, and Wallace recognized that. As early as 1924 he reported that "Folks at the contest had a chance to compare expert human huskers with the mechanical kind. A one-man outfit, including a wagon, corn picker and tractor to draw both, started with the gun with the rest of the pickers. The mechanical picker put about three times as much corn in the wagon in that time as the fastest husker." A small number of machines had already been sold in the state; many farmers were convinced that eventually they would replace corn huskers, and some men predicted that the machines might soon make the contests unpopular. (They might also have prophesied that the machines would persuade some former corn huskers to move to town.) "In time the corn husking contest may share the fate of the old-time hay cutting contest," Wallace wrote four years later. "The mechanical corn picker may put the hand husker, with his peg or hook, in the same class as the old-time hay harvester, with his scythe. . . . Athletic contests based on farm jobs are bound to change with the times." Nevertheless, he was confident that, while they lasted, the corn husking contests were making "a valuable contribution to the farm in lending to a gruelling fall job the zest of spirited competition and playful sport."

Long before the corn husking contest died and well before Wallace left Iowa for Washington, D.C., he developed another con-



By the late 1920s and early 1930s thousands of spectators showed up for corn husking contests. The crowd for the 1931 Iowa state championship meet is suggestive of the high level of spectator interest. The 1931 national meet, also held in Iowa, attracted 60,000 spectators. (courtesy Herb Plambeck)

test with a similar purpose but a longer life expectancy. In 1926 he began for Iowa a Master Farmer contest, copying a practice begun the year before by a Chicago-based journal, the *Prairie Farmer*. Henry C. Taylor, former chief of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the Department of Agriculture, commended him for doing so, writing that the new contest would "show that while corn belt farmers have been putting forth a strenuous effort to secure a more equitable price ratio, they have in no way overlooked the prime importance of doing everything they can to help themselves." But the contest involved more than such a demonstration. It was, at least in Wallace's eyes, a method of affecting the ways in which farmers perceived themselves and were perceived by others and of influencing the size and quality of the rural population.

In selecting Master Farmers, Wallace and his associates looked at more than farming practices and the profits and soil building realized from them. The judges also considered contributions to the community and such matters as education of the children, physical conditions in the farm home, and leisure. *Wallaces' Farmer's* motto — "Good Farming, Clear Thinking, Right Living" — supplied the basis for the scorecard employed. The people selected, Wallace pointed out, "are those who are helping to build a sound rural community and a sound rural civilization as well as providing for themselves and for their families." Friends and neighbors nominated farmers for the honor; the field editor of the magazine, Jay Whitson, interviewed the most promising candidates and other people in their communities, and a three-judge panel that included Wallace made the final decisions, selecting more than a dozen masters each year.

Although good farming practices were not the only criterion for success in the contest, the improvement of such practices was an obvious aim. Wallace assumed that the farmers of the period were living through an "agricultural revolution" in which methods were changing rapidly, new competitors were rising, and shifts in the price level, international trade, and eating habits were complicating the situation. Further, he assumed that those who survived in agriculture would be the ones who were most alert and adaptable. "One of the best guides to successful farming practice is the experience of leading farmers who have been able to meet these new conditions," he believed. "The Master Farmers . . . are examples of what can be done." So the paper reported on their activities.

The contest had other aims, including changing the prestige or status of farmers, a task that seemed essential. "Honors and popular approval are among the desired rewards of living," Wallace argued. "Since the farmer is in no danger of becoming a millionaire and earning attention in this way, it seems especially important that a proper share of the more intangible rewards should be his." He should not be forced to depend solely on his own sense of satisfaction or the applause of his family. "The man who can take care of his own business satisfactorily, who can raise his children in the way they should go, and in addition find time to lead community affairs, deserves to stand well in the eyes of his neighbors," the editor maintained. "He also deserves to stand well in the eyes of the business men of Iowa." An aim of the program, he explained in 1929, was to "honor the farmers who deserve honor." Many people misused the term "fame," he argued. Its true meaning was "the recognition of distinguished work by folks capable of knowing a good job when they see it." All people worked for and wanted fame; farmers were "denied it too often," but the contest was changing that. "We still don't give as much honor and applause to great farmers as we do to great athletes, but we're making a start," he concluded after several years of the contest.

Winner of the 1935 Iowa and national corn husking contests, Audubon County's Elmer Carlson poses "with an armload of his favorite ammunition and wearing a smile that runs about 85 bushels to the acre." (courtesy Herb Plambeck)

Wallace hoped the program would have a broad impact, affecting both rural and non-rural people. "The recognition accorded farmers who are not only leaders in operating their farms, but likewise in community development, is not only an inspiration to those who receive the honor," he observed, "but also to other farm folks who have the ambition to make their efforts to build a prosperous agriculture and a prosperous community count for the most." Beyond that, the contest aimed to give agriculture "the standing it ought to have in the eyes of the non-agricultural world." The contest proclaimed, he explained: "Here is work that is the most important in the nation. Here are men who are efficient producers, who are expert business men, who are unselfish community leaders, in this most important field." The contest showed to "the people outside of agriculture something of the vigor and the virtues that agriculture, at its best, seems to develop in those who trust to it for a livelihood." If the work of leading farmers was not brought to the attention of urban dwellers, they would not appreciate the enormous amount of energy and talent at work on the farm, would not realize how productive and efficient farmers were, and would minimize the importance of agriculture and underestimate the value of suggestions on national policies from farm organizations. The program cost *Wallaces' Farmer* "a good deal of money and . . . work," but it seemed worthwhile, Wallace argued, "in order to impress the

Carl Carlson, middle, winner of the 1936 Iowa meet and brother of the 1935 Iowa contest winner, Elmer Carlson, receives his trophy in front of the contest scoreboard from A.T. Thompson, representing Wallaces' Farmer. *On Carlson's left is E.H. Hendricks, runner-up in the 1936 Iowa contest. (courtesy Herb Plambeck)*

importance of agriculture on other groups, and to let our boys and girls on the farm see that distinction can be achieved by hard, intelligent, cooperative work on the farm and in the farm community."

As with the corn husking contest, a major aim was to hold good people on the land. Wallace assumed that Iowa farm boys were often "discouraged about farming" because it did not offer "intangible" rewards and that the farm would mean more to them "as a field of future activity" if they could "see outstanding accomplishments in farming getting due recognition." Many made poor selections of heroes, a matter of considerable importance. They saw "fame of a sort going to relatively unimportant men" and wondered why it was "necessary to be a ball player or a prize fighter or a successful speculator in order to win the admiration of the crowd." Even some who liked farm life saw "the honors and attention going to men in the cities" and wondered if the city was "therefore the place to go." Thus, the Master Farmer program aimed to "make distinction in farming take on its proper importance in the eyes of farm boys." It held up "to the young people on the farms an example worth following" and tried to "turn the attention of farm boys to the size and the importance of the farm job." By 1930 Wallace was confident that the contest had "dramatized excellence in farming for thousands of young people."

As Wallace's words suggest, he was trying to solve a somewhat puzzling problem. He assumed that farming was a superior activity, yet he saw rural areas losing population. In the flamboyant 1920s, publicists threw the spotlight on pursuits that he regarded as inferior and captured the imagination and ambition of boys that rural America needed for its continued welfare — and that of the nation. Thus, the farm journalist fought back, using the tools of the new public relations industry, employing new techniques for conservative purposes.

A few critics accused Wallace of elitism, although without using the term, and did not do so unfairly. Wallace did hope that a large number of people would continue to farm and dissented from a national policy that seemed to be designed to force large numbers to move to the city. But he assumed that he had special responsibilities to the readers of *Wallaces' Farmer*, to do what he could to help them survive in the struggle for existence in farming, and he assumed also that a high percentage of his readers were in a small class of superior farmers. One critic challenged this class bias,

asking how many of the Master Farmers "started out with nothing but their own hands and health" and how many "inherited a good farm to start with," and suggesting that attention should be paid to farmers who had been less fortunate. "I would like to hear about the fourteen most unfortunate farmers in Iowa, because I am sure that it would make quite a contrast to the account of the fourteen Master Farmers," he wrote. "It would be interesting and stimulating to our sympathies, although perhaps not very profitable, to search out the fourteen unluckiest farmers in Iowa," Wallace replied. "We could make out a score card for them, giving points to ignorance, laziness, slack business methods, lack of conveniences and out-of-date machinery." Thinking perhaps that his words might seem harsh, he went on to suggest that there were "slums on the farms as well as in the cities, but that we do not have any organized way of taking care of our farm unfortunates as they have in town," and he agreed that his critic had made a good point in asking for thought about the class structure of rural Iowa. Suggesting that the class system there was a recent development, he concluded: "In the pioneer days, the contrast between the best farmers and the worst farmers in a community amounted to very little. Today, the gap is enormous and is continually growing wider."

The criticism persisted briefly. A second reader complained that Wallace concentrated on farms and farmers that were "well fixed" and had the means "to run their farms to the best advantage." He wanted to read more about farmers who were in the "same fix" as he was and were "unable to get enough money to farm as they know they ought to farm." Wallace recognized that there were "hundreds of thousands" of farmers like this in the corn belt but had nothing to suggest other than that they "should have a heart to heart talk with their local banker, in an effort to get him to work out with them a practical soil-building program which will get them into a sounder situation within four or five years."

Such men were not Wallace's chief concern at the time. He was more concerned about the people of high ability who were leaving rural America. "It seems to me that the men who have the foresight, ability and money to build up their soil, are just the kind of men to make incomes of five thousand dollars a year or more in the cities," he suggested. "Many men of such abilities, therefore, find their way to town, where they feel that there is more satisfaction for themselves and their families than on the farm."

Wallace seemed no more than mildly troubled by these criticisms, perhaps because they were not expressed in the forceful, insistent way that he would encounter when, as secretary of agriculture, he ran into the class system of the rural South. He recognized that Master Farmers were no more than a narrow elite, arguing that "only about one farmer in a thousand is deserving of the title," and he realized that "in some places there is a prejudice against the whole Master Farmer idea." He permitted himself to suggest that it might be "a mistake to honor those who are more fortunate" and that perhaps "we should spend more of our time thinking about those who are not born right and not trained right," but he believed more strongly that if more farmers worked to become Master Farmers the results would be "beneficial rather than otherwise." For Master Farmers were "much interested in the general social and economic situation" and wanted to "know how the general situation is affecting not only themselves but also their neighbors." If the impossible happened and all farmers became Master Farmers, "it would be very easy to form large cooperative organizations to control production and marketing."

Although the Master Farmers were an elite, they did not owe their standing solely to inheritance or great wealth. "Some started with nothing but their hands — and some good brains," Wallace generalized in 1932; "some had the

doubtful help of being left farms with heavy mortgages attached." They were financially successful — or as much so as the times permitted, but financial success was not the sole test. The farmer's work in the community and his role as head of a farm family were more important. The Master Farmers, Wallace proclaimed during the depths of the Great Depression, "indicate the promise of Iowa agriculture. In a year of discouragement, it is heartening also to think of a man starting life as an immigrant boy, doing a careful and unpretentious job of farming, reaching a position of financial security, and coming to be the sort of community leader and good farmer each of us would like to have living on the next farm."

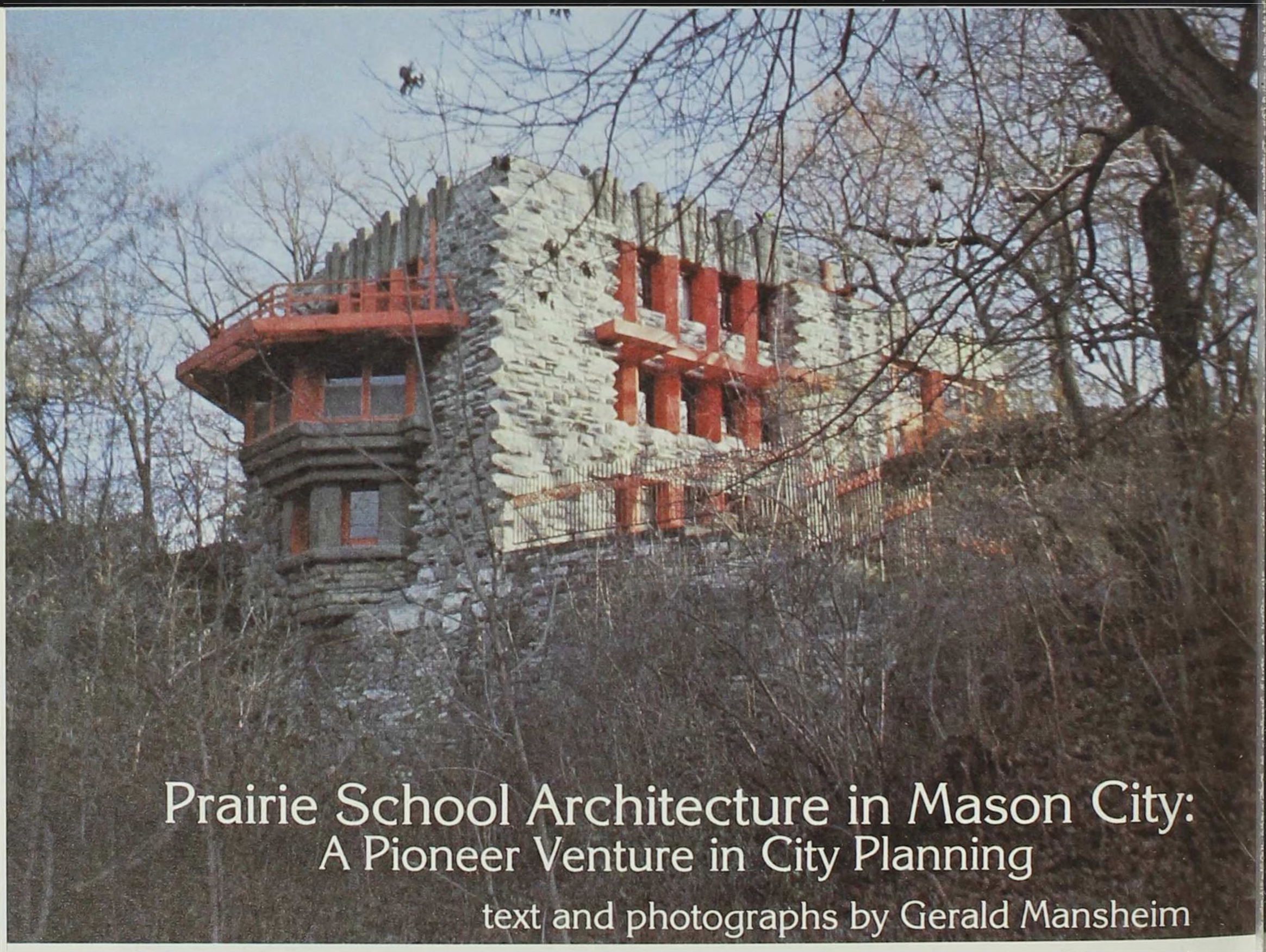
Each Master Farmer received a gold medal. Wallaces' Farmer's motto — "Good Farming, Clear Thinking, Right Living" — and the name of the Master Farmer appeared on one side of the medal. On the other side was the image of a farmer standing behind a plow, with the words "Master Farmer" above and "Awarded by Wallaces Farmer" below the image. (courtesy Ervin J.J. Koos)

