

# *The* PALIMPSEST

Volume 71, Number 1

IOWA'S POPULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE

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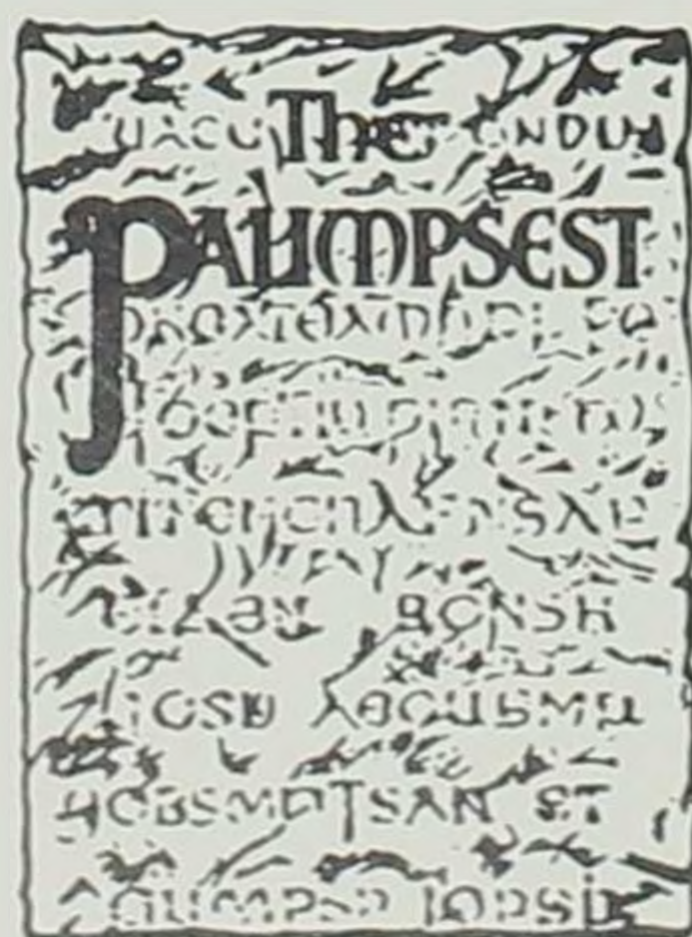




## Inside —



A group posing in front of a building is a common subject of the photographs Americans hand down from generation to generation. Too often the photos lack identification or proper care. In this *Palimpsest*, a new series on interpreting and caring for historical photographs begins on page 34.



### *The Meaning of the Palimpsest*

In early times a palimpsest (*pāl'imp/sēst*) 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:** Detail of a presentation quilt made in 1890 by the Ladies Aid of the Evangelical Lutheran Bethanian Congregation, Burlington, Iowa. For more examples of the incredible mix of color and texture in Victorian crazy quilts, turn to page 16. (The quilt is in the SHSI collections, Des Moines, and was photographed by Chuck Greiner.)

# The PALIMPSEST

IOWA'S POPULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE

Ginalie Swaim, Editor

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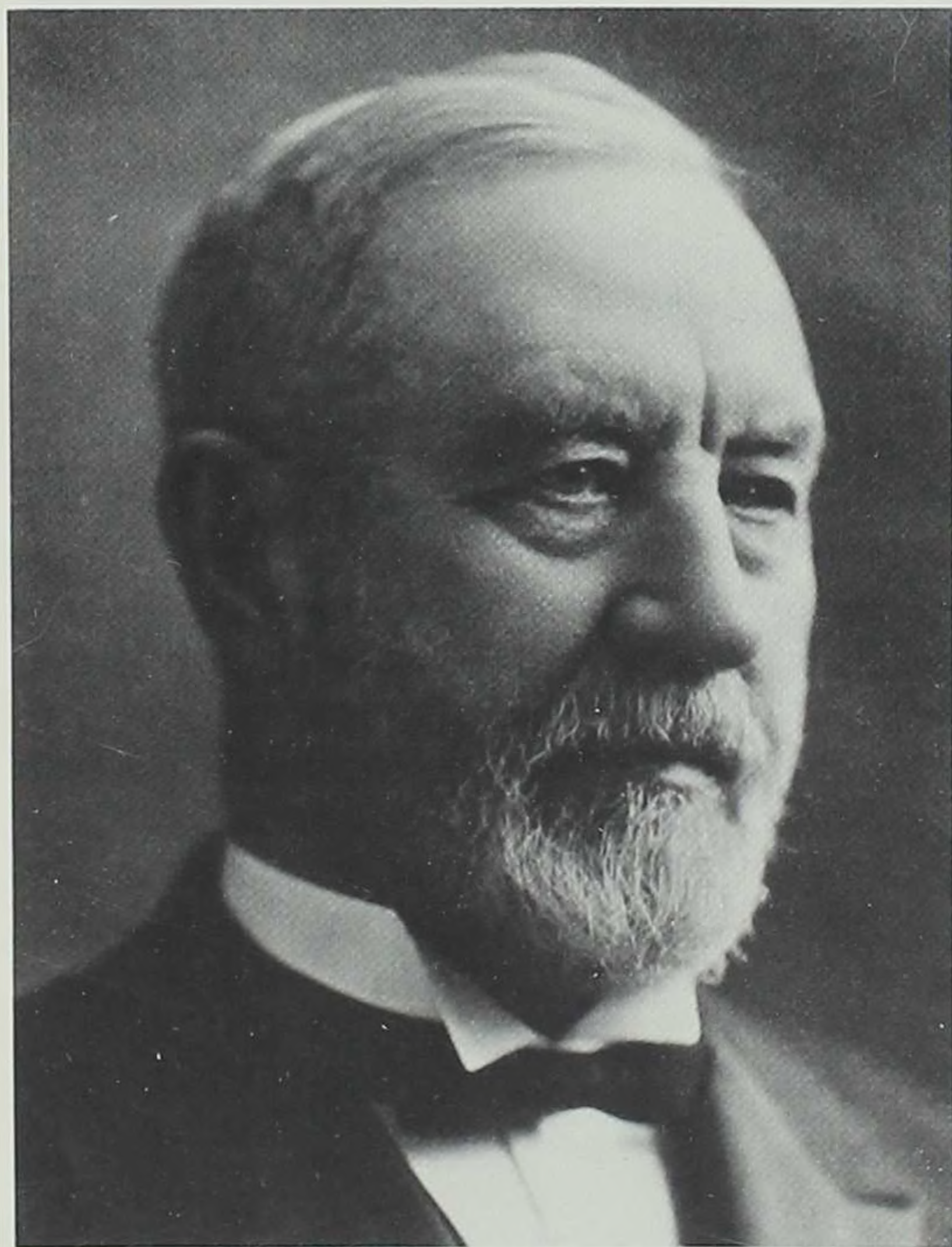
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Henry Wallace, editor of *Wallaces' Farmer and Dairyman* (and often known as "Uncle Henry" Wallace)

# SHAMEFUL VENALITY

IT IS NOT altogether uncommon for election campaigns to deteriorate into little more than acute instances of mutual character defamation. Such was the case in Iowa during the presidential campaign of 1896. Numerous accusations of bribery, fraud, and libel were hurled back and forth, but not between presidential candidates William McKinley and William Jennings Bryan. Rather this vicious battle involved Iowa's two most influential agricultural press leaders: James M. Pierce, who controlled the editorial policy of the *Iowa Homestead*; and Henry Wallace, editor and part-owner of *Wallaces' Farmer and Dairyman*. The election of 1896 provided the opportunity for the most antagonistic installment in an ongoing war of character defamation between Pierce and Wallace — a conflict played out in the pages of the *Homestead*, *Wallaces' Farmer and Dairyman*, and the newspapers of Des Moines.

Originally the two men had been associates on the same publication. Wallace was a Pennsylvania-born Presbyterian minister who had retired from the ministry in the 1870s because



# The Pierce-Wallace Controversy and the Election of 1896

by Joel Kunze

of ill health. He had moved to Winterset, Iowa, and embarked on a new career in farming. Wallace had soon begun writing agricultural editorials for a local paper. In 1883, at the age of forty-seven, he had accepted the position of contributing editor for the *Iowa Homestead*, a Des Moines-based agricultural journal. Two years later, thirty-seven-year-old James M. Pierce became part-owner and business manager of the *Homestead*. Prior to this Pierce had built a career by publishing and editing small county-seat newspapers in Missouri and in Taylor and Clarke counties of Iowa. Under Pierce's management and Wallace's editorship, the *Homestead* quickly became the leading agricultural journal in the state.

In spite of the success of this association, tensions developed in the early 1890s over editorial policy. That such a conflict arose was perhaps inevitable. Wallace, the ex-minister, used the pages of the *Homestead* as a surrogate pulpit. He preached agricultural improvement and crusaded against those who hindered his vision of rural development. Pierce, on the other hand, viewed the journal as a product



James M. Pierce, editor of *Iowa Homestead*. The journal was based in Des Moines, as was *Wallaces' Farmer*.



# WALLACES' FARMER AND DAIRYMAN A WEEKLY JOURNAL FOR WESTERN FARMERS

VOL. XXI.

DES MOINES, IOWA, FRIDAY, PT. 18, 1896.

NO. 38.

that had to appeal to as many readers as possible. More importantly, the poor economic climate of the early 1890s heightened Pierce's urgency for the *Homestead* to survive as a business. To ensure solvency, Pierce no doubt avoided actions that might have offended paying advertisers but that the moralistic Wallace would have interpreted as inappropriate at best.

In February 1895 disagreements reached such a peak that Wallace stepped down as editor. Pierce announced to readers that "the *Homestead* had felt obliged to rid itself of an incubus." Wallace joined with his sons, Henry C. and John, in expanding a small dairy paper published at Iowa State Agricultural College and renaming it *Wallaces' Farmer and Dairyman*. In his first editorial Wallace presented his reasons for having left the *Homestead*; he proclaimed that "no grief or loss of any kind has ever befallen me that has given me so many sleepless nights as the fact that I was suspected of being privy to deals of a corrupt character in connection with the *Homestead*." These two editorials mark the beginning of the public conflict of Pierce and Wallace. Each tried to persuade readers that the other lacked integrity and honesty and was, therefore, not deserving of readers' patronage.

