The PALIMPSEST

Dashing Through the Snow

Iowa — Winter Wonderland

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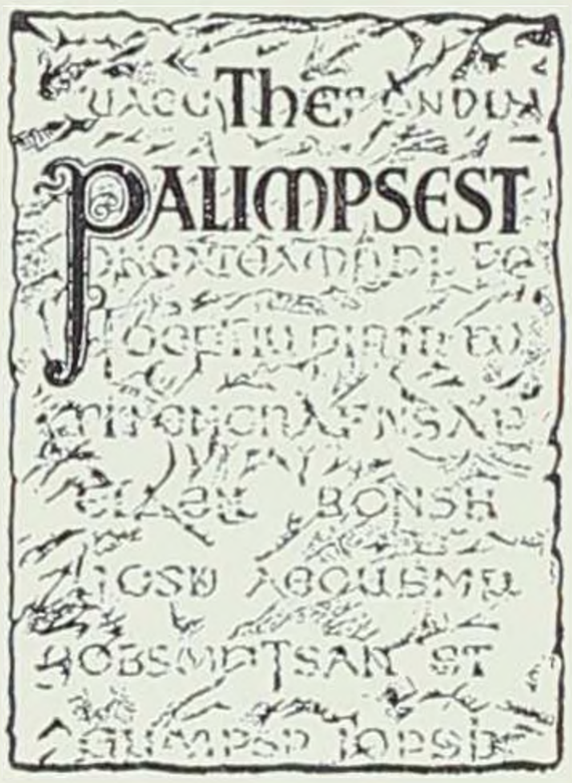

The Meaning of Palimpsest

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.

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Illustrations

The author is especially indebted to the Des Moines *Register*, Cedar Rapids *Gazette*, Iowa City *Press-Citizen*, Mason City *Globe-Gazette*, Storm Lake *Pilot-Tribune*, Station *WMT*, and F. W. Kent for pictures used in this issue. The front and back covers are Currier & Ives lithographs.

Author

William J. Petersen is Superintendent of the State Historical Society of Iowa.

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THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

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Sleighing Time

Cold winter is coming,
With frost in his train;
Cold winter is coming,
With snow and no rain;
Cold winter is coming,
With sleighing again,
With his fireside mirth, and his homely cheer,
The pleasantest time in the whole of the year.

It was with this lilting verse by J. D. Armstrong that the *Iowa Capitol Reporter* suggested to its Iowa City readers how they might make the most of the exhilarating winter weather. Iowa Citians scarcely needed this hint, for two weeks earlier, on December 14, 1844, this same paper had noted: "For the last ten days we have had first-rate winter weather. The snow averages about 12 inches in depth — sleighing is fine, and we have a fair prospect of a merry winter and prosperous courtships." Coasting and skating parties, bobsledding and sleigh riding with all the sociable events that usually accompanied these jolly winter pastimes, afforded much happiness and relaxation to the

Iowa pioneers. Nor should one overlook the beauty of the landscape after a heavy snow when tree and brush are festooned as if by magic into a "Winter Wonderland."

Sleigh riding was perhaps the most typical of all winter sports. Well-to-do families owned their own cutters and sleighs. In the large towns and cities during the winter months livery stables rented gaily-painted omnibuses to private parties. These omnibuses, drawn by four horses, frequently carried more than a score of singing, shouting merrymakers. The popularity of sleigh riding was demonstrated by the frequency with which cutter, sleigh, and bobsled appeared in Currier and Ives winter scenes of town and countryside. In the merriest of all Christmas songs we sing: "Oh what fun it is to ride in a one-horse open sleigh." And, according to a typical Thanksgiving melody, "The horse knows the way to carry the sleigh, through the white and drifted snow." The nostalgia of the old-fashioned sleigh ride is recalled even today as "Bing" Crosby croons "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas."

The farmer's bobsled was important not only for the pleasure it afforded but for its utility during the cold winter months. On the wind-swept prairies the bobsled made mills and markets accessible to the pioneers. By means of his sled the farmer could bring food and fuel to his family; by means of his sled he could harvest a supply of ice

for the summer. The bobsled also brought the family doctor to the sick and ailing. It made possible attendance at church and school; happy family reunions and friendly visits with neighbors.

In 1840 a Muscatine editor observed with no small regret that sleighing was "never better" in the Galena-Dubuque region where deep snow had made the roads and prairies as "smooth as a barn floor." Dolefully he continued: "We can but envy our old friends of the mines their merry sleighrides. They do the thing up nicely. In our more southern regions we have had no pleasures of the kind thus far. The slight snows which have fallen, soon disappeared, leaving us a thin coat of mud to paddle through, while our northern neighbors have fine sleighing. Let southerners curse our cold winters as they may, give them to us as far preferable to a residence a little south, where every southern breeze produces mud, and every evening's shade a solid and rough pavement."

The winter of 1848-49 afforded excellent sleighing for Iowans. A citizen of Burlington declared that "sleigh bells are jingling merrily to the utter destruction of all the horse flesh that can be pressed into the service of Sunday revellers who seem determined to make the most of the New Year's holiday." A Davenport editor declared: "Everything with runners, or that could be made to slide, has been called into requisition. The jingle of the merry sleigh bells has rung out upon

the clear atmosphere, by day and by night, until it has become as familiar, as the younger voice of one's household! Long may it continue — until the bland atmosphere of spring displaces the ruder blasts of winter." The Davenport editor thought there was "poetry" in a sleigh ride.

> Jingle! Jingle! down the hill —
> O'er the meadows — past the mill —
> Now 'tis slow, now 'tis fast —
> Winter will not always last.
> Every pleasure has its time!
> Spring will come and stop the chime!
> Jingle! Jingle! clear the way,
> 'Tis the merry, merry sleigh.

Sleighs were used to deliver merchandise in towns and cities. Most editors, however, called attention to the more spectacular social aspects of the sport. Sioux City enjoyed good sleighing in February, 1859, following a six-inch snow. On January 12, 1861, the Council Bluffs *Nonpareil* noted that sleighing was excellent and that "everybody so fortunate as to be possessed of a horse and cutter, or the wherewithal to hire the same, are having a 'gay time': while printers, and other 'miserable cusses,' without enough money, credit, or friends, to afford a ride, look on approvingly. Some day, after we've had an opportunity to try 'em, we'll tell you what livery stable keeps the best sleighing arrangements."

Rivalry sprang up between Council Bluffs and

Omaha in February, 1861, over which town could produce the most impressive sleigh-riding omnibus. Omaha flung out the challenge when she sent a six-horse sleigh across the Missouri to Council Bluffs loaded with ladies and gentlemen. Council Bluffs countered with an eight-horse team decorated in red and white and expertly driven — not led — by John Forbes. Omaha thereupon sent over a twelve-horse team — led — which pulled the Omaha Brass Band. A number of four-horse sleighs, a four-mule sleigh, and many cutters were included in the Omaha parade to Council Bluffs.

The editor of the Dubuque *Times* recommended a swift sleighride behind a "bobtailed nag" as the most delightful form of winter sport. "Jump into a *bijou* of a cutter," he declared, "and if you have a headstrong horse give him full rein. Away you go — snow balls flying full in your face from the horses' feet, and the sleigh every now and then grating harshly over a stone, in a manner well calculated to make you set your teeth together after the style of heavy tragedy men when they desire to express a sort of fiendish delight. Now you run the gauntlet of a legion of small and mischievous boys, who are sure to yell, 'Lem me ride!' To which a negative answer is sure to call down on your devoted head a shower of snowballs. Thereupon your horse takes fright, and for some time you find it difficult to steer clear of lamp posts, sidewalks and front yards. But then there

is such a novelty about it. True, you can't find time to say one word to the companion at your side, your attention being wholly engrossed in the management of your headstrong horse. Your arms have a dislocated sort of feeling consequent upon holding your horse in; your fingers tingle with the cold, and your face seems to have been flayed with the wind. Yet you experience a hundred happy exhilarating sensations that make a good sleighride, especially to a sedentary person, one of the most delightful experiences of the season."

What boy has not delighted in hitching a ride on a sleigh or bobsled? Slow-moving vehicles afforded no special cause for alarm but when sleighs were whirling down the street real danger might suddenly present itself. "Some of our citizens have been enjoying the snow," declared the Council Bluffs *Bugle* of January 25, 1866. "The bells have been ringing out their merry music, and the horses passing up and down the streets at a two-forty speed."

The problem of boys catching rides on fast-moving sleighs apparently caused considerable concern in many towns. "Our worthy city marshall," declared the Fort Dodge *Messenger* on January 13, 1887, "has undertaken the rather arduous duty of keeping the small boys of the city from risking their lives daily by 'bobbing.' This practice of catching and stealing rides on moving

bobsleds has become a decided nuisance to all drivers of teams besides endangering the personal safety of the small boys, and the effort to choke it out will be appreciated, — not by the boys, however." Despite such precautions, there was a serious accident in the neighborhood of Duncombe in February, 1891. It was the result of foolishness. "A number of small school boys climbed upon a passing sled. The driver in order to prevent their getting off started his team at such a rate as to lose control of them." In McGregor the boys used to catch rides on farmers' bobsleds coming in from the country with freshly butchered frozen hogs. These boys enjoyed more than the sleigh ride, for they carried sharp knives with which they cut off the frozen pig tails, roasted them over a roaring fire, and ate them.

Dances were frequently made readily accessible by the trusty sleigh. In 1857 some of the younger set in Hamilton County drove a four-horse sleigh from Saratoga to Rose Grove for a Christmas Eve dance. Near Kamrar they were set upon by a pack of a hundred prairie wolves but reached Rose Grove in safety. They danced until midnight when their landlord served them a meal consisting of deer, elk, and buffalo meat, corn bread baked on an iron griddle, fried cakes, and pumpkin pie. After doing it ample justice the merry party danced until morning when they ate their breakfast and started for home.

Early in February, 1873, a large party of Clinton ladies and gentlemen took a "jolly" sleigh ride to Camanche where they had an excellent supper at Anthony's and a dance in the hall. The gay and festive party continued throughout the night and "well into the morning."

In 1864 the sleigh ride of the season for McGregorites was made to the farm house of General and Mrs. Bigelow. Several four-horse omnibus sleighs as well as a number of vehicles of "less horse power" carried the party of seventy to their destination where Williams' (colored) Band provided music for the gay revellers. The supper was all that could be desired, the music good, the party lively. According to one account: "The General's 'contraband' served the party admirably, happiness was unalloyed; the expedition returned at 6 in the morning with a unanimous vote that no one will ever lack for pleasure who goes to Bigelows."

It was not merely the McGregor young folks who took advantage of this popular winter sport. In mid-December of 1863 a party of old settlers enjoyed a sleigh ride to Andy Teet's Hotel where a ball was held. A week later another party of "old folks" took an eight-mile bob trip out to the home of Reuben Noble. They were greeted as warmly as though of "the same blood and not made up of different nativities and adverse political opinions," the editor of the *North Iowa Times*

asserted. "A good thorough warming by an old-fashioned *fire-place,* the first that we remember to have seen for the last ten years, though the most comfortable and healthy *stove* that was ever in a house — a universal wetting of the lips with the finest native wines, lots of good words and holiday greetings, the dining hall was cleared of furniture, the Pleasant Ridge (Dickens') Band was announced, the 'previous question' was moved, and 'first four right and left' started the dance. About a thousand young ladies of McGregor, attended by a dozen young gentlemen, all drawn in a Four Horse Omnibus Sleigh, arrived at 12 o'clock and joined in the ceremonies. After eating an Oyster and Quail supper, we had more dancing and any amount of happiness, not the least of which was the gratification of hearing the host sing the old song of 'Twenty Years Ago,' and many other excellent ones, accompanied on the piano by his charming daughter. Take it altogether it was a pretty lively house and party from 8 until 2 wasn't it, Reuben?"

Sometimes the cold weather discouraged even the most ardent sleigh riders. On January 1, 1863, the Anamosa *Eureka* declared that the New Year's dance at the Fisher House had been postponed because of the "terrible cold" but assured its readers it would be put on the following week no matter if it was cold enough to "freeze the

horns off a Siberian reindeer or the tears from a Greenland iceberg."

Cold weather could not deter between seventy and one hundred members of the Congregational Sunday School from setting out for Mrs. A. D. Higgins' mansion in Cass Township in sundry cutters and sleds under the inspiring music of sleighbells. "The drive up was pretty cold business as the wind was keen and cutting, but all arrived in due time, and found hot fires ready antidotes to aching fingers and tingling noses," the Anamosa *Eureka* reported on January 15, 1874. A potluck dinner did much to satisfy "rapacious appetites" after which Mrs. Higgins sat down at the organ and played "Tramp, tramp," "Captain Jinks," "The Little German Band," and other popular airs while all gathered round and sang. "An hour or so was spent in various amusements and at nine o'clock the sleighs and sleds were brought out, and the guests bade Mrs. Higgins, whose pleasant home gives so much evidence of taste and culture, a cheery good-night and away they went in the jolliest good humor possible. The ride home was very comfortable indeed, the wind being to the rearward. Before ten o'clock the younger portion of the sleighing party had been distributed and tired little bodies were no doubt soon at rest in the home nest, and juvenile fancies wandering in a white-robed and star-lit dream-land of perpetual sleigh-riding."

Far more romantic was the "omnibus sleigh-ride" taken by a party of Dubuque men and women in January, 1861. The sleigh was filled to overflowing with "a choice lot of beautiful women and a fair sprinkling of modest damsels, whose charms have not been diminished by the tightening of a tongue-tied knot." According to one of the company, "When coming down hill in the face of the blinding, driving storm the driver either in intentional mischief or otherwise, drove off from the road, and while going at a dog trot speed, easily, gently over we all went, landing harmless in the feathery drift.