Had the term "sexist" been available, Wallace's non-political programs would have been vulnerable to that charge. A few years earlier, another prominent Iowan, Herbert Quick, had argued that the discontent among farm women was the major force behind the movement to the cities, but Wallace's programs did not address that discontent, at least not directly. He did write at the beginning of the Master Farmer competition: "In strict justice, duplicate medals should have been given to the wives of each of these men. No farmer ever reached the first rank without the help of an able wife." And in 1932, he did recognize, for the first time, a woman as a Master Farmer, Mrs. J.E. Hoopes, a widow from Muscatine County. Furthermore, he found much validity in Quick's thesis. Wallace was "quite sure that one of the greatest drawbacks to farming is that few women like the farm." They disliked the hard work, the lack of modern facilities, and the sparse social life. "I am sure that there are thousands of men who would be on the farm today if it were not for this feeling on the part of their wives," he wrote in 1927. "Of the families that leave the farm I suspect that women are responsible for the departure of more than half." He saw signs that attitudes were changing and predicted that they would change "very rapidly when household conveniences become more widely spread." But the "outstanding change needed" was "to build up farm communities which will not look to town for their social life." Otherwise, "large numbers of farm women" would "insist on moving to town" as soon as the family could afford to do so. He was "beginning to think that the farm problem" was "as much a problem of the farmer's wife" as it was of anything else, and he feared that even when the farmers got a fair share of the national income, the "farm wife problem" would not be solved. Yet, although his paper devoted many pages to matters of direct concern to rural women, he personally emphasized rural males.

The corn husking and Master Farmer contests focused on rural males, boys as well as men, and were designed chiefly to encourage them — at least those Wallace regarded as the best — to stay on the land. The contests attested to his high regard for farming and rural life and his great concern about population movements and constituted two of his non-political efforts to check rural decline. The state's farm population continued to fall, doing so at a stepped-up pace after 1940. Corn husking contests eventually died out, victims of increasing mechanization of the corn harvest, as Wallace had expected, but Master Farmers continued to be recognized. That recognition is one symbol of his large impact on Iowa. □

Note on Sources

This essay rests on the writings of Henry A. Wallace in *Wallaces' Farmer* during his years as editor of that publication. For a related essay on his thinking about farming and rural life during that period see the author's article, "The Mind of a Farm Leader," in the *Annals of Iowa* 47 (Fall 1983), pp. 138-153.



Prairie School Architecture in Mason City:
A Pioneer Venture in City Planning

text and photographs by Gerald Mansheim

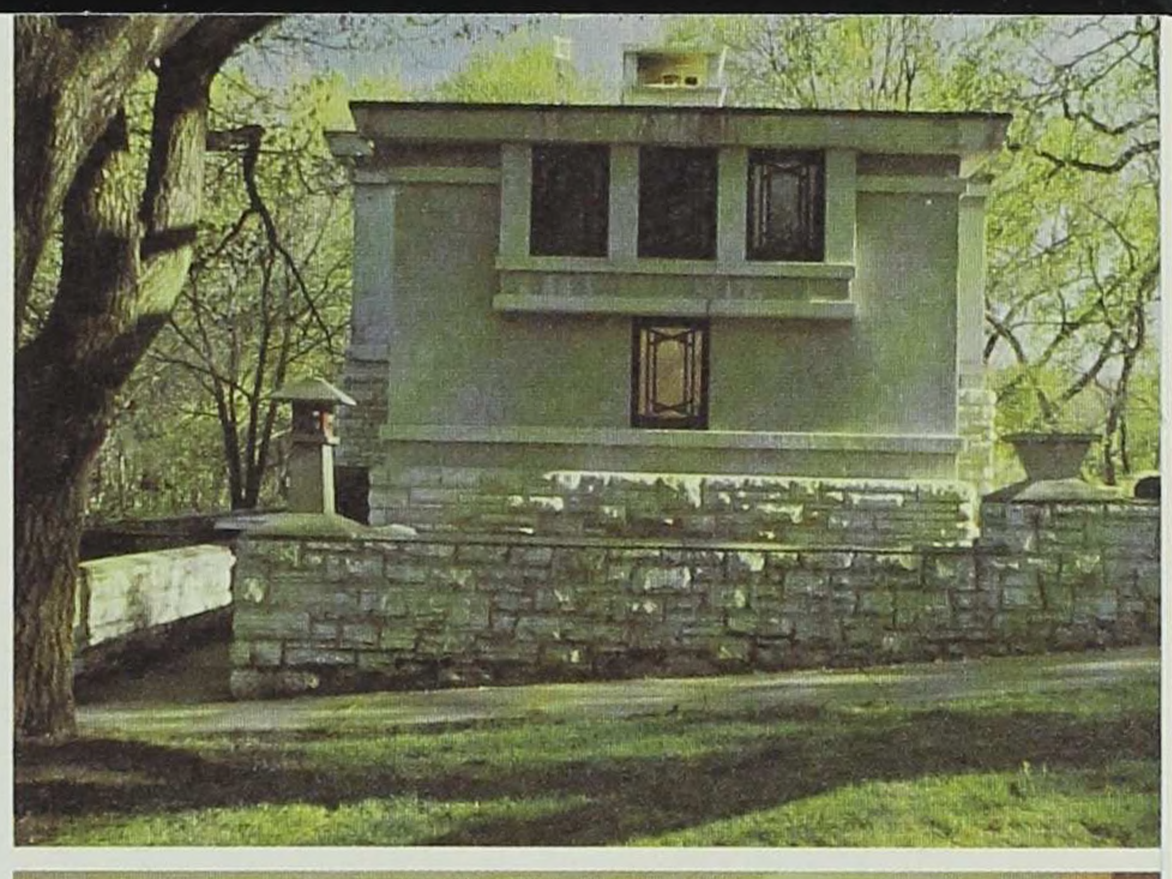
Mason City, Iowa, has a preserve of nationally known Prairie School houses: the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development. An early example of urban planning, it began in 1912 as a contract between a group of Mason City businessmen and Walter Burley Griffin, a Chicago architect, landscape artist, and urban planner. They agreed to improve an 18-acre area that the growing city had bypassed as unbuildable because of its rough and uneven terrain. Willow Creek cuts its way through the center of the area leaving a rugged, limestone cliff on the side known as Rock Crest. The other side, known as Rock Glen, gradually slopes up from the creek.

The agreement between Griffin and the businessmen stipulated that a design should be developed which would preserve the natural beauty of the area. The land would be used only for residential purposes. Houses designed to blend into the natural setting would rim the perimeter of the development and form a protective border between the street and the center area. The center area would remain as a common park for Rock Crest-Rock Glen residents, visible from all of the many-windowed living areas of the houses. The area that had been used as a dump site at one time would be cleared of debris. An old mill would be

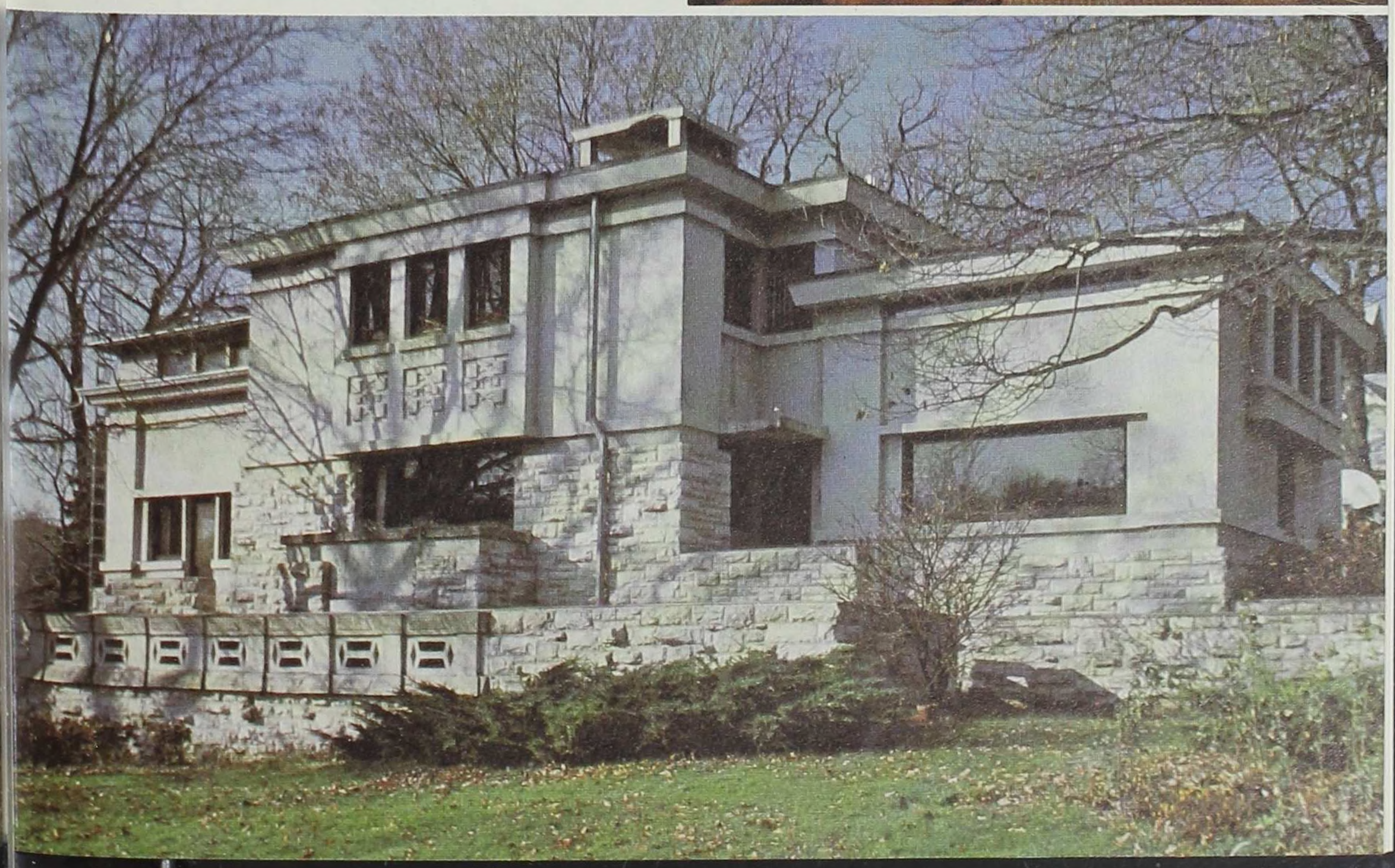
(Above) "The Castle" (1912) appears to grow from the limestone cliffs of Rock Crest. It is the most unusual house in the residential development in terms of Griffin's utilization of the rugged natural setting and new materials. Also, it offers a clear example of the Prairie School attempt to break away from the imitation of earlier architectural styles in favor of creating a native American architecture.

removed, except for its dam on the creek, and the area near the creek would be graded and filled.

Interest in Prairie School architecture in Mason City can be traced to 1908, when Frank Lloyd Wright received a commission for a downtown commercial project to consist of a bank, offices, and a hotel. James E. Blythe, a successful lawyer with a keen sense for business opportunities, and his law partner, J.E.E. Markley, gave Wright the commission for the City National Bank and Park Inn Hotel. Wright also obtained commissions for two Mason City houses: the Dr. George C. Stockman house



Considered among the finest of Griffin's works, the smooth-surfaced Blythe house (1913) provides exceptional contrast to the rugged quality of the Melson house. Symmetrical in original design, the foundation is characterized by the rough limestone that unifies the houses of the Mason City development. The fireplace is distinguished by an Italian tile facing in an intricate, geometric pattern designed by Marion Mahony Griffin. Cove lighting, in combination with a defining oak trim, further distinguishes the large, open living space.



and the Joshua Melson house. The Stockman house was based on Wright's 1906 design plans for a fireproof house for $5000, and remains standing in good condition today. The Wright-designed Melson house was never built in Mason City.