A major factor in the continued animosity following Wallace's departure was that Wallace owned a 30 percent share of the *Homestead's* controlling company. He attempted to sell his interest to Pierce and Pierce's associates, but they refused to buy. In Wallace's opinion, Pierce did not want to provide him with any funds that could have been used to promote and publish *Wallaces' Farmer and Dairyman*. As a minority stockholder Wallace had no say in the management of the *Homestead*, and he

**HENRY WALLACE, Editor.**

**H. C. WALLACE. ASSISTANT EDITOR.**

**Mr. Wallace was for ten years, up to February, 1895, the editor of the Iowa Homestead. His withdrawal from that paper was the culmination of trouble between him and the business manager as to its public editorial policy, Mr. Wallace wishing to maintain it in its old position as the leading western exponent of anti-monopoly principles. Failing in this he became the editor of WALLACES' FARMER over the editorial policy of which he has full control. He invites the co-operation of his old Homestead friends in making the FARMER AND DAIRYMAN the leading western authority on agricultural matters.**

Both weekly papers pushed for reader loyalty and new subscribers. In the section devoted to subscription rates and mailing permits, Wallace routinely printed an explanation about his departure from the *Homestead*.

believed that Pierce manipulated the finances so that all profits went to pay salaries and to make improvements. With no dividends from his stock, Wallace's investment earned him nothing while it was trapped in the *Homestead* company. Wallace entered into a lengthy litigation to force an eventual buy-out.

**P**RIOR TO the nomination of the presidential candidates in the summer of 1896, numerous skirmishes between Pierce and Wallace had already been played out in the pages of their respective journals. Early in the year they argued about the



operation of farmers' institutes and the management of the State Agricultural College in Ames. Pierce, in the midst of this quarrel, described Wallace as a person "who is without any politics so far as principles go, but who manifests a surprising aptitude for politics of the personal, scheming, place-hunting kind."

In March the chief contention was proposed revision of state railroad regulations. Wallace questioned the *Homestead's* lack of comment on this topic, stating that "silence under these circumstances . . . might well awaken the suspicion of guilty knowledge of a scheme to rob the people." He also claimed that the only reason Pierce had permitted an anti-railroad editorial in the *Homestead* in the past was because it was the only stance that sold subscriptions in Iowa. Pierce defended his journal's silence by calling the railroad regulations a non-issue. He labeled Wallace's accusations fraudulent, totally unfounded, and an attempt "to deceive the farmers of Iowa into believing that [Wallace] is lying awake nights watching their interests."

Wallace next focused his barbs on the page layout of his competitor, calling attention to the

*Homestead's* practice of highlighting certain article titles in red ink. The following notice appeared on the front page of *Wallace's Farmer and Dairyman*: "The paper that is obliged to call attention in red lines across its front page each week to the articles it thinks worth reading leaves broad room for the inference that the rest are not worth reading."

**H**ENRY WALLACE'S actions during the presidential campaign generated the most hostile and vindictive accusations in the feud. With the nomination of William McKinley by the Republican party and William Jennings Bryan by both the Democratic and Populist parties, the decisive campaign issue became monetary reform. The Republican party platform stated that the current monetary system, a de-facto gold standard, was to be maintained and that

The headline above the masthead of the October 2 *Homestead* directed readers to Pierce's first political cartoon attacking Wallace and his weekly silver series.

It's as good as a Show! The Acrobatic Antics of a Non-partisan Agricultural Editor on Silver. Page 5.

## HARD TIMES

ONLY INCREASE THE VALUE OF THE HOMESTEAD, AND MAKE IT MORE NECESSARY IN EVERY FARM HOME.

M<sup>R.</sup> FRANK LOWN, of North English, Iowa, writes: "We have taken the HOMESTEAD seven or eight years and could not do without it. It is good from beginning to end."

M<sup>R.</sup> FRED KIECHEL, of Johnson, Nebraska, writes: "The HOMESTEAD is one of the best farm journals published. There are none I prize more highly."

**\$1.00**



VOL. XLI. NO. 40.

DES MOINES, IOWA, OCTOBER 2, 1896.

WHOLE NO. 2107.



the addition of a silver standard was possible only through international agreement. The Democratic platform advocated the coinage of silver unilaterally by the United States at a ratio of sixteen ounces of silver to one ounce of gold — the “free silver” position. With such a seemingly complicated issue, Wallace viewed it his duty to present impartially the pros and cons of each position to his readers.

In the August 14 *Wallaces' Farmer and Dairyman*, Wallace replaced the weekly report on the Farmers' Alliance with the first in a series of twelve installments titled “Silver and the Farmer.” Wallace explained the reason for the new series: Economic prosperity, both in the United States and overseas, depended on the outcome of the election, and it was therefore absolutely necessary to educate the voter on this complex issue. He promised to present the facts in a nonpartisan manner because, as he stated, partisan politics were “alien” to him. He also declared that he had not yet taken a position on either side of the monetary question; once he did, he would publish his opinion.

By mid-September, it was obvious which side Wallace supported. He believed that those groups advocating free silver were being manipulated by mining and banking interests. In his view, free silver was not the cure for farmers' economic ills. If the free-silver advocates won, Wallace was convinced that the nation would suffer great harm. Consequently he supported the Republican party and

William McKinley, a position that he presented in the September 25 installment.

At the end of the series, in late October, Wallace urged his readers to draw their own conclusions from the evidence and then to do their patriotic duty and vote. They were to cast their ballots with the awareness that their decision would determine the fate of not only the United States, but of foreign nations as well. He even recommended that those who did not fully understand the issues of the election should either not vote at all or vote only for local and state offices. Too much was at stake, Wallace believed, for votes to be cast in ignorance.

While Wallace was publishing this weekly series, Pierce presented nothing in the *Homestead* concerned with the election. There were no editorials about the candidates or the silver issue. The only mention appeared the week before the election: Pierce stated that once it was over, farmers could finally get back to work and concentrate on farming.

Even though Pierce never discussed the campaign issues, in October he renewed his attacks on Wallace by questioning Wallace's conduct regarding the weekly series on the silver issue. In the October 2 *Homestead* there appeared a cartoon of a man with Wallace's likeness, balancing on a fence and carrying a pole labeled “silver” on one end and “gold” on the other. The cartoon was titled “AN AGRICULTURAL EDITOR IN HIS GREAT NON-PARTISAN ACROBATIC ACT.” Below this a short

In an accompanying ad for “energetic” subscription agents, Wallace with typical zeal proclaimed, “Our SILVER ARTICLES now running should be read by every farmer in Iowa.”

## Silver and the Farmer.

A Series of Articles on the Silver Question as it Affects the Farmer.

### The Fall of Silver. Continued.

In our article in last week's issue we called attention to the large amount of human nature there is in the discussion of the silver question and the fact that when the placer mines of California, Australia, and Russia began to pour out their treasures, nation after nation began to hedge against gold, some of them to demonetize it, and were disposed to regard silver, at that time the dearer metal, as the most desirable measure of value. We called attention, also,

denness of the change from gold to silver and the reason of it, we print in parallel columns the speeches of Senators Stewart and Jones, both of Nevada, in 1874 and 1876, together with the silver output of the Nevada mines and the market price of silver at those dates, which we think will fully confirm our statement in last week's issue that the farmer of the United States has little ground for sympathy with the mining kings of the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific coast:

Extract from the V. Senator Jones in the

## AGENTS WANTED.

We want an energetic agent to canvass for subscriptions in every township in the state and at every county fair.

Our SILVER ARTICLES now running should be read by every farmer in Iowa.

Write at once for terms.

WALLACES' FARMER, Des Moines, Iowa.

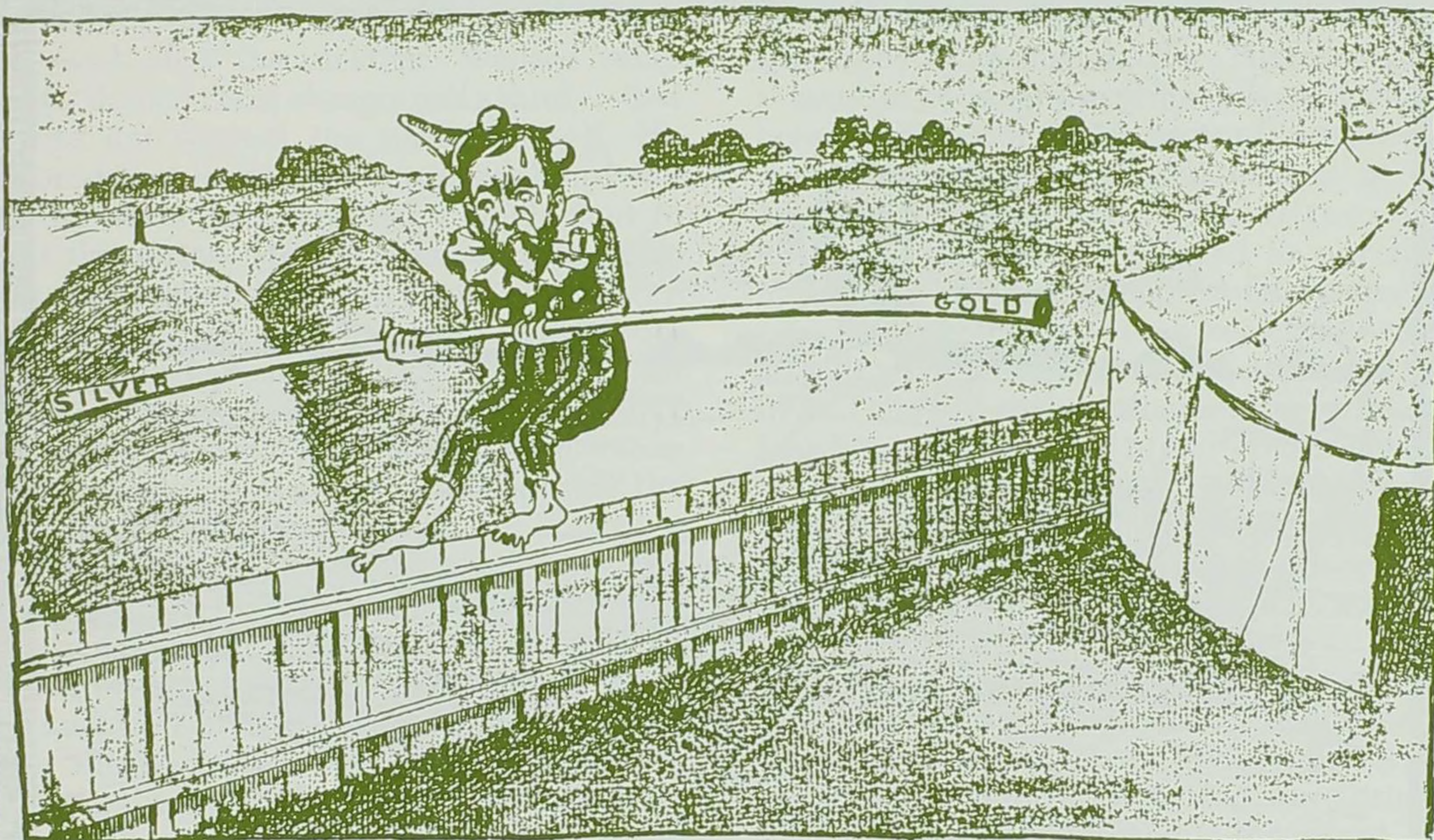
of Germany, France, Belgium, and Great Britain, demanding the use of silver not as subsidiary coinage but as primary money on an agreed international ratio. This seems to us to be the natural, logical, and absolutely invincible position of the farmer who

“Don't farmers buy silver watches as they used to?”

