The PALIMPSEST

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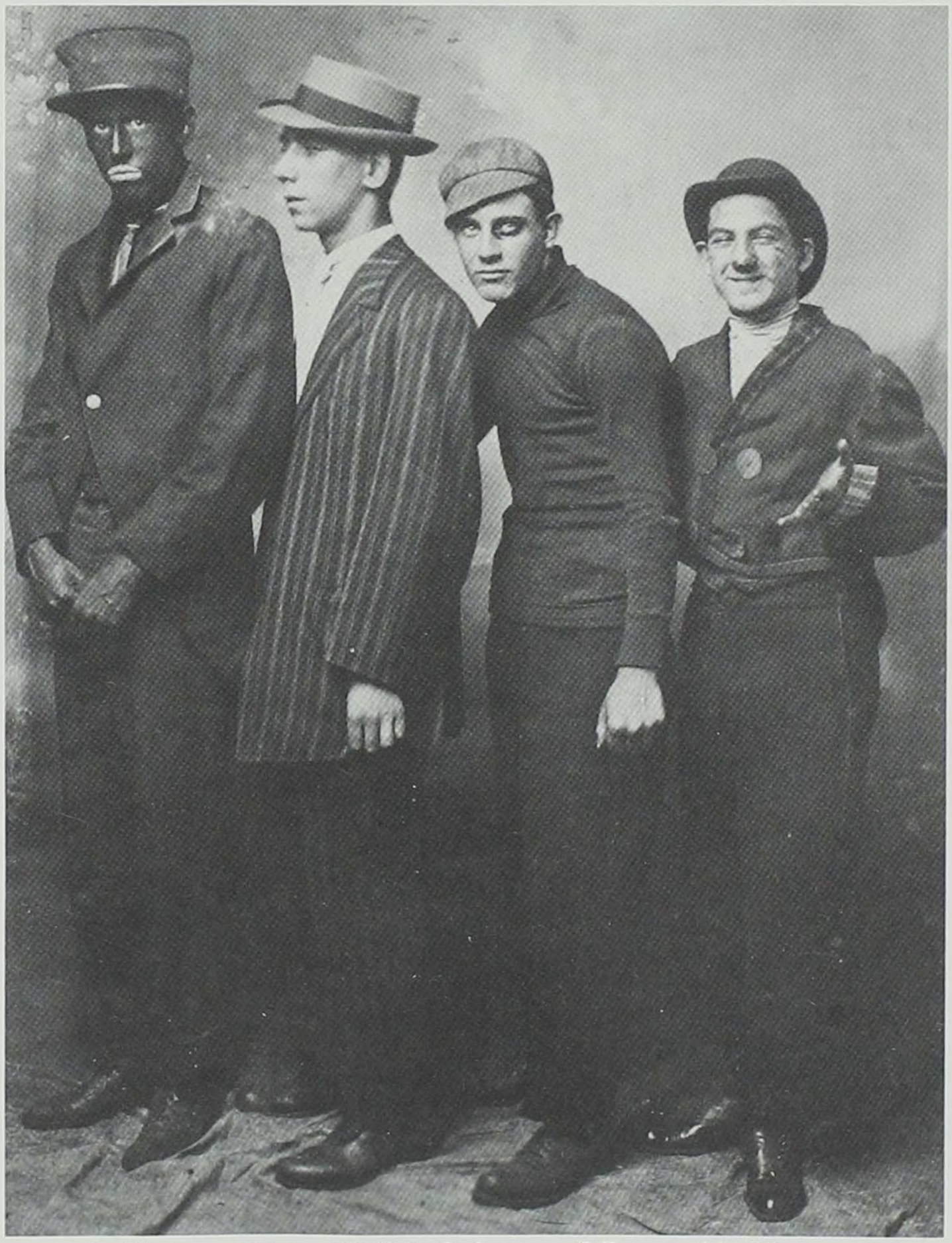
Inside —



A vaudeville team (circa 1910) includes one fellow in blackface and stereotypically compliant pose. In this *Palimpsest*, author William Hewitt examines how the use of blackface in turn-of-the-century entertainment dictated racial stereotypes.

The Meaning of the Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest (*pal'/imp/sest*) 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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COVER: Six-year-old Frances Edith Babcock poses in patriotic garb amidst rockets scattered at her feet. (Circa 1908. From the Stokes Collection, SHSI.) Look inside for more images of how Americans have celebrated the Fourth of July.

The

PALIMPSEST

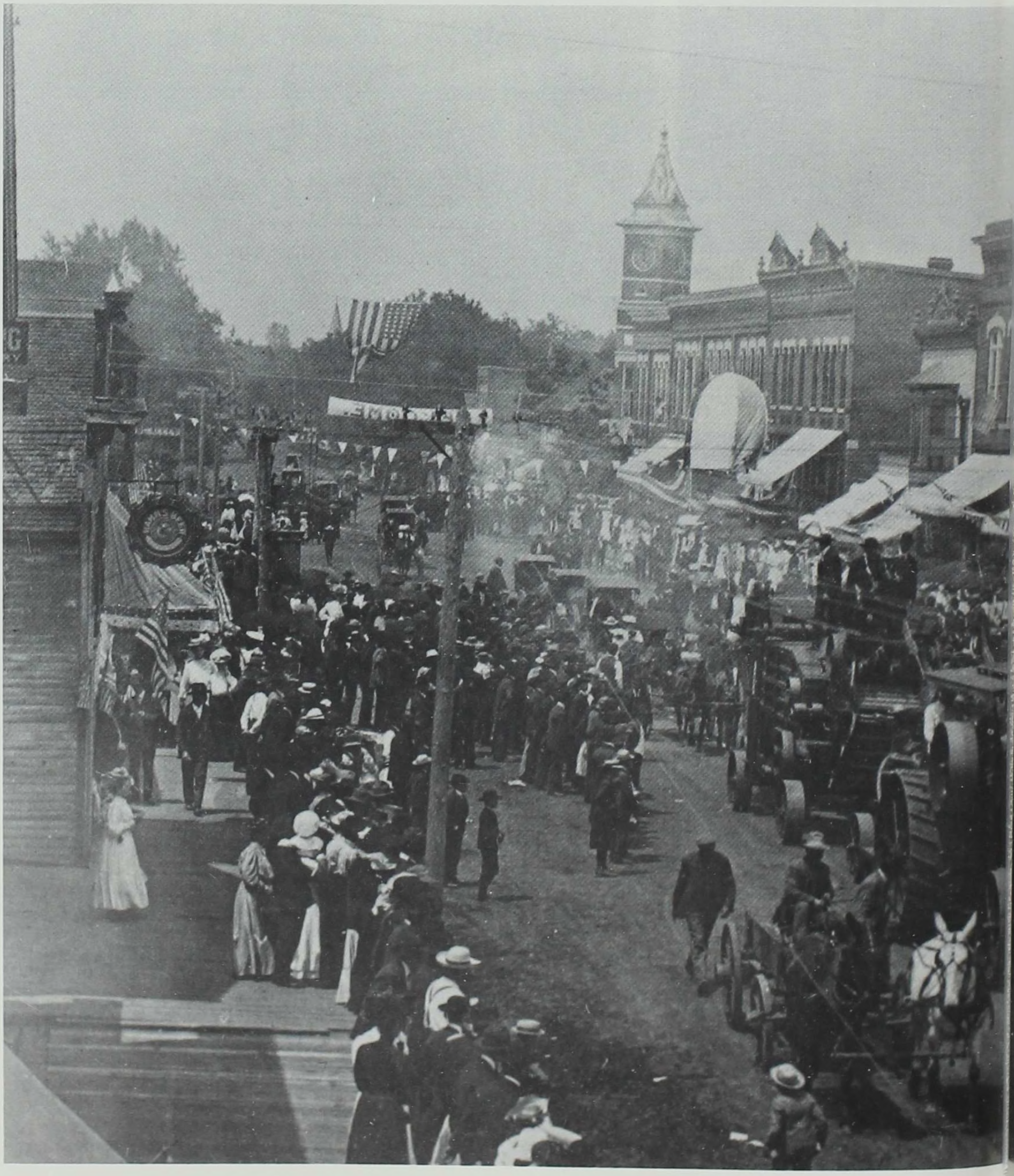
IOWA'S POPULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE

Ginalie Swaim, Editor

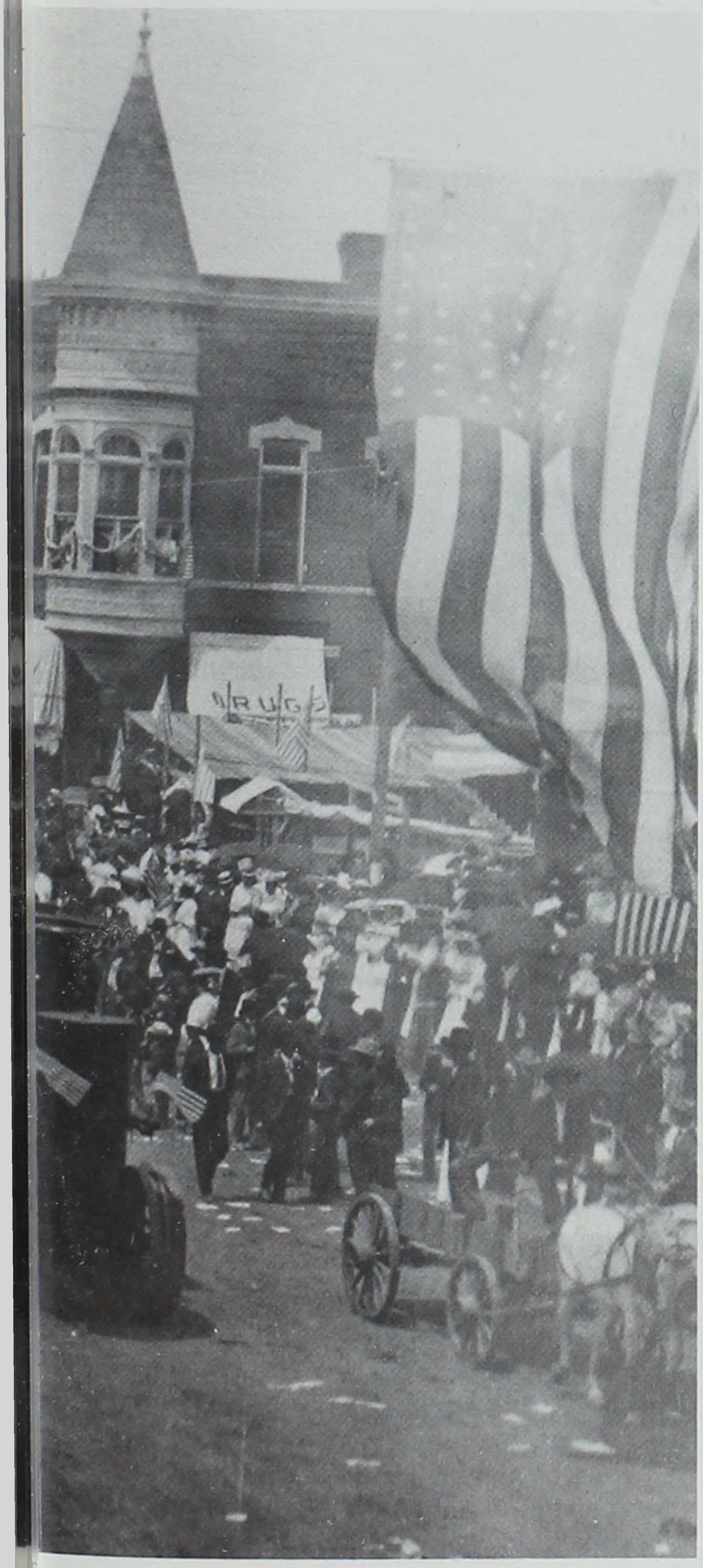
VOLUME 71, NUMBER 2 SUMMER 1990

In This *Palimpsest* —

Threshing equipment joins a Fourth of July parade in Sumner, Iowa, 1906.



Celebrations & Stereotypes



SUMMERS in rural and small-town Iowa were once climaxed by two events — threshing and the Fourth of July. Through words and images, this *Palimpsest* marks those two summertime rituals — one of work and one of play.

In both events, pride apparently motivated certain individuals to pull out their cameras and record these celebrations of harvest and independence. Consequently, the archives of the State Historical Society are blessed with rich photo collections pertaining to the Fourth of July and neighborhood threshing, and we present a sampling of these photos. This issue also includes personal essays on farm work and Part 2 in our series on interpreting and caring for historical photographs.

We also present in this issue a more sobering look at our past. Author William Hewitt explores racial stereotypes at the turn of the century. He focuses on popular entertainment in Sioux City as a way of revealing midwestern attitudes about race. What is revealed are not causes for celebration or pride — but causes for reflection.

— The Editor

Threshing with Steam

As I Remember It

by Charles P. Bennett

IT ALL BEGAN each year about the first week of July when I heard my father tell my mother that he supposed he had better get the threshing coal. He hitched the team to the old wagon — the one with the loose tires and the leaky box — and went to the elevator or the lumberyard in Tingley, Iowa (depending on which one had a car of coal on track). If farmers were hard up they bought Centerville coal and if they had money and wanted to make the operator of the threshing outfit happy, they purchased Illinois coal because it burned better and with fewer clinkers. We usually bought Centerville coal.

When my father arrived home he hauled the load of coal near where he planned to thresh the timothy. Meanwhile we continued "laying by" the corn (cultivating it for the third time) while watching as our field of timothy seed ripened.

Oats were the first crop threshed, so if farmers in the neighborhood had oats ready, we would help them thresh while finishing cultivating our corn and binding and shocking our timothy. There were about thirty-five farms on the threshing run, so it was a busy and worrisome time in the neighborhood, trying to get all the corn cultivated and everyone's oats and timothy threshed.

We threshed with several different outfits through the years from 1910 to 1920 but I especially remember the outfit we used around 1916, when I was ten. The owner of this particular outfit was a slender, wiry, dark-complected man named Billy McDowell. He ran the engine. The separator man was our neighbor Poe Johnston. They made a good team. Billy McDowell could get mad when things went wrong, but Poe was always good-natured and never became excited. The third member of the threshing crew was the water hauler, sometimes referred to as the "water monkey." In this case the water monkey was the engineer's son, Clyde McDowell.

When the big day arrived and the outfit pulled onto our farm in Ringgold County, my father indicated where the machine was to be set. As separator man, Poe Johnston tossed some chaff in the air and watched it drift away. This helped him decide what direction the wind was coming from and where to set the machine in order that the dust and dirt would be blown away from those working around the machine. As engineer, Billy McDowell circled the outfit around until the separator was in the right position. Then the separator man started digging holes for the wheels to drop into. The test of a good separator man was his ability to dig these holes accurately so that the machine would be level without a second try. Any separator man worth his salt would claim perfection in this, but I well remember seeing Poe Johnston digging superstitiously under one wheel when the chaffers failed to clear properly.

Next the engine was uncoupled. With the help of the water monkey, McDowell made a half circle that turned the engine around and lined it up with the belt pulley of the separator. Now here was the test of the engineer. A good engineer never had to make a second attempt at lining up. Of course, both pulleys were crowned and the belts would run okay even if the pulleys were out of line a few inches, but at ten years old I didn't really know that.

In the meantime the separator man had raised the blower up and turned it around, unfolded the feeder, and was unreeling the drive belt. With the engineer up on the engine drive wheel, together they wrestled the heavy belt onto the giant drive pulley. With the separator man holding the belt, often 75 to 125 feet long, the engineer placed the engine gently in

A threshing ring at the J. F. Duncan farm, Oakville, Iowa, around 1910.

reverse. The belt flapped and flopped like a living thing as it was tightened. Then the water monkey threw wooden blocks in front of the drive wheels of the engine.

Grain haulers started backing wagon boxes up to the grain spout, and bundle wagons were maneuvered up to the feeder. The water monkey hauled the water wagon up to the left side of the engine, then hitched his team to the load of coal and pulled it up to the other side.

Meanwhile the separator man was busy turning down grease cups (the old-time version of grease guns) and oiling and adjusting the machine. Then he stood up and nodded to the engineer. The engineer opened the throttle. The wheels began to turn, slowly perhaps for thirty seconds while the separator man checked to see that everything was working properly. Once the engineer opened up the throttle to normal operating speed, we were ready to thresh.