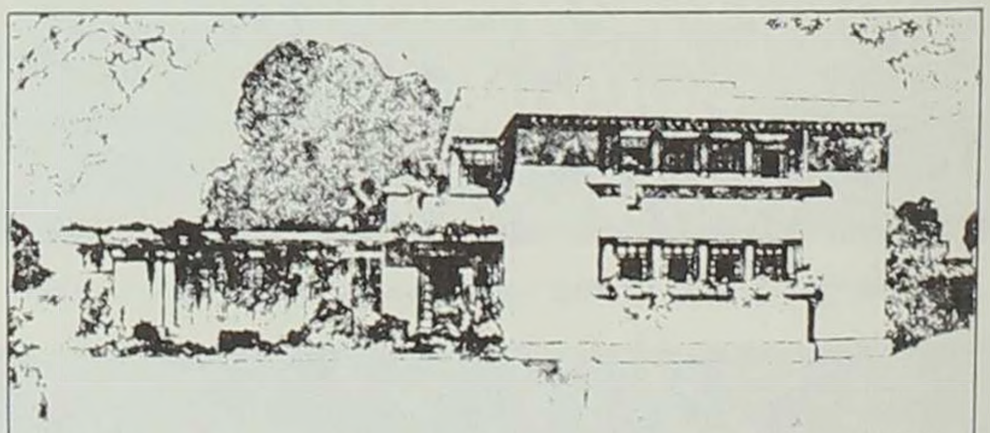
Wright must have become familiar with the Willow Creek area, where the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development would be built, during his preparation of the Melson house design. His perspective drawing for the projected house shows Willow Creek below the house. It is probable that Wright would have been chosen to design houses for the Mason City businessmen who eventually commissioned houses in the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development. But before the bank was finished, Wright gave up his practice, left his wife and children, and eloped to Europe with a neighbor's wife. This was distinctly scandalous behavior at the time. The scandal may have kept Wright from designing the houses, but on the other hand, he made no attempt to contact any of his former Mason City clients after his return from Europe.

Joshua Melson asked Marion Mahony Griffin, who had been a draftsman in Wright's office for ten years and who had taken over some of the projects Wright left behind, for advice about selecting an architect to draft new plans for the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development. She recommended Walter Burley Griffin, who had worked in Wright's office between 1901 and 1905. Mahony and Griffin had just been married and she was now working in his office. Wright was severely critical of the Griffins for taking on the development. Never one to mince words, he accused them, in his best country boy manner, of sucking eggs.

Of the many houses that Griffin planned for the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development, only eight were eventually built. Only five of the eight were Griffin's designs. These five include the Melson, Blythe, Page, Rule, and Schneider houses.

The house on the cliff is difficult to see from the street because it is set at the rear of the lot. Its park side is the preferred one and can be seen even at a distance from the other side of Willow Creek. Historians consider it one of the first modern houses of the twentieth century. To them it is known as the Melson house, but residents of Mason City are more apt to call it "The Castle," because of its fortress-like stone walls and the way it is set into the rim of the rocky cliff.

Joshua Melson, a contractor and land speculator, had sought designs from many architects, including Wright, but none had satisfied him until he saw Griffin's work. The Melson house was designed and the building supervised, even to the laying of the stone, by Griffin. The house stands out because of its dramatic site, its rough stone surface, and its



Wright's design for a fireproof house for $5,000.

The Prairie School style of architecture, as developed by Frank Lloyd Wright and his followers, was characterized by several features: "low proportions; outstretching form; wide eaves; walls treated as flat thin membranes; structure delineated by trim; the free flow of space on the interior between the dining, living, and entry areas and a focus on the fireplace." Other characteristic features included: "a rectilinear geometrical form, banded windows, light-colored stucco walls, and a thin, low, gable roof." The houses of Mason City's Rock Crest-Rock Glen development can be seen to exemplify these features to varying degrees.

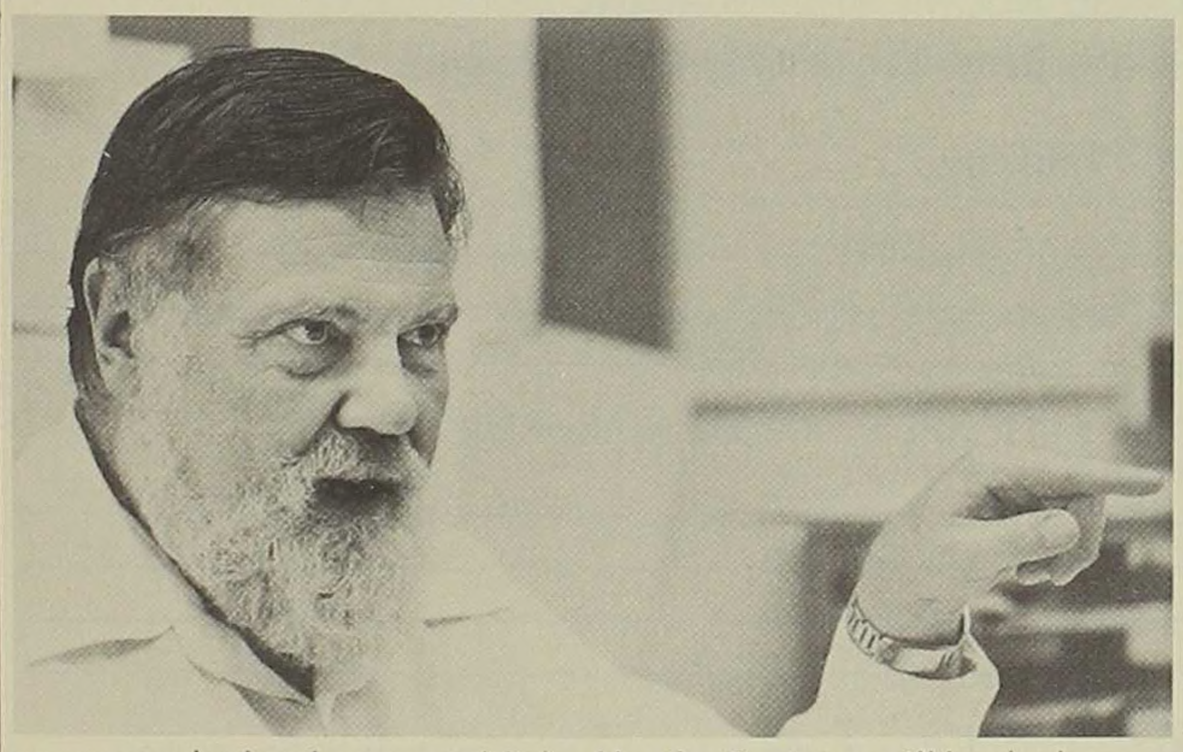
Source: Richard Guy Wilson and Sidney K. Robinson, *The Prairie School in Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1977).

IOWA STATE HISTORICAL DEPARTMENT

Office of the State Historical Society

news for members

Society Banquet — June 16 — Make Your Reservations Now



All members of the State Historical Society of Iowa are invited to attend the Society's 1984 annual meeting and banquet, to be held Saturday, June 16th, at 6:30 P.M. at the Regency Royale Room of The Holiday, Burlington.

It is with great pride that the Board of Trustees of the State Historical Society announces that Dr. Laurence Lafore, professor of history at the University of Iowa and author of *American Classic,* one of the most popular books ever published by the Society, will be the banquet speaker. Dr. Lafore has earned an unusually fine reputation as a writer and public speaker, and his banquet address, "People, Streets and Civilizations," will be on the subject of historic architecture.

The banquet program will also include the presentation of awards to individuals and organizations for achievement in local history, and the presentation of the 1984 Trustees' Award.

Many special events have been scheduled in Burlington and the surrounding southeast Iowa area for Saturday the 16th — banquet day — and Sunday the 17th for the enjoyment of Society members and guests. Members of the Board of Trustees hope that banquet-goers will find a way to spend some time in the Burlington area and take advantage of the special tours and slide shows being planned.

At 10 A.M. on both Saturday and Sunday mornings Steve Brower, a landscape architect and preservationist, will conduct walking tours of Burlington's Heritage Hill. The tours will start at the top of "Snake Alley," at Sixth and Columbia Streets, and last about one hour.

The Des Moines County Historical Society's three museums — "Phelps House," "Hawkeye Log Cabin," and the "Apple Trees Museum" — will be open for special tours between 1:00 and 4:30 P.M. Saturday and Sunday. Phelps House was built in 1851 and is located at the top of Snake Alley. Hawkeye Log Cabin overlooks the Mississippi River in Crapo Park. The Apple Trees Museum is located in the remaining wing of the Charles Perkins home in Perkins Park. A bus tour of Burlington and the museums has been arranged for each day at 12:50 P.M., the bus to leave from the riverfront by the auditorium, where parking is available. There will be a nominal charge for the bus tour. (Please check the box on the banquet reservation form for more detailed information about the museums and bus tours.)

The Southeast Regional Workshop of the Iowa Local Historical and Museum Association will be held in Wapello during the morning and early afternoon of Saturday the 16th. Society members are encouraged to attend this ILHMA workshop on their way to the SHSI banquet. Workshop plans include tours of the Toolesboro Indian Mounds and the County Historical Society Museum in Wapello, a slide show about historic Wapello County, and a talk by Loren N. Horton about the importance of local historical societies and ILHMA as their organization. For more information about the Southeast Iowa ILHMA workshop, contact Barbara Gearhart, President, Box 157, Hopkinton, Iowa 52237.

The members of the Iowa Society for the Preservation of Historic Landmarks are also planning to hold a meeting in Burlington in conjunction with the annual meeting of the State Historical Society. State Historical Society members are invited to participate in the landmark society's activities during Saturday and Sunday. For more information about the landmark society's plans, contact Elizabeth Craw, President, 1226 North 24th Place, Fort Dodge, Iowa 50501.

A social hour for the SHSI banquet will begin at 5:30 P.M. in the Regency Royale Room of The Holiday. Steve Brower will present a narrated slide show about the Burlington area during the social

hour, and there will be several displays and exhibits for the enjoyment of Society members.

Advance reservations for the banquet are required. The cost is $12.50 per person. Please pencil June 16th in on your calendar as a special date and make your banquet reservations soon. A reservation form has been provided for your use in this issue of *News for Members*. Checks or money orders should be made payable to the State Historical Society of Iowa.

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1984 SHSI BANQUET RESERVATION
Regency Royale Room, The Holiday, Burlington
Saturday, June 16, 1984, 6:30 P.M.

Yes, I plan to attend the 1984 banquet:

Name _____
Mailing address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Please list the names of any others that you are enclosing payment for:

Name _____
Name _____
Name _____
Name _____

$12.50 PER PERSON ☐ Send me a list of Burlington area motels

Send this form, accompanied by payment to:
Banquet Reservations
Office of the State Historical Society
402 Iowa Avenue
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

RESERVATIONS AND PAYMENT MUST BE RECEIVED BY JUNE 8

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MEMBERSHIP DUES TO BE RAISED JULY 1 — SPECIAL OFFER TO SHSI MEMBERS

Annual membership dues have been a vital source of financial support for the State Historical Society since its foundation in 1857. In the century and a quarter since that time, annual dues have been increased only twice — in 1902 and 1968. During the past sixteen years, however, the costs of producing publications benefits for Society members have increased dramatically. To meet these rising costs, Society membership dues will be increased on July 1, 1984. The membership dues structure also has been expanded to offer interested Society members greater options, or new levels of membership which will include additional publications benefits.

After July 1, individual dues will be $12.50 a year. Members joining the State Historical Society at this level will receive the *Palimpsest,* Iowa's popular history magazine, six times a year; *News for Members,* the Society's newsletter, four times a year; and a 20% discount on book publications.

Two additional levels of membership will be offered for the first time: Family Memberships at $17.50 a year and Benefiting Memberships at $22.50 a year. Family members will receive the *Palimpsest, News for Members,* a 20% discount on book publications, and the *Goldfinch,* Iowa's history magazine for upper elementary students, published four times each school year. Benefiting members will receive all the benefits of a family membership plus the *Annals of Iowa,* a scholarly journal of Iowa history, published quarterly.

Current life members of the Society will not be affected by the change in dues. Life members will continue to receive their current membership benefits: the *Palimpsest, News for Members,* and the 20% discount on book publications. With the revised dues structure to be implemented on July 1, new life memberships will no longer be available.

A special offer is now being extended to current Society members in gratitude for their continued

support. **Now, before the new fees become effective on July 1, you may renew your membership for one year at the current annual dues rate of $5.00. This announcement is being made to Society members only.** Renew your membership in the State Historical Society of Iowa **now** and continue to receive your current membership benefits for an additional year for only $5.00. Don't delay. The form below has been included for your convenience. — *Christie Dailey*

IOWA STATE HISTORICAL DEPARTMENT
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

Renew My Annual Membership For Only $5.00

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Renew My Gift Membershps For Only $5.00 Each Too

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Send your membership renewal to:

Iowa State Historical Department
Office of the State Historical Society
402 Iowa Avenue
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

CALENDAR OF COMING EVENTS, 1984

May 11	Cedar Falls Historical Society Annual Banquet, Cedar Falls
May 20	Iowa Chapter, Victorian Society in America, Des Moines
May 23-26	National Genealogical Society National Conference, San Francisco, California
May 23-26	Symposium on the History of Soil and Water Conservation, Columbia, Missouri
June 2	Northwest Regional ILHMA Workshop, Boone
June 9	Southwest Regional ILHMA Workshop, Red Oak
June 15-16	Midwest Urban Waterfront Conference, Davenport
June 16	Southeast Regional ILHMA Workshop, Wapello
June 16	**Annual Meeting and Banquet of the State Historical Society of Iowa, Burlington**
June 23	Northeast Regional ILHMA Workshop, Hopkinton
August 16-19	Oregon-California Trails Association, Oregon City, Oregon
Aug. 30-Sept. 2	Society of American Archivists, Washington, D.C.
Sept. 18-21	American Association for State and Local History, Louisville, Kentucky
Sept. 19-22	Association for Preservation Technology, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Sept. 20-23	Oral History Association, Lexington, Kentucky
Sept. 25-28	Midwest Museums Conference, Green Bay, Wisconsin
Oct. 5-7	National Historic Communal Societies Association, Amana, Iowa
Oct. 10-13	Western History Association, St. Paul, Minnesota

SHSI Board of Trustees Election Time

All members of the State Historical Society of Iowa are eligible to participate in the elections for Board of Trustees of the Society. These elections are to fill vacancies that will open on June 30, 1984, in the Second and Third Congressional District seats and in two At Large seats. The people elected will serve three-year terms and work to achieve the board's purposes, namely, to further an understanding of Iowa history, to promote activities and endeavors that will help Iowans better understand their own heritage, and to provide general support services to the Iowa State Historical Department.