"With twenty heads down in the snow in close juxtaposition, and double that number of finely rounded points extending starwards and waving in the breeze, didn't we present a picture for an artist? Such a chaos of hoops, gaiters, scalloped skirts, unheard of embroideries, etc., were never seen before. The group looked like some animated bouquet of gigantic proportions and most exquisite beauty, as they all lay struggling there in the gloom." After contemplating the "novel situation a sufficient length of time" the sleigh was righted, the box and seats put in place, all piled in and proceeded on their way without further adventure worthy of notice "save the usual amount of toll and other extras, in such cases made and provided" as the girls were "properly distributed" to their several homes, all feeling that capsizing into

a snow-drift on a stormy night "is a treat not to be enjoyed every day or soon forgotten."

Difficulties and dangers could be encountered in the course of a pleasant sleigh ride. Late in January of 1867 snow to the depth of twelve or fourteen inches fell in the vicinity of Oskaloosa. Since sleighing was excellent where the roads were broken, two sled loads of Oskaloosans determined to go to Kirkville, some sixteen miles away. "KIRKVILLE," observed the editor of the Oskaloosa *Herald* on January 31, 1867, "is a nice little town, but most awful hard to find when hill and dale are covered with snow, as the two sled-loads of lads and lassies who started in search of it on Tuesday evening will testify. One load after a long ride of about four hours, losing the road several times, arrived at their destination; the other, after swamping the horses in a ditch, sticking in snow-drifts, losing the roads innumerable times, letting down fences, driving across lots, found themselves, after five hours driving, 12 miles from Kirkville, and 3 from Eddyville, towards the latter they bent their way, and after partaking of a good supper at the Slemmons' House, returned home, satisfied that it is easy to get lost upon an Iowa prairie. We will not mention names. P. S. 'Ye local' took supper at Eddyville Tuesday night."

University students were not slow to take advantage of winter sports. On January 31, 1885,

the *Vidette-Reporter* noted: "Several sleighing parties were out last night to improve the fine weather and the excellent sleighing. The evening was lovely."

Murphy Brothers livery stable carried the following advertisement in the *Vidette-Reporter:* "Their rigs are first-class and prices very reasonable. They have an especially fine lot of sleighs, and can furnish either single, double or 'bobsled' on short notice. Try them once and you will go again. Washington street."

One of many happy University of Iowa bobsled parties was recorded in the *Vidette-Reporter* of February 17, 1883:

Under the false impression that the Sophomores did not wish any mention of their sleighride to be made public, we withheld a report of the same in our last issue. From the various accounts given by the many participants, we infer that it must have been an exceedingly happy affair, and were it not for the recent unsurpassed Freshman demonstration, we would be inclined to call it the great event of the season. Twenty-six comprised the party. With their ears well covered and amply provided with shawls, robes, and bonnets, for it was one of those hibernal days in which the thermometer was likely to run down to about fifteen or twenty degrees below zero before night, they started, arriving at Mt. Vernon in time to partake of some —cake, which, it was proven, was a portion of the same that had sated the Senior Foot-ball team some time last fall. After doing justice to the cake the party proceeded to the society halls to listen to a public program given by the students of Cornell College. After these exercises a

hearty reception was extended to the Sophomores, which lasted till nearly midnight. Before one o'clock A.M., our party was again on the way home. Arriving at Solon they could not resist the temptation which a hotel dining-room offered and stopped off. Right here a descrepancy, or rather an inconsistency, exists in the various reports. Some say they supped and then started for Iowa City; rumor has it that they danced. The fact that their blooming faces did not greet us till about eight o'clock in the morning leaves little room for doubt as to what they did at Solon.

Moore brought a relic of the late lamented sleighing up to the class with him on Wednesday. It was about the size of the threads made by the Bohemian glass blowers, of a sunset color, and lay across his shoulder down over his heart, and when one of the boys picked it off he looked pale, like a young fellow who has forgotten to pull down the blinds.

During the 1930's Grant Wood startled Iowa and the Nation when he advertised for some genuine red woolen underwear. The *Vidette-Reporter* of December 19, 1885, carried the following advertisement by Allin, Wilson and Co. of Iowa City: "We have just received 50 doz. fine all-wool scarlet underwear, which we bought at about one-half what they were early in the season and are now selling them the same way. Come and see them." Maybe Grant Wood was able to pick up some of this surplus a half century later.

Red underwear and a dozen petticoats, coupled with straw and buffalo robes, would not protect bobsledders from the bitter cold, even though

packed snugly together. The chilling effects on one young lady were recorded by the *Vidette-Reporter* of February 20, 1886:

A young lady who resides not over a thousand miles from the State University returned late from a sleighride one evening last week, and on going to bed filled up a jug with hot water and placed it in the foot of the bed to keep her feet warm. It happened that she got hold of the yeast jug, in which was a portion of the leaven. About three in the morning there was an explosion. The yeast rose and the young lady rose about the same time. Terrific screams broke the peaceful slumbers of the household and brought the members of the family swiftly to the damsel's room, where the innocent victim was discovered in the middle of the room bathed in tears and — yeast, and looking as if she had been dropped in the editor's paste pot. An investigation developed the situation, and peace once more reigned in the home. She will in the future closely examine a jug before introducing it to her couch.

In Webster County a number of young people took a pleasant sleigh ride on the evening of January 30, 1891. Four horses were hitched to a pair of bobsleds and as they jogged along the jolly youngsters "tried to scare all the dogs" out of Clay Township. The young folks of Elkhorn attended the revival meeting at Kalo in sleighs.

John Lang, a pioneer of Davis County, looked back with pleasure to his sleigh-riding experiences. "It was common," Lang declared, "to hitch up a team to the sled and the whole family go to a neighbor's to spend the evening in visiting and

eating apples or popcorn. The women would take their knitting along. Sometimes they would stay all night. They always had plenty of grub to divide, of the best. Corn bread, home grown buckwheat, flap-jacks as big as the skillet, full size of the griddle, spread with country butter or sausage gravy, and sweetened with molasses, was good enough. One lady said she never liked buckwheat cakes, but I noticed that she kept on until she had eaten six or eight. Those were the days when our amusements were blackman, town-ball, dare-base, drop the handkerchief, apple peelings, singing schools and ciphering matches."

But sleigh riding ultimately gave way to the first soft breezes of spring. Sometimes the sport ended abruptly; at other times it died off slowly. On February 3, 1887, the Fort Dodge *Messenger* noted that the "small portion of snow deposited by the late storm proved sufficient to revive the expiring sleighing and the merry jingle of the bells is again audible." Two weeks later this same editor observed that the "backbone of winter" was doubtless broken and spring would prove a "welcome change." "The snow is leaving us fast," an Otho dispatch reported, "and soon we will be obliged to get around on wheels."

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

When Blizzards Blow

The snow lies thick around us
In the dark and gloomy night,
The cold blizzard wails above us,
And the stars withhold their light.

The pioneers looked forward with genuine concern to the long winter months. Distances to mill, store, or postoffice were long and the means of transportation were cumbersome and slow. The bleak Iowa prairies afforded no protection from the raging blizzards that swept across the wilderness between the Mississippi and the Missouri, burying fences, cattle sheds, and log cabins, and obliterating the ordinary landmarks that served as guides for the early settlers. Tales of untold suffering have been handed down by those luckless Iowans unfortunate enough to be caught in a blizzard on the thinly populated prairies. The hardships endured by many of these frontiersmen left an indelible impression on their minds which the passing of years did not erase from their memories.

Each generation is inclined to regard the cold weather of its youth as the worst ever experienced. "Never, during our residence in the mines," de-

clared the Dubuque *Miner's Express* of November 17, 1842, "have we witnessed so terrible a snow storm as that with which our city was visited on yesterday. . . . We heard old bachelors complaining bitterly of cold lodgings. Poor fellows — we did not feel surprised at hearing them complain — for it was bitter cold."

The month of November, 1842, actually ushered in what Theodore S. Parvin described as the "long winter" in Iowa history. During this period residents of Muscatine enjoyed "continued and uninterrupted" sleighing for 126 days beginning with November 26th. The Mississippi River was closed for 134 days at Muscatine and 147 days at Le Claire. Forty years later, in 1882, Parvin wrote: "We have had other winters with a lower mean temperature and with lower temperature, (as low as 30° below zero), lower daily temperature and more days of extremely low temperature, but none of such long continuance as that famous winter of cold, prolonged cold, of ice and snow, through a longer period than ever before or since."

It was on December 17th of this "long winter" that five Delaware County pioneers set out from Bailey's Ford to drive hogs through the deep snow to Fort Atkinson. On their return they were caught in a blizzard on the Little Turkey River on January 1, 1843. Unable to light a fire, ravenously hungry, exhausted from struggling through the deep snow all day, sleep was sorely

tempting, but sleep meant death. They wrapped their blankets around them and stood huddled together, stamping to keep up the circulation in their feet and talking steadily to prevent any one from falling asleep undiscovered in the darkness. The following night they reached Beatty's cabin after struggling through the snow all day. They were almost past caring whether they lived or died. One man was laid up several weeks; another could not walk for three months; a third lost eight toes and was a cripple for life.

Iowans have always been impressed by the sudden and early arrival of winter. On October 27, 1847, the Dubuque *Weekly Miner's Express* declared:

> Cold weather has come at last. Stoves are passing to and fro in every direction. Wood is snatched at a good round price, after it reaches the city; and sometimes from private woodyards, without waiting to enquire the price. Over-coats are in good demand; fires are comfortable; health is improving; spirits are reviving; business increasing; mortality among the Brussel gentry daily expected. Dress warm, and prevent bad colds. Stop up the cracks in the house, and prevent the squalling of the young ones. Go a-head; who cares for consequences?

On September 22, 1864, the Oskaloosa *Weekly Herald* noted the "first frost of the season" on "last Monday" but was happy to record no injury to the corn. On November 10 the same editor recorded a severe rain storm had been in progress forty hours "until trees, fences, etc., are loaded

with ice." The following November the "Squar Winter" increased "very materially" the business of Oskaloosa stove dealers, Hi Snyder selling $800 worth on Saturday. "Pretty good day's work," the *Herald* of November 2, commented.

Far to the north the *Mitchell County* (Osage) *Republican* of December 2, 1858, noted the arrival of "extremely cold" weather. "The Sleighing is good, and the body of snow on the ground just sufficient to make it good getting about in the woods, so that most of our citizens are busy in hauling saw logs and wood. We imagine there is a long winter before us, but hope not a severe one." Failure of the paper stock to arrive because of cold weather forced the editor of the *Republican* to issue half a sheet in late November and skip the December 9 issue.

In contrast to 1858 the *Dubuque Weekly Times* of December 27, 1860, lamented the tardy arrival of winter with its consequent inconveniences:

> Dubuque is (and will be until the river is bridged) unfortunately situated during the early part of the winter. Boats cannot run, and the ice is not firm enough for teams — we may well say she is ice-olated. Everything which crosses the river now, in the way of baggage and freight, must go on sleds hauled by men. The passengers are obliged to take passage on board of boats drawn also on sleds, by hand.
>
> Messrs. Henry Curtis and C. H. Merry were engaged yesterday in cutting a channel for a boat across from near

the foot of Seventh street, which will be used for the transhipment of freight during the Winter.

The arrival of winter seems to have challenged the best literary efforts of Dubuque editors. On October 24, 1866, the *Weekly Herald* described the weather as "Winterish."

The denizens of Dubuque went to bed with a violent storm of rain beating against their domiciles, and awoke in the morning to find that the wind had moved around to the northwest and was blowing some of its biggest guns. It sang the requiem of departed summer around the corners, played fantastic tricks with signs and awnings, brought the blue devils to the nose and numbness to the fingers, played hide and seek under enormous tilters [hoopskirts] and revealed symmetrical beauties at the street corners. Men nodded hurriedly to each other on the sidewalk and muttered, "cold." Little urchins went scudding away before the blast yelling with delight at the prospect of ice for skating triumphs, while clerks and expressmen shivered like another Harry Gill. It was really a foretaste of winter, and brought vividly to mind the roaring fires and dashing sleigh rides of northern climes. That it may find us all prepared with plenty of wood at each door, plenty of flour in every barrel, and plenty of greenbacks in every purse, is the humble wish of the scribbler of this item.

The sufferings of Inkpaduta and his Sioux Indians during the bitter winter of 1856-57 have been described as an important factor in precipitating the Spirit Lake Massacre. The white settlers likewise endured great privations that winter. As late as 1893 William Larrabee asserted the

"unusually severe" winter of 1856-57 was never equalled in the memory of most Iowans. "Snow fell to an enormous depth, and the mercury not infrequently ranged from 20° to 40° below zero for several days in succession." Larrabee recalled "a series of great storms — now called blizzards" which swept the prairies, "whirling the dust of the powdery snow in a wild dance and piling up large banks wherever natural or artificial obstacles interrupted their turbulent course. During that long severe winter nearly all the deer in northern Iowa were destroyed, some freezing, others starving to death, still others getting fast in the deep, crust-covered snow, and being killed by the merciless settlers while in this helpless condition. Few of the frontier people were prepared for such a winter, and certainly none had anticipated it. Thousands suffered for want of sufficient clothing and fuel, and many a man, overtaken by a blinding storm, or tired out wading through the deep snow, froze to death on the prairie, perhaps only a stone's throw from home." Larrabee himself almost met a similar fate.

It was during this same bitter winter, on December 28, 1856, that Reuben and David Williams were caught in a severe snow storm while watering cattle in Willow Creek, which flowed through the bleak prairie lands of Cerro Gordo County. Through a bitter cold night eighteen-year-old Reuben fought stubbornly to keep his

younger brother moving and awake. At sunrise Reuben found they had wandered to within hailing distance of one of the cabins in Masonic Grove (now Mason City). "I was brought back to a drowsy consciousness," David Williams recalled, "by being pulled out of the snow by Reuben. The air was so cold it seemed fairly blue, and its cutting bitterness struck into my flesh like steel. . . . I tried to walk, but my feet were dead. As if wooden, my benumbed body refused to respond to a still more feeble will. Reuben's efforts to get me towards the house were fruitless. The last I recall was hearing him shout to some one. When I came to I was in bed."