“A farmer past middle age may, but the young fellow wants either a gold or a gold filled watch.”

“Please state what other changes have taken place in the relative use of silver and gold in the jewelry business





AN AGRICULTURAL EDITOR IN HIS GREAT NON-PARTISAN ACROBATIC ACT.

Great Cæsar! how this fence does shake;  
I may fall off before I'm ready.  
With clinging fast my toes do ache,  
My knees with trepidation quake,  
This beastly fence is so unsteady.

I know the side on which I'll drop;  
Ere I set out I knew it.  
But I'll keep up the "impartial" yawp  
Till the very last, when down I flop,  
If this shaky fence will let me do it.

I may fall in the mud—or worse—  
And soil myself quite badly.  
To a little filth I'm not averse.  
When "lofty tumbling" will fill my purse  
I undertake it gladly.

And if the "family name" is tarnished,  
And loses something of its luster,  
I'll have it freshly gilt and varnished—  
The wherewithal thereto being furnished—  
And make it so it may pass muster.

But the farmers whom I've farmed for years  
See through "non-partisan" pretenses.  
They'll spew me out—they'll close their ears  
When next I play on their hopes and fears—  
Oh! why are made such shaky fences?

And when they next my "rousements" scan  
They'll put their thumbs upon their noses,  
And they'll the air with fingers fan,  
And say, "We all know how 'non-partisan (?)'  
Is this self-appointed Moses."

When with sham fervor I essay  
To move their hearts or jil their senses,  
"What are you giving us?" they'll say,  
"And what are you getting for it, pray?"—  
Oh! this is shakiest of fences!

I wish I hadn't been so "slick."  
Nor tried "non-partisan" pretense,  
Been honest, nor sought to trick  
The few that trust me—I am sick;  
Would I were down from this shaky fence!

I should feel shame, but I do not.  
My head is in a perfect jumble.  
I guess it's fear of being caught  
In my "non-partisan, impartial 'rot,'"  
Look out! I'm going to tumble.

poem appeared, purporting to state the fence-walker's thoughts:

"... I know the side on which I'll drop;  
Ere I set out I knew it.  
But I'll keep up the 'impartial' yawp  
Till the very last, when down I flop,  
If this shaky fence will let me do it.

I may fall in the mud — or worse —  
And soil myself quite badly.  
To a little filth I'm not averse.  
When 'lofty tumbling' will fill my purse  
I undertake it gladly. . . ."

Pierce, without mentioning him by name, accused Wallace of not having been impartial or nonpartisan in the silver series and of having

The poem with Pierce's October 2 cartoon calls the bearded clown on the fence a "self-appointed Moses."

known from the very start which side he supported. Pierce charged that Wallace had maintained a pretense of impartiality to deceive readers. The cartoon appeared the week after Wallace's September 25 installment, in which he had clearly stated his support for the Republicans. Pierce believed that Wallace had already opposed the free-silver stance before the series had begun and that he intended to lead readers to the same conclusion under a guise of nonpartisanship, for which he had been paid.

Wallace responded with a vitriolic editorial titled "The Satanic Instinct." Like Pierce, he





mentioned no names. He lashed out at those persons who, when they could not fault another's statements, attacked one's integrity and personal character. He called these persons cowards and declared that he felt no threat from these people with "the Satanic spirit" because good people "instinctively fear the man, whatever may be his station in life, on the farm, in the city, in politics, or in journalism, who manifests the Satanic type of character."

Pierce continued his accusations on October 23 by publishing another cartoon and a short article, "THE NON-PARTISAN AGRICULTURAL EDITOR IN THE ROLE OF A POLITICAL STOOL-PIGEON." Pierce charged that "the agricultural editorial stool pigeon perches himself on his alleged non-partisan tripod and goes

Another Wallace caricature on October 23. The "party net" is set to spring as Wallace, with pipe and tapered beard, acts as stool pigeon to an approaching flock.

through a lot of alleged impartial, non-partisan flutterings, positively in the interest of precious truth, and not in the interests of any political party, as he loudly and with much protestation proclaims, while all the time his gyrations and flutterings have been planned from the very beginning to lead his readers into the party net. . . . The real stool pigeon betrays its fellow innocently, without intending or even being conscious of its treason; the editorial stool pigeon consents to be a stool pigeon for a cash payment." Now, ten days before voters would go to the polls, Pierce



again accused Wallace of deceiving farmers and of accepting payment for it.

A week after the election, Wallace vehemently denied these charges and a third — that he had not written the series himself. He declared that he had written every word and that he never had accepted a single cent to print the series. He did acknowledge, however, that a number of extra copies of *Wallace's Farmer and Dairyman* had been sent to non-subscribers, that some of these had been paid for by a number of different groups, including the Republican party, but that no advance notice of the content or conclusions of the series had ever been given out.

Wallace then switched to the offensive. He attacked the *Homestead's* editorial silence during the campaign. "In a great crisis like that through which we have passed, when party lines are broken up, when the people thought their future financial welfare depended on knowing the truth," he wrote, "the paper that is not willing to tell it on the earnest request of its readers, and tell it honestly, lacks something of being a genuine paper worthy of the confidence and respect of its readers."

**E**VEN THOUGH the election was over, Pierce's attacks were not. On Saturday, November 21, Pierce published a special eight-page edition of the *Homestead*. He declared that a special edition was necessary because he did not want "to either cumber or soil the columns of the regular [Friday] edition." He devoted its entire contents to exposing Wallace as a hypocrite who had changed his political views in return for a cash payment. In large letters the headline read: "Shameful Political Venality! Henry Wallace Charged with Selling His Opinions and Changing Them to Make Them Salable. The Hireling and Mercenary Element in Politics Exposed and an Agricultural Stool Pigeon Unmasked. Non-Partisan Pretense Hereafter at a Discount, Only Causing the Inquiry, 'How Much Does He Get For It?'" Pierce related that the Republican party had offered to pay agricultural journals in Iowa to run favorable

articles. He knew this first hand, he claimed, because the *Homestead* itself had been approached with such an offer. There had been a number of meetings from July to October between Pierce or the *Homestead's* advertising manager and an unnamed official of the National Republican Committee. The unnamed official had offered to purchase upwards of 15,000 extra copies of the paper at a rate of \$30 per thousand each week if anti-silver articles were published. Pierce explained that he had allowed the negotiations to continue so long because he wanted to learn the full details of the plan and report them to the farmers of Iowa. October 2, the date he had ended negotiations, was also the date when the *Homestead* had published the first cartoon attacking Wallace.

Most of the special issue set out to demonstrate Wallace's apparent change of opinion on the silver issue. Selections from Wallace's earlier writings on financial matters were printed next to Wallace's statements in the recent "Silver and the Farmer" series. Again Pierce accused Wallace of changing from an early pro-silver stance to a later pro-Republican position, and that he shifted in return for cash. Finally, Pierce explained that exposing Wallace was not done for political reasons but out of every patriotic citizen's desire for clean campaigns. He considered it his duty to expose "the guerilla element in politics." If not brought to the public's attention, these "venal mercenaries . . . will return to plague the country in each succeeding campaign; their methods will grow more and more unblushing and their hypocrisies more and more shameless, if that be possible."

In two editorials, "The Homestead Boomerang" on November 27, and "The Biter Bitten" on December 4, Wallace defended himself. "Each and every allegation is a brazen and baseless falsehood," he asserted. Wallace admitted that his position had in fact changed, but long before the campaign had begun. He noted that his pro-silver writings used in Pierce's special edition of the *Homestead* had been taken from 1890 and earlier. Wallace also reprinted newspaper interviews with Albert Cummins (noted Des Moines attorney and National Republican Committee member in



charge of newspaper advertising) and with state Republican party officials, who denied any agreement to pay Wallace for changing his views. Cummins reported that Pierce, however, had repeatedly offered Republican officials the editorial services of the *Homestead* for a fee, but that the offers had not been accepted. Wallace attributed Pierce's allegations to a "superfluity of naughtiness" and to a conspiracy by Pierce and the current *Homestead* management to ruin his reputation and rob him of his investment.

**P**IERCE'S accusations came to naught. On the same day that his special issue was published, Des Moines newspaper editors (who had read Pierce's charges in the previous day's *Daily News*) viewed the special-edition allegations as little more than another episode in the continual Pierce-Wallace feud. One editor complained that the animosities had gone on far too long, having been "spread out *ad nauseum* in the courts and in the columns of the newspapers." Another editorial expressed the same sentiment: "This fight among agricultural papers in Iowa has already gone beyond all endurance. Why should the farmers of the state be made parties to an endless controversy over stock in this or that paper in Des Moines?"

Pierce had accused Wallace of a common campaign practice: allowing political parties to buy additional copies of newspapers for distribution to voters. According to Republican officials, however, Pierce himself had tried to arrange this for his own publication. Moreover, his accusation that Wallace had been bribed to change his stance on the silver issue proved groundless. Wallace (and his attorney, Albert Cummins) sued Pierce for libel on this count, originally demanding damages reportedly as high as \$500,000. In July 1899, the litigation was settled in Wallace's favor, but he was awarded a much reduced sum of \$1,500.

On Pierce's other allegation, that Wallace deceived the Iowa voter under a guise of non-partisanship, the verdict is less clear. To his

credit, even though Wallace had apparently not notified Republican party officials of his stance on the silver issue (as Pierce had implied) anyone familiar with Wallace might have assumed that he would have backed the Republicans. Wallace had supported Republican candidates long before becoming an agricultural editor in 1883. The Republican party was the party through which Iowa farmers had most often implemented their reform agenda in the 1880s. Wallace, as editor of the *Homestead* from 1883 until early 1895, had been a strong supporter of the Farmers' Alliance in Iowa and had actively pushed for its proposed reforms. At the same time he had distrusted farmers forming a third party. As the *Homestead's* editor he had urged farmers to work within the two-party system, especially with the Republican party, and not to organize a new party such as the Populists. On the other hand, Wallace admitted to an anti-silver stance long before August 1896; his nonpartisan introduction to his silver series could have been interpreted as deception.