THERE WAS SOMETHING fascinating about the steam engine. The combined odor of coal, water, steam, heat, and oil produced a fragrance hard to forget. The engine seemed to be alive and breathing. The racheting of the oiler, the governor with its tiny belt, and the push and pull of the cylinder built a beautiful picture in the memory. Its power was quiet and uniform.

Some farmers stacked the straw, some didn't. Before 1910 thresher separators had been equipped with traveling carriers that gently lifted the straw into the stack. The work was hard and a little dirty. After 1910 the blower came into vogue, and straw stacking became a very hard, disagreeable, and dirty job. Timothy and oat straw were important parts of the diet of the beef cattle herd of that day, and the farmer wanted the straw preserved in the best possible way. But many farmers were unable or unwilling to pay the price, in sweat and dust and dirt, so more and more the straw was blown into a pile.

The threshing separators of that day were huge machines. They seemed almost unlimited in capacity and were noisy and dirty. We were supposed to feed the bundles in the machine head first, but the feeder was so big no one paid much attention unless the dividing board was in.

The engine whistle was an important part of the outfit. Each outfit had a set of signals. One

signal might say, "Wake up, separator man. Something is going wrong." Another signal would say, "Hurry up, grain haulers." Still another one would warn, "Hurry up, bundle haulers." And then there was the blast that told the water monkey that he must get water to the engine as soon as possible.

The water monkey worked under pressure because the engine could not be allowed to run dry. Sometimes he had to go several miles after water. Most water monkeys spent considerable time trying to "con" someone into going with them to fetch water. Few people went along more than once because hauling water was difficult work. The tank held about ten barrels of water and sat on top of a heavy-duty set of running gears. On top of the tank was a double-action pump. The water monkey ran twenty feet of suction hose into a well, then filled the tank pumping with the long wooden handle of the double-action pump. It was customary to make fun of the water monkey because he could take a nap and loaf a little after he had brought the engine its vital water supply, but in truth he was one of the hardest working members of the crew.

THE THRESHERS' DINNER required hours of hard work and planning. The crew might include as many as thirty people and two or more tables to seat them. My mother usually worked with her sister and my grandmother or some neighbor lady. There was friendly competition among the women of the community to see who could serve the best meal. The food could be, and usually was, out of this world, both in quality and quantity.

Cleaning up for dinner involved washing in cold water out in the yard and drying face and hands on a towel that soon revealed that those who had washed before had not done a very good job of it. The men also combed their hair in front of an old mirror hanging from a tree. The men operating the machine always ate at the first table. There was a lot of fun while eating, but as a ten-year-old boy I did not get to share in it because I had to wait and eat at the third table with the women. I always wondered if there would be any food left for me.

Under the influence of so much good food the crew was often slow getting back to work. In that case the engineer would give the engine whistle a couple of toots as if to say, "Get on the ball, we're ready to start."

Threshers wash up for another legendary threshing dinner at the August Stille farm, near Nashua.

ONE YEAR our timothy was the last crop threshed in the neighborhood, so the run finished on our farm. It was nearly dark that September day when the bundle haulers cleaned up around the machine and went home. Our wagons were piled high with the white sacks of timothy seed. Poe Johnston said to me, "Sonny, run to the house and see if your mother will let me have her broom." Flushed with importance, I raced to the house, got the broom, and was back in a jiffy. The powerful machine was silent. Poe carefully swept every bit of chaff and dirt off the machine. Then he started up the separator and blew out all the dirt that had fallen out of the cylinder. He turned it off, folded up the blower and feeder, coupled the engine onto the separator, and pulled it away from the stack.

The engineer looked at Poe, happy that the run was over. Poe grinned and nodded back at McDowell, who reached for the leather thong that controlled the whistle.

I knew what was coming — the finishing whistle, a long, long, long blast that told the world the run was over. I was determined not to be a sissy and hold my hands over my ears as girls nearly always did.

The engineer pulled the whistle valve open. A wail like a thousand banshees broke over our valley. On and on it went. My ears began to throb and then ache. I decided it wasn't such a bad idea to be a sissy after all and covered my ears with my hands.

Still the mighty whistle roared on. The sound must have gone west across Walnut Creek Valley past Wishard Chapel to Crooked Creek and beyond. To the east it echoed and re-echoed across Gooseberry Creek and East Grand River Valley over to and beyond Old High Point Church. And the men and women and children of the neighborhood listened and looked at each other and said, "It sounds like Billy McDowell has finished his run." □

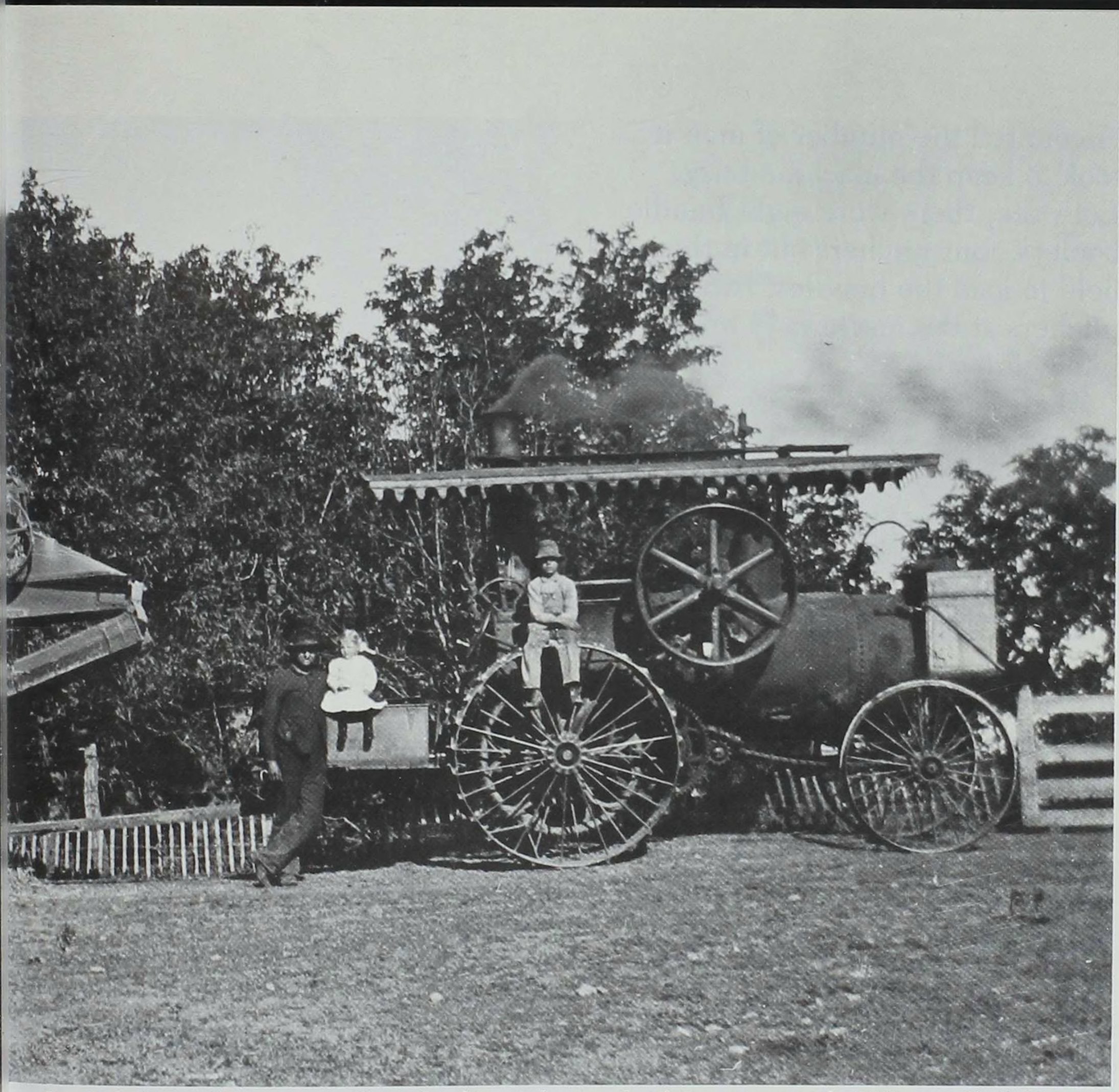
Threshing Day

BY THE TIME I was born into a farming neighborhood in Blue Grass Township, Scott County, Iowa, we no longer threshed. But I remember my mother reminiscing about threshing, about the excitement and urgency.

Now, as an editor who has leafed through files of images, I can attest that threshing was certainly one of the most photographed events of farm life — and I wonder what I missed. The imposing machinery, the proud casts of characters, the grandeur of the setting all lent threshing the quality of a well-staged drama. The pace must have been fast and steady — working against the elements, to the rhythm of machines, amidst the humor of good neighbors.

The following images and words reveal the powerful place that threshing holds in the collective memory of rural Iowans.

— *The Editor*



Otto Nolte (center) balances proudly on threshing rig he owned with Ross Harris in the 1920s near Sheffield.

"It was all poetry for us
and we wished every day
were threshing day."

Hamlin Garland
A Son of the Middle Border

"I counted the number of men it took to keep the machine busy. Let's see, there were eight bundle haulers, four pitchers out in the field to load the bundles, two spike pitchers at the machine to help pitch off loads. . . .

Then there were two grain haulers with wagons, two men to help shovel off the grain at the granary, one or two men inside to pile the oats back, a couple of men stacking straw (and what a dirty job that was, behind the blower), and the engineer, separator man, and water boy. Twenty-six to twenty-eight men, all hungry, hot, and sweaty."

James Hearst, *Time Like a Furrow*

"Pitching the bundles, guiding the blower, stacking the straw, and removing the threshed grain was accomplished in a working rhythm. In retrospect one is conscious of the underlying harmony of cooperation."

Gladys S. Benz, "Furrows of Time"

Above: Eighteen threshers near Anamosa, about 1920.
Below: Threshing crew, August 1924.

ORIGINAL OWNED BY MIDWEST OLD THRESHERS

GABELMANN COLLECTION

ORIGINAL OWNED BY MIDWEST OLD THRESHERS

KOCK COLLECTION, SHSI

Top: Hayracks lined up, late 1800s
Bottom: Threshing at the Axel Hammerstead farm with the Transcontinental Threshing Company, 1915.
Right: Smoke fills the sky around the Transcontinental Threshing Company, circa 1919.

"It was exciting to have the threshing still in progress when Edna and I came home from school, or on a Saturday when we could watch the work all day."

Gladys Benz, "Furrows of Time"

"The interesting thing is how we all roughly estimated how much help we owed each other. A man with twenty acres of oats to thresh shouldn't send as much help as a man with eighty acres. It all worked itself out, and no one felt cheated."

James Hearst, *Time Like a Furrow*

"All through the autumn months, the ceaseless ringing hum and the *bow-ouw, ouw-woo, boo-oo-oom* of the great balance wheels on the separator and the deep bass purr of its cylinder could be heard in every valley like the droning song of some sullen and gigantic autumnal insect."

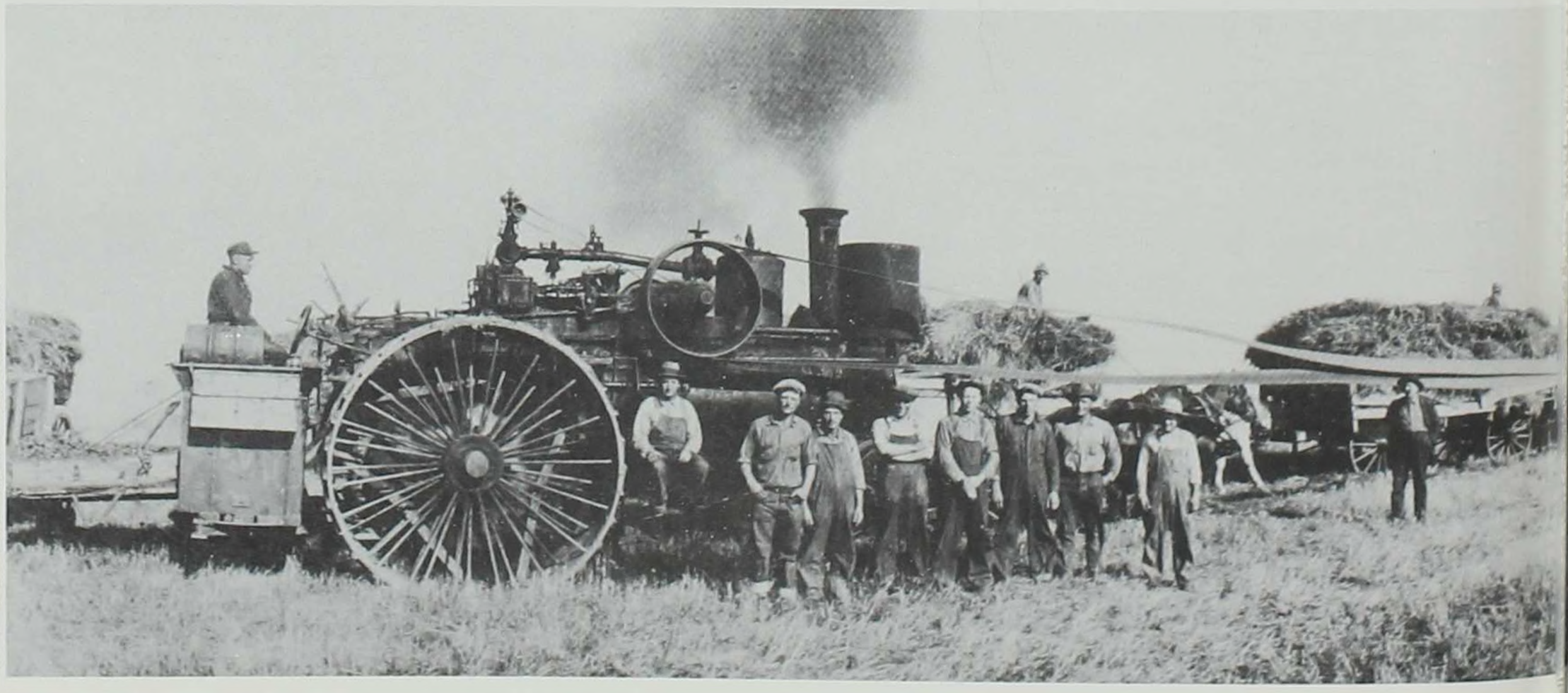
Hamlin Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border*

KOCK COLLECTION, SHSI

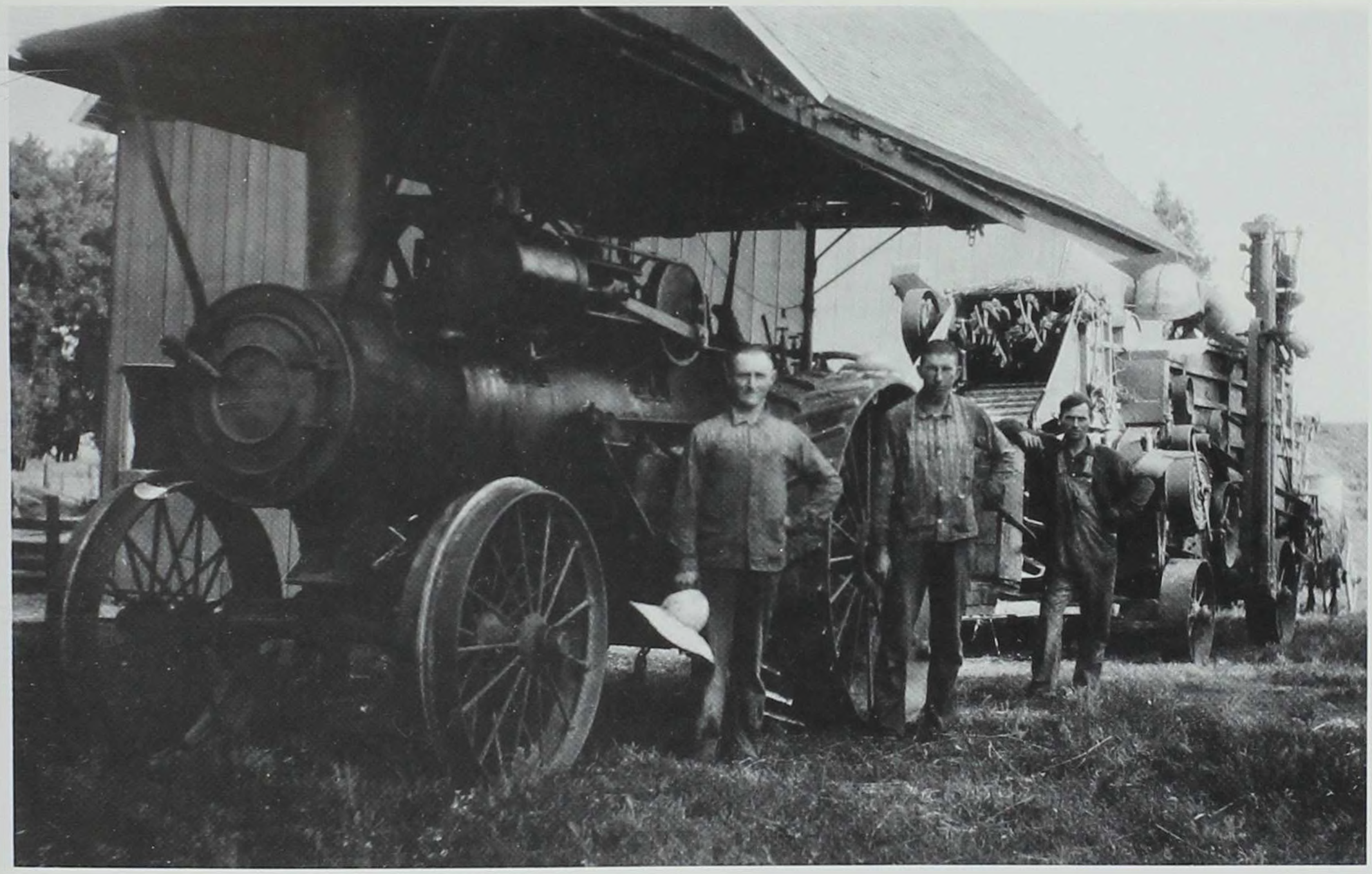
KOCK COLLECTION, SHSI

"The full blast from the blower hit the stack builder full force each time the blower came by. . . . There was nothing to do but shut his eyes, turn his back, and have the full blast of oats straw, chaff, dust, and dirt blown into every crack and crevice of his clothes while he inhaled it with each breath. . . . Dad would cough and spit oats dust for days afterward and his eyes would be fiery red. Grant Wood never captured that part of threshing."