May 1984

PLEASE RETURN BALLOT —

To cast your vote, mark the ballot provided in this issue of *News for Members* with your choice for one candidate for each congressional district seat and with your two choices for at large seats. You should vote for a total of four (4) candidates.

Do *not* sign your ballot, as this will invalidate it. Clip out the marked ballot and mail it to: Election Committee, Office of the State Historical Society, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240. Make sure that your name and address are on the envelope in which you mail your ballot since your name will be checked against Society membership records for voting eligibility. *Your ballot will be invalid if you do not record your name and address on the envelope in which it is mailed.*

Second Congressional District

Michael D. Gibson (Dubuque) is active in the Dubuque County Historical Society as editor of its newsletter, member of its board of directors, and chairman of its building and sites committee. He is also the assistant archivist of the Research Center for Dubuque Area History, Loras College. He has published articles in the *Palimpsest,* the *Annals of Iowa,* and the *Journal of Popular Culture.*

Third Congressional District

Lynn Nielsen (Cedar Falls) has been an elementary teacher at Price Laboratory School at the University of Northern Iowa for more than ten years. Actively involved in several major projects devoted to gathering materials for use in teaching Iowa history in elementary schools, Nielsen recently initiated a publication titled *Iowa History Teacher,* sponsored jointly by the Department of Public Instruction and the University of Northern Iowa.

At Large

Patrice Kay Beam (Indianola) is president of the Iowa Chapter, Victorian Society in America, editor of *Victorian News,* and a member of the national Victorian Society in America board of directors. Her memberships include the Warren County Historical Society, ILHMA, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Beam is currently completing her master's thesis at Iowa State University where she has specialized in late 19th century American social history.

William Cochran (Red Oak) is director of the Red Oak Public Library and has recently been elected a curator of the Montgomery County Historical Society. He received his master of arts (library science) degree from the University of Iowa in December 1983. He worked as administrator of the State Historical Society between July 1982 and October 1983. His memberships include the American Library Association and the Iowa Library Association.

George McDaniel (Davenport) is on the faculty of St. Ambrose College in Davenport. Father McDaniel holds graduate degrees from the Aquinas Institute of Theology, Dubuque, and the University of Iowa, and is currently a doctoral candidate in American history at the University of Iowa. He has published articles on Smith W. Brookhart in the *Annals of Iowa* and the *Palimpsest* and is working on a biography of Brookhart.

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1984 BOARD OF TRUSTEES ELECTION BALLOT

Vote For One Candidate in Each District:

Second Congressional District
- ☐ Michael D. Gibson
- ☐ _____

Third Congressional District
- ☐ Lynn Nielsen
- ☐ _____

Vote For Two At Large Candidates:

- ☐ Patrice Kay Beam
- ☐ William Cochran
- ☐ George McDaniel

Do **not** sign this ballot. Your name and address **must** be on the envelope.

The ballot must be received **by June 8, 1984.** Send it to:

Election Committee
Office of the State Historical Society
402 Iowa Avenue
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

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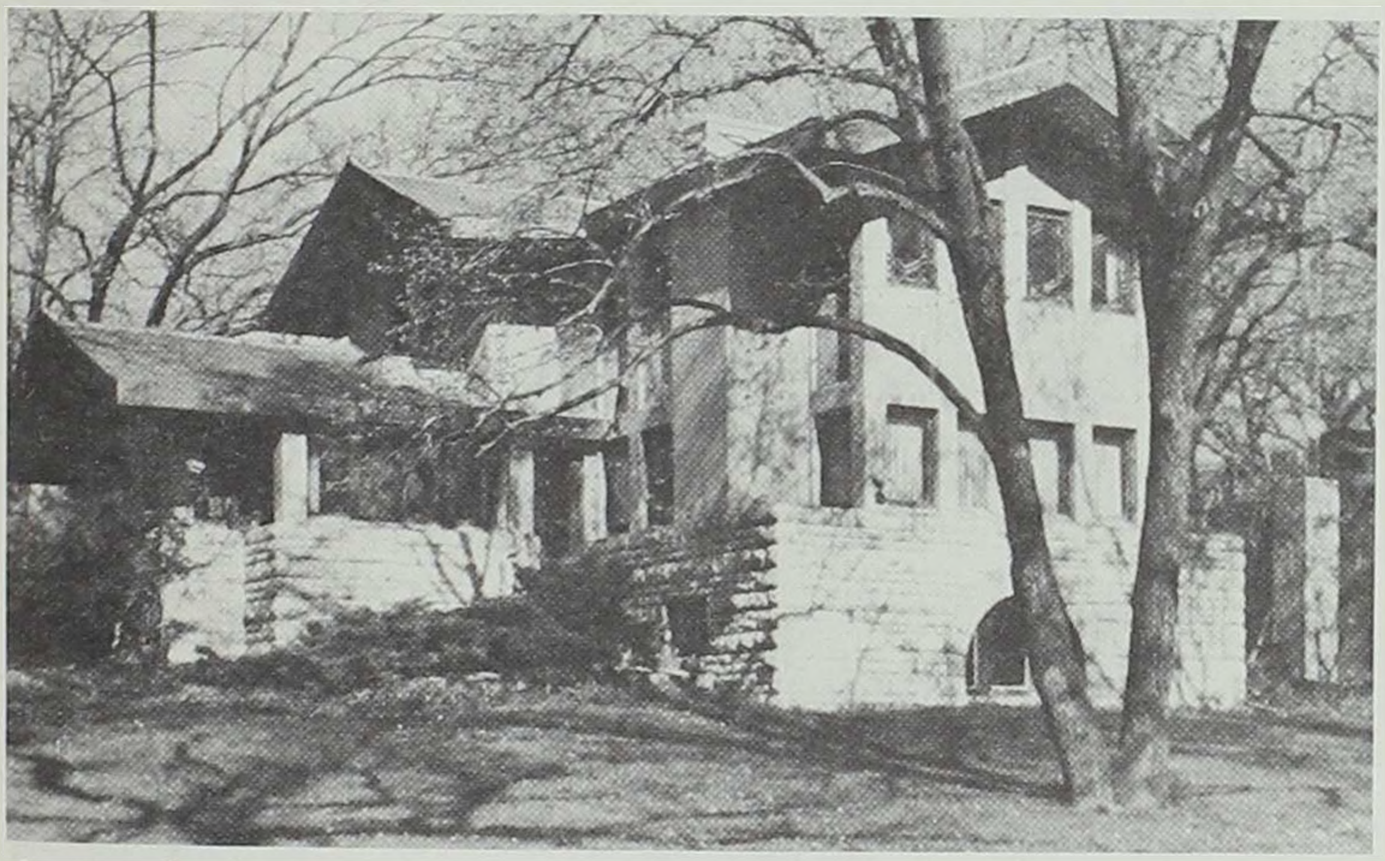
May 1984



The Page house (1912) is characterized by a high, tight design, with walls built of an exposed reinforced concrete framework that adds to the ornamental effect of the house. The roof is gabled, with projecting flared eaves, and rough ashlar distinguishes the ground level.

daring design.

The comparatively smooth-surfaced Blythe house was built on a sloping Rock Glen site, across Willow Creek from the Melson house. Unfortunately, the house was not built as first designed. As built it has a stone ground floor that, with the addition of a walled terrace garden, gives it a feeling of being on a platform. The sculptural railing set into the walls of the terrace would seem to be an attempt to compensate for the loss of the elaborate upper cornice and the elimination of the Prairie School urns from the roof line of the wings, both features of Griffin's original plans. The design's drive-through garage in one wing was closed in on the Willow Creek side and a large window put in, giving the garage a picture window before most houses had one. Later, the balcony above the solarium on the other wing was roofed and closed in, destroying the symmetry of the front elevation. The wings of the Blythe house are connected to the principal part of the house by narrow areas that allow them to seem freestanding instead of stuck up against, or leaning on, the main house.

One of the most unusual features of the Blythe house is the tent-like ceiling of the billiard room above the garage. This kind of ceiling was used by many Prairie School architects to eliminate the boxiness of a room. There is also an extraordinarily long and narrow window, 10 inches high by 13 feet long, placed near the ceiling. This window adds light to the room as clerestory windows do, yet is hardly noticeable from the outside.

The walls, floors, and roofs of the Melson and Blythe houses were constructed entirely of reinforced concrete in an experiment with new materials that sets them apart from ordinary houses of the period, and houses of the present period. The cost of similar construction materials would be prohibitive today. The limestone ashlar that characterizes the Melson house may appear like stone laid in the usual way, but the stones were set into the concrete as the forms went up.

The Page house, northeast of the Blythe house, is also a tribute to experimentation. Chronologically, this was the first of Griffin's Rock Crest-Rock Glen houses to be built. In keeping with his plan to make each house unique, Griffin exposed the reinforced con-

The exterior of the Rule house (1912) is characterized most by its massive stucco corner piers which, combined with its low, overhanging hip roof, give the house its squarish, symmetrical quality.

crete structural frame, which at first glance seems like added ornamentation even though it functions as support. To fit the house into the overall pattern of the development, he used a stone first floor and window patterns similar to those of the Blythe house. The roof differs in that it is not a low, flat, hip roof like those of the Melson and Blythe houses, but is gabled and overhung, with slightly turned up ends that give the house an oriental feeling. It seems remarkable that Page, who was in the lumber business and was not one of the signers of the original agreement, would have a concrete house built. Yet Page's intrigue in Griffin's overall concept for the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development led him to prefer the concrete house design.

James Blythe also commissioned the building of the Rule house. Blythe was to occupy this house while his own was under construction and then sell it to his law partner, Arthur Rule, whose name it bears. The Rule house provides a good example of a typical Prairie School house based on Wright's much-used 1906 design of a fireproof house for $5000. Widely imitated by Wright's followers, this compact

The Franke house (1915) was designed and built by Barry Byrne and, other than its rough limestone base, it bears little resemblance to Griffin's Rock Crest-Rock Glen houses. The upper walls are of smooth stucco and it has a low-rising roof with little attempt at ornamentation.

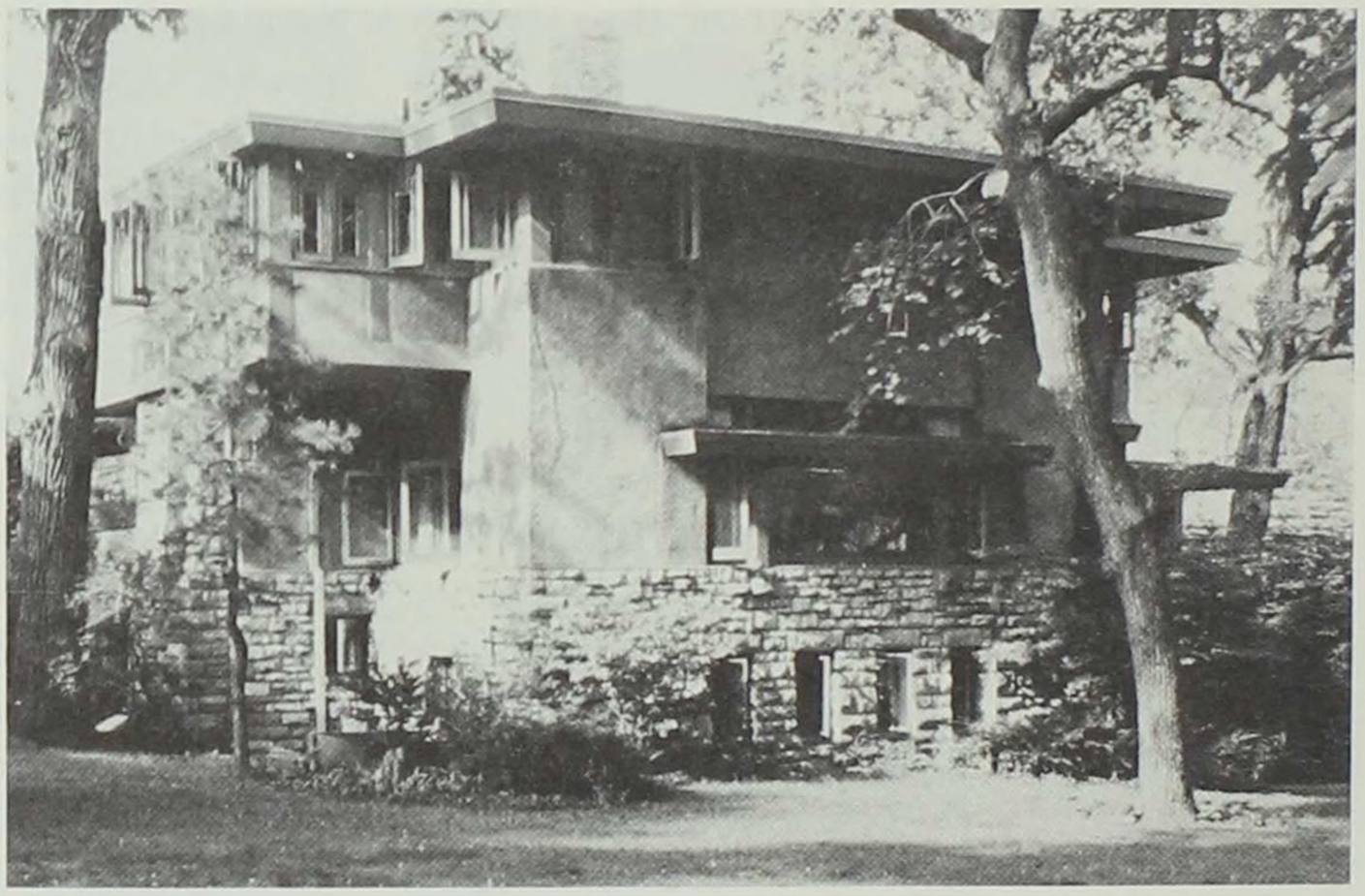
design, somewhat like that of the Melson house, was basically a square form with similar yet varied sides. Variations might include bands of windows or sometimes a door and porch. In the Rule house, variations included projecting trellises over the windows and veranda. The veranda was later closed in and two bedrooms added above, which altered the original effect. The massive corner piers, more noticeable on this house than on the Melson house, end at the second floor, where corner windows are set far enough back to allow for window boxes for plants. The overhanging, hipped roof emphasizes this set-back. The interior plan is an open square, except for the kitchen, with a centered fireplace and cove or indirect lighting. The additional space provided by the piers allows built-in cabinets at the outside corner of each ground floor room to stand flush with the interior walls. H. Allen Brooks, in his book *The Prairie School*, called this house, "The most modest, yet one of the best," of Griffin's Mason City houses.