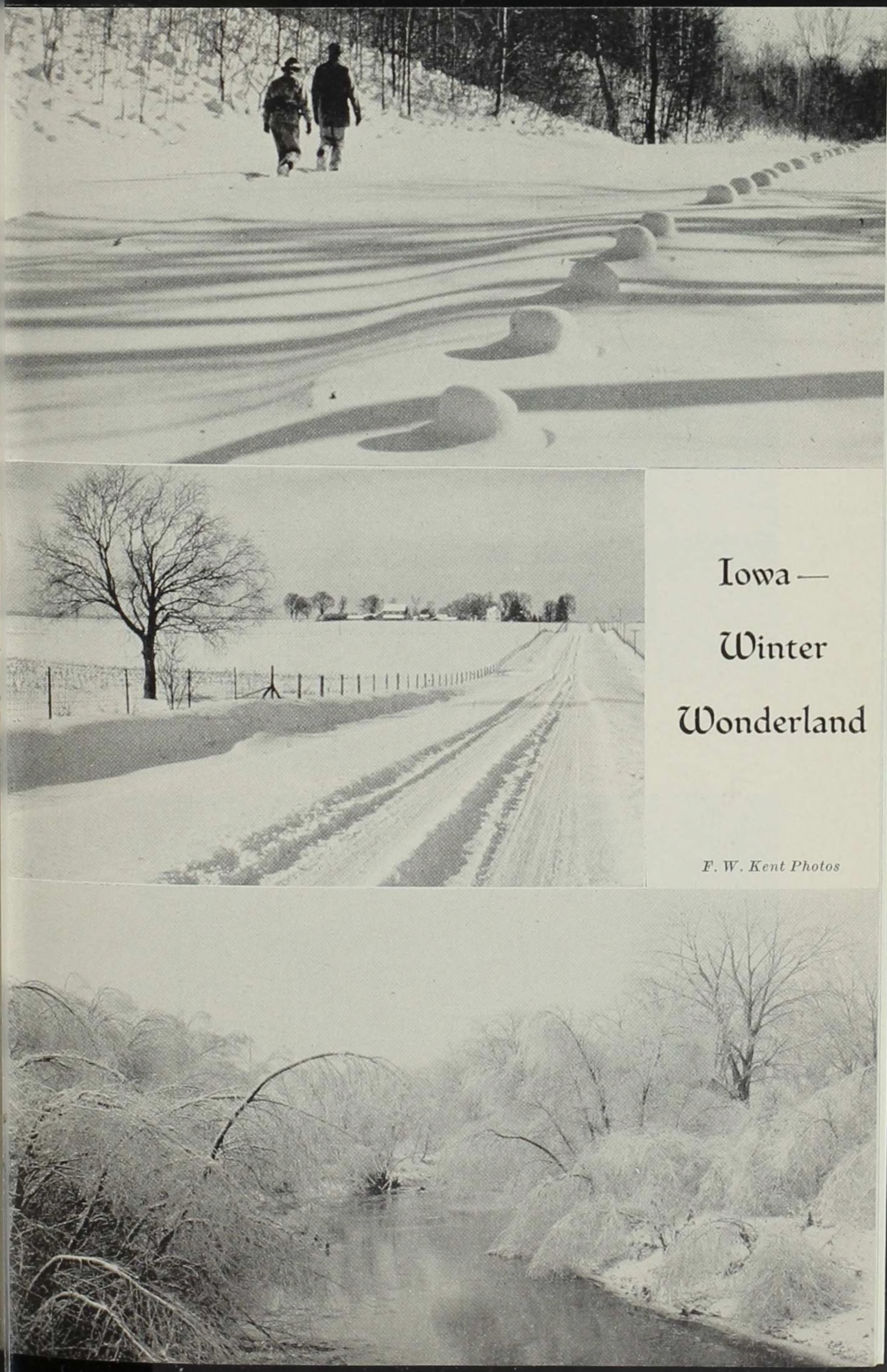
A Black Hawk County pioneer recalled that there was snow on the ground when the family moved into their new farmhouse on November 27, 1856. The first snow had fallen before the corn was gathered, and it had to be left in the field all winter. December 1st dawned bright and clear but by night a fierce blizzard was blowing which lasted three days. One Sunday a short time later a small group gathered for religious services at the schoolhouse. It was found that there was not enough wood so services were adjourned to the Nelson Fancher house, about a quarter of a mile away. "In a little while a heavy snow began to fall and the wind blew a gale," according to Mrs. Fancher. "A few near neighbors went home, but the rest waited for the storm

to abate. The minister, John Kirkpatrick, ate some lunch and started home. Instead of taking the road, he went through the river timber until he reached a spot in the woods which he knew was directly opposite his farmhouse, a short distance away. With the aid of a pocket compass he reached his home, but was badly frozen.

"About 3 o'clock in the afternoon the storm reached its climax. The air looked blue and there was a humming sound. Two peddlers drove up, and we took them in, as it was sure death to go on.

"We had thirty-two guests that night. I found beds for all the women, but the men had to bring in their buffalo robes and sleep on the floor in front of the fireplace. Ropes were stretched to the barn so the men could find their way back after feeding the stock. After the storm passed it was intensely cold. I remember we had to cut the ham for breakfast with an ax."

The pioneers were quick to challenge anyone who claimed that a certain winter was the coldest, the longest, or the snowiest. When William Larrabee's description of the winter of 1856-57 was printed in the Des Moines *Register* in 1909, Sumner Smith of Melrose admitted it was a "bad one" but contended that the "worst and coldest storm" took place on December 31, 1863, and January 1, 1864, the latter date being the "coldest day" he had ever known since his arrival in Iowa on April