Carl Hamilton, *In No Time At All*



ORIGINAL OWNED BY MIDWEST OLD THRESHERS



FAWCETT COLLECTION, SHSI

"The machines we used could knock out four thousand bushels of oats a day. The big steam engine could pull the hind end off creation."

James Hearst, *Time Like a Furrow*

"We were awakened at dawn by the ringing beat of the iron mauls as Frank and David drove the stakes to hold the 'power' to the ground. The rattle of trace chains, the clash of iron rods, the clang of steel bars, intermixed with the laughter of the men, came sharply through the frosty air, and the smell of sizzling sausage from the kitchen warned us that our busy mother was hurrying the breakfast forward. . . . I had a sense of being awakened into a romantic new world, a world of heroic action."

Hamlin Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border*

Above: Threshers at George Hollingsworth farm, Sandyville, Iowa. Upper left: Stacking straw, Al Treliar (Trealiar?) farm, 1915 Left: Belts connecting the engine and separator were often a hundred feet or more. Date and location unknown.

GABELMANN COLLECTION

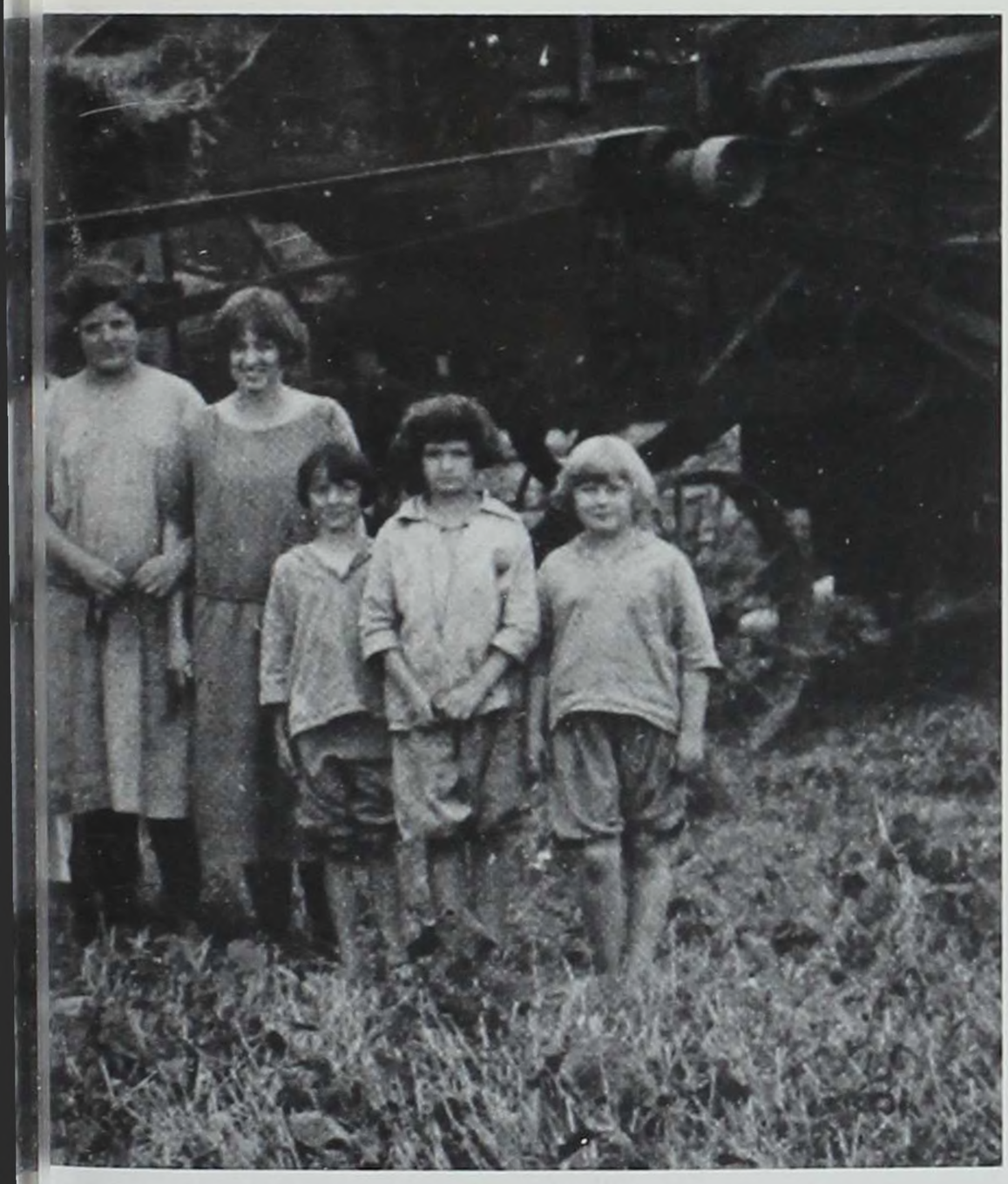
Clockwise, from upper left: Farm women and children, 1924; boy on bicycle (date & location unknown); Meservey farms, circa 1928; threshing rig on road near Wellman, 1912.

"Tuesday 28
[Sept 1869]
finish threshing, 128
bu. wheat & 180 of
oats. I bake every
thing, have 3 men to
breakfast, 14 to dinner
& 13 to supper & Mrs.
Snell, she stays all
night. Henry is better.
I am also tired"

Diary entry
Emily Hawley Gillespie
"A Secret to Be Burried"
Judy Nolte Lensink, ed.

"Many threshing rings are in operation. They average about five of them threshing and one moving on the road."

Years of Struggle: The Farm Diary of Elmer G. Powers, 1931–1936
H. Roger Grant and L. Edward Purcell, eds.



"There were some memorable times—the day I put a bouquet of nasturtiums on the table and the crew joker passed them around the table."

Mrs. Raymond Sayre
"Women's Role in Threshing"

"It wouldn't be a threshing job without a small boy or two around all the time."

Years of Struggle: The Farm Diary of Elmer G. Powers, 1931–1936
H. Roger Grant and
L. Edward Purcell, eds.

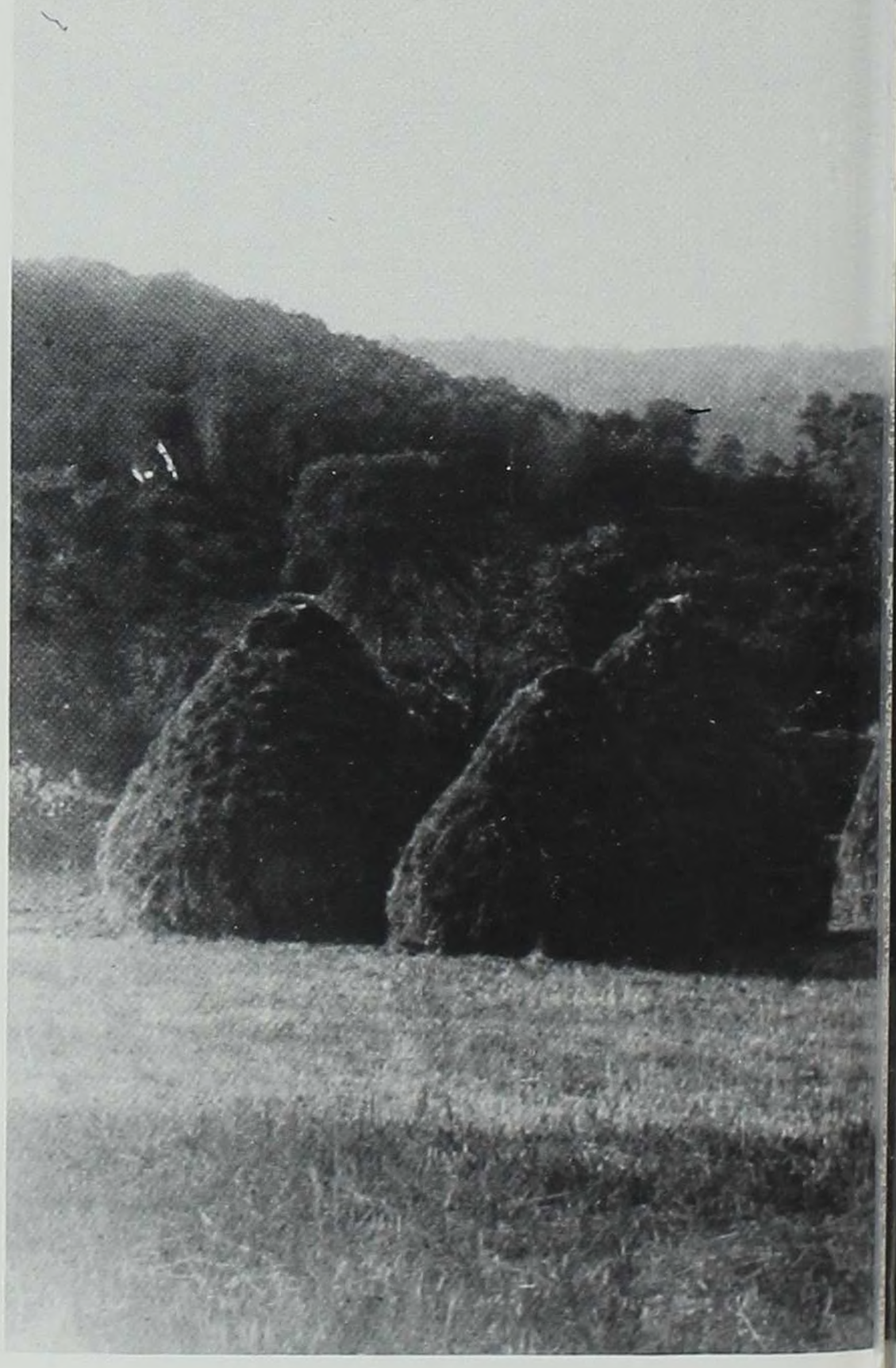
KOCK COLLECTION, SHSI

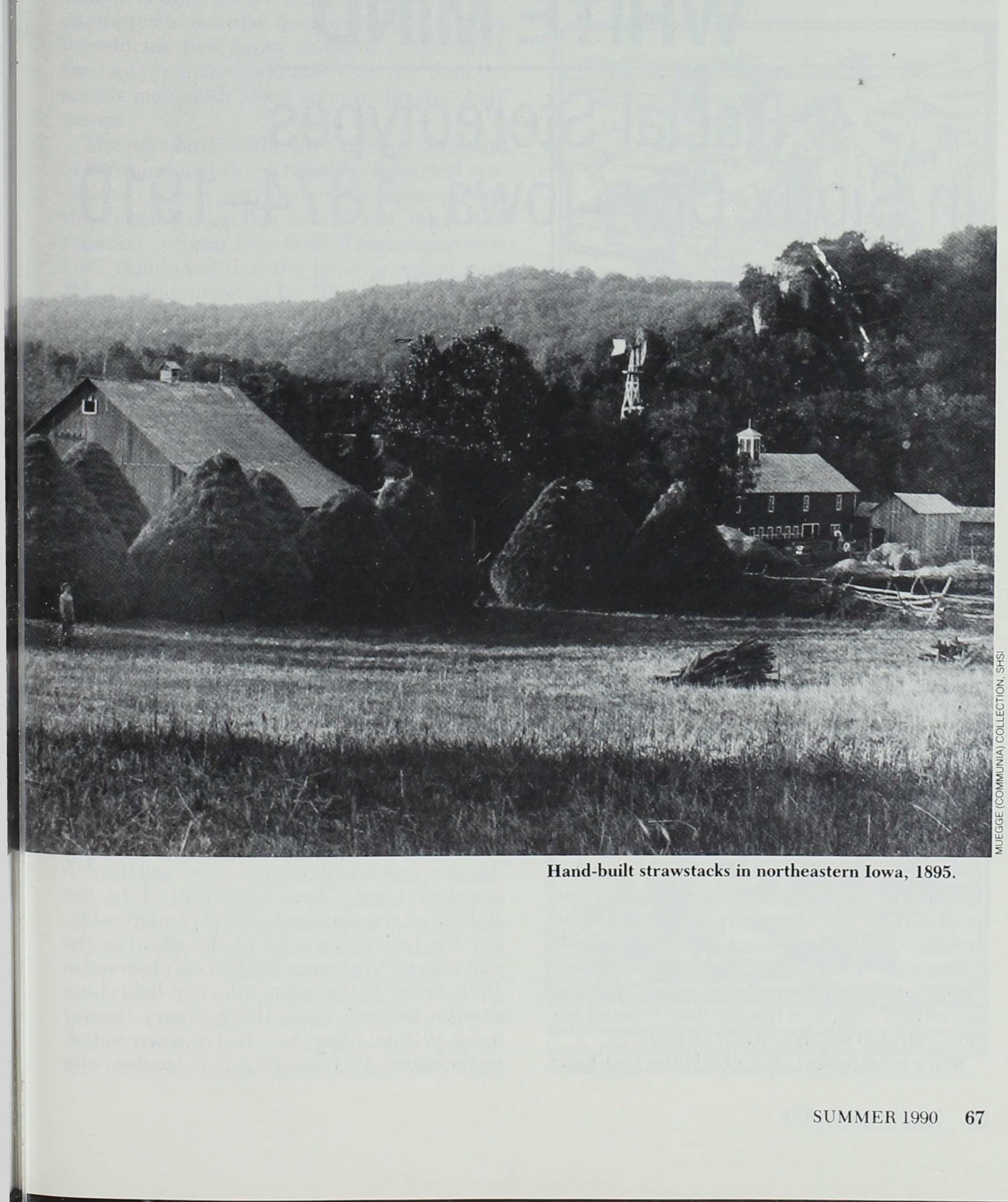
"Day after day, therefore, father or the hired man shouldered a fork, and went to help thresh."

Hamlin Garland, *A Son of the Middle Border*

"Within the shelter
of the towering stack
I lie in shadow, blinking at the
light . . .
. . . It is so sweet
To lie here, taskless, dumb and rapt
With wordless weight of reminiscent
scenes and sounds,
Weight of unremembered millions
of autumns."