The Einar Broaten-designed Drake house (1914) was constructed on the Rock Crest side of the development, overlooking the old mill dam. The design was somewhat akin to that of the Rule house, with its squarish quality, and with a projecting solarium and garage.

Griffin had finished his plans for the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development by 1912. Most of the houses were built during the next four years, which was also a very productive period for Griffin, who was working on the Trier Center Neighborhood (Chicago), the Clark Memorial Fountain (Grinnell), and his own home, which would have been in the Trier Center Neighborhood. In 1912 Griffin won an international design competition for a city plan of Canberra, the new Australian capital. As the official architect for the new city, Griffin spent considerable time outside the United States between 1912 and 1914, when he moved to Australia permanently. The plans for the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development were taken over and continued by Barry Byrne, who, like Griffin, had received training and worked in Wright's office.

James Blythe had commissioned Griffin to design a row of three houses to the north side of the glen, leaving enough room behind them for the park. In Griffin's 1913 design the three houses would be connected by a walled court. Of the three, only the Sam Schneider house was built. Well below street level, and near the bridge that crosses Willow Creek, the Schneider house stands much as Griffin designed it. It shared many features of the other houses of the development, and differed mainly in a small bridge at the entrance and a two-level living and dining area. The house was later altered for its second owner by Barry Byrne, who had supervised original construction.

Barry Byrne designed the mausoleum at Elmwood Cemetery in Mason City that Joshua Melson commissioned after Mrs. Melson's death. Byrne also designed the house that

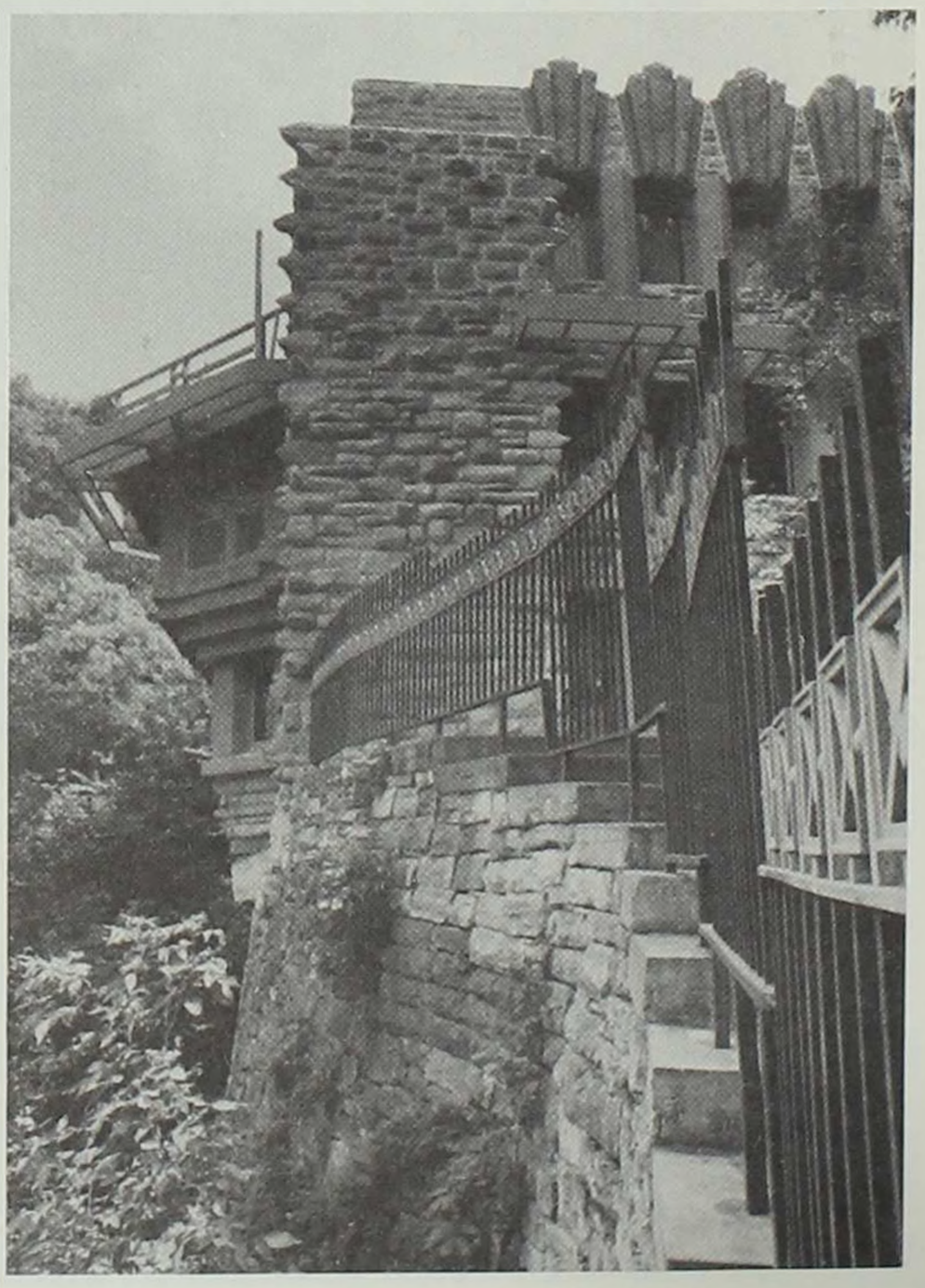


The Schneider house (1913) was originally designed by Griffin but finished by Byrne after Griffin's departure for Australia. It is characterized by a heavy stone foundation, a low-pitched roof, and window-topped corner piers. Griffin utilized space somewhat differently in designing this house, including a bridge off the street to a small entry hall, which led to a distinctively divided-level interior plan.

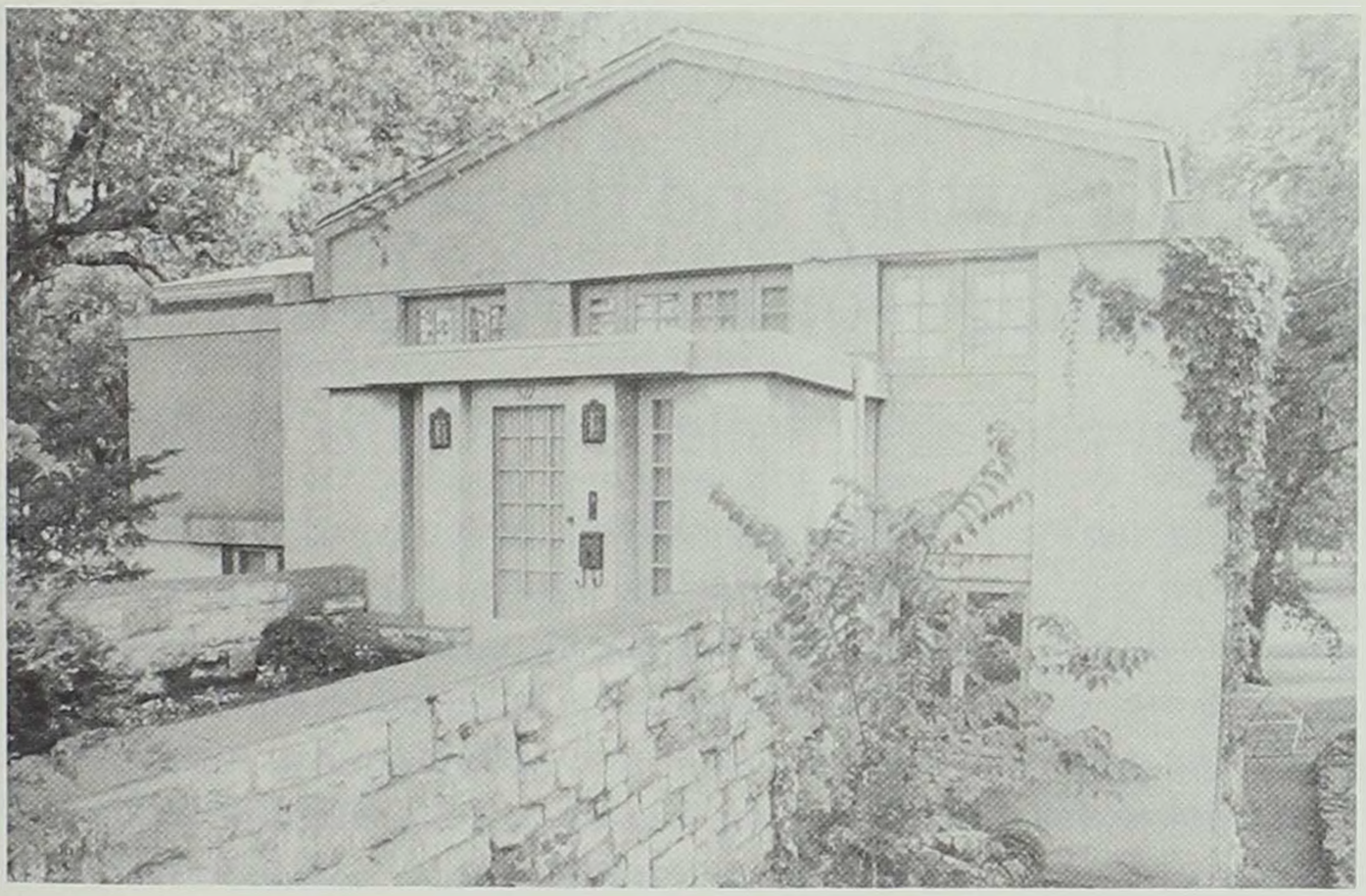
James Blythe commissioned as a wedding present for his daughter. The Gilmore house, west of the Schneider house, was the first house in the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development not built to a Griffin design. It does not fit as well into the overall plan of the development, except for the stone first floor. This was also true of the Franke house, built next door. In these houses Byrne's style can be seen to have been influenced by modernist architecture. They are not as successful as Byrne's design for a small summer house to cover the foundation of the old mill on Willow Creek. The summer house was never built.

Many houses built in Mason City during the next few years had Prairie School characteristics. One of these, the Samuel Drake house on the Rock Crest side of Willow Creek, was designed by a local architect, Einar Broaten, although the design may have been based on an earlier one by Barry Byrne.

In 1959 Curtis Besinger designed the Tom MacNider house, which was built between the Page and Rule houses on the last unoccupied



(Right) The rough limestone, obtained from the old quarry in the Rock Crest area, was set into the reinforced concrete framework of the Melson house as the forms went up. The stone disguised somewhat the house's architectural lines, as did the elaborately stylized keystones above the windows, but its design is quite similar to Wright's design for a fireproof house for $5,000 and the Rule house. Massive corner piers added to the interior openness of the house.



The Gilmore house (1915) was designed and built by Byrne. It is a somewhat awkward, simplified design relative to Griffin's Rock Crest-Rock Glen houses, yet has the rough ashlar base and stucco walls that identify several of the development's houses.

lot in the Rock Glen area. In order to utilize the narrow lot, Besinger projected the living area and prow-shaped terrace of the house toward the park, and based the interior on Wright's open plan. Besinger worked to blend the house into the overall plan of Griffin's development, although the cost of construction materials forced the use of concrete block rather than the limestone and stucco which characterizes the early Rock Crest-Rock Glen houses.

It is difficult to discern how much Marion Mahony Griffin contributed to the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development. Because of her devotion to her husband she took a back seat in his practice and gave him full honors, except that her monogram appears on the drawings she did for him. After Wright's departure for Europe she finished several of his houses. During a ten-year period she had done some of Wright's most successful perspective drawings. She had also designed decorative features for his buildings and furnishings. After her marriage to Griffin she performed similar functions for him. Her fine drawings of the Melson, Blythe, and Holahan houses (the Holahan was never built) surely must have contributed to Griffin's getting the commission for the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development, just as her drawings of his Canberra plan must have helped him in the competition for the Australian capital.