**D**ID WALLACE purposely deceive his readers? The evidence leads me to say "no." He had stated that he would publish his personal opinion along with discussion of both sides of the issue. Farmers were still free to reach their own conclusions. Furthermore, he did not view the campaign issues as solely political. The seriousness of the silver issue, in his mind, transcended the boundaries of political parties. Rather, for Wallace the former minister, the question was more appropriately a moral one. The Republican party, a party he had supported since the Civil War, represented for Wallace a future of agricultural and, more importantly, national improvement. He wholeheartedly supported McKinley because the Republicans represented progress, while Bryan represented stagnation and possible ruin. The election was therefore not Republican versus Democrat; it was Good versus Evil. With the issue posed in this manner,



there would be no way for Wallace to have viewed his support of McKinley as partisan because it was the only position morally acceptable to him.

This episode also represents the differing approaches of Wallace and Pierce to their agricultural papers. Wallace as editor used his journal to promote his vision for agriculture. In this way he appealed to a more select readership and was not afraid to take stands that might not please everyone. A farmer who disagreed with the editorial bent could simply stop subscribing. Pierce, on the other hand, viewed his journal as a product that should reach as wide an audience as possible. To avoid offending readers and advertisers, he did not publish strong opinions or controversial issues — unless he thought it could damage his major competitor. Pierce was more likely to weigh the consequences of controversy in terms of readership appeal and advertising, whereas Wallace simply published what he thought was the correct stand, believing that his readers would agree with him.

The presidential campaign of 1896 was a novel and contentious process dependent upon educating the voting public about a complex issue. This was no less true in the state of Iowa, but in this particular episode the actual campaign message became less significant than its

presentation. Henry Wallace felt a critical need, a moral duty, to inform the Iowa farmer of exactly what was at stake in the coming election. In doing so, he provided an opportunity for his chief competitor, James M. Pierce, to attack his integrity and personal character. Pierce, however, greatly exaggerated and misrepresented the circumstances in order to carry on his personal feud with Wallace. For Pierce the campaign of 1896 was perhaps not so much a great political struggle as it was the most acrimonious episode in a series of animosities and quarrels conducted publicly on the pages of the agricultural press of Iowa. □

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

Primary sources used are Des Moines newspapers; *Daily News*, *Iowa State Register*, and *Leader*; the *Homestead*; and *Wallaces' Farmer and Dairyman* (originally *Farm and Dairy*). Wallace's account can be found in Henry Wallace, *Uncle Henry's Own Story of His Life: Personal Reminiscences*, vol. 3 (1919). Other sources on Pierce and Wallace are Russell Lord, *The Wallaces of Iowa* (1947); Donald R. Murphy, "The Centennial of a Farm Paper," *Palimpsest* 37 (Sept. 1956):464-74; and Gerald L. Seaman, "A History of Some Early Iowa Farm Journals (Before 1900)," master's thesis, Iowa State College, Ames, 1942. For background on the election of 1896, see Paul W. Glad, *McKinley, Bryan, and the People* (1964); and Stanley L. Jones, *The Presidential Election of 1896* (1964).







# METHODIST REVIVAL MEETING

## Remembering a Boyhood Experience in 1865

by Henry A. Miller

**I**N THE EARLY SPRING of 1865 a religious "revival" was held at the Methodist Church in Unionville, Iowa. Such revivals in those days were usually rather frenzied affairs and this was one of that kind. I attended it, and was caught by the spirit, and "got religion" myself. I had a bad case. It has always been my nature to do everything I do with all my might. I have always played ball or marbles, or gone swimming, or fought, or cussed, enthusiastically. Even in my illnesses (when I had any) I had them bad. When I had the measles in '62 I was sick a month longer than any other member of the family. When I had the mumps, in the wet and muddy spring of '63, I had them on both sides at once and had them bad. I fell down on a slippery plank into the mud while I had the mumps and I thought there could be nothing more painful than to fall down on a slippery plank into the mud when you have the mumps on both sides.

So when the big revival began in the Methodist Church I fell into grace, and I fell hard. Under the earnest exhortations of Reverend Orr (who was really a fine man) I became "convicted" of my sins and felt sure that I was on the straight road to Hell. I remembered that I had done about everything bad that a small boy should not do. If I did not repent and turn over a new leaf I was surely a "goner." Merely repenting and turning over a new leaf was not all that was necessary, either. I would have to make a public confession and join the church. As I listened to the preacher, I realized the imminence of my impending doom. What if I should die before reaching home that night? And the preacher said I stood a good chance of doing that very thing; for it happened that way to many sinners. What would become of me in

such a case? I shuddered to think of it.

My past life confronted me in memory, ominously. Those watermelons I had stolen! Those chickens we boys had "confiscated" and fried in the woods while we were "soldiering"! And my cussing! And those window panes Bill Bailey and I had broken out of the Baptist Church! I tried to think that Bill had probably suggested that enterprise, but I could not get much comfort out of that thought; for my belief in the doctrines of free moral agency and "every fellow for himself" convinced me that it would do no good to lay that job onto Bill. Had not every broken pane of glass opened another avenue to perdition? And perdition was not described by the preacher as simply a mental condition after death. If it had been, I think I would have been willing to take a chance for a while longer. *Bodily* resurrection was preached, and the unregenerate would be literally roasted in Hell over a hot fire — hotter than any fire I had ever seen. And that fire would never go out either, or even die down a little. I wouldn't have a chance to get out of it even for a little while and put a wet rag on the burned places (as I had done when I burned my hand so bad trying to mold some hot lead into a ferrule around the handle of a dirk-knife that had been made for me out of a file at the blacksmith shop). No, I would just keep on burning, forever and ever. And forever was a long time. I had never realized before what a long time forever would be. The brimstone would be furnished by the Devil, and he had unlimited supplies. Brimstone was supposed to make a hotter fire than any other fuel. Gasoline hadn't been heard of then, nor acetylene gas, nor the electric torch. The Standard Oil Company had not been invented then, or I



suppose the Devil would have made arrangements for a rebate on the price of gasoline in large quantities.

As I listened to the preacher, I became almost frantic about the risk I had been taking in leading my ungodly life and resolved to make a change at once. People were shouting, singing and exhorting all around me. Every little while some good brother or sister, fully satisfied that he or she was on the right track, would jump up and exhort those who were about to be lost to come forward at once. Time was precious: "Come right now, for it may be everlastingly too late in another minute." Strike while the iron is hot, was their motto; and I became satisfied that they had the right viewpoint.

**A**ROUND the platform on which the pulpit stood was a black walnut bench, about ten inches wide and eighteen inches high. It was called the "mercy seat," and it was the place where sinners could go and kneel down and get freed from the clutch of the Devil. I didn't know whether there were any other mercy seats in the world. Probably not, for the Baptist Church didn't have any. But that didn't signify much, for the Baptists were mostly Democrats and would go to Hell anyhow. But from the way folks were crowding around the mercy seat in front of me, taking turns for it like men waiting for a shave in a barber shop, I thought it likely that there were no other mercy seats in the world outside of that one in Unionville, Iowa. After the sinners had remained on the mercy seat awhile, they would be led back to a bench reserved for them exclusively and another lot would go forward, accompanied by the singing and shouting of the congregation. The preacher had said that salvation was free, and I could see that the reserved seat was free. I was very glad of that; for if there had been any charge I certainly would have been lost, for I was broke.

Being so little, I didn't have much show with the bigger and stouter sinners, but I watched my chance and edged in and put my head between my hands on the black walnut bench and confessed all my sins — that is, all that I

could think of on such short notice, for I may have left out a few small sins in my hurry. Occasionally, a good old sister would come along and put her soft, motherly hand on my head and ask me if I had "seen the light" yet?

"No, it's all dark here," I would murmur.

"You haven't given everything up then, my dear. You must just let everything go and give it all to the Lord. If you do you will see a great light and you will know that you are saved."

I couldn't understand what she meant by "letting everything go," for I didn't have anything to let go that I thought the Lord could possibly want. And it wasn't the Lord anyhow that I was interested in. It was the Devil that I was trying to get away from, and that bake-oven he was operating. The Lord, I had understood, was kind-hearted and would listen to reason. But the Devil was not to be put off with any sort of argument. Why crowding around that mercy seat would get me shut of the Devil I could not make out, but the preacher had said it would work and I was willing to try anything once. But no great light would come to me, however much I tried to "let everything go."

I finally concluded that no one could be expected to see a great light with his head between his hands on a black walnut bench, and maybe the light of the big coal-oil lamps at the pulpit would do. They certainly gave a great deal better light than the tallow dips we had at home. So I raised my head from between my hands and went back to the reserved seat and took my place among the other brands plucked from the burning, while the stentorian voice of the self-appointed leader of the singers struck up, as another relay of penitents went forward:

*"O, won't you go 'long,  
we're purty nigh there,  
We're gatherin' heavenly man-na."*

**N**OW, I DON'T MEAN to speak irreverently of religion. Indeed, I am not doing that. I am just relating an incident that took place during a meeting that seemed more an attack of religious hysteria than a revival of deep religious feeling. Religion so acquired may be a good thing for some people, and no doubt there



are a few who are improved by it. But my observation has been that most of the converts secured under the stress of such excitement do not stick very long and soon backslide. Those who do stick and remain consistently faithful to the teachings of their religion were probably good enough for all practical purposes anyhow.

As for me, I expect that almost any change would have been a good thing, for there was room for improvement. I understood that from that time on I was to go to Sunday School regularly and also to preaching once in a while; and that it would not be right any longer to steal watermelons or chickens, or to break window lights out of a church, or fight or cuss, or play marbles for keeps, for that would be gambling. I must not play hooky and go swimming while I was supposed to be in school, nor "ring" switches for school-marms so they couldn't administer corporal punishment to needy pupils.

I believe my "conversion" did improve my general conduct for some months, and it helped the other boys who got religion too — some of them. A lot of them joined the church, before the revival closed like a fire burns out for want of fuel. Bill Bailey became fairly docile and Sam Crow did not play marbles for keeps for some time. For that change in Sam I felt truly thankful, for Sam was a much better

player than I. In fact Sam was usually the owner of nearly all the marbles in the neighborhood. Sam was bigger than I was and I believe he had been tougher. But I had not tried to compete with him, for I realized that I could never aspire to the heights of toughness that Sam Crow attained. I am sorry to be obliged to relate, however, that Sam did not hold out faithful very long; for in the following summer he was caught red-handed by one of the older church members while he was skinning us boys playing for stakes; and, being called to account for his fall from grace, he excused himself by explaining that his church dues would soon have to be met and business in other lines was dull just then.