Hamlin Garland
"In Stacking-Time"





MUEGGE (COMMUNIA) COLLECTION, SHSI

Hand-built strawstacks in northeastern Iowa, 1895.

BLACKFACE in the WHITE MIND

Racial Stereotypes in Sioux City, Iowa, 1874–1910

by William L. Hewitt

TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY Sioux Citians took pride in their city, situated on a bend of the Missouri River where Nebraska and South Dakota meet Iowa. They saw their community as a progressive one with few social problems. They considered themselves benevolent and paternalistic in their dealings with their own small population of blacks. Black-white relations certainly seemed amicable, since there had never been an incident of racial violence that anyone could recall. Nevertheless, upon examination, Sioux Citians — as consumers of the popular entertainment accessible to them — directed a surprising amount of ridicule toward their black population. Borrowing from plays, minstrel shows, best-selling novels, and movies, whites adopted racist stereotypes of blacks that ranged from the contented plantation worker to the vicious black "beast." These attitudes, probably representative of those of many turn-of-the-century white Americans, are revealed in the theater reviews, news reports, and editorial cartoons of Sioux City newspapers and provide chilling evidence of the racism in mainstream America a century ago. Although Sioux Citians increasingly accepted negative and critical images of blacks, they resisted the most extreme manifestations of racism.

Since most Sioux Citians had little first-hand understanding of blacks, they borrowed what understanding they did have from abstract portrayals of black personalities on the stage. The stereotypical image of blacks associated with the idyllic and carefree gang labor on antebellum plantations received constant reinforcement in Sioux City through such popular entertainment as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and minstrel shows. From 1870 to 1915, for example, Sioux Citians saw 237 productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and minstrel shows. These performances provided compelling images of blacks and of white relationships with blacks.

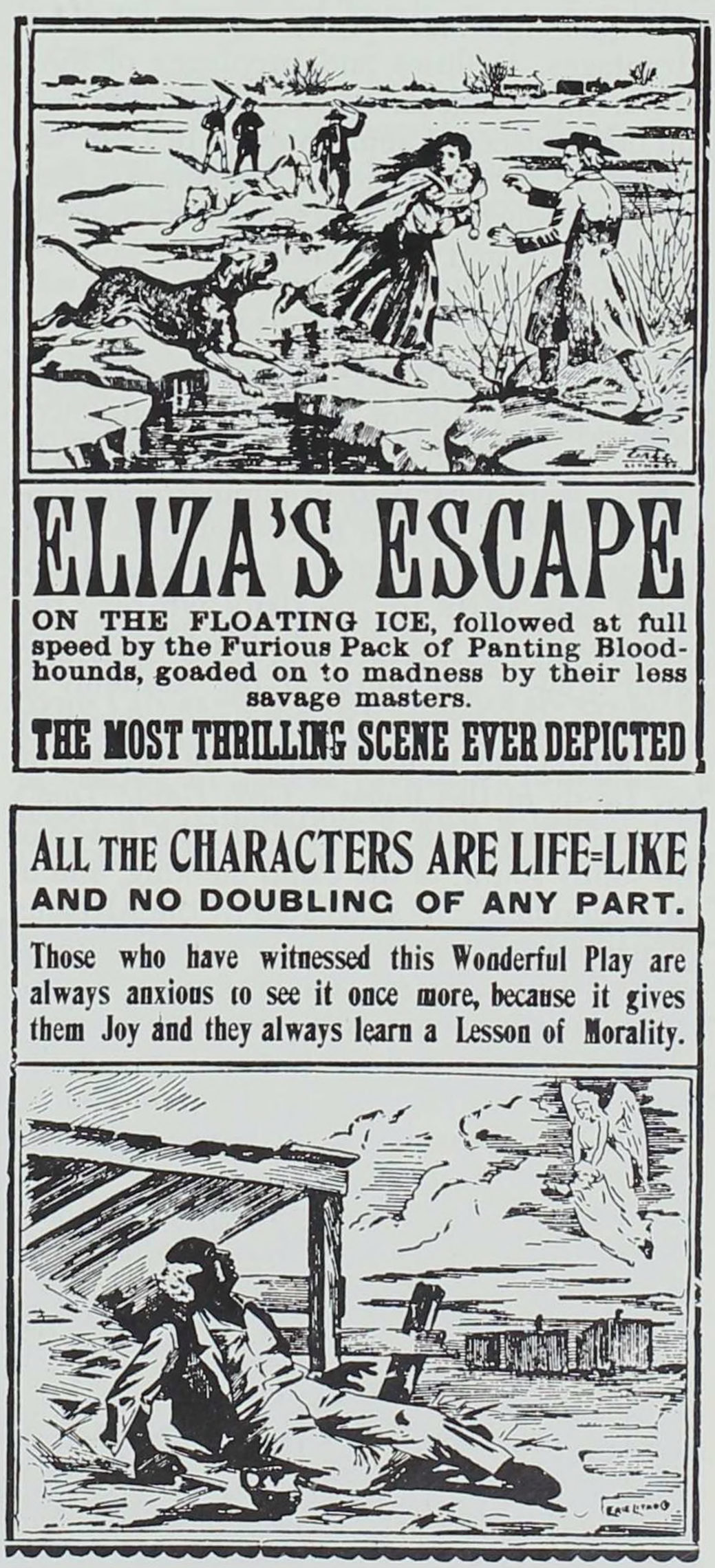
The popular novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, first published by author Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1852, provided a stock of memorable characterizations for stage productions. Characters such as the benevolent Kentucky plantation owner Mr. Selby; Eliza fleeing her pursuers over the ice; angelic little Eva; comical Topsy and Mark the Lawyer; and especially the drunken and brutal Simon Legree and the deferential Uncle Tom contributed to the audience's romanticized view of plantation life. Even a bad production of the play, as the reviewer for the *Sioux City Journal* observed in 1881, drew "to the front of the foot-lights hundreds who look upon the ordinary theater going as sinful pleasure." The reviewer noted, furthermore, that "everybody is familiar with

the book upon which the play is founded, and though Mother Stowe might be excused for holding up her hands in holy horror at the liberties taken with her characters, there is an interest bordering on the morbid attached to the historic volume which enables its dramatization to draw like a funeral." One production attempted to increase the appeal of the play by introducing two Topsy characters, two Mark the Lawyer characters, and "two trick donkeys and six mammoth blood hounds" for the chase scenes.

The popularity of the play in Sioux City, and in surrounding towns visited by theatrical syndicates, created such demand for the novel that the local bookseller could not meet the requests. A *Sioux City Daily Times* reporter in 1883 contended that the book provided suitable reading material for "the freedom loving elements of Christendom." Long after the Civil War and Reconstruction, the book and the play still evoked the same response Stowe had sought in the 1850s. The *Sioux City Daily Times* reporter asserted in 1883, in fact, that "whether the present spontaneous and simultaneous revival of the demand for copies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a premonition, or warning to democrats in power to 'go slow,' and to embryo republicans to wake up to the duties of the present and the future, would make a fine subject for lyceum discussion."

The moral tone in many of the stage productions of the novel outweighed any compunction on moral grounds an opponent might have had to theater productions in general. The *Sioux City Journal* had editorialized in 1878 that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* should be regarded as "so mild and moral that even tolerably strict church members may see it performed without compromising themselves in regard to those matters which are popularly supposed to be required of professors of religion."

Although *Uncle Tom's Cabin* clearly established the stereotype of compliant plantation slaves, its sentimental and moral message also dramatically reinforced Sioux Citians' and other Iowans' commitment to egalitarianism for blacks. Their rejection of the antebellum planter class and reaction to the failure of Reconstruction led to state legislation protective of blacks. Iowans resented southern white Democrats usurping the newly gained voting rights of blacks. These developments moved Iowans to protect blacks in the state from such abuses. A referendum passed in 1868 removed the word "white" from the state constitution and guaranteed black men the vote; in 1880 a



Early popular entertainment such as minstrel shows and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* perpetuated racial stereotypes and sentimental attitudes about plantation life.

state constitutional amendment removed the barrier to blacks serving in the state legislature. Just when southerners, especially, adopted more stringent "Jim Crow," or segregation, measures, the 1884 Iowa legislature passed a civil rights act affirming that "all persons within this state shall be entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of the accommodations, advantages, facilities and privileges of inns, public conveyances, barber shops, theaters and other places of amusement." In 1892, the legislature added to the list restaurants, chop houses, eating houses, lunch counters, refreshment stands, and bathhouses.

YET AS IOWANS moved to protect the civil rights of blacks, they also witnessed changes in the ways blacks were portrayed in popular entertainment. In 1874, before more elaborate opera houses seated blacks only in balconies and provided box seats for wealthy whites, the reviewer for the *Journal* noted that if any show could draw a full house at the Academy of Music it was a minstrel performance, whereby "the aristocracy from 'Codfish Hill' jostles the low breds of the levee." Like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, minstrel shows evoked "the flavor of the sunny south, of the camp meeting, and of the cotton field," as suggested by the Alabama Quartet's harmonizing of "fun on the old plantation." But minstrel shows augmented the plantation stereotype with a repertoire of more negative images and distortions. A new and more elaborate Peavey Grand Opera House, built in 1888, provided the Primrose and Dockstader Big Minstrels with a large and enthusiastic audience on Saturday, October 10, 1898. The highlight of their performance occurred when "a watermelon ten feet high and reaching across the stage is sliced so as to show the luscious meat and the black seeds . . . the latter representing the faces of pickaninnies."

Moreover, these later minstrel shows featuring what the local papers called "dusky," "ebony-faced," "Big Black Coons," or "Ethiopian" comedians firmly established the notion that blacks were inherently musical — either sadly resigned to their position (depicted by mournful spirituals) or joyously carefree.

Handsome Young Brunette.

By distorting physical features and dialect, cartoons such as these two poked fun at blacks for seeking inclusion in what whites considered an exclusively white past, and for copying northern fashions. (*Sioux City Journal*, June 2, 1902 and February 17, 1900).

Blacks, and white actors in blackface, portrayed plantation slaves as untutored, simple, docile, and manageable, or as unambitious and lazy buffoons. White audiences saw blacks as, essentially, perpetual children or comical fools in need of white guidance and supervision. In time, these images came to be lumped together under the label "Sambo." The downcast eyes of the Sambo, along with shuffling feet, soft, uncertain words, and a totally pliant manner, were white-invented signals to be used by a black character to say that this individual posed no threat.

Another feature of minstrel shows, the high-kicking, strutting cake walk, became popular after the 1870s. The cake walk had originated on plantations when slaves dressed in their masters' and mistresses' discarded finery and competed for a prize, usually a cake. Blacks affecting white standards and style of dress appealed to white egos. But to make the distinction clear and unambiguous — since more and more northern blacks copied white fashion — whites looked for exaggerated ties, boutonnieres, vests, uses of handkerchiefs, or fabric

AT THE FANCY DRESS BALL
She—Who is yo' goin' as, Rastus?
Rastus — I'se Sir Waltah Raleigh. Who's yo'?
She — I'se Marta Washington, I is.

patterns as a focus for their criticism and ridicule of these "pretensions."

The creation of ludicrous northern black characters reinforced white self-esteem and made white audiences feel superior in intelligence and socioeconomic status. Robert Toll concludes in his study *Blacking Up*, "Minstrels created and repeatedly portrayed the contrasting caricatures of inept, ludicrous Northern blacks and contented, fulfilled Southern Negroes. Besides providing 'living' proof that whites need not feel guilty about racial caste, the minstrel plantation also furnished romanticized images of a simpler, happier time when society was properly ordered and the loving bonds of home and family were completely secure."

Newspaper cartoonists also attempted to capture the spirit of minstrelsy in their visual portrayal of blacks, and they embellished the distorted caricatures with outrageous hairstyles and enlarged ears, eyes, lips, and feet. Moreover, the use — or misuse — of black dialect through slurred word endings, mispronounced words, and misunderstood meanings added a superficial air of authenticity to black caricatures and did editorially what blackface did visually. These distorted cartoon characterizations revealed subtle shifts toward a "new Negro" image.

White audiences expected and preferred the distorted images of blacks offered by white minstrels. Black minstrel troops had played in Sioux City as early as 1883 but not always to the best reviews. The Georgia Colored Minstrels, according to a local reviewer, provided "a wishy-washy imitation of what is usually well performed by a white troop." Nonetheless, the

E.M. CLARK COLLECTION, SHSI

Black minstrel singers perform in Ruthven, Iowa, circa 1910. Turn-of-the-century newspapers reported that audiences considered white performers in blackface superior to black minstrels.

Iowans in blackface enjoy themselves at a 1902 party.

reviewer continued, "Sioux Citians as a rule seemed to take unexplicable [*sic*] pleasure in flocking to the Academy of Music when the trashiest kind of so-called amusement troupes come here." Despite drawing good houses, black entertainers did not provide the essence of the minstrel show, according to Sioux City whites. "Minstrelsy by real black faces" proved less popular since "playgoers are somewhat uncertain about the ability of negroes as entertainers, and they save up their money for such minstrelsy as Wm. West and Dockstader & Primrose are in the habit of furnishing," commented a *Journal* reviewer in April 1901. When McCabe and Young's Minstrels combined white and black minstrel players for a performance in Sioux City in 1894, audiences were small.

Although Sioux City audiences enjoyed performances by renowned black minstrels such as Billy Kersands because of "his cavernous mouth," they repeatedly preferred white men in blackface. After seeing a black minstrel show in 1901 the *Journal* reviewer found "further proof that white men make funnier black men for minstrel purposes than the real article of negroes. That real fun and that real comedy and wit which are found in the makeup of a white minstrel comedian are wanting in nine black minstrels out of ten." Thus what the reviewer revealed was the desire on the part of whites to retain control of the images of blacks projected by minstrel players.

The consequences of minstrel shows included jokes told and retold and vivid visual images that made black stereotypes "a kind of 'national folklore,'" according to Houston A. Baker, Jr., in *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, "a constellation of images, definitions, symbols, and meanings that most Americans could and did share."

WHITE AMERICANS, and Sioux Citians as represented in this case study, actually represented a spectrum of racial attitudes that historian Joel Williamson has broadly categorized as liberal, moderate, and radical. "Liberals" believed, in brief, that they could accept blacks

even though they did not yet know their potential. Liberals, however, were overwhelmingly outnumbered by "Moderates," who always assumed black inferiority, yet who might accept a degree of accommodation with blacks. Moderates, or "accommodationists," called for kindness towards blacks on the grounds that they had retained under freedom many of the supposedly amiable characteristics of the faithful slaves under the paternalistic plantation tradition. Surely images of loyal Uncle Tom and benevolent Messrs. Shelby and St. Clare came to mind. To uphold their view of the black as a harmless child or helpless ward, these neopaternalists of the Progressive Era had to counter the charge that a growing incidence of sexual attacks on white women reflected a fundamental bestiality in the black race. In general, Moderates countered that charge by pointing out that such crimes remained so rare and exceptional that they revealed nothing about the essential black character.

"Radicals" were especially prominent during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Under their "black degeneracy" hypothesis, a "new" or "beast Negro," freed from the restrictions of slavery at the end of the Civil War, was retrogressing rapidly toward a natural state of savagery and bestiality. With the shift in orientation of minstrel shows from plantation to urban North, the "beast" and dumb comic stereotype, viciously spread by Radicals, supplanted the tragic or contented plantation black stereotypes adopted by Moderates.

Under the Radical mentality, blacks were seen as watermelon- and chicken-eating fools and the butt of jokes. Dice, gambling, chicken stealing, watermelons, bananas, ham bones, camp meetings, and a penchant for razors became trademarks of these urban caricatures. The "coon song," moreover, assigned traits that emphasized grotesque physical features in big-footed, big-lipped, pop-eyed black caricatures. The menacing razor-toting black man completed the stereotype. These images, seen over and over, instilled fear of what Radicals termed the "bad coon" and replaced the paternalism of the plantation. Subliminal messages portrayed blacks as subhumans, not to be trusted. The Radical solution was complete separation of whites and blacks.

According to Liberals and Moderates, the Radicals were whipping the masses into frenzies of racial hatred that endangered the very foundations of society. Although they failed to change popular opinion in the South, Liberals and Moderates partially restrained Radical influence in the North. They began to campaign against lynching and helped bring about a gradual decrease in racial murders of this type.