Other midwestern cities have Prairie School buildings but few have so many buildings by so many architects within a similarly small urban area. Fewer still have a planned Prairie School residential development on the scale of Griffin's Rock Crest-Rock Glen development. Mason City has a particularly rich Prairie School heritage in that at least thirteen buildings exemplifying Prairie School architecture were completed in the period after Wright's 1908 commission for the downtown commercial project. Many of these buildings have been added to, and some of them have suffered peculiar alterations. Still, Iowans and others can thank Mason City residents for giving Prairie School architects the opportunity to realize some of their finest work. □

Note on Sources

Information for this article was drawn from a variety of published materials about Wright, Griffin, and the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development. Dr. Robert E. McCoy's article, "Rock Crest/Rock Glen: Prairie School Planning in Iowa," *Prairie School Review* 5 (1968), was particularly helpful, as were H. Allen Brooks' *The Prairie School* (University of Toronto Press, 1972) and *Prairie School Architecture* (University of Toronto Press, 1975), and Richard Guy Wilson and Sidney K. Robinson's *The Prairie School in Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1977). Information was also drawn from the author's article in the Winter 1975 issue of *The Iowan*.

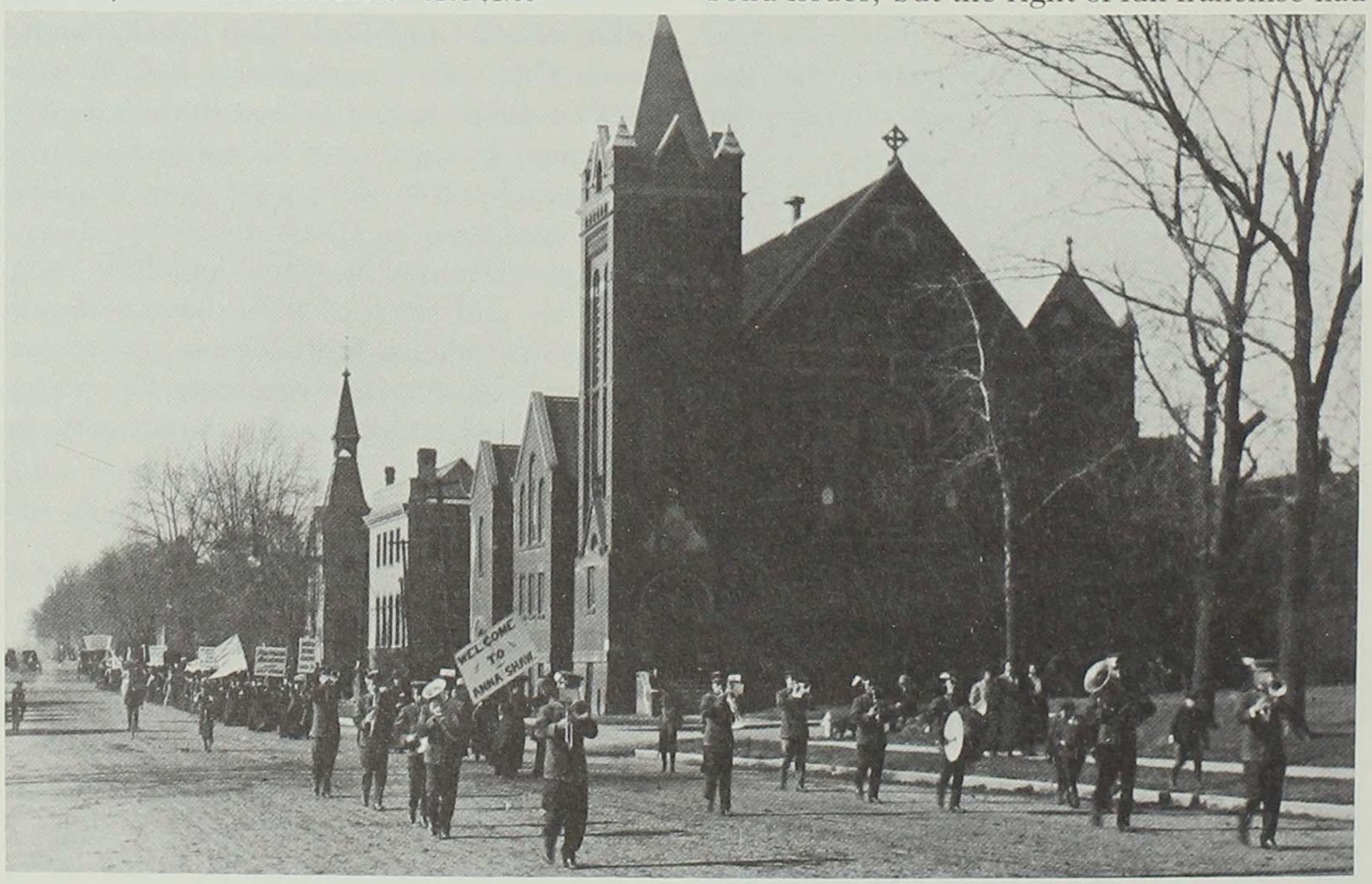
Behind the Yellow Banner:

Anna B. Lawther and the Winning of Suffrage for Iowa Women

by Steven J. Fuller and Alsatia Mellecker

The color note of the evening was yellow and the large banquet room was gay with suffrage banners, jonquils being used in profusion on the tables. An amusing and attractive feature was the tiny doll impersonating a suffraget [sic] *with which each guest was presented during the last course. The diminutive suffragists were gowned in yellow satin and wore "Votes for Women" banners across their breasts.*

The social event of the season — a suffrage banquet in honor of Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association [NAWSA] — had been the talk of Des Moines for weeks. The concern of the women attending the 1916 banquet and meeting was the status of the Iowa campaign for woman suffrage. Catt met with a group of eager and confident women during the visit. The long-awaited victory seemed close at hand. Since 1894 Iowa women had been allowed to vote on school, municipal, and bond issues, but the right of full franchise had



A 1908 parade in Boone, Iowa, in support of woman suffrage. (ISHD, Des Moines)

eluded them. In 1916 a resolution to amend Iowa's constitution to grant full franchise to women was to be put before the state's voters in the June primary election.

Getting the resolution on the ballot had not been an easy task. Supporters of woman suffrage in Iowa had been working diligently for forty-five years to secure a constitutional amendment. According to Iowa law, the resolution had to pass both houses of two successive legislatures before it could be put to a popular vote in a general election. Every Iowa legislature since 1870 had considered the resolution, but it wasn't until the 1913 and 1915 sessions that the legislation passed both houses. The men who would go to the polls on June 5, 1916, would decide the political and democratic future of the state.

Realizing the importance of an orderly election campaign, Catt encouraged Iowa suffragists to organize throughout the state and not let any area go uncanvassed, regardless of size. Following her advice, efforts were made to organize the state by appointing working chairmen in each precinct and county, raising money, training speakers, and waging an extensive campaign in the newspapers.

Fairy sprites and gypsy maidens mingled with the gayly frocked society throng which made the fourth annual suffrage ball a social and financial success last evening at [the] Hotel Chamberlain.

The ivory and champagne tinted ballroom was festive with "Votes for Women" pennants and palms behind which T. Fred Henry's orchestra was grouped. Daffodils and jonquils used on the punch tables accentuated the suffrage color.

The Dubuque Equal Suffrage League met for the first time on March 11, 1916. Anna B. Lawther was elected county chairman.

Now that the Iowa suffrage campaign has opened in earnest and the antis are becoming active, it seems to have become fashionable to emphasize the "votes for women" proposition upon every social occasion.

In a March 17, 1916, letter to the editor of the Des Moines Capital, *one supporter of woman suffrage described her recent experience at the polls and expressed frustration about being unable to vote on more than school, municipal, and bond issues:*

I was greatly amused last Monday at the polling place where I went to vote on the school bond issue. When I reached the polling place it somewhat resembled an island — well at least an island is a body of land entirely surrounded by water — and the polling place was entirely surrounded by men. There were men of all sizes, height and complexion, and they seemed to delight in making what they no doubt thought [were] witty remarks about the women voting.

I asked a lady with me if they didn't have a law in Iowa prohibiting men from congregating around the polls and staying there and almost blocking the entrance to the building.

Well we finally were able to push our way through this crowd and got inside. After we were handed our little school bond ballot, the only thing we could vote on, I was jostled aside by a man who pompously walked past us on to where the real voting was taking place. I looked at him and recognized him as a man who could not read or write. And I wondered how he would know how to mark his ballot.

Well, I started to look over my ballot again, when in walked another of these superior beings, and I knew him and knew that he never owned any property or anything that was taxable in his life; in fact only last winter he had appealed to the county for aid. Yet he could go and vote.

Then just as we were leaving[,] two foreigners who could scarcely speak a work of our language, entered and were allowed to vote on all issues. There were we four (4) American-born women, all of us taxpayers, we could read and write, and could vote intelligently, yet we were denied the full right to vote. Well I hurried out of there before I would see any more, and at the door was a man just entering who was staggering drunk. I don't know whether he was allowed to vote or not. But I presumed he was.

(ISHD, Des Moines)

Anna Bell Lawther was born in Dubuque, Iowa, on September 6, 1872, the daughter of William Lawther, Sr., and Annie Elizabeth Lawther. She attended Dubuque public schools, prepared for college at Miss Steven's School in Germantown, Pennsylvania, and received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Bryn Mawr College in 1897. She stayed on at Bryn Mawr for several years after receiving her degree, serving in various official capacities. In 1912 she returned to Dubuque and embarked on what would be a distinguished political and public career.

Lawther worked for suffrage until 1920. After passage of the Nineteenth Amendment she focused her attention on politics and education. In 1920 the Democratic National Committee selected Lawther as an associate national committee member for Iowa, an appointment that took her across the state, explaining the merits of the Democratic party to the newly enfranchised voters. In 1927 she ran unsuccessfully for state auditor.

In 1921 Lawther was appointed to the state board of education — the first woman to receive such an appointment — and served until her retirement in 1941. In recognition of her dedication to education, a dormitory built on the campus of the University of Northern Iowa was named after her in 1948.

Other distinctions included receiving several honorary degrees from various state colleges, serving as secretary for the Mt. Pleasant Home for the Young and Aged, delivering the first convocation address at the State University of Iowa by a woman, and serving as director of the Iowa Suffrage Memorial Commission.

One of the hostesses to take advantage of such an opportunity for suffrage propaganda was Mrs. Walter S. Brown, who, with Mr. Brown, entertained the 500 club at dinner last evening.

Yellow, the suffrage color, predominated in the table appointments — in candles, place cards and flowers. The subject of "Votes for Women" was presented in a mirthful manner by mottoes and various kinds of literature, and was cunningly designed to arouse the interest of the guests at the same time that it entertained.

to their clothes.

They are buying yellow sports suits and yellow sports hats to match.

On the Country club golf links there will be bright splotches of yellow this spring. Mrs. Aletta Early Sloan and Mrs. Percy Coffee are among the suffrage sports clothes advocates. Mrs. Sloan, a member of the board of the Votes for Women, bought her yellow suffrage togs yesterday. She is a golf winner and an ardent suffrage worker.

"I understand the suffragists have made yellow the popular color," said Mrs. Sloan yesterday as she tried on a canary colored golf hat. "Everyone is talking suffrage now and I think it is a fine thing to wear yellow. I intend to wear the color almost altogether this year."

Iowa voters rejected the constitutional amendment resolution, voting it down by a margin of 10,325 out of 337,459 votes cast. Many woman suffrage supporters claimed that the resolution's defeat had been caused by election fraud. Informed by their attorney that there was no way to rectify the errors since the election concerned a constitutional amendment, the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association [IESA] decided not to conduct any formal investigation. The Women's Christian Temperance Union was not willing to let such a thing pass, however. They instigated an investigation of the election procedures and official returns in forty-four counties. The findings of the investigation, presented in a two hundred-page report, were summarized by the *Des Moines Register* in October 1916: "The W.C.T.U. can draw but one conclusion from this condition, namely, that they were defrauded out of their right to the ballot."

Des Moines suffragists are loyal to the cause even

Yet the 1916 Iowa Equal Suffrage Association convention, held in Des Moines between September 19 and 21, was not characterized by pessimism and regret over the June election defeat, but rather by renewed hope and a fighting spirit. Miss Flora Dunlap, the outgoing IESA president, said:

> *No state could carry on so well organized, so active and successful a vote getting campaign as the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association without having as one result a large group of trained efficient women. A group of women like this is prepared to work. Having borne defeat we are better prepared for victory.*

Dunlap had been the IESA president since 1913 but was ready to yield to new leadership. The convention unanimously elected as head of

This well-used sign urged Iowa voters to approve the woman suffrage amendment to the Iowa constitution at the polls on June 5, 1916. (ISHD, Des Moines)

the association Anna B. Lawther, the Dubuque County chairman of the June 1916 campaign. Although the suffrage amendment had been soundly defeated in Dubuque County, Lawther's efficiency and organizational skills made her the favored candidate for the IESA presidency.

Educating the public had been the main goal of Iowa suffragists since 1870. However, by 1916 it was time to work on the political structure as well. The two major political parties, foreseeing the ultimate success of the amendment, began to change their attitudes. The Progressive, Democratic, and even the Republican parties had endorsed woman suffrage during the summer of 1916. Delegates to the IESA convention agreed it was time for intensive lobbying efforts and for direct challenges to political candidates to openly support woman suffrage.

A suffrage tea will be held Tuesday afternoon at 3 o'clock at the home of Miss Augusta Eighmey, 1337 Main Street, the second in the series of social events under the auspices of the local Equal Suffrage association. The program will include a group of songs by Mrs. Frederick W. Keator, of Olympia, Wash., and Miss Lawther and Miss Bissell will give a report on the state board meeting which they attended at Des Moines during the past week.

In April 1917 two important events took place. The United States entered World War I and both houses of the Iowa legislature again passed the resolution for a constitutional amendment granting full franchise rights to women. Lawther sent a newsletter to all her county chairmen in that month, declaring, "We must go over plans for keeping our organization together in this time of stress and at the same time make it a channel of usefulness to the nation."

Registration cards were sent to county chairmen asking them to enlist all suffragists in special war work along the lines of increased food production, Americanization, child welfare, protection of women and children in industry, and participation in Red Cross activities. Liberty Loan drives were directed by men and women alike.