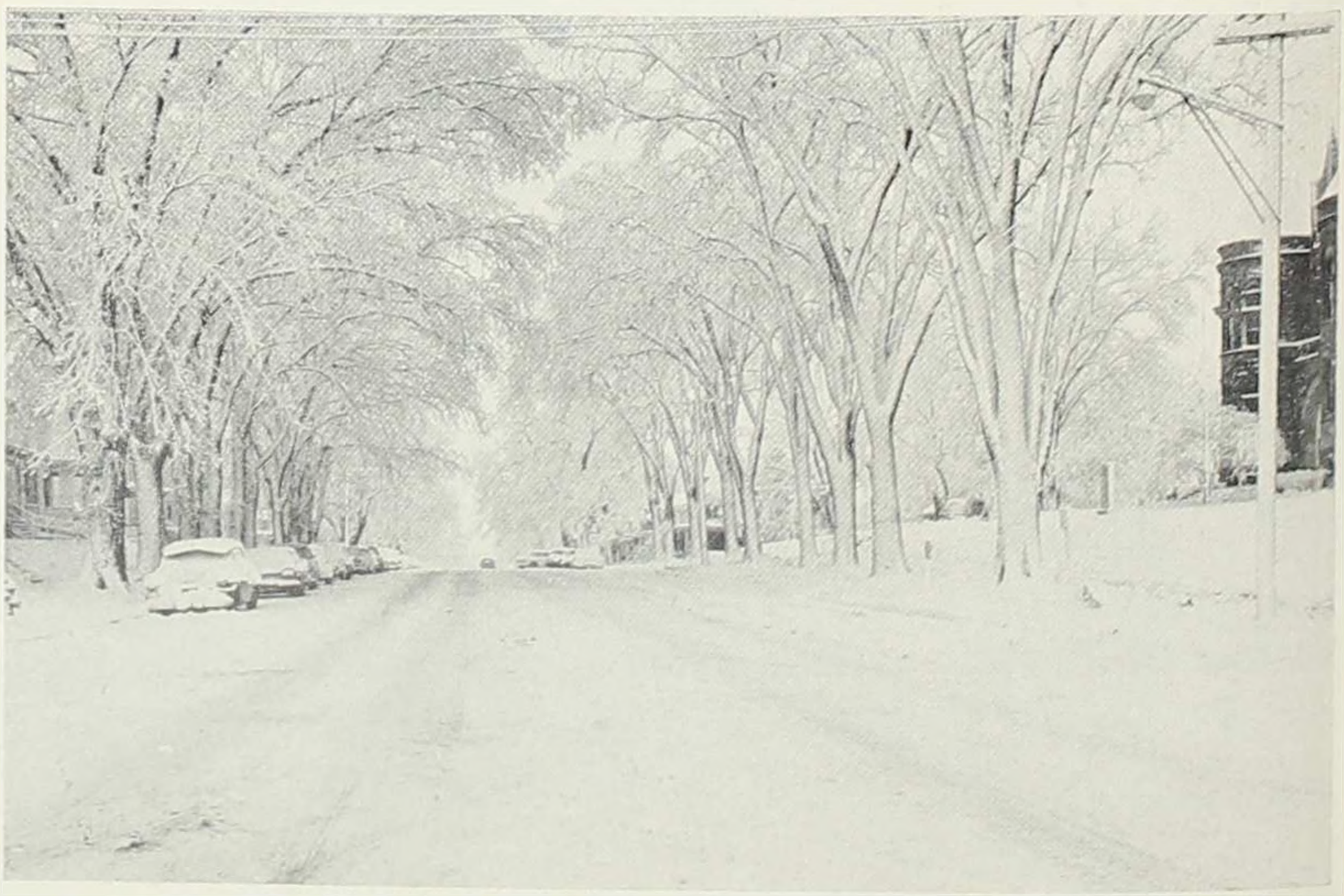


Iowa — Winter Wonderland

F. W. Kent Photos

IOWA CITY IN WINTER — 1961

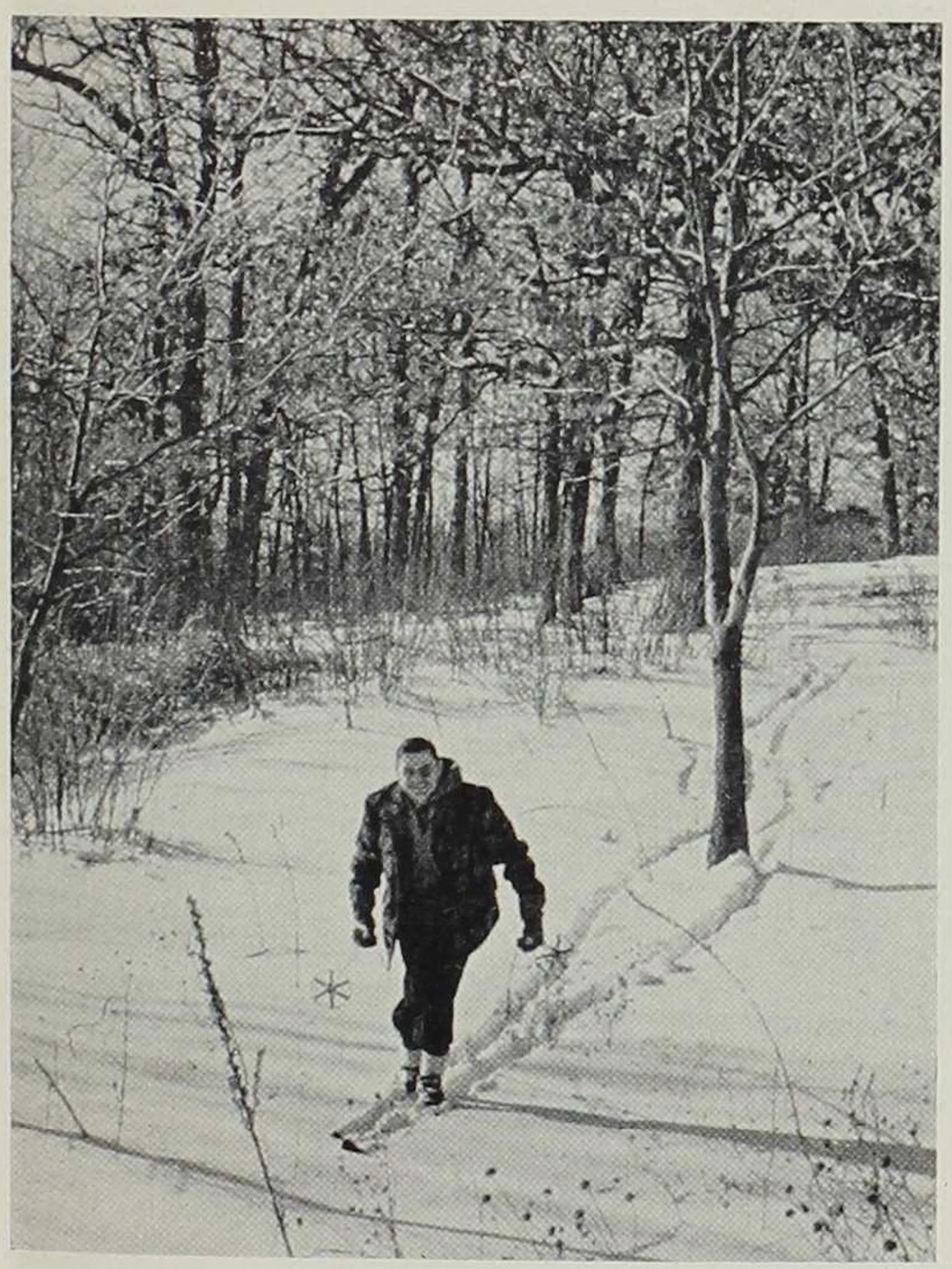
Looking West from Old Capitol



Press-Citizen Photos

Looking South on Clinton Street

THE MAGIC SPELL OF WINTER

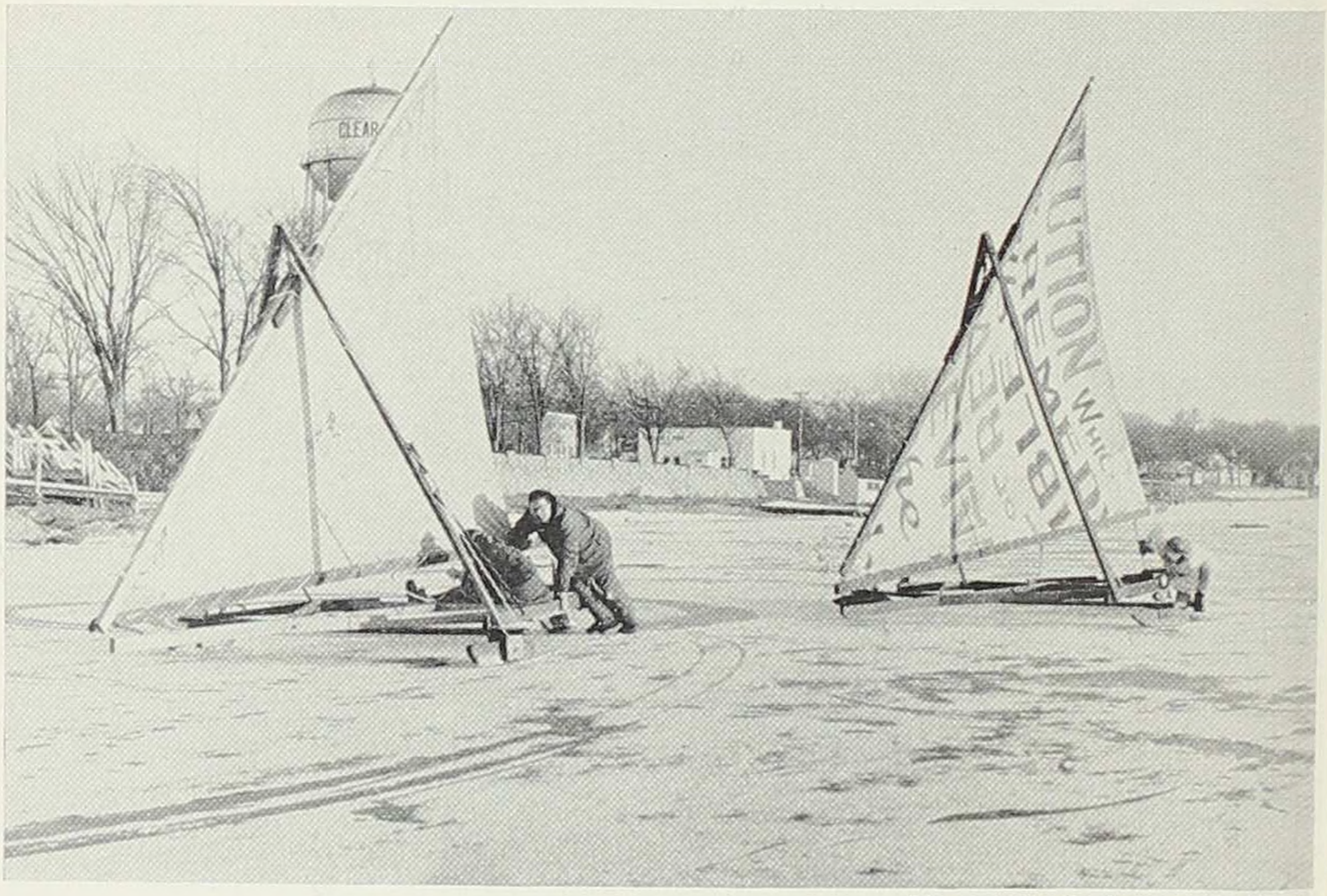


Not even trees can halt the enthusiastic skier in his flight!

F. W. Kent Photo

Reliving Old Time Sleighride — In Picturesque Storm Lake

Courtesy W. C. Jarnagin — Storm Lake Pilot-Tribune

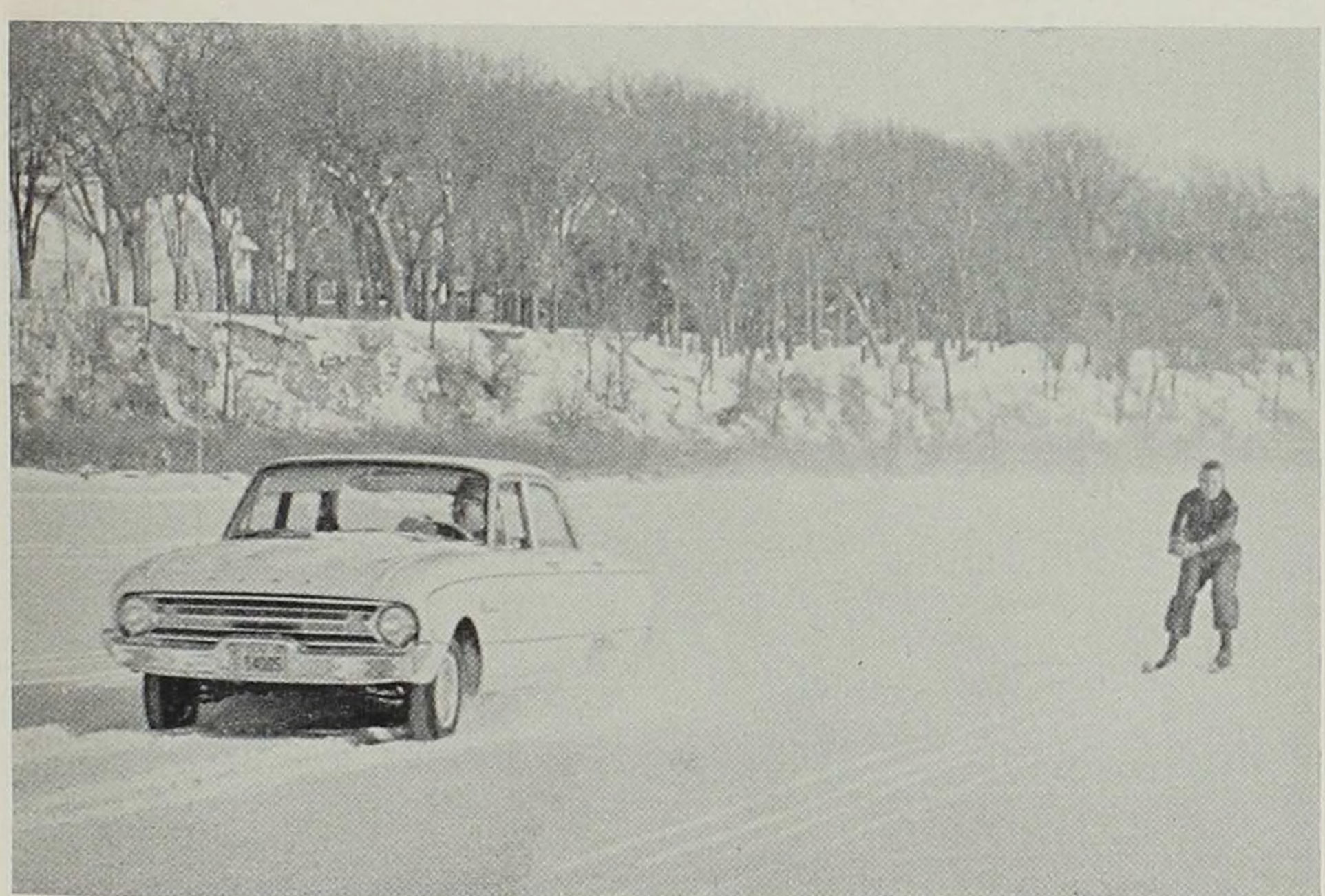


Mason City Globe-Gazette Photo

Ice Boating on Clear Lake

Mason City Globe-Gazette Photo

A Modern Ice Boat Race on Clear Lake



W. C. Jarnagin — Storm Lake Pilot-Tribune

Auto Towing Skier on Storm Lake

Station WMT Photo

"Doc" Meder and Tait Cummins Enjoy Thrill of Ice Boating
on Mississippi at McGregor