Yet in 1901 Sioux City narrowly escaped the onus of a lynching. James McGuire, a black, was arraigned in police court on October 28, on the charge of sodomy with a thirteen-year-old messenger boy. Because of the talk of lynching during the day, the chief of police moved McGuire from the city jail to the county jail. Shortly after McGuire arrived at the county jail, cell mate Matt Davey tried to escape while

SENATOR TILLMAN GIVES PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT A FEW POINTERS ON HOW TO CONDUCT ONESELF IN OFFICE

The issue of lynch laws hangs from the back of Senate chair of a hysterical Benjamin Tillman, outspoken Radical. (January 19, 1906)

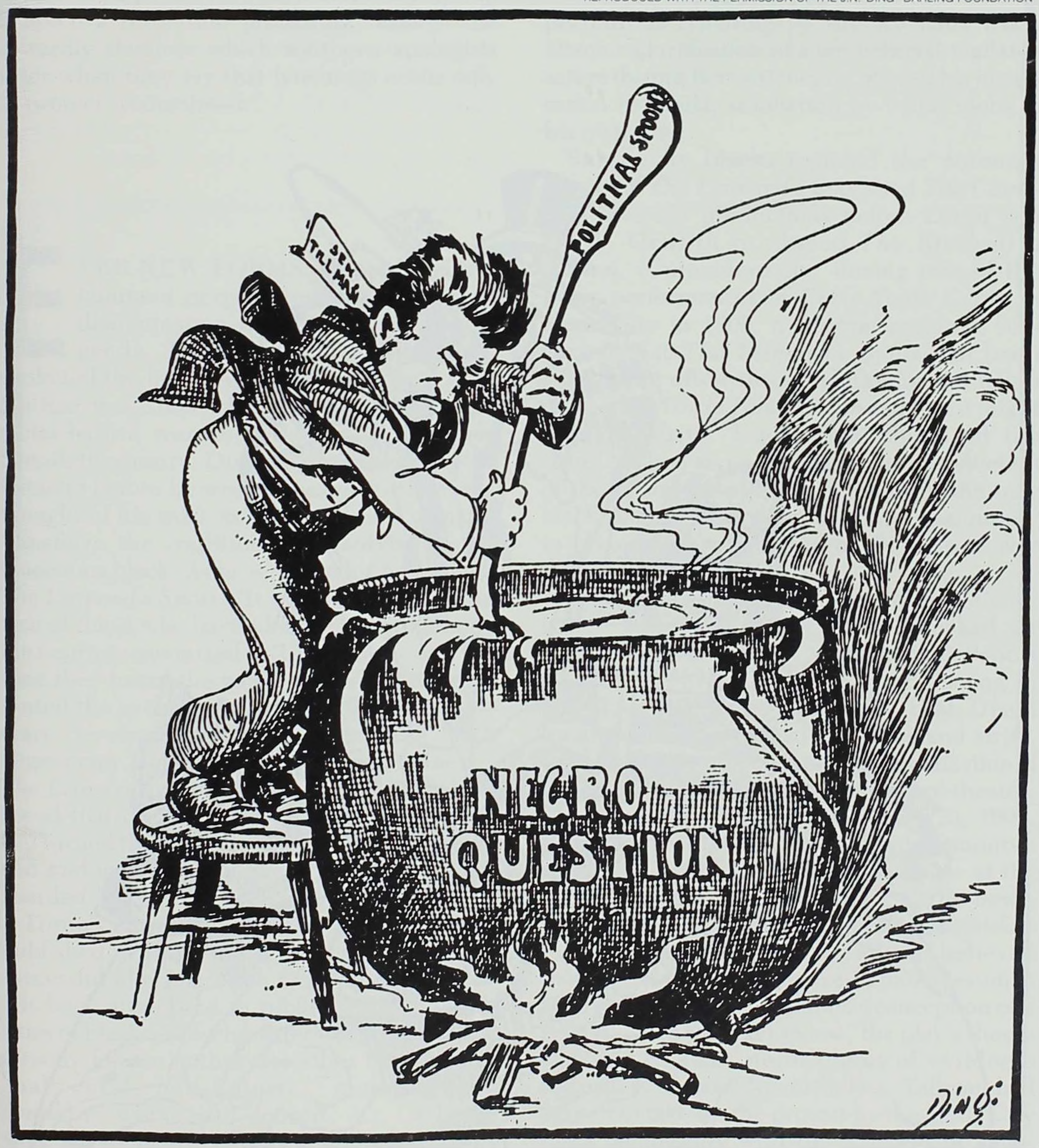
working on the rock pile. After his recapture Davey said that he had thought he might be lynched if a mob breaking into jail had mistaken him for McGuire. The *Journal* made light of the incident in its story titled "Coons Might Look Alike." (This title echoed a song by variety show performer Clara Kimball on December 14, 1897. According to a local newspaper review, Kimball sang, "'All Coons Look Alike To Me' in such a fetching manner that she at once installed herself in the hearts of her hearers.")

ALTHOUGH Sioux City Moderates did not usually object to the Radical notions of black inferiority or the need for separation, they dissented from the extreme manifestations of the Radicals' racism. A partial explanation for their dissent might be the image of an evil Simon Legree persecuting Uncle Tom, repeatedly witnessed in productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The creations of local newspaper cartoonists reveal most graphically the image Sioux City Moderates had of blacks and of Radical approaches to what was termed "the Negro question." The cartoons of Jay N. "Ding" Darling, for example, reflected the consensus of the Sioux City community at large. Later a Pulitzer Prize winner, Darling began his career as cartoonist for the *Sioux City Journal* from 1901 to 1906. In a 1903 Darling cartoon, two enormous children are squaring off for a fight. The black child is labeled "Race Question," and the white child, "Mob Law." In the foreground a much smaller Uncle Sam rolls up his sleeves and prepares to paddle them with his shoe, labeled "Justice." Darling thus indicated his disdain for the Radicals' use of extralegal violence but apparently recognized the size of the problem. In another 1903 cartoon, Darling depicted a northerner and a southerner crowding a black man off the earth, thereby suggesting that the Radical position of providing no place for blacks in American society offered no workable solution.

Sioux City's rejection of the Radicals' racial attitudes might best be gauged by local reaction to Radical firebrand Benjamin F. Tillman, a South Carolina senator. In the 1890s Tillman had begun making nationally publicized anti-black statements. During his 1892 South Carolina gubernatorial bid, for example, he declared, "I would lead a mob to lynch the negro who ravishes a white woman." Sioux City's reaction to Tillman revealed the residue of the *Uncle Tom* shows: Tillman was held to be the incarnation of "the barbarous depravity of 'Legrees' of the South." Darling's cartoons of Tillman make him look hysterical. Reverend Doctor F. E. Day, pastor of the Whitefield Methodist Church in Sioux City, declared at a meeting of the Ministerial Association that "he would a thousand times rather entertain a negro at this table than Benjamin F. Tillman." Day maintained that "as long as white people continued to judge the colored man by the worst example and the white man by the best example, just that long would the race separation continue."

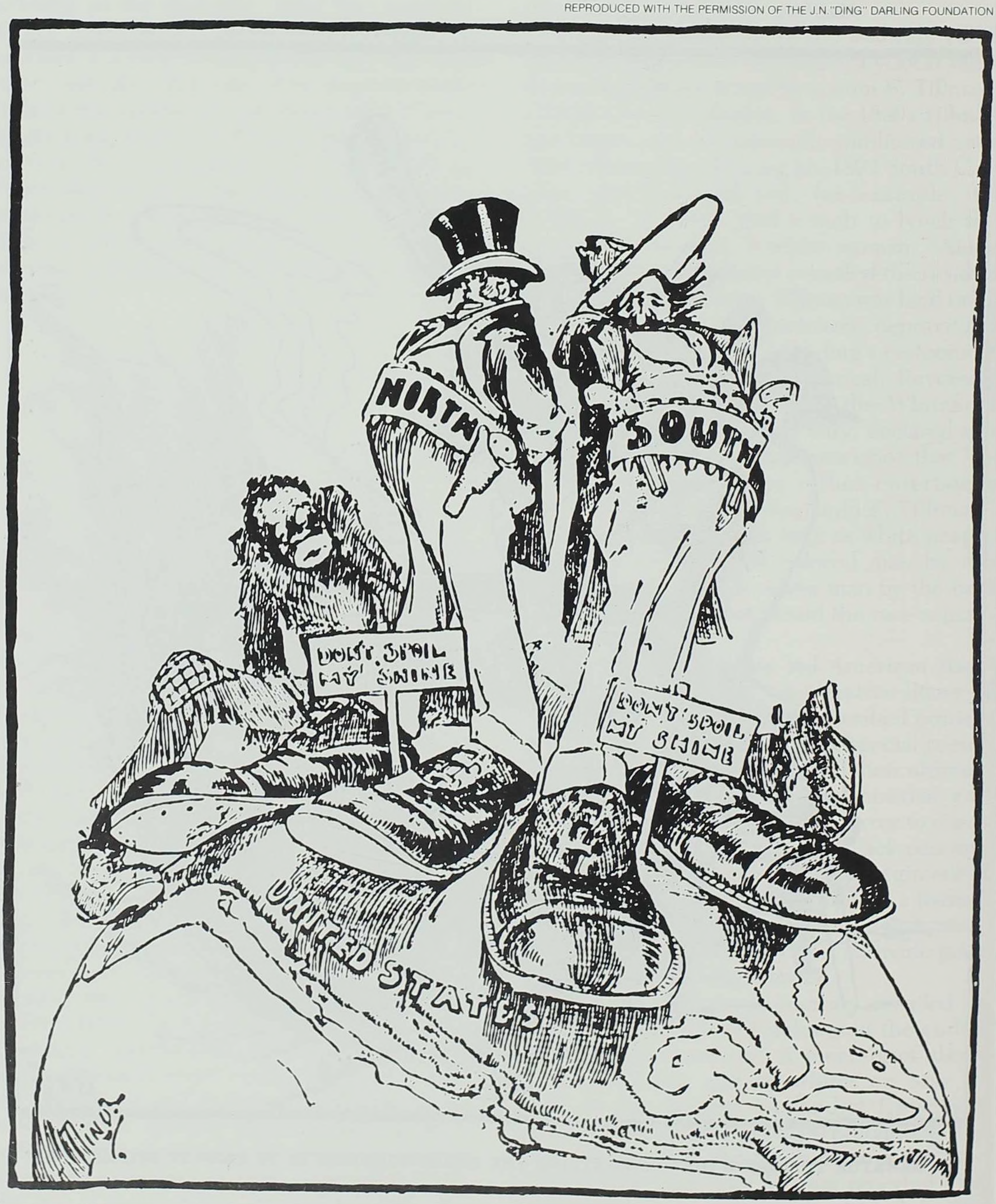
Nevertheless, Tillman led American Radicals in an increasingly vituperative litany of propaganda. Rape and the prescribed punishment of lynching became their special preoccupation. Lynching represented their ultimate sociological method of racial control and repression. They used fear and terror to check "dangerous" tendencies in the black community, considered to be ineffectively regimented or supervised. As such it constituted a Radical confession that the institutions of a segregated, or Jim Crow, society provided an inadequate measure of day-to-day control.

Sioux City's black community recoiled in reaction to the rash of lynchings at the end of the nineteenth century. A meeting of about thirty-five blacks and six whites on May 5, 1899, at the African Methodist Episcopal Church, for example, had been precipitated by thirty lynchings in the nation during the preceding thirty days. The *Journal* reported that state senator J. S. Lothrop, local black leader W. P. Shields, and Reverend J. A. Fisher spoke at the meeting, although "only [Fisher] displayed much indignation" about the lynchings. They cautioned blacks not to "assume a



SENATOR TILLMAN'S IDEA OF SETTLING THE NEGRO QUESTION IS TO KEEP IT STIRRED UP.

In his August 26, 1903, cartoon, "Ding" Darling represented the moderate viewpoint, editorializing against the political demagogue from South Carolina, Senator Benjamin F. Tillman.



NO PLACE TO GO BUT OFF
THE COLORED MAN: "Land o' Lobe, White Man, Where Does You 'Low I's Gwine to Stan'?"

According to Darling, the stand taken by northerners and southerners left little room for blacks (August 3, 1903).

spirit of anarchy" but to attend to "business and godliness [to] overcome prejudice." The group adopted a resolution protesting "against the cowardly slanders which southern apologists utter when they say that lynchings occur only to protect womanhood."

EVER NEW FORMS of popular entertainment perpetuated the widespread dissemination of radical racial propaganda. The novelist who most fully exploited the literary possibilities arising from the fear was Thomas Dixon, whose novels of racial hatred were best sellers in the early twentieth century. Dixon, a prominent Baptist minister before he wrote sensationalist novels, thought of his work as an evangelical effort to transform the traditional stereotype of the innocuous black. As he wrote of his first novel, *The Leopard's Spots*, "It may shock the prejudice of those who have idealized or worshiped the negro as canonized in 'Uncle Tom.' *Is* it not time they heard the whole truth?" Dixon presented the extreme racist position, the full literary development of the concepts of black degeneracy, animality, and "sexual Madness." *The Leopard's Spots*, published in 1902, proposed that the Civil War and Reconstruction had turned the black from "chattel to be bought and sold into a possible beast to be feared and guarded."

Dixon's most popular novel, *The Clansman*, published in 1905, was the basis of the highly successful film *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915. His book attempted to prove bestial propensities of blacks. The character who speaks most directly for the author describes the black as "half child, half animal," motivated by "impulse, whim, and conceit, ... a being who, left to his will, roams at night and sleeps in the day, whose speech knows no word of love, whose passions, once aroused, are as the fury of the tiger." The climax of the book is the rape of a young white virgin. As Dixon described this event, before discreetly lowering the curtain, "A single tiger spring, and the black claws of the beast sank into the soft white throat." The act results in the suicide of the victim and her mother, followed by a solemn, portentous lynching by the Ku Klux Klan. Dixon's glorification of such fictional vigilante action during Reconstruction offered his justification of similar retaliation by white mobs in his own time.

Sioux City blacks realized the potential impact of *The Leopard's Spots* and *The Clansman* as stage productions before Dixon and D. W. Griffith produced *The Birth of a Nation*. (Coincidentally, during one of the many performances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in Sioux City in 1906, a *Journal* reviewer suggested that *The Leopard's Spots* had been "written to offset the sympathy for the negro aroused by *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and that it might someday drive 'Uncle Tom' shows off the road.") When an upcoming theater production of the Dixon novels was announced, the new black pastor in town implored his community to become more involved in the debate over the race question.

Described as "a progressive and active minister," Reverend J. Cornelius Reid had assumed the pastorate of the Mt. Zion Baptist Church in November 1906 after serving in Ft. Madison, Iowa. Believing that Dixon sought to increase racial prejudice and strife, Reid stridently objected to the dramatization of the novels, soon to be shown in a local theater. The *Sioux City Journal* of February 24, 1907, reported that Reid had taken his community's protest to Harry H. Tallman, manager of the New Grand Theatre. According to the newspaper, Reid had found the meeting "satisfactory." Reid reported that Tallman believed that *The Clansman* "conveyed a moral lesson to both races and that the public's conception of it is wrong." In Tallman's view, the play's theme was one of swift punishment of evildoers regardless of race. Nevertheless, Tallman had agreed to take up the protest by the Sioux City black community with the Kansas City management of the theater and that managers "Woodward & Burgess would have to settle the matter."

Reid had then confronted Tallman with his practice of seating blacks only in the balcony, derisively called "nigger heaven." According to Reid, "Mr. Tallman said he never had

refused to sell a ticket to colored people in any part of his theater." But Tallman had added in a paternalistic tone, "the colored man could use his money to better advantage than to pay fabulous prices for parquet seats."