When one joined the Methodist Church in those days he was taken in on probation. That is, he was put on his good behavior for six months before being admitted to full membership. After that he could do pretty much as he pleased. Like being vaccinated for smallpox, he should be able to stand a good deal of exposure to sin without catching the disease. Even if he did catch it, it would be only a slight case and not dangerous. I managed to behave fairly well for my period of probation and became a full-fledged member of the church in the fall. But I took it easy after that and felt reasonably natural again. □

IN 1935 Henry A. Miller, the author of this piece, wrote, "If this somewhat crude and incomplete account can convey . . . something of a picture of the simple, rugged life of those days, I will be satisfied and will feel repaid for my effort."

Miller was born in 1854 in Wisconsin and the family moved when he was four to Unionville, Iowa. His eight boyhood years in a southern Iowa border county were punctuated by the Civil War, Fourth of July celebrations, revival meetings, and frontier farm work.

In 1866, after his father had left his mother, Miller was bound out to a printer in Lan-

caster, Missouri, where as a 12-year-old he went alone to make his way in the world. Later he courted and married Ella Mary Potter, and they lived in Lancaster for two decades. There Miller copublished the *Lancaster Excelsior* and held county office. He was an avid reader, musician, and gardener. New technology fascinated him. In his forties he studied law at home; in his sixties, Latin. His son recalled his father's "abounding, whimsical sense of humor." Miller himself admitted that he "never seemed to meet a stranger."

In 1921, Miller "wrote out a sort of history" of his boyhood years. "Some members of my

family had asked me to do this several years earlier," he wrote, "but I hesitated to do so as I felt that the small events of my life were of no especial interest to anyone outside my own dear ones." He expanded the manuscript twice more before he died in 1937. These memoirs, "Recollections of an Octogenarian," were later found in an attic, and both son Franklin Miller and grandson Franklin Miller, Jr. have worked to preserve and distribute them to relatives.

The account of a revival meeting is reprinted here with the permission of Franklin Miller, Jr., of Gambier, Ohio.

—The Editor



# Victorian Crazy Quilts

by Carole A. Spencer

**D**URING the last two decades of the nineteenth century, a new type of needlework emerged in the form of the crazy quilt. Its origin is unknown, as is the source of its name. Some surmise that crazy quilting may have been

inspired by the asymmetry and juxtaposition of color and texture in Oriental artwork, viewed by the public through the Japanese exhibit at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. Some suggest that the term "crazy" might be explained by the fact that making crazy quilts did indeed become a "craze." Others note that the irregularly shaped pieces create a cracked or "crazed" look, like the hair-line cracks of a ceramic glaze.

Victorians adored the crazy quilt for its jewel-toned colors and lavish ornamentation. Scraps of rich fabrics — silks, satins, velvets, laces, and brocades — were carefully selected and purchased. Pieces of ribbons, sewing scraps, and men's ties were also used. American flags, political campaign ribbons, Civil War memorial ribbons, and other souvenirs were sometimes sewn into the patchwork as well. Each piece was basted to a foundation fabric in a typical random pattern.

The quilts on the following pages, from the Des Moines museum collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa, represent the rich variety of Victorian crazy quilts in design and ornamentation. About half of these quilts were made in totally random patterns. Others are composed of equal-sized squares made up of random pieces. Although a few follow a pattern, the fabric choices and ornate stitching are typical of Victorian crazy quilts.

Once basted in place, the edges of the pieces

Right: Reflecting the Victorians' love of color, the crazy quilt was as likely to be found in a parlor as in a bedroom. In such an elegant setting it might be used as a piano cover or be draped over a couch, as it appears here in the reception room of Terrace Hill, the Governor's Mansion in Des Moines. Left: 1883 advertisement.



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were adorned with elaborate embroidery stitches such as the feather, herringbone, or chain stitch. The pieces were then lavishly decorated with fancywork in silk or metallic thread, fine ribbon, and beads. Fabric paintings, chenille work (made with a pile yarn), and appliqués were also favorite choices. Popular magazines such as *Godey's Lady's Book* advised readers that the more ornamentation and "the greater the diversity in stitches the better." The finished work was often bordered with a velvet band, scalloped edging, metallic braiding, or other ornamentation.

Pre-stamped fabric pieces and silk thread were available in do-it-yourself kits, and remnants of silk and ribbons could be ordered through the mail. Fancywork patterns were either drawn by the quilt maker or obtained from fabric or thread companies such as the Brainerd and Armstrong Silk Company in New London, Connecticut, or the E. M. Lemarie Company in Little Ferry, New Jersey. Patterns were also provided in women's magazines such as *Godey's Lady's Book*, *Peterson's Magazine*, *Harper's Bazar*, and *Delineator*. Popular needlework patterns for crazy quilts included birds (owls and peacocks were used most often), wild and domestic animals, butterflies, bugs, spiders, and spider webs. Japanese folding fans were also common motifs, as were Kate Greenaway figures, inspired by the English illustrator of children's books.

Flowers often adorn the Victorian crazy quilt. The sunflower, iris, cattail, and lily were fashionable choices of the 1880s. Some flowers, especially the rose, were made in three-dimensional form. By combining certain kinds of flowers, the quilt maker could convey a message through the Victorian symbolism ascribed to flowers. For example, the red rose symbolized love; the yellow rose, jealousy; and the weeping willow, mourning.

Like the album quilt, crazy quilts were often made as commemorative gifts for friends, family, and public figures (especially highly regarded men). Women often made crazy quilts as personal gifts for fiancés and husbands, and groups often made them for their ministers. A block-style crazy quilt that lacks a central theme often indicates this kind of group effort, in which the blocks were made sepa-

## REMNANTS FOR CRAZY PATCHWORK

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Above: Common ad in women's magazines. Right: This quilt, attributed to Emily Packard in 1888, is a virtual catalog of crazy-quilt motifs, from butterflies to American flags. Note also the embroidered comet in the upper left corner, and, in the bottom square, an embroidered penknife, spider web, insect, anchor, and fish. The musical staff may be based on a design published in *Ornamental Stitches for Embroidery* by T. E. Parker (1885).

Elsewhere, the quilt proudly proclaims in embroidery that it contains 780 pieces. Each block, separated by a velvet band, has different embroidered initials, and there is some variance in the embroidery technique. The blocks may have been made by other women and assembled by Emily Packard.

(Silk, velvet, cotton, and felt; 1888, 82¼" x 58½")

rately by individual women and then combined into a quilt. These quilts were embroidered with names, dates, biographical information about the person or family, poems, and perhaps the outline of a hand. The museum











recently acquired a presentation crazy quilt made in the sampler block style. In 1890 the Ladies Aid of the Evangelical Lutheran Bethanian Congregation of Burlington, Iowa, presented the quilt to their pastor, the Reverend Paul Bieger. The elaborate quilt is inscribed in German, bordered in velvet, and edged in metallic cording with corner tassels.

Crazy quilts were not typically used in the bedroom but rather in the parlor or music room, where they could be displayed. Small quilts, often thought to be children's quilts, were actually made to be used as table covers, antimacassars, and piano covers, or to drape over a sofa or cover a footstool.

Although crazy quilts occupied only a brief period in the history of quilting, some consider them most significant as representations of women's "silent rebellion" against the restrictions of Victorian society. Because of the Industrial Revolution, many changes had taken place in the lives of middle- and upper-class women. Women's roles had changed from producer of goods to that of consumers and moral protectors, and to engage in fancy needlework symbolized their leisured status and reflected favorably on their husbands. Although Victorian women were governed by strict behavioral codes and limited both economically and politically, they were able to demonstrate some control through the domestic arts. Frances Lichten, in *Hearts and Hands*, suggests that crazy quilts were "restless textiles" and "protests against the shackles of needlework discipline" imposed upon women to display their leisured status.

As the fad neared its end, crazy quilts were no longer made as decorative pieces but for functional purposes. Cotton thread and wool yarn replaced the silk and metallic thread. The quantity and quality of needlework lessened, and larger pieces of pastel cottons and wools replaced small pieces of jewel-toned fabrics.

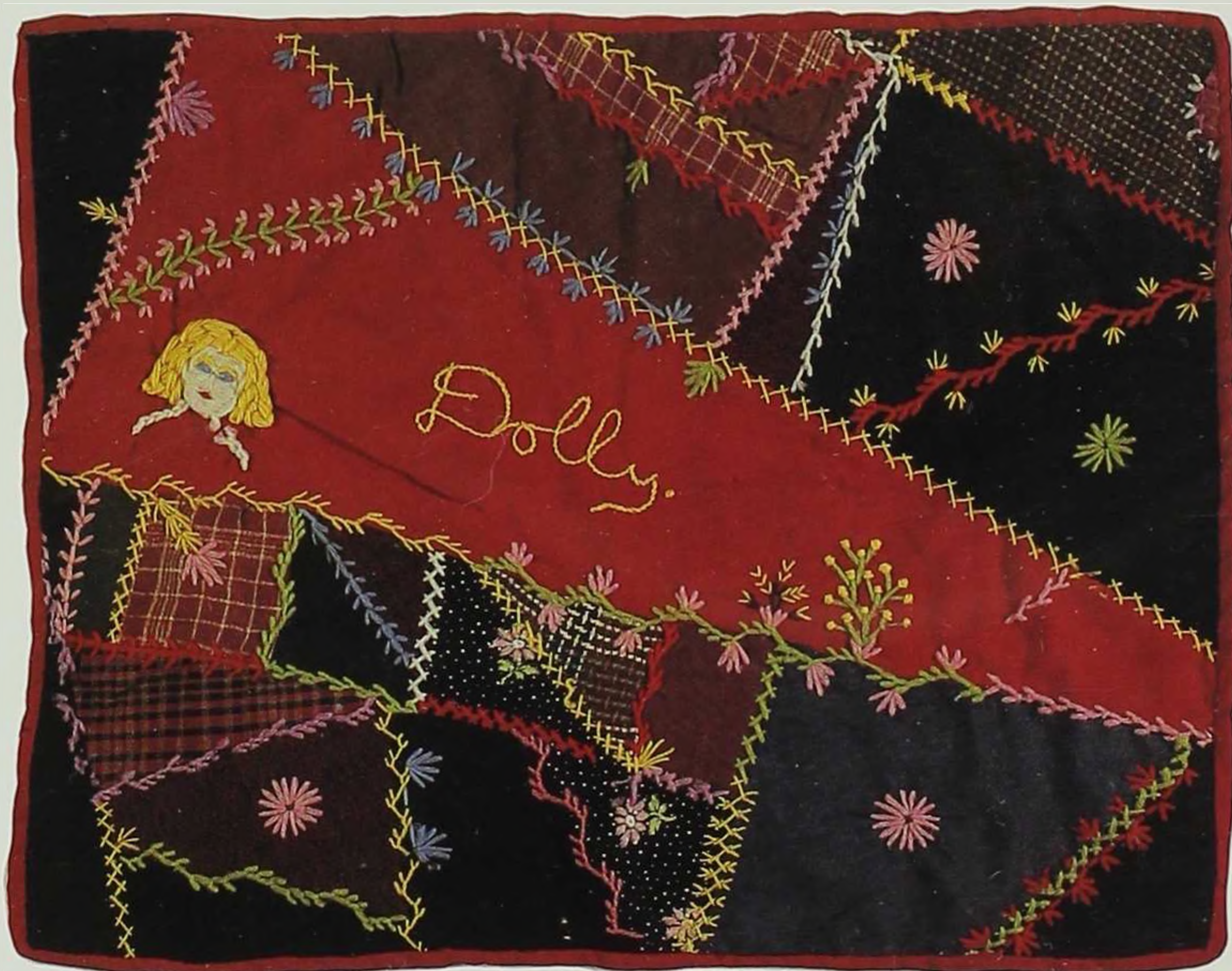
While the popularity of crazy-quilt needlework lasted for a relatively short time, crazy quilts continue to be valued today for their beautiful combinations of vivid colors, rich fabrics, and intricate ornamentation. Furthermore, the crazy quilt serves to document changes taking place in women's lives during the nineteenth century.