W. C. Jarnagin — Storm Lake Pilot-Tribune

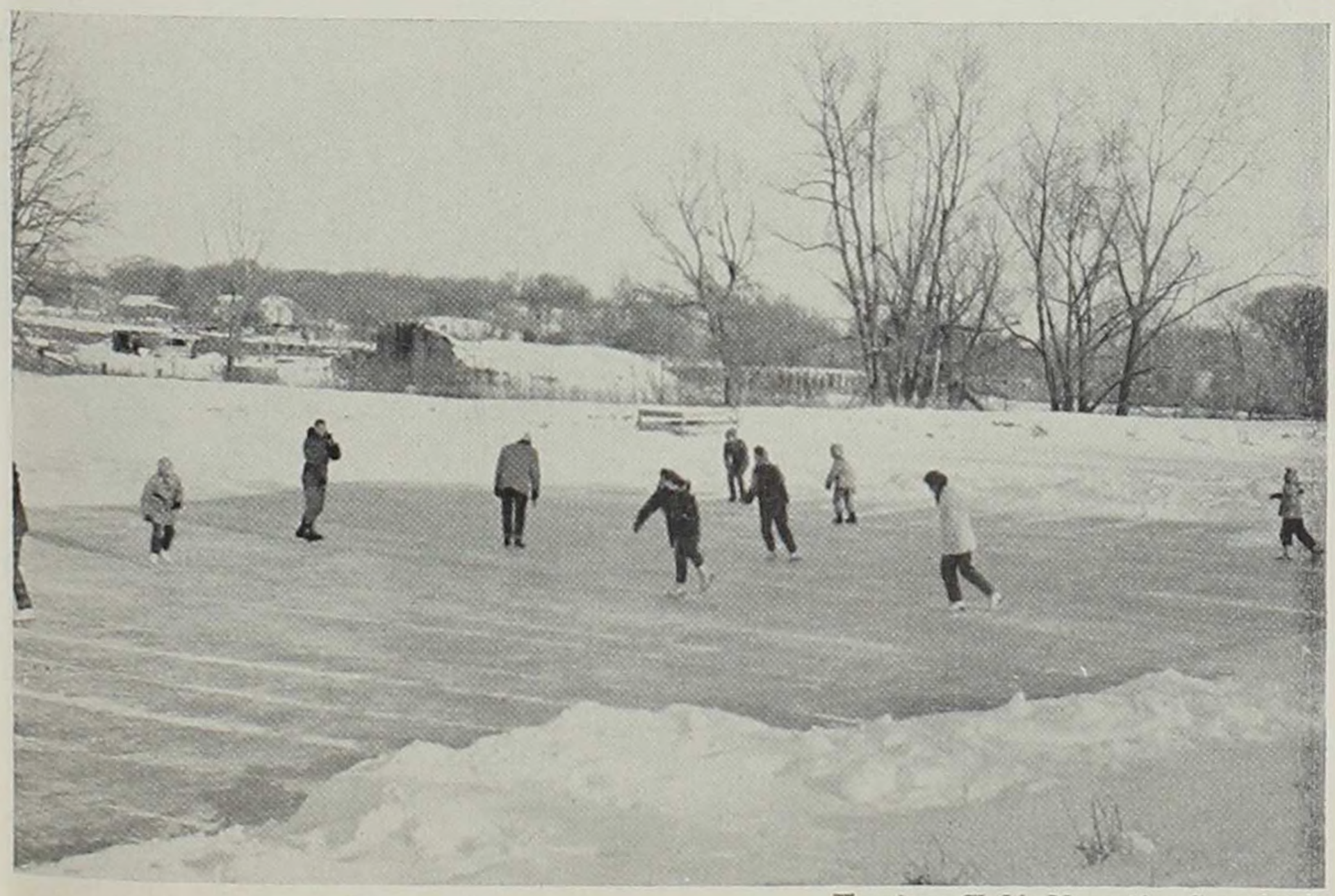
Playing Crack-the-Whip on Storm Lake

W. C. Jarnagin — Storm Lake Pilot-Tribune

Young and Old Enjoy Ice Skating on Storm Lake

Iowa City Press-Citizen Photo

Skating on Melrose Rink in Iowa City



Keystone Club's Muscatine Scrapbook

Skating at Weed Park in Muscatine

SILVER SKATES TOURNAMENT AT CEDAR RAPIDS

A Close Finish in the Boys Race

Cedar Rapids Gazette Photos

A Cold Spill in the Girls Race

Courtesy Mildred Rasmus

Skating on Mill Creek in Cherokee County — 1915

James Kent Photo

Skating in a Winter Wonderland

Des Moines Register Photo

Winter Fishing — a Popular Iowa Sport

Winter Fishing — a Popular Iowa Sport

Des Moines Register Photo

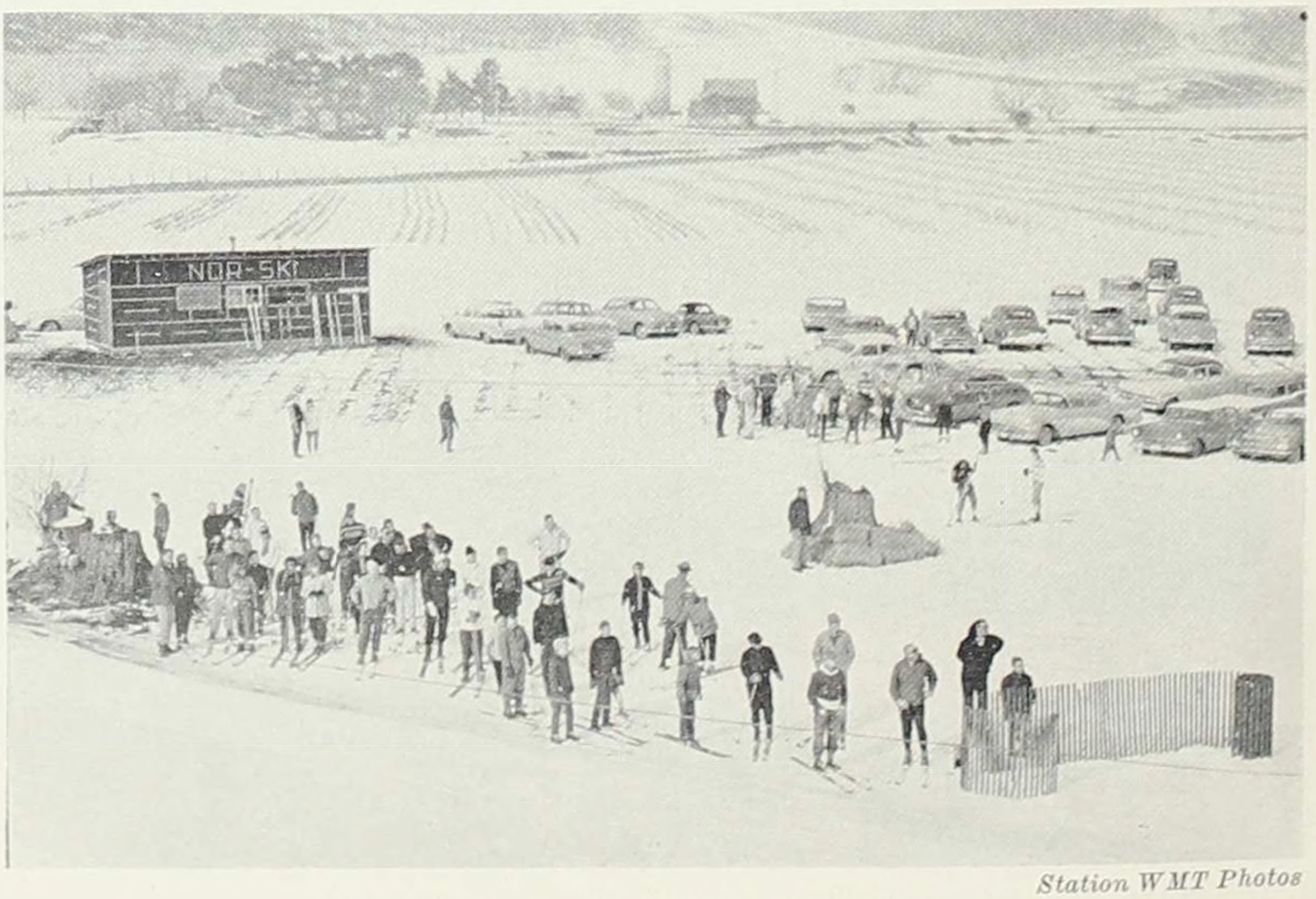
Courtesy Provident Mutual Life Insurance Co. of Philadelphia

Water Color by Lucille Hobbie

On the Hill

FROM DREAM TO REALITY

Six Men with a Dream — Planning a Ski Lift



Station WMT Photos

Ski Enthusiasts Came from Far and Near

DECORAH NOR-SKI CLUB

Young and Old Are Avid Skiers

Station WMT Photos

The Ski Lift Is a Welcome Boon to Sports Fans

THE FISHEREE IS POPULAR SPORT ON IOWA RIVERS AND LAKES

Three-Fourths of Those Who Fish on the Mississippi Between McGregor and Prairie du Chien Are from Iowa

Station WMT Photos

Prizes Are Offered for Largest Fish Caught in Each Class

Photo Courtesy Des Moines Register

Huts Such as These Can Be Seen Everywhere — Okoboji, Ahquabi, Spirit Lake, Storm Lake

Some Iowans Don't Mind the Cold

Photo Courtesy Des Moines Register

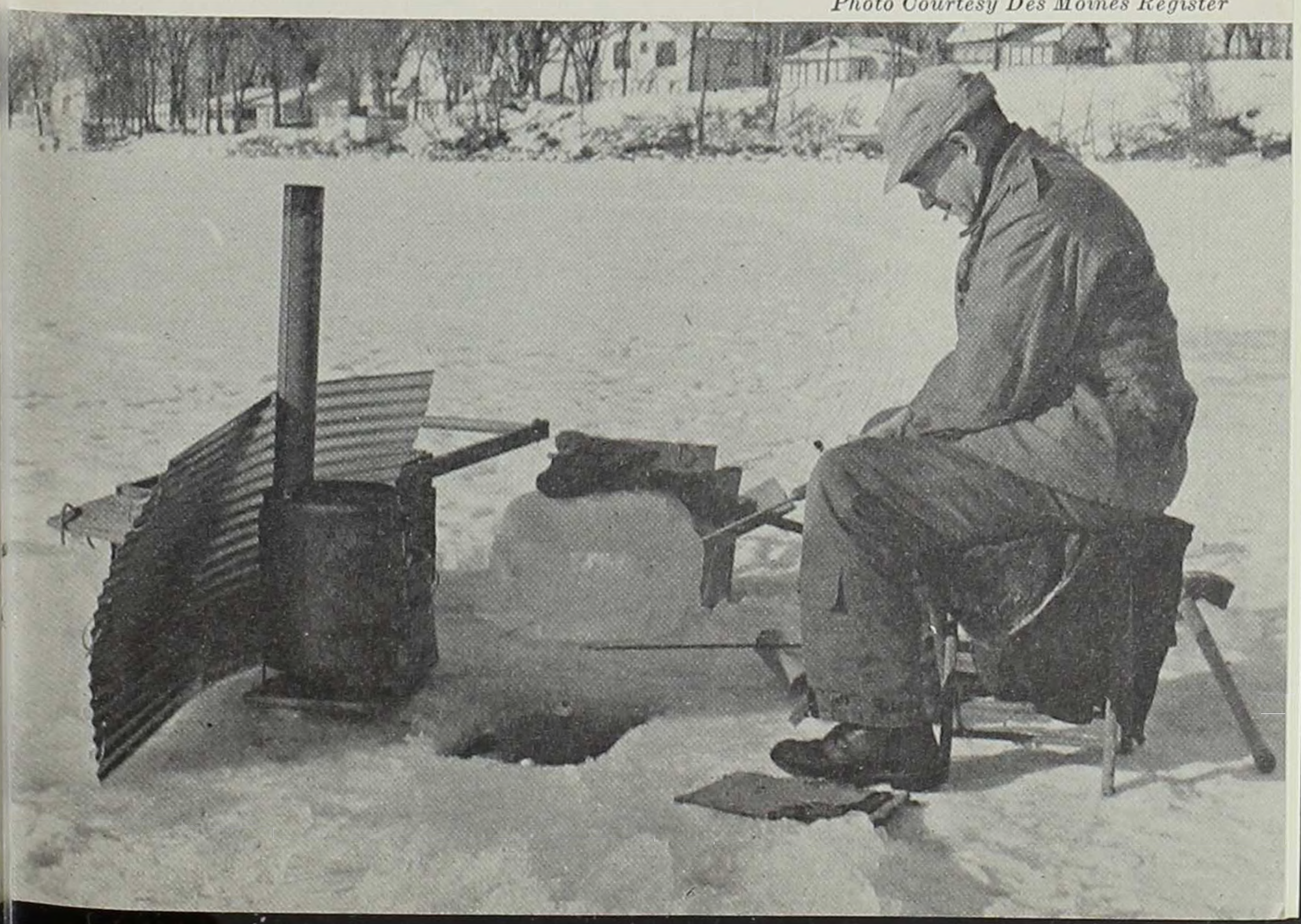
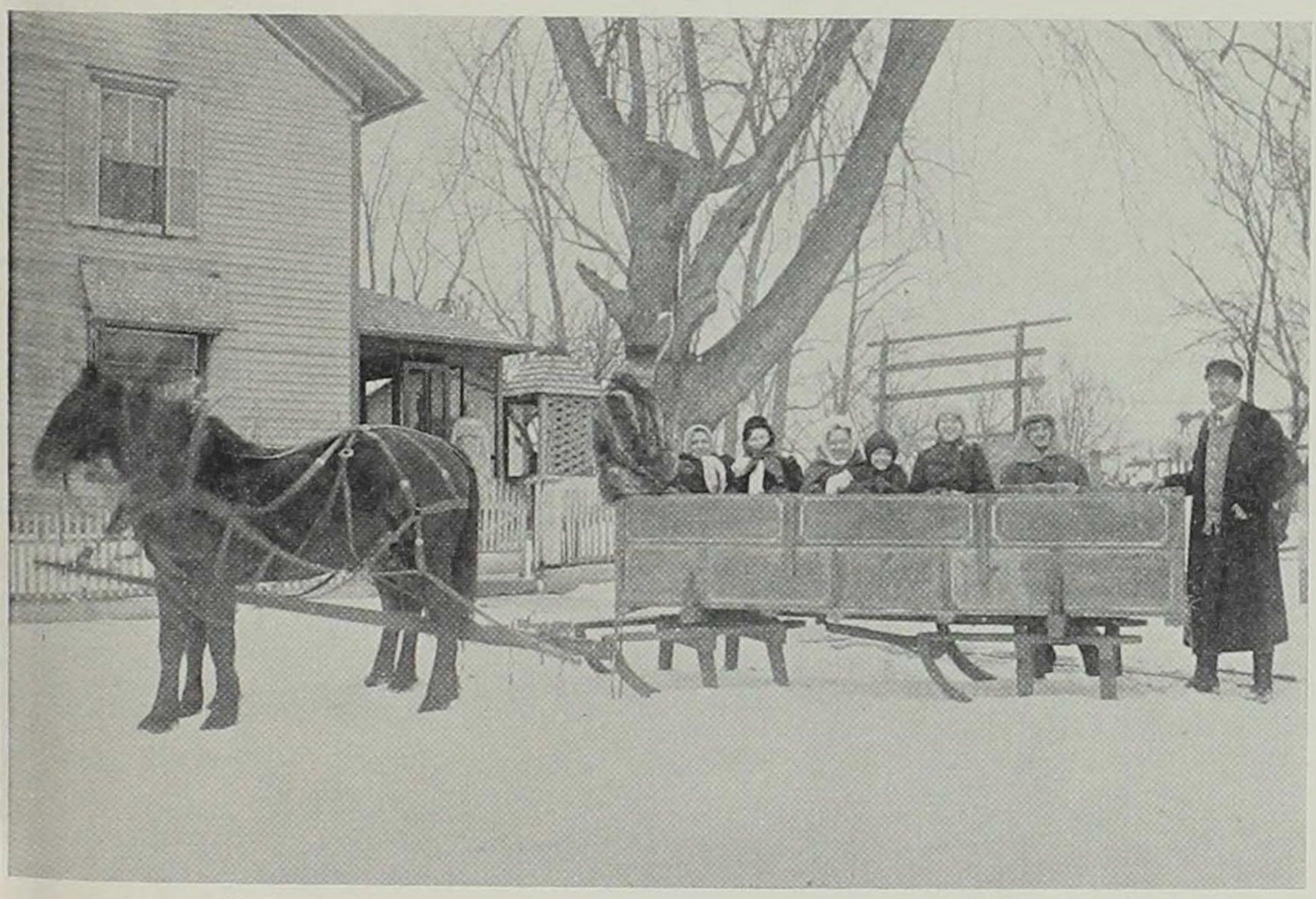


Photo Courtesy Des Moines Register

Some Prefer It Warm — Hut Built Over Hole
While One Man Fishes — Another Removes Hook from Catch

Fisherman Is Well-Prepared to Eat

Photo Courtesy Des Moines Register



Bob Sledding Was Popular Farm Sport at West Liberty

Little Folks Liked to Sleigh Ride, Too

Maurice Horner Photo — Des Moines Register

BETTER THAN CALIFORNIA!

Iowa's snow and occasional sub-zero temperatures don't bother a California couple, Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Grether, who are launching a 200 to 250-cow dairy farming project seven miles south of Lorimor. "We love it — snow, cold weather and all, and enjoy every minute of it," said Mrs. Grether, who had never been east of Reno, Nevada, before she moved to Iowa in November, 1958.

Iowa Once Was Dotted with Shocked Corn in Winter Time

F. W. Kent Photo

An Iowa Farm in Winter of 1949 *George Yates Photo — Des Moines Register*

"The prints from the house to the barn, and the well-trodden paths around the barn suggest the many jobs that must be done by the farmer, despite the weather. See the loaded sleigh just southwest of the barn, and the runner tracks leading from the field. The team has been unhitched and returned to the barn, and the sleigh waits to be unloaded when the farmer has a spare minute.

"Big, deep tracks around the farm buildings — the tracks of men in heavy boots, carrying heavy loads from barn to hog house to shed. Then — small, light steps, breaking away from the path from the house, and heading for the chicken house to the north — the farmer's wife taking care of her chickens and gathering the eggs."

Poland China World, February, 1949.