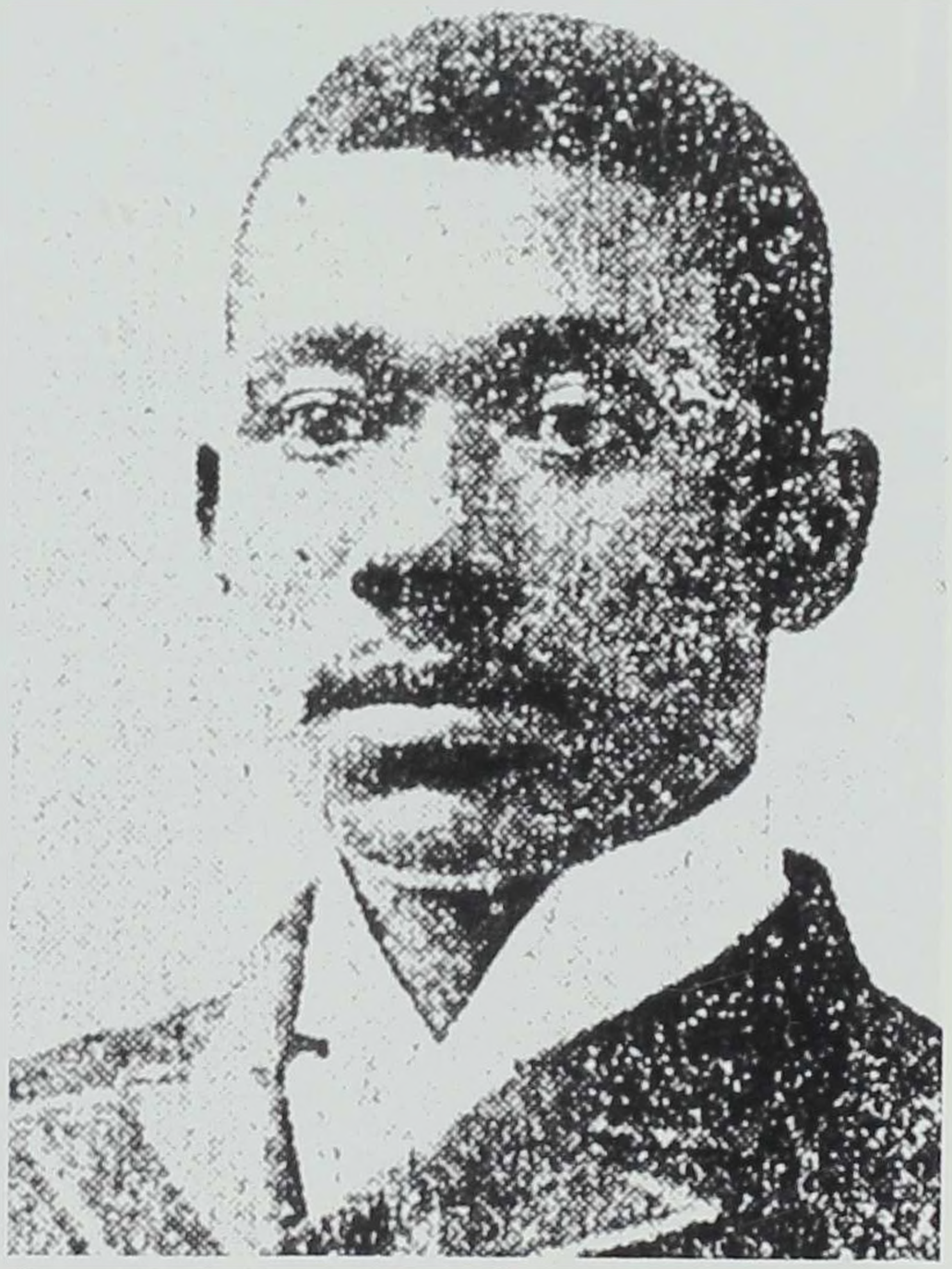
Reid responded that "racial dignity is what the black man needs." He condemned the practice of local theaters seating "respectable colored people" in Jim Crow sections and proposed a boycott of the theater. He urged the black theater-goer "to stay at home, even if an intense desire prompts him to witness a good play." Reid continued, "The sins of the management will not minimize the wrong, neither will those who complain of decent colored people sitting beside them be blameless."

SPARE THE ROD AND SPOIL THE CHILD
It's Time You Were Getting Busy, Uncle. Those Boys Will Soon Be Too Big to Handle.

"Ding" Darling's cartoon of July 28, 1903, suggests that extralegal methods such as lynching threatened the nation's judicial foundations.

Reid asserted, moreover, that even though blacks had been guaranteed the right of citizenship and a franchise by constitutional amendments, their social equality would only be guaranteed by white acceptance. Dignity could not be revealed from behind a burnt cork mask of minstrel images.

THUS, IN THE YEARS between 1874 and 1910, Sioux City whites accepted the spectrum of black stereotypes pervasive in white America. They viewed blacks "through a glass, darkly," using a lexicon of racial vocabulary and notions from a variety of popular entertainment. These plays, minstrel shows, novels, and movies supplied, reinforced, and reflected racist portrayals of blacks as inferior to whites physically, intellectually, and temperamentally. However, contrary to attempts by Radicals to violently suppress and eliminate blacks from American society, Moderates in Sioux City foresaw continued accommodation with blacks. Yet as the Radical images of blacks became more stridently negative and pervasive in local popular entertainment, it remained to be seen if the Moderate consensus in Sioux City would prevail. □



Sioux City minister J. Cornelius Reid called for "racial dignity" in his protest against segregated seating and dramatizations of racist novels by Thomas Dixon.

NOTE ON SOURCES

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Lawrence Levine discusses humor as an adjustment to the harsh reality of life in Jim Crow America in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (1978), especially chap. 5, "Black Laughter." See also Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America* (1974), and *On With the Show: The First Century of Show Business in America* (1976); William L. Van Deburg, *Slavery & Race in American Popular Culture* (1984); Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (1987); and Margaret Just Butcher, *The Negro in American Culture* (1956).

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Dorothy Schwieder, Joseph Hraba, and Elmer Schwieder provide a good description of an Iowa black community in *Buxton: Work and Racial Equality in a Coal Mining Community* (1987); see also Leola Nelson Bergmann, *The Negro in Iowa* (1969). A good description of the "child," "beast," and local-color Negro in another midwestern city with a small black population can be found in James E. DeVries, *Race and Kinship in a Midwestern Town: The Black Experience in Monroe, Michigan, 1900–1915* (1984).

Above: Fourth of July parade in Maquoketa, 1919. (Photo by Cundill). Opposite: 1901 broadside.

FOURTH OF JULY
A Photographic Celebration

Iowans have celebrated Independence Day by sending fireworks into the sky, parading floats and flags down Main Street, gathering for family picnics or political speeches — each activity bedecked in yards of red, white, and blue. Herewith, a sampling of images from the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa.

WELCOME
TO
FORT DODGE
TO SPEND THE
4TH OF JULY

1776 1901

GRAND PROGRAM

of Independence Day Events. The Brightest and Best City in Iowa extends an invitation to everybody to spend a Happy National Holiday within her gates. The People will be addressed by the Peerless Orator and Statesman, Senator

J.P. DOLLIVER

BALL GAMES

Greatest ever seen in Northern Iowa. Giants of the Diamond on every base and in every position + + + + + + + +

Racing Balloons

Monster Flying Machines guided by daring atmospheric navigators in a marvelous race among the clouds + +

DAYLIGHT FIREWORKS

One of the most unique and amusing Exhibitions ever shown on such an occasion. Don't fail to see it + + + +

Pain's Fireworks in Evening

A grandly Brilliant and Costly Spectacle. The most gorgeous illumination yet seen in Northern Iowa + +

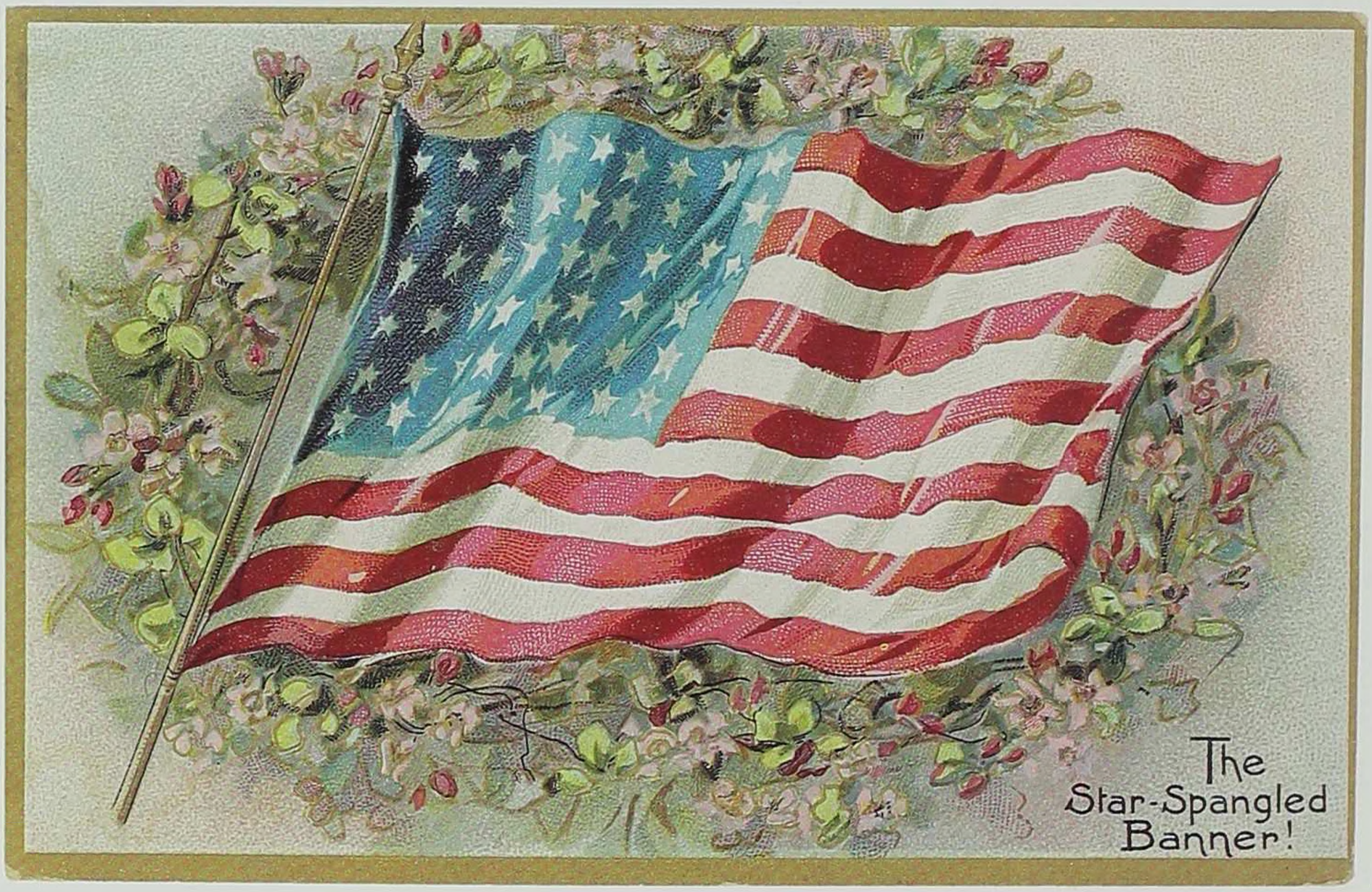
PATRIOTIC MUSIC BY MANY BANDS

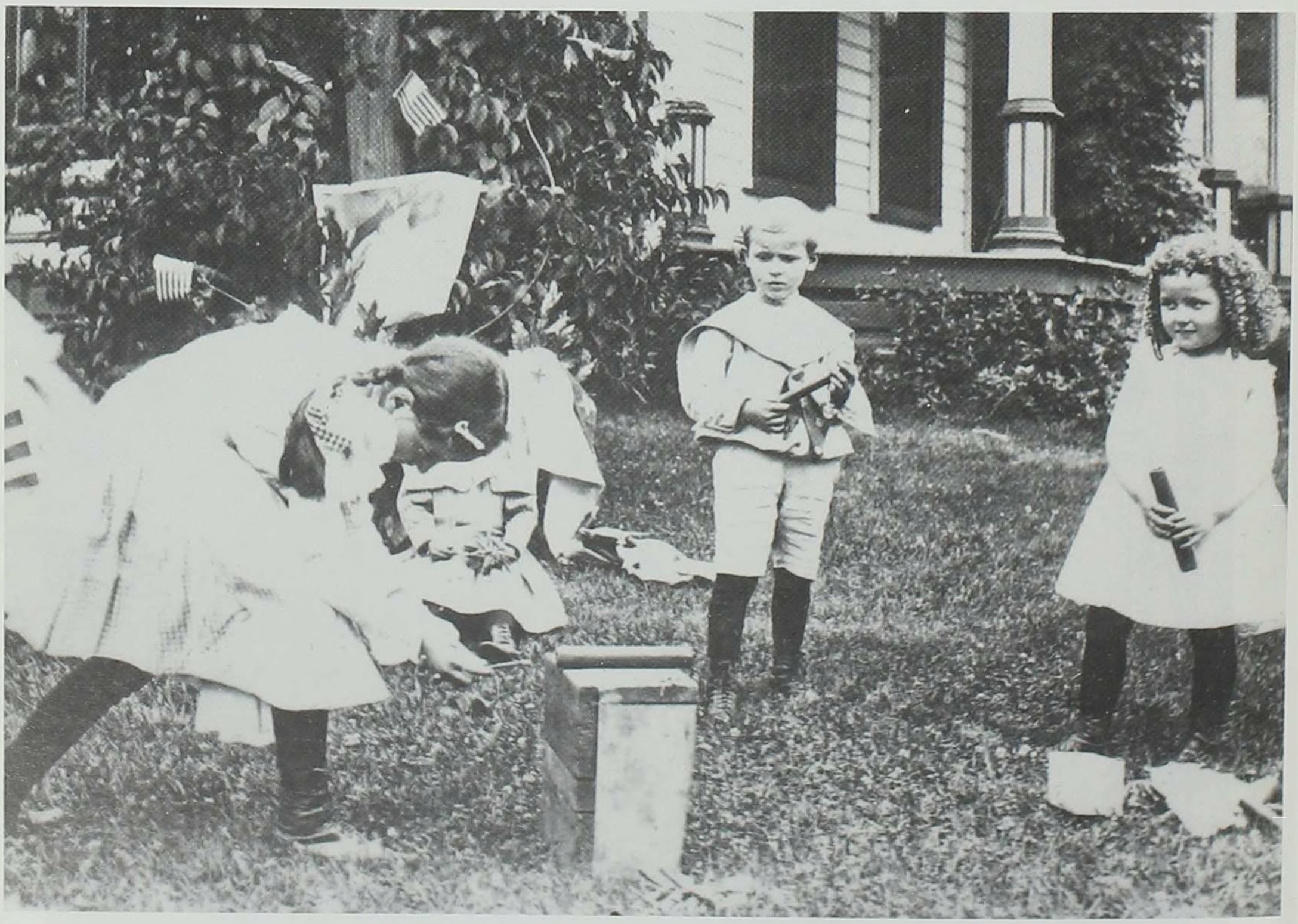
Automobile Races, a novelty in Racing annals. Come and see the horseless carriage show its speed.

ALL RAILROADS WILL GIVE REDUCED RATES.