Opposite: This small quilt or "throw" is not precisely a crazy quilt because of the material used and the method of construction. Along with the craze for "crazy patchwork" in the nineteenth century was the practice of constructing quilts of other "found" materials. One popular material was silk badges. The majority of badges used in this quilt are Knight Templar badges; others include an 1896 Wisconsin State Fair badge, an IOOF badge, and an 1887 badge honoring E. R. Clapp on the fiftieth anniversary of settlement in Iowa.

Above: On reverse side of the "badge" quilt, the central piece is a man's silk handkerchief. (Silk; 1895-1905; 44½" x 29")





Above: Crazy piecework was used for many different items, including doll furnishings often made by little girls. This quilt was probably not made by a child because the embroidery is fairly sophisticated.  
(Wool and cotton; 1900–1920; 20½" x 16½")







Above: Made by Laura Henegan of Ottumwa, Iowa, this small quilt or "throw" was probably intended for use on a couch in the parlor. According to family tradition, the quilt and a companion throw were made from remnants of silk neckties. (Silk; 1900–1920; 49" x 48")

Lower left: Thought for many years to be a doll quilt, this small quilt was probably a small throw or pillow cover originally. The embroidered "E" indicates this probably was made by Emily Burch of Baxter, Iowa, after her marriage to Dr. H. W. Canfield in 1903. (Silk; after 1902; 26" x 24<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>")





Three details from an 1894 quilt, composed of squares made by various Iowa chapters of the Women's Relief Corps. W.R.C. was the women's auxiliary of the Grand Army of the Republic, the Civil War veterans group. The quilt is attributed to the Aunt Becky Young Tent 6.





Far left: The American flag square is from a W.R.C. chapter in Afton, Iowa. Note the three-dimensional flowers around it. Far right: One square incorporates a silk meeting badge from Missouri Valley, Iowa. (Silk, wool, and cotton; 1894; 74 $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 71")



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| 1 bunch of Strawberries                                       | 1 Alphabet, 1 1/2 in. high, with Sprig of Ferns | 1 sprig Daisies and Buds.                                |
| 1 vine of Forget-me-nots and Daisies                          |   | 1 new vine of Roses, 2 inches wide                       |
| 1 single Daisy and Forget-me-not, 2x2 in.                     |   | 2 Braiding Patterns, narrow design                       |
| 1 boquet of Daisies and Forget-me-nots, 5x6 inches            |   | 1 little Butterfly with closed wings                     |
| 1 sprig of Bachelor's Button, 3 1/2 in. high                  |   | 1 new scallop with Forget-me-nots                        |
| 1 Scallop with sprigs of Lily of the Valley                   |   | 1 vine of Roses and Buds, 5 inches                       |
| 1 vine of Daisies and Ferns, 5 1/2 inches wide                |   | 1 Butterfly on spray of Rosebuds                         |
| 1 growing design of Violets, for Lambrequins, &c., 6 in. high |   | 1 Butterfly with wide open wings                         |
| 1 sprig of Daisies, 4 in. high                                | 1 Braiding Pattern, wide                        | 1 bunch of Forget-me-nots, 4 1/2 in.                     |
| 1 sprig of Barberries, 3 in. high                             | 1 boquet Daisies and buds                       | 8 or 10 Crazy Patchwork designs                          |
| 1 single Rose and Bud, 2x2 in.                                | 1 spray of Autumn Leaves                        |  |
| 1 vine with Scallop, 2 1/2 in. wide                           | 1 vine of Leaves, 1 1/2 in. wide                |  |
| 1 design, Two Owls on branch                                  | 2 sprigs Bachelor's Button                      |  |
| 1 sprig of Golden Rod, 4 in. high                             | 1 plain scallop for Flannel Skirts              |  |
| 1 bunch of Roses and Buds, 3x5 in.                            | 1 Boy holding Sunflower, 7 in.                  |  |
| 1 cluster of Strawberries, 2 1/2 x 3 in.                      | 1 Boy and Girl for Tidy, 7x6 in.                |  |
| 1 sprig of Forget-me-nots, 1 1/2 x 2 in.                      |   |  |
| 1 Peacock Feather   |   |  |
| 1 Cat   | 1 Kitten, 3 1/2 in. high                        | 1 Wide Braiding Pattern for Tinsel                       |
| 1 Fish  | 1 Full-blown Daisies                            | 1 large Butterfly  |
| 1 Daisy   | 1 little Girl, 5 in. high                       | 1 Spray of Leaves  |
| 2 Stars   | 1 large bunch Daisies                           | 1 Spray of Daisies                                       |
| 1 Pansy   | 1 Bachelor's Button                             | 1 Full-blown Rose  |
| 1 Arrow   | 1 large bunch Pansies                           | 2 small Butterflies                                      |
| 8 Sparrows  | 1 Wild Rose and Buds                            | 1 Star and Anchor  |
| 1 Buttercup   | 1 Vine of Flowers, 8 in.                        | 1 Hen and Chickens                                       |
| 1 Tulip, 5 in.  | 1 Bird on Branch, 4 in.                         | 1 Spray Jessamine  |
| 1 little Bird   | 1 Half Moon with Face                           | 1 Sprig Buttercups                                       |
| 1 Sprig Pink  | 1 branch of Roses, 9 in.                        | 1 Hand holding Hat                                       |
| 1 Golden Rod  | 1 large spray of Wheat                          | 1 Pretty Girl's Face                                     |
| 1 sprig Violets   | 8 Sprigs Forget-me-not                          | 5 Snowflake designs                                      |
|   |   | 1 Odd Fellow design                                      |

In addition to the above 136 PATTERNS we include Book of Instructions, 1 Box White Powder, 1 Box Black Powder, 2 Best Pads, 1 Piece Stamped Felt with Needle and Silk to work it, also as follows: **THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO 5 DIFFERENT BOOKS OF FANCY WORK,** 500 ILLUSTRATIONS Book of Ornamental Stitches, Fancy Braid Book, Knitting and Crocheting and Sample Book, with several hundred patterns. Teaches also HOW TO STAMP PLUSH, FELT, &c. Teaches the Kensington, Plush Ribbon, and other stitches. Also How to Do Kensington, Lustre Painting, &c. The patterns contained in this outfit are all useful and desirable for stamping Hatbands, Lamp and Table Mats, Tidies, Doylies, Towel Racks, Lambrequins, Splashes, &c. Plain and concise directions are given for doing Kensington and Outline Embroidery, Artistic Needlework, Painting on Silk, Velvet and Satin, China Decorating, Darned Lace, Knitted Lace, Crazy Patchwork, Macreme Crochet, Java Canvas Work, Feather Work, Point Russe, Cross Stitch, Indian Work, and Turkish Drapery, &c.





This quilt was probably used on a child's bed. The scalloped border runs on three sides. The quilt descended through the Redhead family of Des Moines. (Silk and velvet; 1880–1900; 57" x 52½"). Left: typical ads from 1880s-90s women's magazines.





The year after Lydia E. Henderson of Greene County, Iowa, married Samuel E. Shaw, she made an elaborate crazy quilt, details of which appear on this page. The quilt incorporates most of the popular embroidery patterns for crazy quilts in the 1880s. Note, for example, the hummingbirds, swan, and flowers.

Opposite: Lydia Henderson Shaw's quilt graces a couch in the reception room at Terrace Hill. Shaw may well have intended her quilt to be displayed in an elegant parlor rather than to be used in a bedroom as extra bedding.

(Silk and velvet; 1884; 65 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 57 $\frac{1}{2}$ ")











This presentation quilt was made by the Ladies Aid of the Evangelical Lutheran Bethanian Congregation, Burlington, Iowa. In 1890 they presented it to their pastor, Paul Bieger. Each square was created by an individual; the squares were then joined and quilted by the group. Note the six signature squares on the top and bottom panels.





Details of presentation quilt: Two center panels are embroidered in German text. The name "Louise" is embroidered by one of the fans beside the text. The presentation quilt features several typical crazy-quilt motifs, including an American flag, anchor, fans, and flowers (both painted and embroidered). There are also Trinity circles and a Star of David. (Silk, velvet, and cotton; 1890; 75½" x 64⅝")







Though made in the style of crazy patchwork, this quilt is much more practical than those made of silks and velvets and embroidered designs. The use of wool and large scrap pieces and the lack of fancy embroidery stitches place its construction towards the end of the era of crazy quilts.

(Wool and cotton; 1900–1920; 73 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 67 $\frac{1}{2}$ " )

#### NOTE ON SOURCES AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Major secondary sources used were the following: Pat Ferrero, *Hearts and Hands: The Influence of Women and Quilts on American Society* (1987); Sandi Fox, *Small Endearments: Nineteenth Century Quilts for Children* (1985); Rosemary Connolly Gately, "Crazy Quilts in the Collection of the Maryland Historical Society," *The Magazine Antiques* (Sept. 1988), pp. 558-73; Jonathan Holstein, *The Pieced Quilt: An American Design Tradition* (1973); Sue Barker McCarter, *North Carolina Quilts* (1988); Penny McMorris, *Crazy Quilts* (1984); and Pamela Tubby, *Patchwork and Applique* (1977).