An Iowa Farm in Winter of 1961 *Bob Long Photo — Des Moines Register*

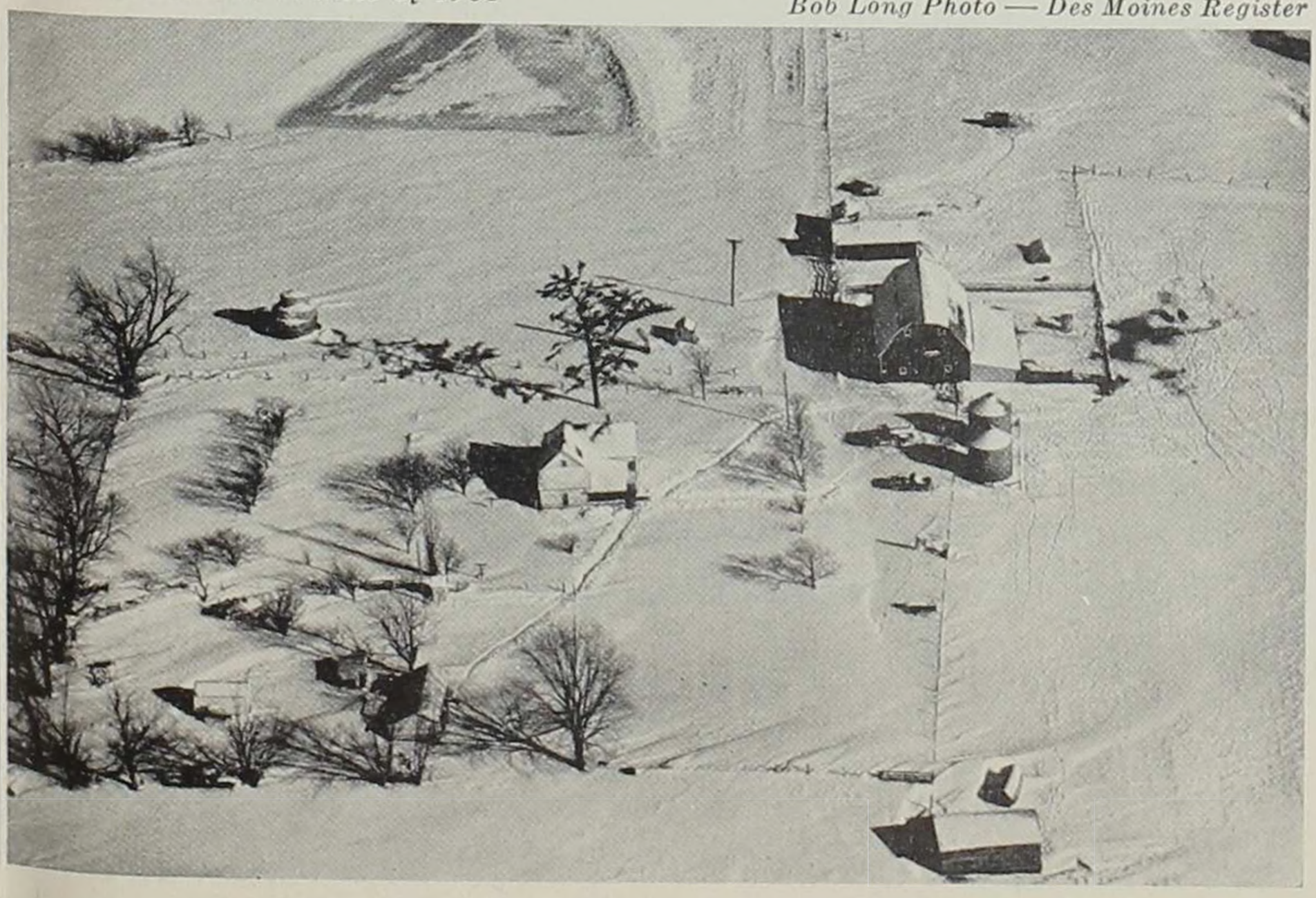


Photo Courtesy Mrs. Kirk G. Grunder

Bob Sled Party of Methodist Sunday School Class of
Wilton Junction — 1906

25, 1838. The second worst storm, Smith thought, occurred on January 13, 1855. Many old-time Winfield residents, Smith believed, would remember "how we used to drive heavy loads over the fences, after that storm."

Although his records were incomplete, Charles D. Reed, former chief of the United States Weather Bureau at Des Moines, thought that December 31, 1863, and January 1, 1864, might possibly mark the date of the "great blizzard" in eastern Iowa, while January 12, 1888, was probably the date of the worst blizzard in western Iowa. Newspaper reports clearly indicate that the great blizzard of 1864 took a firm grip on the entire eastern half of Iowa. A Des Moines dispatch dated January 1st read: "Whew! old Boreas is rampant today, and is blowing in the new year in a rage, and with a frosty touch that bids beware to noses and toeses." The editor thought he would rather risk his life "in front of rebels, with a chance of one to four" than to brave the terrors of driving a stagecoach over the snow-blanketed, windswept prairies of Iowa.

The Muscatine *Courier* asserted that many would long remember the "big storm" of January 1, 1864, which the "oldest inhabitant" believed was the most severe one ever to visit Muscatine County. The first of January was such a "snapping cold day" that New Year's calls were at a low ebb. The roads into the country were blocked

and few people came into town, except by foot. Railroad tracks were blockaded, trains late, and no mail was received or forwarded. "We hear of a large number of persons who had limbs frozen," the *Courier* reported, "and almost everybody on the prairies had some of their stock frozen to death. Buyers of hogs found their droves freezing on their hands, and it did not help the matter any to load the cars with them, for cars were 'no go'." In one instance, out of a flock of 400 sheep, 300 perished in the storm.

At Iowa City, Theodore S. Parvin recorded that the "most violent snowstorm known in this region" commenced on January 1st. The temperature stood at –26° at 7 A. M. and it did not rise above zero until January 7th. The Iowa City *Republican* of January 6, 1864, declared the weather was not ordinarily a proper subject of editorial discussion, but apparently the first of January, 1864, was an exception. Old Boreas stood in the streets of Iowa City shaking whirlwinds of snow from his garments as if intent on destroying the town. "It was deposited on your hat and under your hat; in the front of your neck and the back of your neck; in your pockets and in your boots. It blew down your chimney and up your cellar way; through your cornice and beneath your shingles. It covered your pig-sty, buried your wood-pile, obstructed your gate-way and barricaded your side-walk. And the little

boys, on their little sleds, say they never saw 'such a crackin' big snow.' . . . Railroad men are digging away to get the mails through, and we are scribbling away to fill our columns up. Charge this gust of words to the gust of snow."

There were many cold winters and many heavy snowfalls between 1864 and 1888 — the year the "great blizzard" struck western Iowa. Late in January, 1867, the Oskaloosa *Herald* recorded a snowfall of from twelve to fourteen inches. A pioneer of Montgomery County thought the winter of 1866-67 was the coldest he had ever experienced. A Decatur County pioneer declared that the snowdrifts were up to the eaves of log cabins that year. "After the snowfall the weather turned colder and the snow froze hard. We could drive in any direction across the prairie over high fences. We had just put out a washing before the snow and it was six weeks before we were enabled to find it all. Heavy snows were common, but this one was the heaviest I ever saw."

So wary had many Iowans become of the sudden frigid blasts that swept the State that newspapers frequently carried forecasts by local weather prophets or printed accounts that might enable farmers to foretell the approach of a hard winter. On November 8, 1867, the Oskaloosa *Herald* chronicled the following sure signs of a hard winter. "Hives are said to be overflowing with honey; the husks of corn are declared to be

of extra thickness, and the furs of animals are pronounced exceedingly rich and heavy. It is observed, too, that the rats are traveling eastwardly in great numbers, and the squirrels are making arrangements on an increased scale for the storage of nuts."

Out of the harrowing experiences of the Iowa pioneers was coined the word blizzard, a word now best defined to mean a sudden and violent storm of fine driving snow accompanied by intense cold. The word blizzard itself was not new, for it had been used as early as 1829 to denote a "sharp blow, or a shot, or volley of shots." Its use to describe fierce winter snowstorms seems to have originated in Iowa, though blizzards are more common farther northwest. Apparently the term was first used in this sense by the editor of the Estherville *Northern Vindicator* when he noted on April 23, 1870, that a pioneer had had "too much experience with northwestern 'blizards' [sic] to be caught in such a trap." The following week the editor used the accepted spelling when he recorded that the "unfortunate victim of the March 'blizzard' . . . is rapidly improving."

The word "blizzard" quickly became popular among Iowa editors. On January 11, 1873, the Sioux City *Weekly Times* referred to a "blizzard" or "customary annual winter storm" that had broken out in Woodbury County on Tuesday morning. "During the day the wind blew a gale,"

the editor declared. "The snow was almost blinding, and the thermometer indicated stiff freezing air." On March 9, 1874, the Dubuque *Telegraph* noted that a local gentleman had been hooted for predicting a blizzard. On December 3, 1876, the editor of the *Wright County Monitor* at Clarion wrote: "A genuine blizzard set on its hind legs and howled for twelve or fourteen hours while the mercury lurked at from ten to fourteen degrees below zero."

Both the weather bureau and the pioneers recognize the big blizzard of 1888 as one of the worst. Although it caught many Iowans unprepared, readers of the daily newspapers had ample warning of its approach. Early in January the temperature fell to 50° below zero in northern Minnesota. A dispatch from Bismarck on January 13th was hopeful that the fury of the "terrible blizzard" had been spent, but expected that the railroad tracks would not be cleared for several days.

In the path of this "deadly blizzard" stood Rock Rapids in the northwesternmost county in Iowa. The *Lyon County Reporter* of January 6, 1888, had quoted a Rock Island weather prophet as forecasting that January would "average equal to or above the mean of the season." A week later the *Reporter* gave the following account of the "worst blizzard" in several years: "The storm began here about five o'clock in the afternoon and

raged with unabated violence until morning. The temperature was fully thirty degrees below zero and the wind blowing a perfect hurricane made it impossible for those who were out to distinguish objects at a distance of fifty feet. The snow was very fine and dry and blew into every crevice while the piercing cold seemed to penetrate the most solid buildings."

A Greenfield editor recorded that the "snow, fine as powder, was hurled along by the gale. On the prairie an object forty feet distant could not be seen. A man's voice could not be heard six feet distant." The snow darkened the sky, creating the "most dismal, drear, and forsaken" scene that man had ever looked upon. At Eagle Grove the *Boone Valley Gazette* of January 19th declared the blizzard "surpassed in violence anything we have ever seen in this climate. Friday morning the storm still raged with the mercury 22° below zero."

The great blizzard of 1888 was notable for the loss of human life, especially among children who were caught returning from school in the afternoon. A few miles north of Rock Rapids, for example, the two Cushman boys were on their way home when one "separated from the other and was obliged to pass the night in a cornfield." Though he was found in the morning he was badly frozen and it was feared that he could not survive. Thirty-four years later, the Rock Rapids

Review, commenting on the "big blizzard," remarked that the person who had most reason to remember the storm was Tommie Cushman, rural mail carrier, who lost his hands as a result of being frozen. The *Review* also noted that it was necessary to amputate both the hands and feet of John Langfeldt, an operation which attracted widespread attention in the medical world.

There were stories of heroism and devotion. Near Archer a brother and two sisters were caught in the blizzard of 1888. When the girls were unable to go farther the brother took off his coat and told them to stay there while he went on for help. The brother himself became lost and was badly frozen. The bodies of the two girls were found just where the brother had left them. Conductor Charles Gustafson was "terribly frozen" while he went back up the track with his lantern to stand guard and flag a train which would have run into his own that had been blocked by a snowdrift. Mrs. Temple at Paullina sent her little boy across the street on an errand, not realizing what a violent storm was raging. Thoroughly frightened by the power of the wind and the cutting snow, the boy cried for help, and fortunately his mother heard. But when she dashed out unprotected the wind carried her in the wrong direction and before she could rescue the boy her face and arms were severely frozen.

Pat Quigley, who married an Irish lass on Jan-

uary 12, 1888, was returning to his homestead with his bride after dinner, when he was caught in the blizzard. "Pat had an excellent team, a double wagon box, a lot of wedding presents, among them a cake and a jug of wine, a lot of bed clothing and robes. With terrific suddenness the storm began. He faced the storm and drove steadily onward until the horses refused to go farther. So Pat unhitched them and turned the double box over himself and bride. . . . The couple ate the cake and drank the wine — spent that night, all the next day and the next night under that wagon box and when Pat tried to turn the box over — and he was a brawny Irish lad, he couldn't budge the thing. It was snowed under and he had to call upon his newly wedded wife to help him." After much effort they managed to crawl out. The storm was over. And Pat found he was just twenty feet from his stable!

In the half century between the creation of the Territory of Iowa and the frigid winter of 1888, almost two million people had settled in Iowa and railroads crossed the State in all directions. Groves of trees had been planted on many farms and neighbors were of necessity much nearer than in former years. Nevertheless, death still stalked the Iowa prairies whenever a mid-winter blizzard howled through town and countryside.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

Variable Winters

When the mild winter of 1943-44 came to a close, many old timers were ready to assert that the cold, snowy weather of pioneer days was a thing of the past. Off-hand observations tend to emphasize the changes in climatological conditions. A study of available weather bureau statistics, however, coupled with a generous use of old newspaper files, reveals no pronounced trend in the weather during any season of the year in Iowa.

There are plenty of reasons why the winters of yesteryears should seem colder. In the first place both the log cabin and the early frame houses lacked the heating equipment and the insulation in use today. Secondly, modern Iowans can travel from Davenport to Council Bluffs faster and more comfortably by automobile than the pioneer could cross the average county in his bobsled. Roads were not well graded in pioneer days, there were no slat fences to serve as snow breaks, nor were State highway crews maintained to remove the snow from the main-traveled roads. Today, the radio gives almost hourly warning of an approaching snowstorm so that there is relatively little danger of Iowans being caught unpre-

pared. Finally, the commonplace is soon forgotten whereas unusual weather, such as a raging blizzard or a balmy Christmas, makes an indelible impression.

While not overlooking the "long winter" of 1842-43, the severe winter of 1856-57, or the great blizzards of 1864 and 1888, it might also be well to remember that exactly the opposite type of weather was experienced in many winter months. As early as 1836 Albert Miller Lea observed that "we often have fine pleasant weather in mid-winter" and declared that even as far north as Prairie du Chien there was "never so much snow" as to interrupt traveling. James Newhall considered wintertime in Iowa "decidedly more cheerful than dreary." The season of "sleighing and hunting is upon us," he wrote, "with all their accompanying allurements. Our young Nimrods are buckling on their armor for the sports of the forest; parties form hunting campaigns for the elk and deer; young lovers rig out a 'jumper,' and with their smiling lassies, hie away to the minister or magistrate to tie the 'true-lover's knot'; and 'quiltings,' mirth, and weddings make the prairie fireside resound with their joyous notes of rural pastime."

Iowa newspapers frequently confirm the high estimates of Lea and Newhall on Iowa's mild winters. The winter of 1838 was so pleasant that the editor of the *Iowa News* saw a Dubuque

farmer plowing his field on New Year's Day. Six years later, on December 27, 1844, the Bloomington *Herald* expressed delight over the "mildness of our Iowa climate" when Christmas dawned "as balmy and delightful as one could expect to witness in the month of May." The day was unmarked by the appearance of "sleighs, buffalo robes, and the merry jingle of sleigh-bells, with which our eyes and ears have been so often greeted in colder climate and which to the eye of a genuine son of New England, are so indispensably necessary to a proper observance of the day."