The Iowa Division of the Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense was formed in Des Moines in June 1917. The IESA merged its work with this committee and appointed Anna Lawther as its representative. The other members of the committee were officers of various women's groups in the state. The committee's chief purpose was to organize the work by women of the state in support of the war effort.

Lawther attempted to bolster support for woman suffrage during the war by openly stating, "The women who are most active thruout [*sic*] the state as leaders of war work are 99 per cent suffragists." Further, "The new war service should be done as much as possible under our own banner so that we may keep together our organization and increase our numbers. Women all over the country are doing their bit. We can best do ours in preparing all women for citizenship." Lawther painted a different picture in her correspondence, however. She was enraged that the women's war efforts were being carried on almost unnoticed by the political powers. "Every where the suffragists of Iowa are doing their utmost to win this great war for democracy, and every where they are feeling a bitterness that our own nation falls far short of being an ideal democracy while the women are disenfranchized [*sic*]."

Issues other than war work were discussed at the IESA's 1917 convention in Des Moines. The legislative committee reported that there were two types of partial suffrage that could be enacted by the Iowa legislature without changing the state's constitution: presidential and primary suffrage. A law could be passed allowing presidential suffrage because the federal constitution allowed individual states to deter-

mine how presidential electors should be elected and "this power [was] quite apart from the state constitution governing other elections." Primary suffrage was a possibility because "at the primaries only an expression of opinion is given in order to nominate candidates and the primary is not an election." While continuing to investigate these two possibilities, the committee would continue to press for a resolution to resubmit the constitutional amendment to Iowa voters. If both houses passed it in 1918 it could go before the voters in 1919.

Anna Lawther was reelected IESA president at the 1917 convention. She praised the war work undertaken by suffragists in the aftermath of the 1916 electoral defeat, and won the wholehearted support of the convention delegates.

The IESA members' decision to concentrate their efforts on the legislative scene, coupled with the entrance of the United States into the war, tended to change the composition of the IESA. Rather than a mass organization, the IESA became a small group of hard-core activists. Anna B. Lawther, Dr. Effie McCullum Jones, Mrs. W.W. Marsh, and Mrs. Frank Dodson, with a handful of other suffragists, waged the battle while the remainder of Iowa's women planted victory gardens, rolled bandages, and attended club meetings.

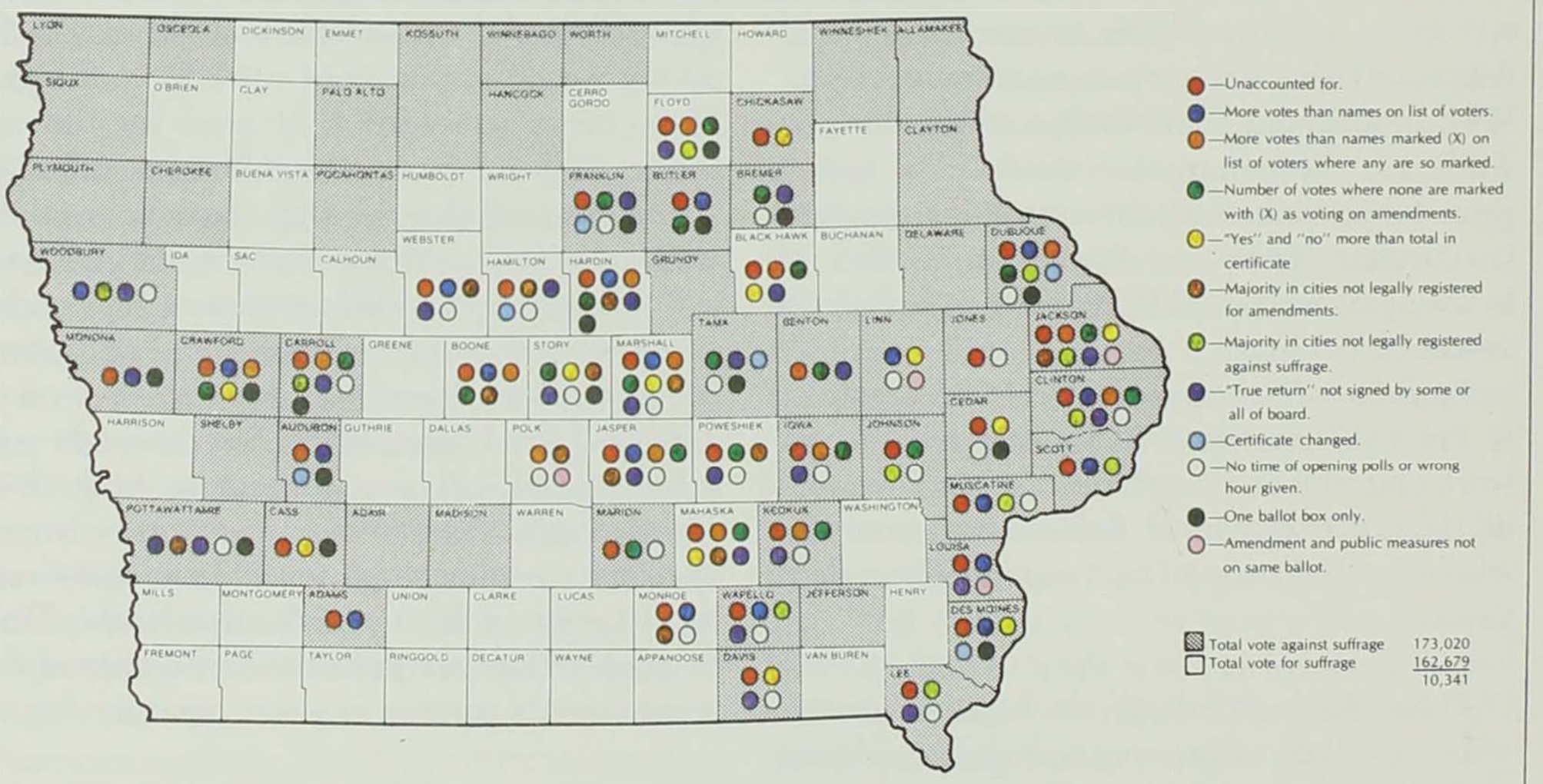
After the defeat of the 1916 referendum, the IESA's work was increasingly divided between securing the vote for Iowa women and helping Carrie Chapman Catt and the NAWSA get a national woman suffrage amendment passed and ratified. Lawther's correspondence with Catt and others reflected her attitude toward Iowa women, who were seemingly complacent about their political status, and more concerned with war work than suffrage work. In a March 1918 letter to her county chairmen, she urged them to get each primary candidate to declare himself on the issue of woman suffrage, whether he was running for "mayor, treasurer, recorder, [or] dog-catcher." Lawther also mentioned the next Liberty Loan, which was to be floated in April, "We must not let those opposed to our cause have a slight excuse for saying we do nothing but work for suffrage. I know every suffragist is at work for the war harder than she has ever worked for suffrage."

Even though the war might have been taking time away from suffrage work, it did give Iowa suffragists badly needed assistance. It provided an organizational framework, and additional ideological arguments to use. When it appeared the United States Senate might pass a federal suffrage amendment in May 1918, Lawther sent yet another letter to her county chairmen, urging them to publicize the event and to prepare for the ratification battle, "Talk to people that you see of the necessity of the amendments passing as a war measure."

By June 1918 Catt was instructing each state to prepare for ratification. Lawther believed that Iowa needed trained workers to carry out the tasks demanded by the ratification effort, but attempts to get workers from other states were unsuccessful. She arranged with William Penn College, Oskaloosa, to hold a three-day suffrage school. Applicants had to be at least twenty-one years of age, and had to promise to work for the cause for at least four weeks. They also had to pay their own railroad fare, but meals were furnished by the IESA and lodging was provided by William Penn College. The faculty included members of the IESA board, the faculty of William Penn, and "one or more prominent women from outside the state." The subjects taught were "History of the Woman's Movement," "Suffrage Arguments," "Organization," "Finance," "Public Speaking," and "Parliamentary Law." Approximately twenty women attended the school, promising their month to the cause.

The IESA legislative committee attempted

The Vote on Woman Suffrage, 1916



The W.C.T.U.'s forty-four county investigation of voting irregularities that occurred during the June 5, 1916, election resulted in an elaborate map from which the information for the above map was drawn. Both the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association and the W.C.T.U. believed that the woman suffrage amendment had been defeated by election fraud. Shaded counties indicate the counties where the 1916 suffrage proposition was defeated. (ISHD, Des Moines: Iowa Suffrage Memorial Commission Suffrage Campaign Records)

to lobby the legislature and special interest groups to support woman suffrage. Their attempts were not all successful, though in June the Iowa State Federation of Labor passed a resolution asking that the federal "Suffrage Amendment be brought out immediately for consideration by the Senate, and be favorably acted upon by the members." Dr. Effie McCullum Jones, corresponding secretary of the IESA, pressed W.C. Cross of Burlington, a potential candidate for the Iowa Senate, for a statement of his position on the woman suffrage issue:

> *You will understand that the members of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association are deeply interested in your nomination to the State Senate this fall. In view of the fact that your party . . . has endorsed woman suffrage, it might probably be taken for granted that the candidates on the party ticket will vote favorably on all suffrage legislation that may be presented. We should be glad, however, for a special assurance on that point . . .*

To this blunt appeal, Cross scrawled his response:

> *I opine a person would make a very poor juryman, who would render a verdict before the trial of the case, and for the same reason, I think a man would make a very poor State Senator who would commit himself on any question before his election.*

Cross was not elected, and his position

remained unknown.

Catt was relentless in striving for national legislation. At the end of July Catt was gearing up for Senate consideration of the woman suffrage amendment in late August. She wanted to know what the IESA could do for the national organization and vice versa. Catt sent the following eight questions to Lawther, and received answers to each, descriptive of the state of the Iowa campaign:

1. Are you planning to carry on the petition work for men and women? *[Yes.] In some counties the petition for the women is being circulated first but in others . . . where the men are better suffragists than the women they will be circulated at the same time.*
2. Are you going ahead with it now? *[Yes.] At least ten of the twenty women who agreed to work for one month after the suffrage school in Oskaloosa will give the month of August or part of August . . .*
3. Will you be ready for ratification in January? *[Yes.] We feel that we ought to be ready for ratification in January. That at least is our aim. The two parties gave us very good endorsements and that ought to help us a little. I have a feeling however that the big business of Iowa is quite opposed to us and will do what it can to offset anything we do. . . .*
4. Can you not do the work without outside help (We should send our workers to the doubtful states)? *From the present outlook I think we could get on without outside help . . .*
5. If you are going to ask any assistance from the National, what is likely to be its nature? *I do not think we in Iowa ought to ask assistance of the National at this time. . . .*
6. Is there any special requirement in your state not now covered by our literature? *The Literature is satisfactory, but I fear not enough women take time to read it. They are so devoted to bandages, packing food boxes for the soldiers, knitting and reading recipes for saving sugar and canning that suffrage literature is put aside for the future when it may not be needed.*
7. Have you made your budget for your ratification campaign and planned to raise your money? *We have made a budget which ought to cover our expense and is probably more than we shall get from the "tight" suffragists of the state. . . .*
8. Can Iowa pay its last year's quota to the National? *Iowa has paid . . . all but $100 to the National of the $500 we pledged in December. I hope we can pay at least $500 for the year 1918.*

Lawther concluded her response by adding, "You say you hope our helpers are cheerful doers. I can't say that many of them are but a few are going on dogedly [*sic*] trying to get the work done in the hope of final victory. Once more I want to say that the whole business would be hopeless if Dr. [Effie McCullum] Jones did not work fourteen hours a day. I find that ten to twelve hours is my poor limit . . ."

In this one letter Lawther explained the condition and attitude of the IESA. Its support was largely cosmetic, and hard workers and money were scarce. The optimistic outlook for the federal amendment, moreover, was threatening state legislation. "The tactics of our opponents," Lawther wrote Catt, "[are] to tell every suffragist that it will come any way why waste time demanding it. It does the business of stopping all but the most ardent." In fact, Lawther believed that there was not enough support in the state for a suffrage referendum to pass if the federal amendment failed: "I feel sure that we will have a dreadful time . . . if the amendment should not pass in December." To which Catt replied, "I think you may go to the Legislature and ask it not to subject you to a referendum since the amendment is coming on from Washington. I suggest you let it stand at that."

With Lawther feeling discouraged about the chances of suffrage at the state level, she suffered a personal setback. Her mother suffered a fatal heart attack, and Lawther wished to quit the movement to care for her father. Alerted to

the situation by Effie Jones, Catt pleaded with Lawther,

> *I beg of you do not do that. No one human being has a right to give her entire strength to the care of another human being. At present it seems good and right for you to do this, but it will mean that you are giving up your duty and your place in the world for another person.*

Lawther did decide to go on, but only because a replacement could not be found:

> *The difficulty of going on with the work is that I can not go and come as I have done for nearly three years or even for all my life for that matter. But for the last three years I have given all my time to the cause and gladly but now I can not possibl[y] give so much. I wanted to have some women selected who could do that thing but I find that no woman is willing to undertake so large an order and so it has been decided that I am to remain as President but that Dr. Jones will fill the speaking engagements over the state.*

When the federal amendment failed in October 1918 the chances of successful Iowa legislation seemed even more doubtful. In November Lawther wrote to Catt wondering whether a referendum could pass in the state: "If the whole contry [*sic*] can not vote by that time there is no reason why we should expect to be able to do it. Besides if we should and a democrat could slip in in the state for a national office the Republicans will hesitate to enfranchise any more women."