The advertisements illustrating this article are from the Mary Barton Research Collection, SHSI (Des Moines).

*The Palimpsest* thanks the following individuals for their assistance in producing this article: SHSI chief curator Michael Smith, for help in photographing the collection and providing caption information; Chuck Greiner of Front Porch Studio, for photographing the quilts; and especially the Terrace Hill Commission and Barb Filer (administrator) and Pat Arnold (tour and volunteer coordinator) for allowing us to photograph the E. L. Shaw quilt in the reception room of Terrace Hill.

—The Editor



# Quilts Reveal Lives of Early Iowans

by Steven Blaski

Imagine you're making a quilt. You've designed it to commemorate an important event in your life. Composing your quilt, you use cherished remnants — fabric from a wedding dress, perhaps, or from a shirt that belonged to a friend who has died. You devote many hours of care and patience stitching it together. And when it's finished you sleep with it. What handmade item is more personal?

Because they so intimately reflect the lives and times of the people who make them, quilts are rich sources of historical information. This will be illustrated in *The Thread That Remains: Patterns from Iowa's Past*, an exhibit opening May 13 at the State Historical Building in Des Moines. The exhibit will contain sixty-three quilts made in or brought to Iowa before 1925 — and thus will shed light on the public and private lives of early Iowans.

*The Thread That Remains* is a collaboration between the State Historical Society of Iowa's Museum Bureau and the Iowa Quilts Research Project. According to chairperson Kathryn Russi, the project was established in 1987 to register and photograph pre-1925 quilts, teach how to properly care for them, and create an exhibit of outstanding quilts for the public to view.

To accomplish this, the project sponsored twenty-eight "quilt days" in towns across the state. Iowans brought in more than 2,500 quilts to be registered, Russi says. This entailed documenting everything known about each quilt — its size, patterns, materials, condition, and history. The project will donate these documents to the State Historical Society so that future researchers will have easy access to the information.

"Quilts are like family records," Russi says. "We wanted to make Iowans more aware of the historical value of quilts so that future generations can appreciate and learn

from them."

After registering and photographing the quilts, a project committee and the Society's Michael O. Smith, curator of the exhibit, selected a theme to determine which of the registered quilts to display. "The theme is about how quilts are signposts, markers of important life passages — like births, birthdays, weddings, mourning, and community events," Smith says.

Included in the exhibit are both pieced and appliquéd quilts. All were made before 1925. The oldest ones date from the early 1800s, Russi says. The exhibit, on display through September 2, will include photos of some of the quilt makers, plus related artifacts from the Society's collections.

In addition, the following events will be held in the State Historical Building this summer:

- **June 9, 9 AM** Sara J. Kadolph  
"Conservation Practices for Historic Quilts"
- **June 9, 10:30 AM** Shirley McElderry  
"T.L.C. for Antique Quilts and Textiles"  
(Note: Registration is required for June 9 workshops, as part of the Congress of Historical Organizations (COHO). For more information on COHO, see back page.)
- **June 10, 1-4 PM** Quilt Identification Day
- **June 23, 1:30 PM** Liz Porter, Marianne Fons  
"Never Underestimate the Power of the Nine Patch"
- **July 28, 10 AM** Barbara Brackman  
"Quilts as Vehicles for Social, Political, Religious, and Self Expression"
- **July 28, 1:30 PM** Barbara Brackman  
"Patchwork Souvenirs: Quilts from the 1933 Chicago World's Fair"
- **August 18, 1:30 PM** Cuesta Benberry  
"Afro-American and Slave-Made Quilts"
- **August 18, 9-1:30, 3-4 PM**  
Quilt Identification Day



# Interpreting the Image

## How to Understand Historical Photographs

*by Loren N. Horton*

IN PHOTOGRAPHS as in life, there is often more there than first meets the eye. People who have unidentified photographs in their own family collections can use the following analysis to help determine the who, what, when, where, and why of the photograph.

The simplest way to interpret or understand a photograph is to begin by asking the following questions:

- What is revealed or suggested by clues of architecture, clothing, and setting?
- Why was the photograph taken?
- Why was it saved? What was its value to the possessor?

The intentions of the photographer, or the subject of the photograph, may seem apparent, but additional information of interest can be found in almost any photograph. When examining a photograph, pay attention to the people (and how they are arranged), the buildings, the context within which the people and structures are shown, the setting, objects, and any seemingly peculiar or unusual aspects. Not all photographs will answer each question. But a surprising number do have clues to help us give tentative or approximate answers. Some clues will be quite small, so pull out the magnifying glass.

A note of caution before beginning: Whenever we use architectural styles, fabric patterns, clothing styles, or room furnishings to date or place a photograph, we should remember that not all persons followed fashions at the same time. Time lags might be due to economic circumstances, personal tastes, geographical isolation, or lack of opportunity to buy the latest fashions and fads. Such aspects are clues to dates and places, but can never be depended upon absolutely. All of us know people whose clothing is a decade out of high fashion, or whose room furnishings may remain the same for decades. House construction may

be out of style because of the lack of skills of the available builders. Time lags may hold especially true in isolated, rural, or poor regions less affected by the convenience of mail-order catalogs and rapid transportation.

Let us examine this particular photograph and see what conclusions we can come to. The photograph shows a building with people in front. A bit of landscaping is also visible.

### Architectural Clues

To start with the basics, we might assume that this building is a house, because of the people in front of it. Also, we know that it does not resemble closely any type of public or commercial structure with which we are familiar, and the setting does not seem appropriate for anything other than a residence for people.

The house is of frame construction, is L-shaped, has a porch, two dormers, and a bay window. The basic siding is clapboard, the shingles are wooden, and there are two crowned chimneys (an element of sophistication). There are varicolored scalloped or "fish scale" shingles, millwork on the porch posts and balcony rail. The lintels, sills, and corner-board quoins casing the clapboard siding have been factory-milled rather than hand-hewn. The rosettes in the lintels over the windows are repeated in the cornice-like board over the front porch. The porch floor is wooden rather than dirt.

Although this is surmise, the two front doors leading to the porch seem to indicate a separation of functions within the house. One door may lead to the kitchen area, and the other door may lead to living or sleeping quarters. Bay windows are usually found in the parlor, sitting, or dining areas, rather than the kitchen or bedroom areas.

These observations help us date the house. The L shape was common for decades but was





COURTESY LOREN N. HORTON

most popular from 1880 through 1910. Earlier L-shaped houses were usually the result of building an extension onto an existing small house. This house seems to have been built as one unit at one time, because the roof lines are even, the gable angles are the same, and identical millwork is used throughout.

Millwork of this type was available in Iowa as early as the 1840s, but the details and trim were more common in the last third of the nineteenth century. While we cannot date this building exactly, houses that resemble it were often found in the Midwest during the 1890s. There are no elements present on the building, or at least none visible in the photograph, that would be anachronistic in 1890.

### Clues About the People

An adult female and adult male, with a young child on his lap, are in the center of the photo. An adolescent male sits to the left, nearly obscured by the fence post. Two children stand on the balcony. One is clearly a girl. The younger one is probably a boy, but gender-neutral clothing was common for very young children, and the short hair could be hair grow-

ing back after an illness such as a fever.

The combination of ages in the photograph suggests a nuclear family. The adults could certainly be the husband and wife and all of the others could certainly be their children. We don't know that this is true, but the visual evidence suggests this strongly. Considering the setting, we might go further and suggest that this family is posing in front of their own home. But are there other reasons why this combination of people of various ages might be in this setting?

### Clothing Clues

Clothing is often evidence of time and attitudes of the persons photographed. In this example the clothing is not very formal, yet it is not ragged or shabby either. The man is wearing a vest but no coat. The woman's dress is practical but not high style. No jewelry or other ornaments are visible on it. The pattern of the cloth suggests that it was probably a work dress, because "dressy" dresses of the period tended to be solid colors. Its style, skirt length, the sleeve, waist, and collar all are typical of women's clothing in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The clothing on the



younger people is not distinct enough to help date or geographically place the photograph.

### Clues About the Setting

In the foreground, a barbed wire fence creates some sort of boundary, and the wire is strung on wooden posts. (Barbed wire was patented after 1870, so the picture has to have been taken after 1870.) Fences, of course, are useful to keep things out, or to keep things in. The height of this fence suggests that it was meant to keep animals out rather than to keep people (children) in. Although not visible in the photo, this presupposes a gate through the fence that could be opened or closed.

Also visible on the grounds, presumably the front yard, are examples of ornamental vegetation that may have been set out. There is a lilac bush, a cedar tree, and other young, deciduous trees. The grass is cropped rather than shaggy. Set-out vegetation seems to indicate an effort on the part of the owners or residents to beautify the environment in which they live.

Adjacent outbuildings or neighboring buildings are always good clues for locating a structure in its context. No other buildings are visible on either side, nor in the background. Because of the barbed wire fence, we might think this is a rural scene, but the absence of all other buildings is inconclusive. The house could be on a farm, on the outskirts of a small town, or isolated on a large lot in a town.

### Seasonal Clues

Because the leaves are out but the lilac is not in bloom, it is probably early summer. Were it later in the summer, things might appear drier. There is no evidence of drought or mud, and it is warm enough for people to be outside without coats on. The chair outside and table on the porch would also indicate summer time. The light seems bright, so it is probably mid-day.

### Clues About the Photographer

The photograph shows definite clues about the skills of the photographer. The placement is beautiful, with the building centered and framed nicely. There is a lot of sky showing (perhaps for contrast to the darker colors of the

house) but only a small amount of yard and fence. The perspective is a bit distorted because of the angle of the camera. The details are very clear, showing some care in developing.

### Clues About Why the Photograph Was Taken

We can safely assume that the building was as important as the people, because great care was taken to include the entire house in the photograph. If the people had been the major focus, then the photographer would have probably moved in closer so that they would have appeared larger, with the house appearing only partially, as a background. The young man would not be blocked by the fence post.

### Conclusions

From all of the clues observed, we can conclude that the photograph was probably taken by a professional photographer or skilled amateur towards the end of the nineteenth century, perhaps in the 1890s. Photographs of families standing or sitting in front of new homes are a common genre for the times. This is probably a single family in front of their home, and the chances are it is a rural scene rather than an urban scene.