Apparently such winters were common during the next few years, for it was not until 1848 that a Davenport editor reported a real December snowfall. The sleighing was never better, he declared, than that enjoyed during the Christmas-New Year season of 1848-49 and did much "to make amends for the deficiency" of the previous four or five years.

The value of a warm winter was not overlooked by Iowa editors. "The fine weather we are having these days is worth hundreds of thousands of dollars to Iowa," declared the Keokuk *Daily Gate City* of December 5, 1855. "The farmers are enabled to finish up their fall work," while thousands of immigrants would have time to finish their new houses. Many emigrants, both native American and foreign, came to Iowa during the

late fifties, lured in part by Nathan H. Parker's praise of Iowa's climate in his *Handbook for 1856*. After observing that the Hawkeye State occupied three degrees of latitude, Parker called attention to "some variations" in the winter climate. "In the northern part the winters are cold and dry, but short. Spring comes on early, so that the farmer commences his work in the month of March, seldom as late as April. In the southern portion of the State the winters are more mild, and spring somewhat earlier. The climate is free from the sudden changes of New England, and from the long drizzling rains and foggy weather of portions of the Middle States, and those States within the influence of the Great Lakes."

Similar mild winter seasons were enjoyed during the 1860's. The editor of the *Weekly Gate City* recorded that Christmas at Keokuk in 1867 dawned cloudy with a weak attempt at rain. As the hours passed the clouds disappeared and the "warm sunlight and genial breeze made it very pleasant out-doors, if one could move along unmindful of the mud under foot."

The many mild winters of pioneer days led the Winterset *Madisonian* of December 26, 1872, to query: "Has Our Climate Changed?" The editorial continued at some length on the mild winter and fortified its conclusions by quoting the *Good Health Magazine*. "We do not have those continual piercing and sharp winds that made our

winters so very severe a few years ago. Our climate is getting more and more friendly." The editor of the Sioux City *Weekly Times* also lamented the absence of snow in 1872. "It promises to be dull here, in the way of amusements, during the holidays," he wailed. "The absence of snow, no doubt, is the cause of it. Christmas is no more like Christmas without sleighing than Fourth of July is like New Year's." But Sioux Citians had their fun at Christmas time nevertheless, for the editor observed that "racing oxen in the streets is all the rage now."

If Fort Dodge shivered in the big blizzard of January 12, 1888, the town fairly basked in the delightful weather three years later. "The balmy breezes of Monday," declared the Fort Dodge *Messenger* of January 22, 1891, "brought out a few tennis players with net and rackets and a regulation set was played on one of the local courts in the afternoon. All of which be it remembered occurred right here in Fort Dodge in the state of Iowa, upon the 19th day of January, A.D., 1891."

Such variable winters have been recognized in Iowa since pioneer times. "The past week has been marked by very undecided weather," declared the Davenport *Gazette* of December 23, 1841. "It was cold, warm and pleasant; snowed, hailed and rained; froze, thawed and froze again; calm, blustering and mild; in brief, as a Yankee

would say, we have had 'considerable weather,' — enough, however, to suit the most fastidious taste, if properly proportioned." Three years later, on January 18, 1844, the Davenport *Gazette* observed: "Our weather is as fickle as fortune. Alternately it smiles and frowns upon us till fatigued we, for once, sigh for sameness. If we were not right sure the clerk of the weather, like our Legislature imitating Congress, would disregard a petition, we would get numerous signers for cold weather."

The winter of 1909 illustrates how variable Dame Nature could be in Iowa. It was marked by the heaviest snowfall ever recorded in the State. And yet, a Sidney editor saw the "unusual spectacle" of Fremont County farmers plowing in January. The Marshalltown *Times-Republican* felt that if the present weather man continued in office Iowa would be "alternating her apple and peach trees with orange trees and planting pineapples along with potatoes." Writing in the Des Moines *Register* Isaac Brandt declared that the first month in 1909 was the "most pleasant January" he had seen in fifty-three years of Iowa residence. "When we have weather like this it is certainly nonsense for anyone to leave for the rainy days that they will meet in California. While I like the splendid weather we are now enjoying, I hate to think of the disappointment

that we will meet when old Jack Frost makes up his mind to pay us another visit."

Scarcely had Brandt penned these words when Jack Frost put in his appearance, bringing one of the worst blizzards ever experienced in Iowa. "The high winds caused the snow to drift badly, blew down hundreds of windmills and thousands of telegraph and telephone poles. All street car and railroad train service was practically abandoned, and many head of livestock would not face the wind and flying snow to seek shelter. The maximum velocity of the wind during the storm ranged from 31 miles an hour at Dubuque to 72 miles an hour at Sioux City, and was probably higher on the prairies."

The greatest amount of snowfall at any Iowa station occurred in the calendar year of 1909 at Northwood — 113.4 inches; the greatest 24-hour snowfall was 20.0 inches at Humboldt; the greatest monthly snowfall was 32.0 inches at Perry; and the State average was 49.0 inches. After comparing these figures with the State average of 30.0 inches between 1892 and 1960 and the record low of 13.5 inches that fell in 1922, one can readily grasp the difference between light, average, and blizzardy winters.

The following are the heaviest annual Iowa snowfalls in inches since systematic records were inaugurated in 1892:

1951.....53.2 in.	1960.....42.2 in.	1897.....38.8 in.
1959.....49.3 in.	1929.....41.8 in.	1901.....38.5 in.
1909.....49.0 in.	1898.....40.3 in.	1932.....38.5 in.
1936.....48.9 in.	1945.....39.8 in.	1905.....38.3 in.
1940.....46.4 in.	1952.....39.5 in.	1912.....38.0 in.

Since 1892 thirteen out of the fifteen heaviest snowfalls have occurred in the twentieth century. Moreover, the first, second, fourth, fifth, and sixth heaviest snowfalls have occurred since 1936. Even more amazing is the fact that three of the six heaviest annual snowfalls have occurred since 1951. Since 1951 was the record-breaking snowfall year, it is worth recording the reactions of the staid Weather Bureau:

> Iowans experienced many weather extremes in the year 1951. In general, the year was cold and wet. Temperatures for the state averaged 45.6° which was 3.0 degrees below the normal. It was the 6th coldest year since Statewide records began in 1873, and the coldest since 1917. Temperatures averaged below the monthly normals for ten months of the year; only in February and May were the monthly averages above normal. The lowest temperature for the State was 43° below zero at Decorah on January 30. . . . Precipitation for the State averaged 42.22 inches, which amount was 10.85 inches above the normal. It was the third wettest year since records were begun in 1873. The annual amount has been exceeded only in 1881 (44.16 inches) and in 1902 (43.82 inches). . . . The total snowfall for the calendar year, 53.2 inches, was the greatest of record (snowfall records began in 1892). In March the average snowfall for the State, 23.2 inches, was the greatest on record for that month. . . . Snowfall amounts were greater than would be expected for the

amount of precipitation. Much of the snow fell during periods of cold weather, and was light and fluffy in character. Several eastern localities received the heaviest December snowfall of record, with Clinton reporting the greatest fall of 27.9 inches. The period from the 12th through the 27th saw the most persistent December cold period of record. Temperatures were below zero on 14 days at Sibley in the northwest, and the cold weather was climaxed by a low temperature of –28° at Sibley and Spencer on the 27th. The rivers in Iowa froze over early during the cold period and remained frozen the rest of the month.

Snow frequently has made Iowa a Winter Wonderland. On December 22, 1952, a general snowstorm insured "one of the most beautiful" white Christmases in Iowa. Eight years later snow and temperature joined to keep the ground snow covered at Des Moines for the "unusually long" period of 75 days, from January 15 to March 29, 1960, inclusive.

Between 1892 and 1961 the heaviest average snowfall has occurred between December and March. Although 4.9 inches fell in October of 1925 the average is only 0.5 inches for that month. The average for November is 2.6 inches and the greatest fall for that month 8.7 inches in 1898. April has averaged only 1.6 inches, but in 1893 as much as 6.0 inches were recorded. The following table shows two things: first, the average snowfall for each winter month between 1892 and 1960; and second, the heaviest State average

snowfall recorded in each of these months, with the year in which it fell.

Month	Average Snowfall	Heaviest Snowfall	Year
December	5.9	15.9	1897
January	7.0	19.4	1936
February	6.7	15.9	1936
March	5.6	23.2	1951

Temperature statistics began at Council Bluffs on October 22, 1819, and have been kept at various places in or near Iowa ever since. The coldest temperature ever recorded in Iowa was –47° at Washta in 1912. The coldest month in the past 141 years was January, 1912, with a State average of 4.2°, comparable with the next coldest average of 4.9° in 1875. The coldest two months were January and February, 1875, with a State average of 5.6°. The coldest three months were December, 1874, to February, 1875, with a State average of 11.8°. Starting with a cold wave on January 18, 1936, and continuing almost unabated to February 22nd, Iowa experienced its most prolonged period of very low temperature in the 125 winters of recorded weather history.

In recent years the Weather Bureau has been changing its methods of recording weather statistics, dividing the State into nine districts. This system emphasizes the wide difference between, for example, the northwestern Iowa counties and the southeastern counties.

Annual Precipitation

Division	1959	1960
Northwest	32.03	29.81
North Central	37.28	26.15
Northeast	39.84	35.95
West Central	33.20	29.68
Central	35.18	34.40
East Central	42.72	38.47
Southwest	39.28	36.50
South Central	42.63	38.67
Southeast	42.47	38.28

These figures reveal the variable precipitation for various parts of Iowa. Snowfall records for four months during the same period follow:

	January		February	
1959	20.0″	Clinton #2	26.0″	Cresco
1960	19.7″	Onawa	28.0″	Albia

	March		December	
1959	35.0″	Fayette	10.7″	Maquoketa
1960	25.8″	Albia	10.8″	Fayette

Apparently the winter climate of Iowa is not changing significantly. Variations of temperature and precipitation are still as extreme as they used to be, the memories of old settlers to the contrary notwithstanding.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

Winter in Old Dubuque

Dubuque, with its many hills, has always been a coasting paradise for boys and girls. The writer can recall many a thrilling trip down Madison Street and particularly Fourteenth Street. Starting at Alta Vista Street he would begin the swift descent past Cox, Walnut, Prairie, Henion, Dell, Cornell, and on to Bluff, where the real danger of cross streets began. At Bluff Street one had already traveled half a mile down two steep hills. The descent thereafter was Locust, Main, Iowa, Clay, White, Jackson, Washington, Elm, and on a few occasions even to Pine Street. The smaller individual sleds seldom got beyond White or Jackson, but the big bobsleds, with eight to twelve lads sixteen to eighteen years old, would sometimes reach the railroad tracks on Pine Street.

Representatives John Duffy and Thomas Patrick O'Toole of Dubuque recently reminded the writer of such large bobsleds as the *Nonpareil,* the *White Ghost,* and the *Bucket-of-Blood.* The latter was appropriately named for if a collision ever occurred on one of the many street crossings the result would have been disastrous. Fortunately, most of these experiences date back to 1910-1916 when the horseless carriage was still a novelty, particularly in the winter months.

Next to coasting, Dubuque lads loved to hitch their sleds to the sleighs owned by such firms as Martin-Strelau, Thomas J. Mulgrew, and Conlin & Kearns. Most of the drivers were friendly but occasionally a surly one cracked his whip at his horses, and sometimes at the would-be hitch-hiker.

A copy of the February, 1920, Dubuque High School literary magazine — *The Echo* — was re-recently unearthed by Representative Duffy. It contained a description of an old-fashioned sleigh ride recorded by the Athletic Editor — now the editor of THE PALIMPSEST. It appears the foot-ball team had invited the cheer leaders and other loyal girls to go on a bobsled ride to the home of Roy Bartels, a guard on the 1919 football team, who lived in Center Grove. Coach Blaney Mat-thews was invited to make the trip.

It was a jovial crowd indeed that met on Eighth and Locust for the purpose of having a good time. When the bob came there was a center rush for places and the result was that before things finally quieted down most of the fellows were sorry they had not brought their headgears and shoulder pads along. Our destination was the home of our old friend, "Country Cousin." We arrived at Cen-ter Grove and prepared for the evening's festivities. Blaney made the first number on the program a hot one for the football men. Considering that we had been knocked around enough for one season, we were entirely unprepared for our part. The villain gently coaxed us to get under a sheet with him and soothingly told us that one of the girls, who were standing near us, would tap us gen-

tly with an iron rod. It would then be our duty to catch the young vixen.

It hurt, verily, it did, since Blaney himself applied the scourge four times before he allowed us to go and hide our heads in shame. It is inconceivable to think the aforesaid Mr. Matthews would be guilty of such violence. The remainder of the evening was spent in dancing and other sports. At an early hour (?), a delightful luncheon was served by the mother and sisters of our host.

The journey back to the city was then begun and the metropolis of Center Grove and the suburban West Dubuque were awakened by our merry shouts and jovial singing.

On March 6, 1860, the editor of the *Vinton Eagle* recorded with a chuckle the experiences of a Milwaukee editor on skates.

Last night, about gas light time, after reading a glowing description of life on skates, we prepared for our first attempt, and sallied forth to join the merry crowd. We had on a pair of stoga boots, trousers' legs tucked inside, a Robert tailed coat and white hat. We went down on the ice, and gave a boy two shillings in good coin of the realm, for the use of his implements. . . .

Encouraged at the sight of some ladies on the bridge looking at the skaters, we struck out. A slant to the right with the right foot — a slant to the left with the left foot — and just then we saw something on the ice, and stooped over to pick up! On our feet again — two slants to the right and one to the left, accompanied with loss of confidence. Another stride with the right foot, and we sat down with fearful rapidity, with very little if any elegance! What a set down it was, for we made a dent in

the ice not unlike a Connecticut butter bowl! Just then one of the ladies remarked — "Oh, look Mary, that feller with the white hat ain't got his skates on the right place!" Ditto, thought we. Just then a ragged little devil sung out as he passed us — *"Hello, old timber legs!"* and we rose suddenly and put after him. Three slides to the right — two to the left, and away went our legs — one to the east, and the other to the west, causing an immense fissure in our pants, and another picture of a butter tray in the cold — *oh! how cold — ice*! . . . Once more we tried skating — made for the shore — sat down and counted damages.