Lawther's fears about a referendum were removed by forces beyond her control. The Iowa secretary of state, William S. Allen, had failed to meet the requirements necessary to put forth the suffrage referendum. The law required that the secretary of state notify the next legislature that the previous legislature had passed a constitutional amendment, and that by passing the same amendment, it could be submitted to the voters. The secretary of state's office neglected to publish this fact, therefore the referendum was effectively killed. Lawther, while outraged that the referendum was stopped by seemingly unethical means, was greatly relieved. She wrote to Catt,

> *Apparently our prayer is answered in the gross carelessness of our secretary of State. . . .*
>
> *. . . but it is also a godsend that it works out as it does. My idea is now that we must go to these Republicans and make them promise that they will ratify the first minute they can in order to offset this crime they have done by their neglect.*

Catt was not as pleased as Lawther, however. The NAWSA was surprised at the ease by which suffrage measures had just passed in both Michigan and South Dakota, and believed that Iowa could win if women worked hard enough. Lawther disagreed.

> *If you had tried to work for suffrage as I have done in Iowa for the last two years you would be more than pleased that the campaign is off. I hate to tell you how stupid the women have been about the work. They for the most part were ashamed to mention suffrage during the war lest some anti should accuse them of being 'Bolsheviki'. They plead with me to turn all our attention to winning the war — by that they meant working for furlough homes — knitting and talking of saving food.*

The proud wearers of suffrage yellow had indeed disappeared: "it was quite awful that Dr. Jones, Mrs. Marsh, Mrs. Dodson and I seemed to be the only women that kept suffrage alive."

Even so, Lawther was attacked by Catt for having let the referendum fail. In a stinging rejoinder she wrote:

> *Now, my dear Miss Lawther, I must tell you that I for one have always believed*

that the suffrage amendment was lost not through normal opposition on the part of Iowa men, but through fraud so skillfuly [sic] *concealed that it was not discovered. . . . The friends of suffrage were not alert in Iowa. . . .*

The National Association asked you to secure that referendum and agreed to stand by you in the conduct of the next campaign. I think you will make a great mistake if you do not thoroughly advertise the fact that the excuse of forgetfulness is not an acceptable one. . . . you should howl about it from the Mississippi to the Missouri.

Lawther, nevertheless, believed that the error was an honest mistake, and one that actually helped the cause. After receiving another letter of explanation from the secretary of state, she wrote Catt, "He claims not to belong to the unscrupulous group and I believe he does not, but belongs with me in the stupid class. I shall write him in a day or two and ask him to help us to wipe out this disgrace on himself and the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association."

Attention turned to the national amendment. In preparation of its passage, the IESA gathered signatures for petition and tried to forecast the mood of the Iowa Senate and House concerning ratification. The legislators, as it turned out, were more inclined toward suffrage than the women of Iowa. The petition drive resulted in "A few feeble petitions . . . in each mail." The influenza epidemic that swept Iowa and the nation was also a major factor in the low response. In the legislature, however, victory seemed assured as early as December 1918. And in January, Governor William L. Harding publicly supported the amendment, thereby making the Republican party's support for ratification public knowledge.

The NAWSA, responding to this support, wanted the Iowa legislature to pass a resolution calling upon the United States Senate to pass the federal amendment. The IESA, consulting with their legislative committee, believed this was impossible. Unfortunately, Catt learned that the legislative chairman for Iowa, Mrs. Frank Dodson, had consulted a male lawyer and was furious:

I have my doubts about the capacity of Mrs. Dodson as a legislative chairman. . . .

As I understand it, the only thing you have in the legislature is a primary suffrage law which I should say was about the poorest thing which Iowa could put up. . . .

I strongly recommend that Iowa should get a state amendment submitted in this Legislature. If they sell us out in Washington, you will at least have a referendum in Iowa after 1920. . . .

I think you [Lawther] had better go down to Des Moines, yourself, and see if you can't catch up with your [neighboring states].

Lawther replied that she would go to Des Moines but that she was *persona non grata* because she had helped oust the chairman of the Republican National Committee. She went on to say, "They think I am a dangerous woman — and maybe I am." The women of Iowa, claimed Lawther, were more interested in having the National Biannual meeting of the Federated Clubs in Des Moines in 1920 than in obtaining the right to vote. Later Lawther wrote, "I do attribute all of the backwardness of our State to the women of the State who have either never had the vision or completely lost it." As to Iowa women's fears of being called Bolsheviki or Socialists, Lawther expounded, "I want to say that it begins to look as if the Socialist Party is the only one that holds out a welcome to the women of the Nation. But by there [*sic*] route suffrage seems a long way off for the women of Iowa." Lawther's low spirits were revealed in a letter written to an officer of the IESA when she suggested that "we might

have a pleasant time talking over our woes and the stupidity of cornfed people."

The IESA's legislative committee, headed by Mrs. Dodson, did try to get a primary suffrage bill approved by the Iowa legislature, but primary suffrage was passed over for "full suffrage." The woman suffrage amendment was approved by the legislature, but would have to be approved again by the next legislature, and then by Iowa voters. The legislators who arranged the exchange of full suffrage for primary suffrage were seen as really being opposed to suffrage. Lawther wrote a stinging letter to the bill's sponsor, Senator A.L. Rule, declaring that, "I shall always declare publicily [*sic*] and privately that you are only a 'supposed' friend of woman suffrage." Rule's reply was even more caustic,

> *Your very insulting letter of March 15th has been received and I am very sorry indeed to see that the President of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association is continuously of the opinion that I am trying to placate the Association of which she is the head. I am glad indeed to inform you that I do not care one iota for what you think or some of your associates think. . . . for I am not the only one who considers that you and a few of your friends are the worst enemies suffrage has in this state, and any time I can do something that is going to thwart and bring to naught your misguided purposes, I have done a great service for Suffrage.*

A presidential suffrage bill, which would allow women to vote for presidential electors, did pass the legislature. It met with little resistance, and was aided perhaps by the success of similar bills in other states.

In June 1919 the United States Senate finally passed the constitutional amendment allowing woman suffrage, and in a special session on July 2, 1919 — a session lasting only one hour and forty minutes—Iowa legislators made Iowa the tenth state to ratify the amendment. It was an easy victory, with a Senate vote of 47-0, and a House vote of 96-5.

The struggle for suffrage in Iowa was difficult, and for the most part unsuccessful. Several factors made passage of any suffrage legislation in Iowa difficult, but perhaps the most serious obstacle was the lack of an effective two-party system in the state. With Republicans in almost absolute control of the state, they felt no need to give the women of Iowa the vote.

But strangely the greatest opposition to suffrage in Iowa came from the women, through outright disapproval or unwillingness to fight for it. For the most part, Iowa women fully expected that it was only a matter of time before a federal woman suffrage amendment would receive congressional approval and they felt quite ready to wait for it. Lawther and other Iowa suffragists could not achieve the victory alone, but their efforts did create the foundation of support which insured the legislature's speedy ratification of the federal amendment in July 1919. □

Note on Sources

Much of the information in this article came from the Anna B. Lawther Collection located at the State Historical Society. Several newspapers were useful reference tools. The *Des Moines Register and Leader* and the *Dubuque Times-Journal* were especially valuable.

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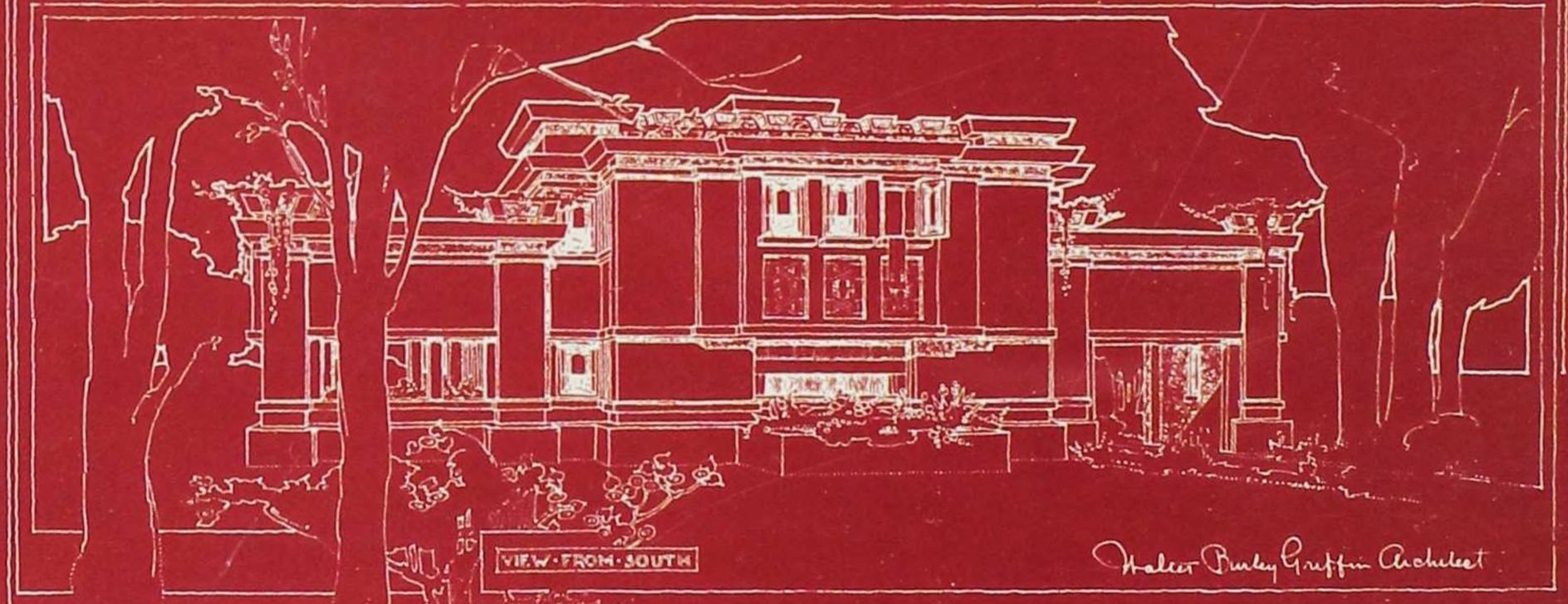

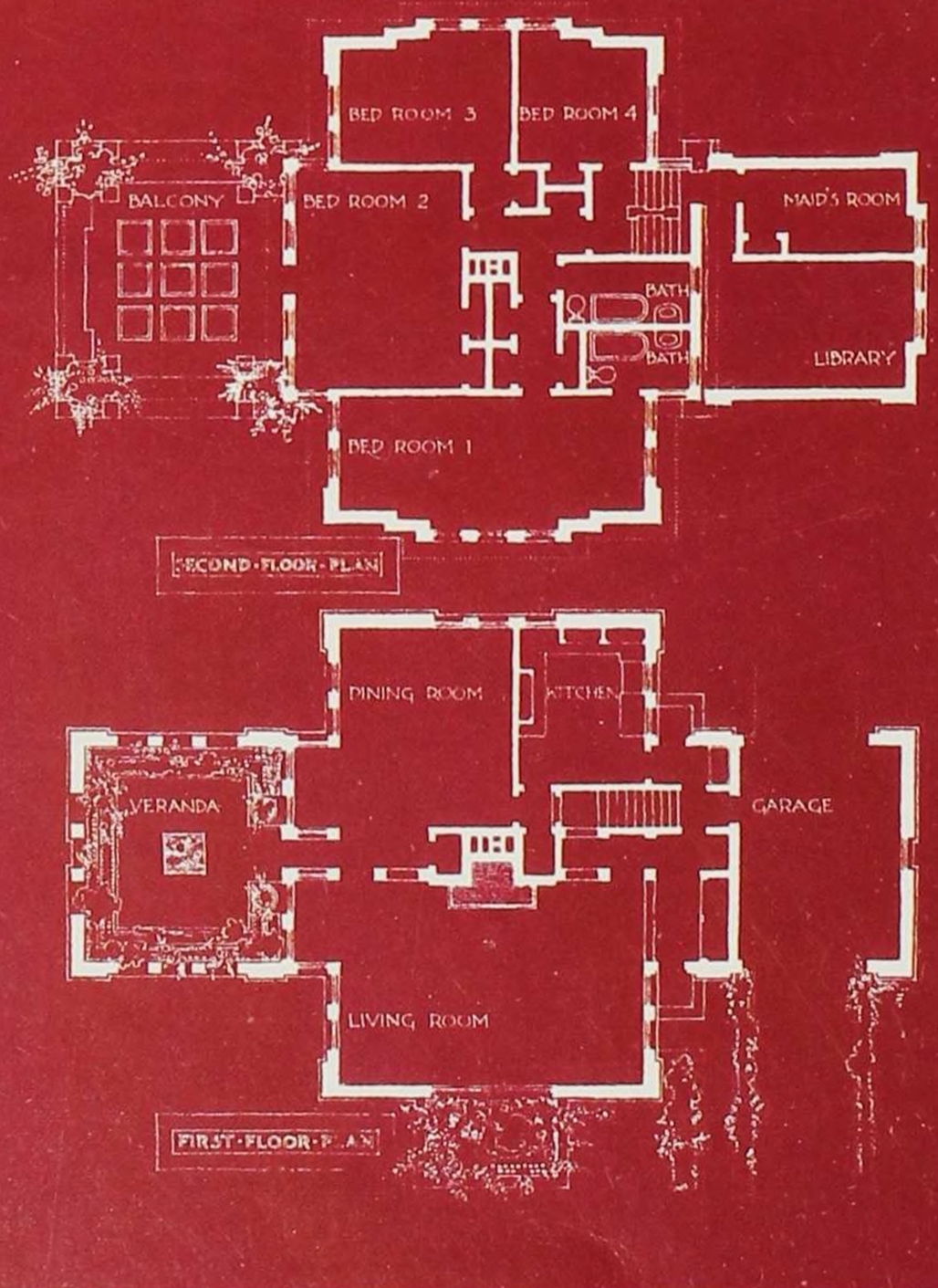

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