EVERYBODY INVITED=COME

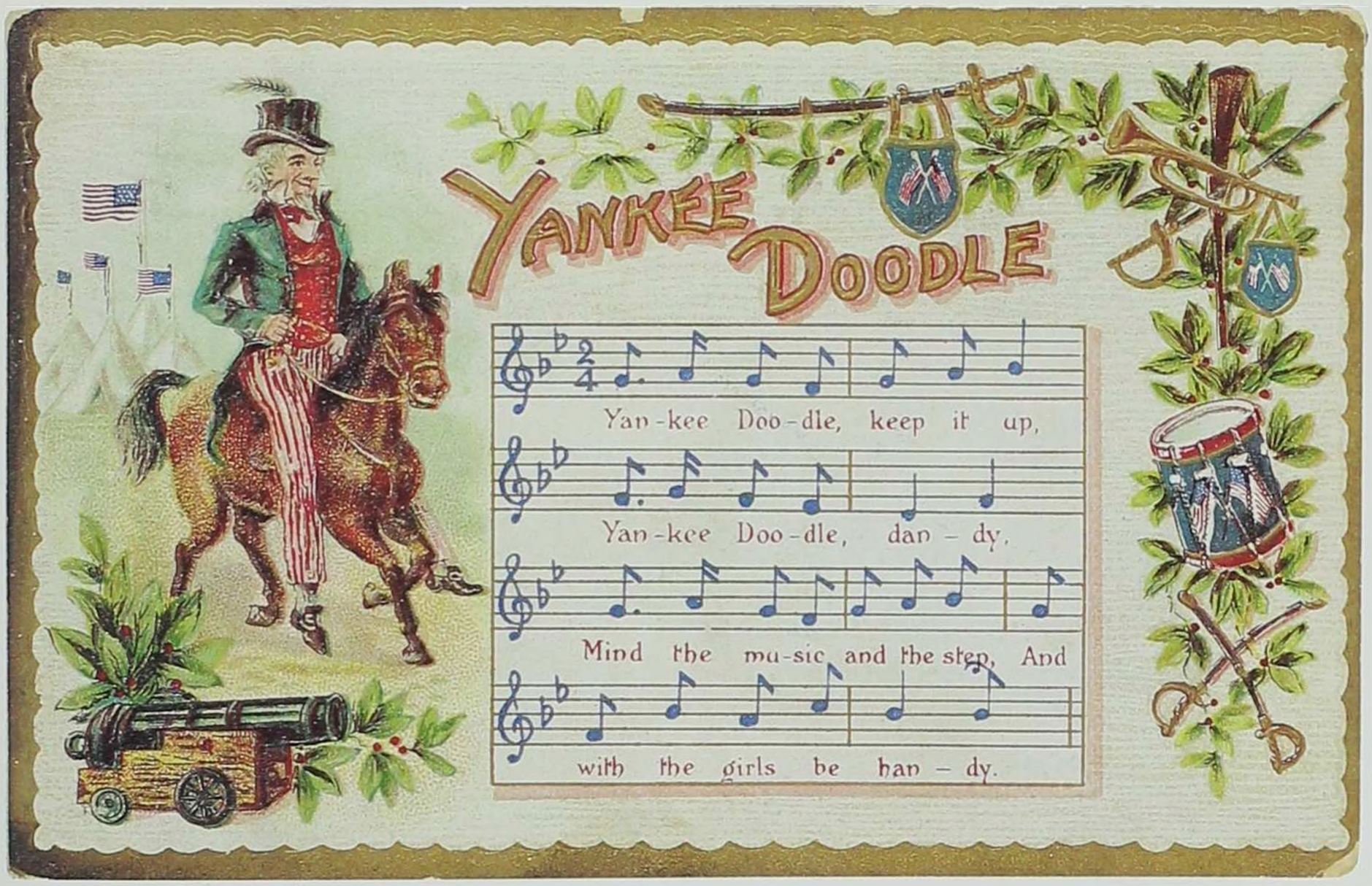
The Post Publishing Company, Printers, Fort Dodge, Iowa


The
Star-Spangled
Banner!



Above: The Goddess of Liberty (Mrs. E. L. "Annette" Bower) prepares to meet her public in a 1910 Guthrie Center parade. Left: Setting fireworks in Carroll, c. 1901; postcard (date unknown).

FOSTER COLLECTION, SHSI

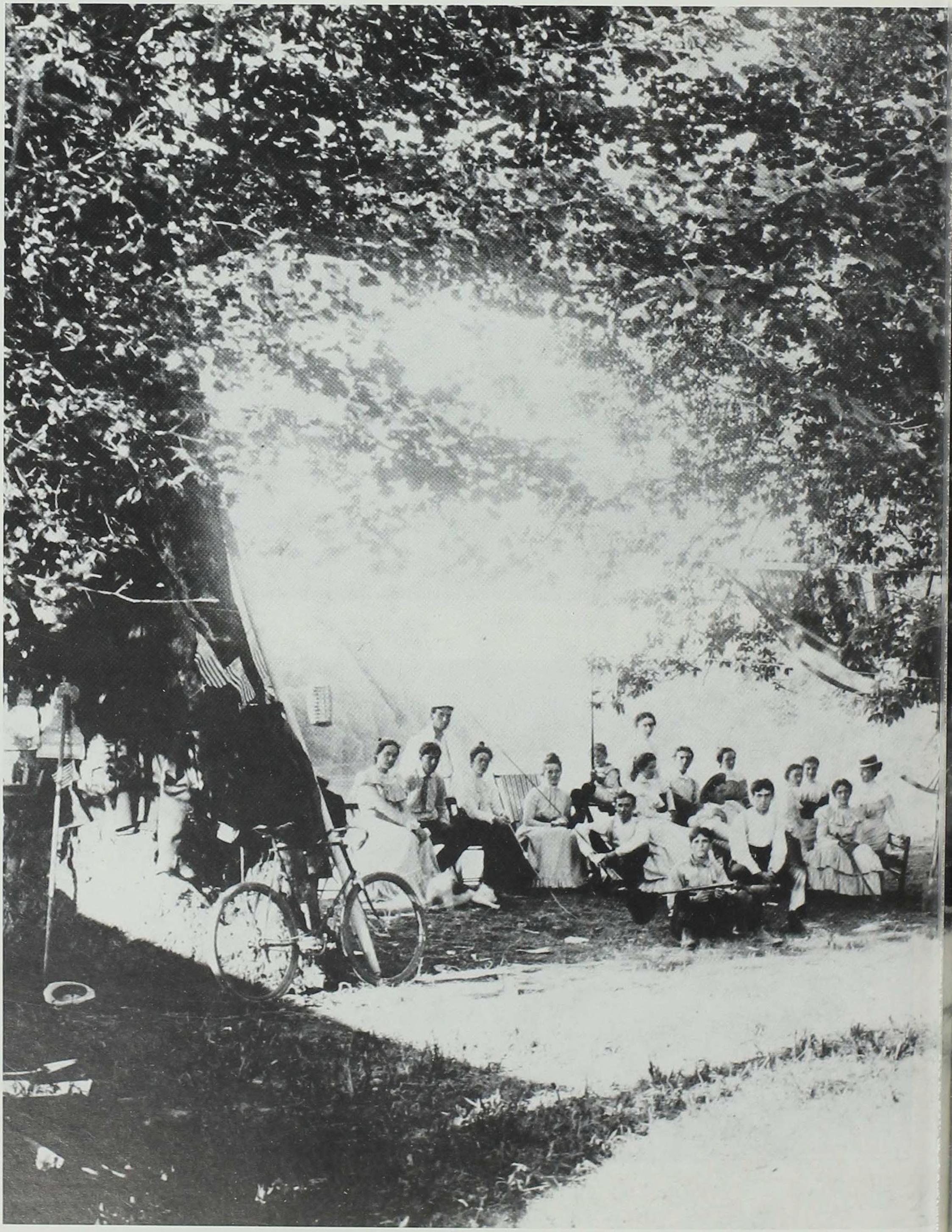


Left: Frank E. Foster and sons John E. and Fred H. Foster add to the noise of a typical Fourth of July celebration as they light firecrackers in Iowa Falls, about 1900.

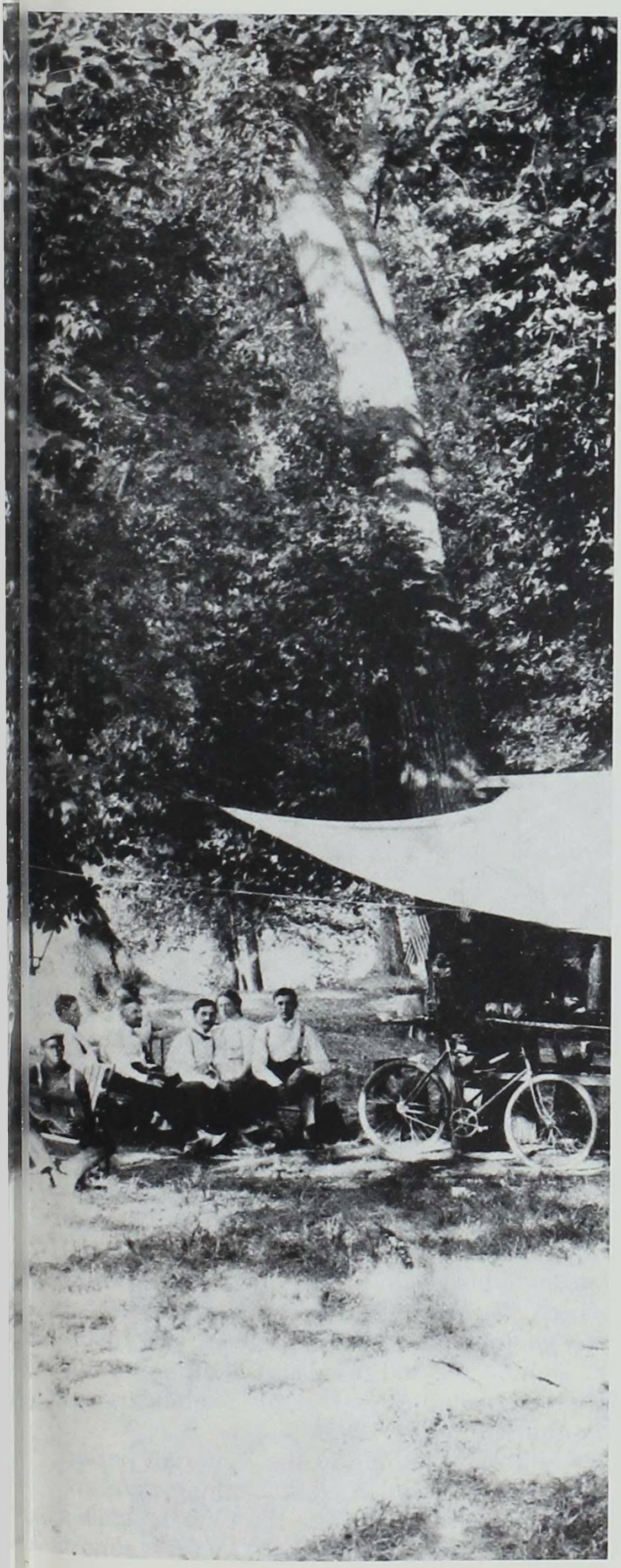
Above: Women and flags, possibly Story City, date unknown. Note on back of postcard: "How did you like the fireworks? Have a good time and don't shoot your toes off" (1909)

An entry in the 1904 Fourth of July parade in West Liberty. Postcard above dated 1911.

Long shadows precede the flag bearers (date and location unknown). Date of postcard below unknown.



CRANE COLLECTION, SHSI



Sunlight filters through the trees and Old Glory as the Crane family and friends relax at a Fourth of July picnic on the Melton farm south of Mt. Pleasant, around 1900.

Part 2 in a series

Interpreting the Image

How to Understand Historical Photographs

by Loren N. Horton

IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, having one's portrait (or "likeness") taken was a special occasion for which people dressed specially. Clothing style is one of the best ways to date studio portraits, such as the cabinet card shown here of two adults and a girl. (We might assume that the subjects are parents and child, but there is no definite proof of that in the photograph. We might also assume that it is not a wedding photograph, since the child is present. That, too, is not certain but probable.)

One of the easiest ways to date studio portraits is to find other identified photographs or illustrations of clothing that are firmly dated, and then check for similarities and differences. Various books and magazine articles also offer dating clues about clothing styles; consult the sources listed at the end of this article.

Clues about Clothing

In general, women's dresses with elaborate cuffs and ornate trim were more likely to be worn in the 1870s and after than prior to the Civil War. This woman's elaborate dress includes enough fashion details to establish clearly the decade in which it would have been most appropriate. Note, for instance, the puff at the shoulders, the stocking-like fit along the arms, and the bands on the upper arm and wrist. These details all indicate a style popular in the 1880s. By the 1890s a much fuller sleeve, called the "leg o'mutton," was in vogue, and a decade earlier the shoulder slope was much simpler and more pronounced.

The entire line of the dress confirms this dating. The pleated and panelled skirt, trimmed in braid in a horizontal design, and the corsetted bodice are also characteristic of the 1880s, as is the elongated bodice trimmed with a jabot (a strip of white lace or muslin) at the throat. In the 1850s bodice waistlines had been popular, only to be replaced in the 1860s by separate bodices with flared extensions at the bottom, called peplums.

Skirts were elaborately draped at the sides and back. Although this seated figure does not show this feature to its best advantage, the usual dress of the 1880s was full, sometimes with an overskirt. This was the time of bustles, often made of wires and steel stays connected by tapes. Sometimes the effect of a bustle was created with rows of box plaiting on an undergarment. The *Bloomingdale's Illustrated 1886 Catalog* advertised many varieties of such apparel. Dress illustrations in the Bloomingdale's catalog are also quite similar to the one pictured here. Apparel in the catalogs was certainly available to people in Illinois and Iowa by the date of the catalog.

The woman's hairstyle is also appropriate to the 1880s. Etiquette books of the time period dictated that hair was to be plaited low at the back but fringed on the forehead.

There are fewer clues for dating men's clothing, perhaps because men's styles are less detailed and changed less rapidly than women's. In this photograph, the man's top button of his single-breasted jacket is not buttoned. We can quickly assume therefore that the photograph was not taken in the 1890s, when men affected that habit. Nothing in this photograph indicates that his clothing is not appropriate to the 1880s.

Children's clothing in the Victorian period was often replicas of adult clothing. We are lucky in this case, because the Bloomingdale's catalog contains an illustration of a dress almost

COURTESY THE AUTHOR

exactly like the girl's dress worn here. This confirms our earlier estimate of the date.

Clues about Studio Props

Common to most nineteenth-century photographs are such props as pedestals to lean on, chairs to sit on, and tables with decorative items on them. Because the styles of studio furniture and painted backdrops changed over time, such clues also help us.

The use of balustrades, stair rails, columns, curtains, draperies, and portieres is more likely in early studios (prior to the Civil War and probably not as late as the 1880s). By the 1880s photographers often used rustic backdrops, with rail fences, stumps, straw on the floor, trees, and nature scenes in the background that might remind one of settings of Wagnerian operas. Towards the end of the century, recreational and sporting motifs were used, such as bicycles, croquet mallets, tennis rackets, hammocks, swings, and tack relating to horses or vehicles.

In this photograph, there is no furniture visible, so we must depend upon the painted backdrop and the carpeting for clues. The carpet design is appropriate to the 1880s, although it might have been used earlier or later. The formal interior painted on the backdrop was common for several decades, and is found on photographs from the 1870s through the 1890s. Photographers who wished to have the latest styles of backdrops might change them frequently, but more likely they would keep several backdrops on hand and allow the subjects to choose, or change them from time to time.

Clues about the Photographer

One should not neglect the photographer's advertising on the bottom of the card or reverse side. Such bits of information help identify a photograph in time and place, since the photographer's address is usually given. In this case, we might research when an individual named Jaycox was actually operating as a photographer in Sheridan, Illinois. If the subjects were identified, we could check their birth dates from family or census records and estimate their ages from their appearance in the photograph and information about the studio.

Conclusions

This particular photograph is rich in some details and sparse in others. Most photographs in a family collection will be likewise. Because of the elaborate nature of this woman's dress, we can check many details, some of which have relatively precise dating. The clothing of the man and the child and the furnishings and backdrop do not contradict our conclusion that this photograph was probably taken in the last half of the 1880s. In this, we are looking for rough estimates, not absolute precision. □

Nineteenth-century studio photographs may also be dated by their process, format, and availability. Daguerreotypes and ambrotypes were slow and expensive. Therefore fewer were created and fewer have survived. Albumen prints were cheap and durable, and many have survived. (Dates span periods of general use in America.)

Calotype (1835; never popular in America)
The process required a long exposure time and therefore stiff poses and produced dull, brownish-grey images.

Daguerreotype (1839–late 1850s)
The copper metal plate sensitized by iodine fumes exhibits a mirror-like reflection when tilted in direct light. Generally encased, the image plate is covered with a brass plate mat and clear glass. Long exposure time led to stiff poses. These black and grey images were very popular in America. Sizes vary; commonly 2¾″ × 3¼″.

Ambrotype (1852–c.1860)
The image, fixed on a glass plate, may appear to be a glass negative until backed by black cloth or paper or dark varnish. It is generally enclosed in a case.

Tintype (or Ferrotype) (1856–1870s)
The tintype became very popular during the Civil War because it was durable for carrying and mailing. Often in cases and hand-tinted, it may resemble other types of encased images behind glass. Common size: 2½″ × 3½″.

Albumen Print (1850; popular in 1860s–1890s)
Glass plate negatives were sensitized with albumen from egg whites. The image was then fixed on paper, with a dull finish (if pretreated with salt) or glossy (if albumenized). Albumen prints were commonly mounted on card stock and are usually identified by two characteristic sizes, the carte de visite and the cabinet card.