Two shillings in cash thrown away. Seven latteral and one "fronteral" bumps on the ice. One immense fissure in as handsome a pair of ten dollar cassimers as a man ever put his legs in. One rupture on the knee extending to the bone. Four buttons from our vest, a "fragmented" watch crystal, and a back ache big enough to divide amongst the children of Israel. . . . We have got through skating. It's a humbug. It's a vexation of spirit, of business, of flesh, and a tearer of trowsers. It's a head-bumping, back-aching, leg wearing institution, and we warn people against skating. We tried it, and shan't be able to walk for a month. . . .

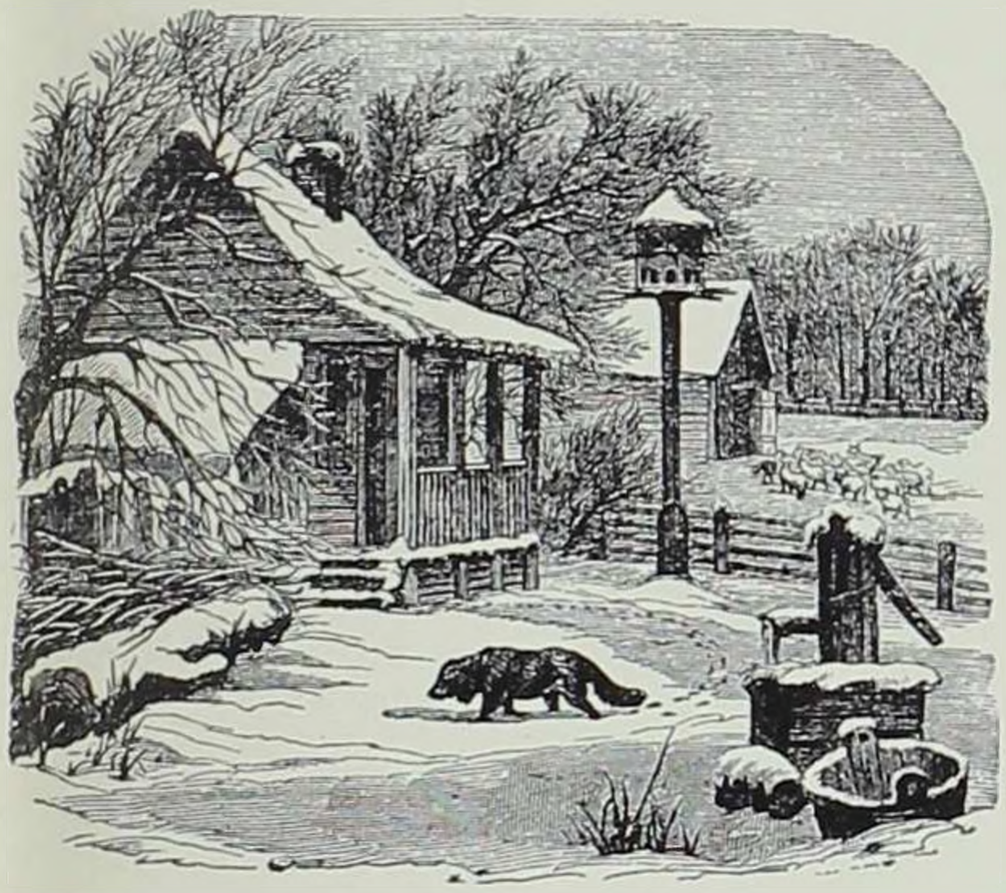
From brief experiences on Lake Peosta, Hooper's Cut, the Boat Harbor, and Eagle Point the writer solemnly subscribes his "Amen" to the Milwaukee editor's remarks.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

TABLE II—COMPARATIVE DATA FOR THE STATE—ANNUAL

Year	Temperature					Precipitation in Inches			
	Average Annual	Highest	Date	Lowest	Date	Average Annual	Greatest annual	Least annual	Average snowfall
1873	46.1	102	August 31.....	—38	.....	33.92	41.04	23.34	.....
1874	47.7	101	July 5.....	—24	January 24.....	30.76	39.76	25.43	.....
1875	43.3	97	July 16.....	—31	January 14.....	35.83	48.42	28.55	.....
1876	45.9	96	August 24.....	—28	December 9.....	36.65	53.57	19.92	.....
1877	48.4	100	.....	—31	January 8.....	35.16	49.82	22.52	.....
1878	50.0	104	.....	—13	January 6.....	34.53	42.08	20.92	.....
1879	48.0	102	.....	—35	December 25.....	28.23	46.71	16.49	.....
1880	47.9	104	.....	—25	December 27.....	30.95	51.10	14.90	.....
1881	47.5	104	.....	—40	January 9.....	44.16	56.81	34.02	.....
1882	48.4	98	.....	—23	December 7.....	33.40	50.30	17.71	.....
1883	44.8	100	.....	—38	.....	34.54	46.15	18.00	.....
1884	46.0	96	.....	—38	January 5.....	35.59	46.60	23.35	.....
1885	44.7	102	July 30.....	—42	January 28.....	32.23	44.89	17.01	.....
1886	46.4	103	July 13.....	—34	February 4.....	24.71	35.48	15.55	.....
1887	46.6	105	July 29.....	—34	January 7.....	26.31	38.61	12.30	.....
1888	45.3	110	August 2.....	—43	January 15.....	31.44	41.17	20.60	.....
1889	48.0	104	August 30.....	—28	February 23.....	24.95	37.61	13.66	.....
1890	47.5	110	July 13†.....	—27	January 22.....	29.48	45.45	16.54	.....
1891	47.3	106	August 9.....	—31	February 4.....	32.90	49.05	23.48	.....
1892	46.6	104	July 11.....	—38	January 19.....	36.53	48.77	24.78	34.2
1893	45.7	102	July 13†.....	—36	January 14.....	27.59	33.27	19.19	37.2
1894	49.7	109	July 26.....	—37	January 25.....	21.94	29.81	15.65	19.2
1895	47.2	104	May 28.....	—33	February 1.....	26.77	35.25	18.57	26.0
1896	48.6	104	July 3.....	—20	January 4.....	37.23	51.60	28.68	22.6
1897	47.8	106	July 23†.....	—30	January 25.....	26.98	36.18	20.21	38.8
1898	47.7	103	August 20.....	—25	December 31.....	31.34	55.47	19.51	40.3
1899	47.3	104	Sept. 6.....	—40	February 11.....	28.68	42.06	21.79	23.4
1900	49.3	103	August 3.....	—27	February 15.....	35.05	47.33	25.05	25.8
1901	49.0	113	July 22.....	—31	December 15.....	24.41	37.69	16.35	38.5
1902	47.7	98	July 30.....	—31	January 27.....	43.82	58.80	20.14	28.0
1903	47.2	101	August 24.....	—27	December 13.....	35.39	50.53	26.41	19.4
1904	46.3	100	July 17.....	—32	January 27.....	28.51	38.93	19.34	29.2
1905	47.2	104	August 11.....	—41	February 2†.....	36.56	52.26	24.66	38.3
1906	48.4	102	July 21.....	—32	February 10.....	31.60	44.34	20.63	32.8
1907	47.4	102	July 5.....	—31	February 5.....	31.61	43.90	19.93	24.0
1908	49.4	101	August 3.....	—18	January 29.....	35.09	49.98	24.11	22.7
1909	47.4	103	August 15†.....	—26	February 15†....	40.01	53.48	37.20	49.0
1910	48.6	108	July 16.....	—35	January 7.....	19.89	27.99	12.11	23.4
1911	49.5	111	July 3†.....	—35	January 3.....	31.37	46.77	19.74	35.3
1912	46.3	104	Sept. 8.....	—47	January 12.....	28.65	33.13	15.25	38.0
1913	49.7	108	July 16†.....	—25	January 8.....	29.95	45.18	20.31	25.4
1914	49.1	109	July 12.....	—31	December 26.....	31.93	44.11	23.30	27.5
1915	47.8	99	May 14.....	—32	January 28.....	39.53	51.15	27.29	31.3
1916	47.2	106	August 4.....	—34	January 13.....	28.90	46.34	22.48	29.5
1917	44.8	106	July 30.....	—40	December 29.....	27.81	36.00	20.78	31.6
1918	49.2	113	August 4.....	—36	February 4.....	32.78	47.53	25.03	33.6
1919	48.6	104	July 30†.....	—36	December 10.....	36.76	48.16	26.88	26.6
1920	48.2	102	July 23.....	—26	January 4†.....	31.75	44.00	20.95	21.7
1921	52.2	104	July 11†.....	—22	December 25.....	32.03	46.47	20.44	20.7
1922	50.2	104	June 23.....	—29	January 6.....	29.98	44.20	19.08	13.5
1923	49.0	102	July 22†.....	—23	February 3†.....	29.50	37.47	21.36	36.3
1924	46.4	100	August 21†.....	—36	January 5.....	31.39	43.85	19.41	37.2
1925	48.8	105	July 1†.....	—25	December 29.....	28.24	45.53	13.77	29.2
1926	48.3	109	July 19†.....	—22	January 28.....	33.07	48.36	22.35	27.8
1927	48.8	102	July 11.....	—27	January 15.....	29.35	47.54	18.75	17.9
1928	49.4	100	August 1.....	—20	January 2.....	35.96	47.81	24.67	22.5
1929	46.4	102	August 22.....	—35	February 20.....	30.20	44.24	20.57	41.8
1930	50.2	113	August 3†.....	—37	January 22.....	26.10	35.65	16.15	23.6
1931	53.2	109	July 28.....	—15	January 21.....	35.37	49.23	18.20	23.7
1932	48.2	106	July 27.....	—27	December 16.....	32.28	48.17	22.67	38.5
1933	50.8	109	June 10.....	—31	February 8.....	24.94	35.79	17.28	18.4
1934	51.5	118	July 20.....	—25	February 27.....	26.85	37.47	16.77	27.2
1935	48.6	107	July 28.....	—30	January 23.....	33.16	52.73	20.79	24.0
1936	48.6	117	July 25.....	—35	February 16.....	26.00	33.97	13.83	48.9
1937	47.5	108	June 24†.....	—30	January 10†.....	27.60	36.13	17.86	35.8
1938	51.2	107	July 11	—25	January 10.....	36.29	47.63	25.69	24.9
1939	51.1	113	July 12.....	—23	February 11	25.16	35.92	14.56	34.1
1940	47.9	110	July 25.....	—32	December 3	30.66	43.38	20.78	46.4
1941	51.1	106	July 24†.....	—18	February 19.....	36.84	49.61	24.00	31.9
1942	48.9	105	July 17.....	—36	January 4.....	32.63	46.16	19.28	22.3
1943	47.9	101	June 27†.....	—31	January 19.....	31.20	46.45	16.40	26.1
1944	49.3	102	Aug. 10†.....	—30	February 12.....	37.26	49.77	26.67	32.9
1945	47.7	102	July 24†.....	—26	February 10.....	34.60	42.13	24.97	39.8
1946	50.7	108	June 16.....	—27	December 31.....	35.15	46.67	25.72	17.9
Period	48.1	118	July 20, 1934.....	—47	January 12, 1912.	31.70	58.80	12.11	30.0

†And other dates.



LESSON LXXII.

WINTER.

1. It snows. The large, soft flakes fall, one by one, through the still air, and lose themselves in the dry grass, or melt in the path and on the door-stone. Soon the snow becomes fine and falls thick and fast.

2. Hour after hour passes, and the grass in the meadow is hid. The doorstep is covered with a soft mat of white. The brown roof of the barn is concealed. The dry and leafless boughs of the garden trees bend under the weight of the winter snow.

3. The horses are in the warm stable. Men are milking the cows under the sheds. The sheep in the pasture are moving toward the barn, and the lambs gambol after them. The old house-dog marches slowly through the strange covering of earth. He shakes the flakes of snow from his long ears, and seeks his dry bed in the kennel.

4. In a few days the cold weather sets in. The air is keen and frosty. The white breath of winter is on the window-panes. The sharp north wind bites your ears, your nose, and your fingers, and almost chills your blood. The water in the brooks is frozen hard, and the ponds and rivers are covered with thick ice.

5. In pleasant weather, you loved to wander in the fields and the woods, and were tempted to play the truant; but now, you are glad to go to school. As you hear the fierce winds blow, and, looking out of the window, see the snow fly the thoughts of the cold almost make your teeth chatter. You lean cheerfully over your book and learn your task.

6. When Saturday comes, if you have been good, and learned your lessons well, your parents will allow you to coast with your playmates. You draw your sleds up to the top of a high hill, in the field, and then start them, all at once, to see which will go furthest and be down first. Your sled goes so fast over the hard and smooth snow, that it almost takes away your breath.

7. You sometimes go to the river or pond to see the large boys skate. How smooth and bright the ice is! How fast they go on their skates! Some boys skate backward, some slide a great distance on one skate, and others cut letters and figures on the ice.

8. You and your little sister ride to town with your parents, in the sleigh. The sleigh slips so smoothly over the snow that it makes no noise. The bells tinkle merrily, and you are so very happy, that you don't once think of the cold air.

9. On a winter's night, you like to sit up and hear pleasant stories. Sometimes you read a fine book, or study the lessons your teacher gave to you. Then you have nice apples and nuts to eat. You throw the shells of the nuts into the fire, and as you sit watching the strange shapes they make on the bright coals, you fall asleep in your chair.

Parker & Watson, *The National Second Reader* (A. S. Barnes & Co., N. Y., 1875), pp. 218-221.

WINTER SPORTS