Carte de Visite (1860s and 1870s)
Immensely popular, this format was sometimes used for calling cards. The size became popular in England when an enterprising individual published a "Royal Album" of fourteen cartes de visite of the Royal Family. One could add one's family likenesses to the album and no doubt feel the greater for the photographic association with royalty. Typical size is 2¼″ × 3¾″ mounted on a 2½″ × 4″ card.

Sometimes an imprint on the back identifies the photographer and location. (Caution: Printed cards could be purchased in bulk lot, and a photographer might use up leftover card stock after moving to a new town or sell leftover card stock to another photographer.) Celebrities' cartes de visite were mass produced and used much as today's fan mail photographs. Family albums, with slotted pages, might contain celebrity images (such as Jenny Lind, U.S. Grant, Tom Thumb) that came with the album or were purchased separately. Cartes de visite with a federal tax stamp on the back were produced between September 1, 1864 and August 1, 1866, when the government was raising revenue to pay for the Civil War.

Cabinet Card (1866–1890s)
Also albumen prints, they supplanted the carte-de-visite in popularity. Literally millions were produced. Typical size is 3¾″ × 5½″, mounted on 4¼″ × 6½″ cards. Many advertise a photographer on the bottom and back (but the same cautions about leftover card stock hold true). Slotted albums were also available, and during the transition some albums were made with slots for both sizes.

For more information, consult these sources

Bloomingdale's Illustrated 1886 Catalog (Mineola, New York: Reprinted by Dover Publications, 1988).

Jane A. Farrell, "Clothing for Adults in Iowa, 1850–1899," *Annals of Iowa* (3rd ser.) 46:2 (Fall 1981), 100-20. (Photographs, drawings, and text provide specific information about styles, ornamentation, and colors of clothing worn by Iowa men and women.)

Alison Gernsheim, *Victorian and Edwardian Fashion: A Photographic Survey* (New York: Dover, 1963, 1981). Family photographs can be compared to more than 235 photographs dated from 1845 to 1914.)

Patricia E. Horridge, Diane E. Smathers, and Diane L. Vachon, *Dating Costumes: A Check List Method* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1977), Technical Leaflet No. 102.

Note: Information about men's clothing is sparse in all of these references. Only the Gernsheim book is much help, and the men shown in identified photographs are mostly upper-class individuals dressed in high style. This does not necessarily help us identify men's clothing in the Midwest, although it may help.

Additional sources useful for interpreting and caring for historical photographs are listed in the Spring 1990 Palimpsest, part 1 of this series.

Tips on Storing Historical Photographs

by Mary Bennett

1. To prolong the life of your photographs, maintain constant temperature and humidity in a clean storage area year round. Don't store photos in basements or attics. Aim for a cool, dry, and consistent environment.

2. Separate prints from each other by placing them in acid-free paper envelopes or triacetate sleeves, with print surface away from gummed seams.

3. Do not use brown kraft envelopes, glassine sleeves, colored paper (because of the dyes), or vinyl or plastic-based materials that contain polyvinyl chloride. Acidic paper will become brittle with age and speed the deterioration of images. Cheaper plastics will often cause fading and sticking.

4. Interleaf albums or large groups of photos with 100 percent rag paper. Wrap oversized photos in archival paper and store them flat in acid-free boxes. Support torn or fragile photos with acid-free matte board. Make copy negatives of any damaged photos.

5. Store prints vertically in acid-free storage boxes or metal cabinets with baked-on enamel finishes. Wood boxes or cabinets (even if painted) and cardboard release fumes that will accelerate the aging process.

6. Don't use rubber bands, paper clips, adhesive tape, or pens. They damage prints.

7. Always wash your hands or wear white cotton gloves when working with photographs. Never touch the print or negative surface because skin oils and chemicals (such as sulphur) will cause permanent damage.

Sources for archival materials: Light Impressions (439 Monroe Avenue, Rochester, NY 14607) and Hollinger Corporation (PO Box 6185, Arlington, VA 22206).

The next two issues will offer tips on storing negatives and displaying photos in albums or frames.

A Town Girl Becomes a Farm Helper

by Ruth D. Hein

WHEN I ASKED, "Why do you cap the shocks of barley?" the boys who lived on the farm answered, "Because it only has a beard and not a cap, and so it's bald-headed."

In their perspective, I must have asked a lot of dumb questions as a town girl. Dad was a minister in Van Horne in Benton County, Iowa, from 1925 into the 1940s. Since I was the middle child with two brothers and two sisters, not all of us were needed to help at home. I was the one who liked to cook and bake and work outdoors more than I liked to read or embroider. That's how it came about that when I was about fifteen I was spared from family duties and for several summer vacations around 1940 I worked instead for two farm women.

Being a town girl, I didn't know one grain from another — except for corn. When I took lunches out to the men and boys in the fields, the blades scratching my bare arms and neck was a clear sign that it was a cornfield I was running through. But knowing which field was barley, which was oats, and which was timothy was beyond me — until the boys told me that barley was bald-headed. "That's why we cap the shocks," they explained. I never was sure if they weren't just joking with me.

I worked for Paula and George Werning and later for Walter and Ilma Schminke, two Benton County farm families who were related to each other. I soon learned that mealtime, especially on the Werning farm, was full of delights. One treat was a bowl of garden lettuce with real whipped cream and just the right amount of vinegar and sugar. (I had to learn by trial and error how much vinegar was just enough.) And I was surprised to find cake or leftover pie on the breakfast table along with fried potatoes and bacon and eggs. Of course, we finished the meal with homemade sweet rolls. I learned to make huge pans of raised cinnamon or pecan rolls. No one seemed to mind, either, if I experimented with prune, apricot, peach, or apple coffee cakes. Healthy appetites put good food in constant demand. At mealtime in the summer kitchen, the radio was usually tuned in to the news and weather. But no matter what we were listening to, when all of us were seated and ready to fill our plates, a hand reached out first to turn the radio down while we joined in asking God's blessing on our meal and on us.

Never had I, a "p.k." (preacher's kid), tasted beer. But when neighboring farmers finished harvesting their summer crops, they held threshing parties. They usually had beer and food at these get-togethers. I overcame my built-in inhibition when everyone assured me that on the farm, at the threshing party, it was okay to try the forbidden. My taste buds soon told me beer was pretty bitter, and a taste was enough. But in the tasting, I felt like one of the crowd.

AS A HELPER on the Schminke farm, my courage and confidence were boosted considerably by the responsibility of arising at 4:30 A.M. to build a fire in the summer-kitchen range. I learned to start it with paper, cobs, and then wood. While the fire built, I went out to pump water from the well to fill the reservoir. At just the right time, the damper on the range had to be closed

Opposite (front row, from left): Lois, Lenore, and Elaine Schminke, daughters of Walter and Ilma Schminke, on whose farm the author worked in the summer of 1940. Author Ruth Ullerich Hein holds Ruth Schminke, born that July. Dolores Werning is in the center.

COURTESY THE AUTHOR

to cut down on the draft. Occasionally the roaring in the firepot and stovepipe scared me a little, but I grew accustomed to it.

On Mondays, I used the fire to heat a copper boiler full of water for a huge washing that I hung out on clotheslines by the garden. Later in the week, the fire warmed a dishpanful of bread dough that I had set to rise near the stove. By late afternoon on baking days, ten fresh loaves would stand in line cooling. Magically, one usually disappeared, in buttery slices before supper.

Ten-year-old Dolores Werning and I did a lot of the work together on the Werning farm. But one thing Dolores didn't like to do was to wash one part of the cream separator. A ring of casein had to be removed first by running one or two fingers under it to loosen it from the metal cup. The casein was smelly and slimy. I was stuck with that job, and it always felt especially good to be finished, after all the milk pails, cream cans, and separator parts had been washed, rinsed, and set to dry on the fence in the fresh air and sunshine, ready for the next milking.

THE WERNING FAMILY included two boys about my age. I often heard popular tunes being whistled from the barn at early-morning milkings, and I always imagined that the songs were chosen especially for me, a teen-aged girl hauling in water for the day from the well in the front yard. The whistling made me feel noticed. (Maybe though, they whistled in January, too, when I wasn't there.)

The boys delighted in teasing me. Many's the time my apron strings were untied "accidentally" while I was helping set a meal on the table in the summer kitchen. Yet if a bucket of drinking water was spilled on the floor in the process, someone always helped mop it up and get more water. Working in the summer kitchen was a little like living in a summer cabin: we didn't really have to mop up all the water or sweep up all the sand or grass tracked in from the yard. It was a relaxed, casual way of living amidst the hard work of summertime.

In the Werning family, the parents expected us to rest when they did, right after lunch. The younger generation found the front porch the coolest place at noon. We sat in rocking chairs to read or stretched out on woven scatter rugs. In the evening, when the day's work was done, we carried the rugs and porch pillows out to the front yard, where we could wind down in air that cooled before the house did. We all talked, sang songs, and enjoyed the time together. We kids were all in our growing-up years, but in the friendly company of the parents sitting in their lawn chairs, nothing more happened than a few stolen handclasps beneath each other's porch pillows.

On Sundays the Werning and Schminke families and other relatives often had gatherings in the nearby town of Newhall. Each family brought food and all the kids. I gradually met enough of the clan to feel at home with them, and it seemed to me that there was more to life than going to my own home (all of five miles away) for the weekend. I had discovered the companionship of friends my own age. After church there were the big potluck dinners followed by conversation and finally, in mid-afternoon, the baseball games.

ALTHOUGH THOSE WEEKENDS did wonders for me as a person, they didn't add to my monetary income. The first summer I worked on a farm, my pay was three dollars a week. It eventually increased as high as five dollars a week, depending on my responsibilities. I saved the money for my upcoming tuition at Iowa State Teachers College in Cedar Falls. (Of course, tuition was then as minimal as the wages.)

I realize now that those summers prepared me for college in more ways than financially. I adjusted to being away from home, and I gained valuable work experience that proved useful in a similar job during college working for a Cedar Falls family for three years for room and board. Through association with good people, I had learned a great deal, developed a strong sense of self-worth, and made long-lasting friends in my summer jobs on family farms. □

CONTRIBUTORS

Charles P. Bennett is a retired farmer in Ringgold County. He has written two family histories and has served as the president of the Ringgold County Historical Society and the Iowa Local History and Museum Association.

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LETTERS FROM READERS

Ornithologist and oil companies

I was pleased to read your article about "Althea Sherman and the Birds of Prairie and Dooryard" [and] pleasantly surprised to see the article about the independent oil companies [Winter 1989]. My father, Leland Harms, from Allison, Iowa, was the first president of the Iowa Oil Jobbers.

Carol Lee Goettler, Luana, Iowa

I read with great interest your article and pictures of Althea Sherman. Our families were neighbors, but not much socializing was done. Althea took "us kids" through the bird house (it's now falling apart in Harpers Ferry, Iowa).

Eloise Brownson Meyer, Waukon, Iowa

Iowa City in the twenties

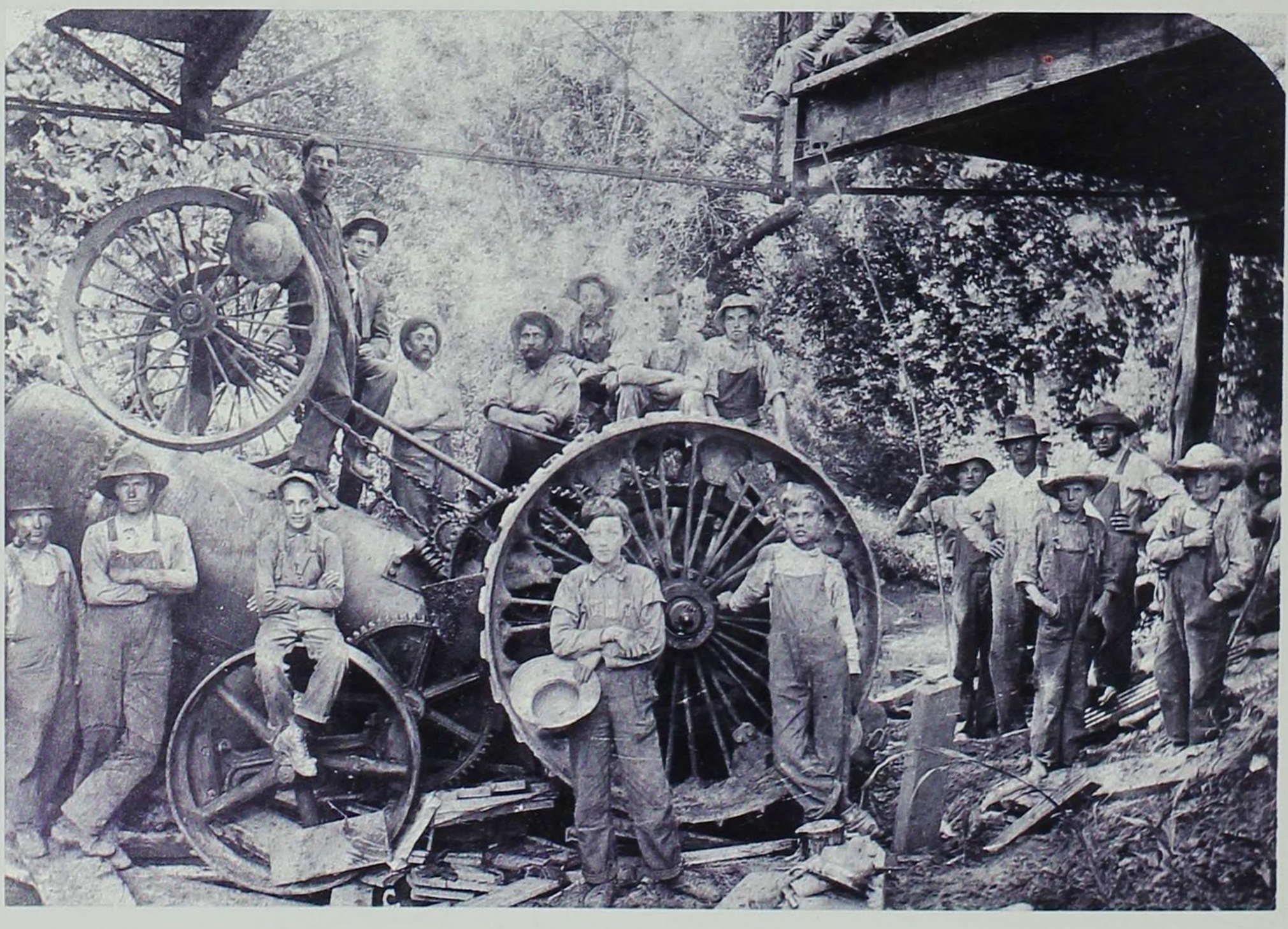
The charming article ["A Young Latin Scholar: University Life in the 1920s" by Helen Clifford Gunter; Spring 1990] interested me especially because I grew up in Iowa City. . . . Some of the people [author Helen Clifford Gunter] mentions and references to the environs of Schaeffer Hall were familiar to me, and Schaeffer Hall was the building where most of my [history] classes met. . . . [The author's] year at Iowa must have been a happy one. The university and Iowa City in the twenties were congenial places. As I look back upon the time and the places I see them as they were, I think, and not through the mists of nostalgia.

Carl B. Cone, Lexington, Kentucky

The *Palimpsest* welcomes letters. Published letters may be edited for clarity and brevity. Write: *Palimpsest* Editor, State Historical Society, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.

SUBMISSIONS

The editor welcomes manuscripts and edited documents on the history of Iowa and the Midwest that may interest a general reading audience. Submissions that focus on visual material (photographs, maps, drawings) or on material culture are also invited. Originality and significance of the topic, as well as the quality of research and writing, will determine acceptance for publication. Manuscripts should be typewritten, double-spaced, and follow *The Chicago Manual of Style* (13th edition). Standard length is within ten to twenty manuscript pages, but shorter or longer submissions will be considered. Include a list of sources used and a brief biographical sketch. Because illustrative material is integral to the *Palimpsest*, the editor encourages authors to include photographs and illustrations (or suggestions). Please send submissions or queries to Ginalie Swaim, Editor, *The Palimpsest*, State Historical Society of Iowa, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.



Pete Mougin and his thresher-yeomen gather around his upside-down steam engine, which crashed through a small wooden bridge over Davis Creek near Riverside, Iowa around 1910. For more successful ventures with steam threshing equipment, look inside this *Palimpsest*.

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