From these observations, we may also conclude that the house was constructed after processed lumber was available in the area, that the purely utilitarian aspects were not paramount (hence the decorative details on the building), and that the people who paid for the construction were not satisfied with a tiny cottage-type house.

We cannot isolate this photograph geographically, except to note that it is very similar to other photographs taken in the Midwest during early summer. The people involved have some pride in the appearance of their home and of themselves. While the clothing is not formal, it is neat and respectable. We surmise that the house is prized, because there is trim and decoration beyond what is required for simple function.

By looking at all parts of the photographic image, we can learn a great deal about the people and places represented in it. Try it on your own family photographs. □



## For More Information, Consult These Sources

Thomas Davies, *Shoots: A Guide to Your Family's Photographic Heritage* (Danbury, NH: Addison House, 1978).

Arlene H. Eakle, *Photography Analysis* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Family History World, 1976).

Julia Hirsch, *Family Photographs: Content, Meaning, and Effect* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

Laurence E. Keefe, Jr., and Dennis Inch, *The Life of a Photograph* (Boston: Focal Press, 1984).

Catherine Noren, *The Way We Looked: The Meaning and Magic of Family Photographs* (New York:

Lodestar Books, 1982).

James M. Reilly, *Care and Identification of 19th Century Photographic Prints* (Rochester, NY: Eastman Kodak Company Publications, G-25, 1986).

Robert A. Weinstein and Larry Booth, *Collection, Use, and Care of Historical Photographs* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1977).

William Welling, *Collectors' Guide to Nineteenth-Century Photographs* (New York: Collier Books, 1976).

## Tips on Handling and Labeling Historical Photographs

by Mary Bennett

1. Always wash your hands or wear white cotton gloves when working with photographs. Never touch the print surface because skin oils and chemicals will permanently damage the image.

2. Do not use tape or adhesives of any kind on the original photograph. The chemical composition may break down and permeate or discolor the photograph. Removing the adhesive, often impossible, may damage the image.

3. Do not use pen, ink, or felt-tip pens when labeling photographs or storage envelopes. (Ink may bleed through. The pen's impression may "dent" the image.)

4. Write in pencil on the storage envelope and on the back side of the print in the margins only. Faithfully copy any information or identification that comes with the photo. Make some attempt to date the photo even if it is only an approximation, such as

circa 1900, or post-1920, or 1960s. It is also helpful to record the donor's name on the envelope. Careful labeling will make the collection more convenient to use and more valuable for future use. Record all that is known about the photograph now; information passed down orally may be lost or remembered inaccurately by future generations.

5. Writing with pencil on the backs of today's commercially processed prints is nearly impossible because the paper is too slick. Try using a very soft pencil, with #1 lead. If this doesn't work, label only the storage envelope or album page and key it to the photograph by a short description.

For more detailed information, consult the sources listed above, especially those by Reilly and by Weinstein and Booth. Upcoming *Palimpsests* will offer more tips on storing photographs, displaying photos in albums or frames, and storing negatives.



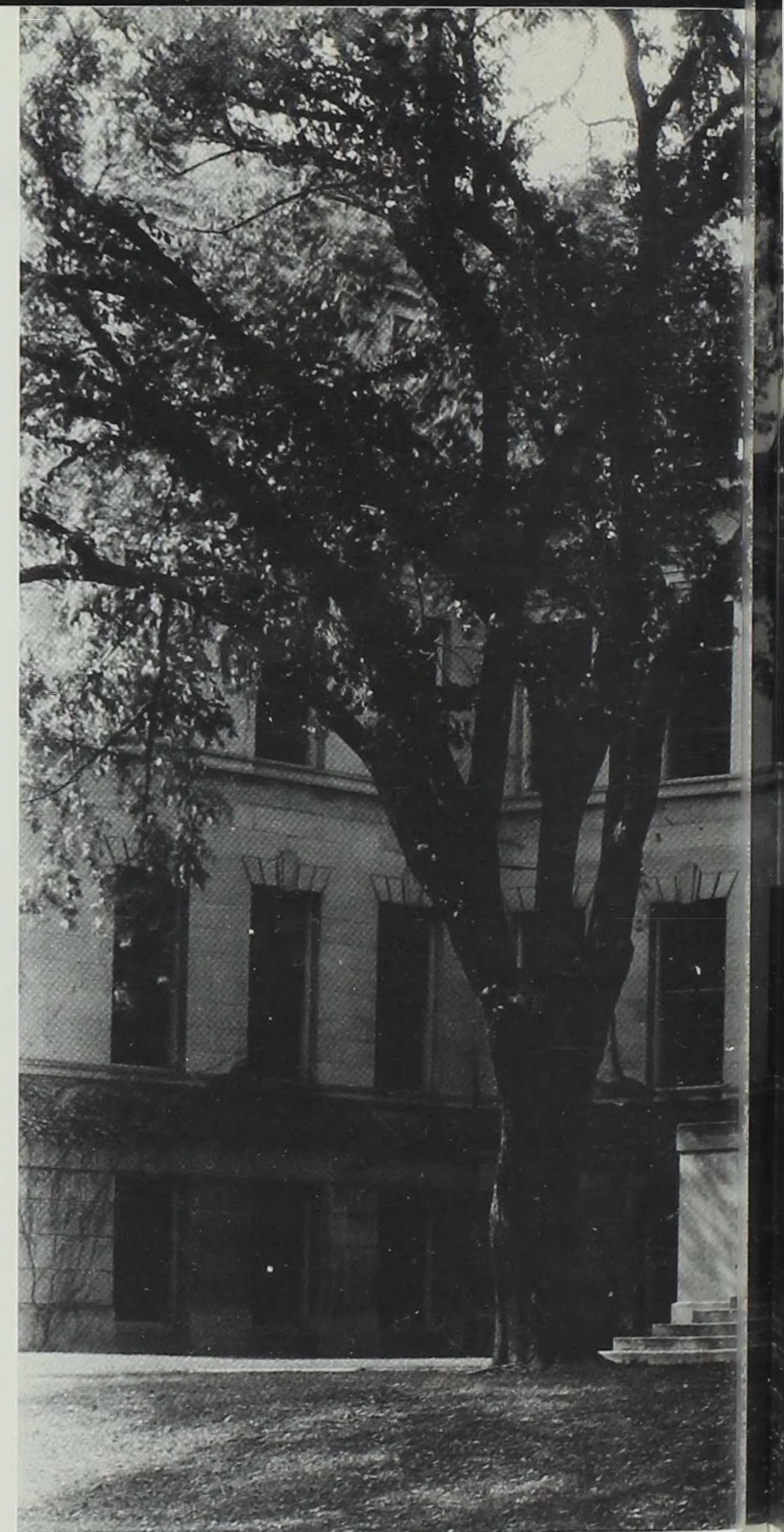
# A Young Latin Scholar

## University Life in the 1920s

*by Helen Clifford Gunter*

**A**FTER ONE YEAR of teaching high school Latin, I had a different attitude toward university study. I was not going back to school, in the autumn of 1927, to follow the traditional sequence of grade school, high school, and college. My one year of teaching in Duncan, Oklahoma, had interrupted that sequence. Now I was choosing to advance my professional career by obtaining a master's degree. My specific purpose was to become better informed and more confident to answer any question that might arise, whether about Latin literature, ancient history, or the people who had spoken Latin and lived in antiquity. If I was to be a teacher, I wanted to be a good one.

I had applied for a scholarship at the University of Iowa at the suggestion of Dr. Frank Justus Miller, a favorite professor of undergraduate days at the University of Chicago. He was a true humanist who had introduced me to Horace and Latin lyric poetry and made life in Rome's Golden Age come alive. At age seventy he had reached compulsory retirement at the University of Chicago, but was immediately snapped up by the University of Iowa as an emeritus professor. It was to follow him that I had applied at Iowa. Upon his recommendation to Dr. Roy C. Flickinger, head of the



Classics Department, I received a scholarship by which I was to teach nine semester hours, attend classes half time, and be paid five hundred dollars plus free tuition for my services. By also going to summer school in 1927 and 1928 I could earn a master's degree. It was an exciting opportunity to teach, to study, and to research.

I realized that the problem I had had with discipline in my first year of high school teaching was due in part to having been too casual, too friendly, too informal at the start. It had been so hot when school began that autumn in Oklahoma that I had let pupils move chairs





close to open windows and sit helter-skelter to catch any breeze, instead of requiring formal rows. Because I had wanted a friendly atmosphere I had allowed casual interruptions and sometimes silly comments before having established respect. I wasn't going to make that mistake again.

Now, on the first day of fall semester, standing behind my closed office door, I prepared to face my University of Iowa students in Elementary Latin. It was hot in early September, and I knew that at age twenty-two, in comparison to the regular faculty, I wouldn't look very formidable, with bobbed hair, wearing a

The Hall of Liberal Arts (now Schaeffer Hall) on the campus of the University of Iowa, where the author was a graduate student in Latin in the late 1920s.

sleeveless summer silk shift, green beads, and green and white sandals. Nevertheless I stood erect, squared my shoulders, pursed my lips into as grim an expression as I could summon, and walked to the classroom next door.

As I pushed the door open fourteen young men wearing suits, collared shirts, and neckties looked up and together smiled as if to say, "Good! There'll be a girl in this class."

Frowning a bit I looked them all over as I marched to the platform in the front of the





**Helen Clifford.**

room. Standing, I announced, "This is Elementary Latin. I am Miss Clifford." I wrote the subject and my name on the blackboard, told them what textbook to buy and sat down behind the desk. Unanimously they sighed, a quite audible, collective sigh. I asked them to introduce themselves and learned that all fourteen were "pre-law" students from small Iowa high schools. Latin was a required subject for students who aspired to become attorneys, and these fellows had to take it. Apparently my grand entrance gave me the right start, because I never had discipline problems with those young men (although later in the year, when several of them came by my office to invite me to a movie, I had to tell them that as a teacher I couldn't "date" my students).

One of the students was older than the others and blind. He sometimes came to my office for extra help because the Latin textbook available in braille was not the one the class used. He told me he had lost his vision in an explo-

sion in the chemistry lab of Western Electric in Chicago, where he had been employed. A colleague had tried to help by throwing water in his eyes, which had set off a chemical reaction that completely seared his eyeballs. He said that for a couple of years after the accident he was so despondent that he had just sat around feeling hopeless, but after a while he had asked how other blind people passed their lives. When he learned about a blind senator who had built a successful political career in Washington, he decided to study law.

He was the best student in the class, either because he was older, or smarter, or because he had fewer extracurricular distractions than the other fellows. Because he couldn't see he had a habit of speaking out of turn. One day when a slower boy was having trouble with syntax, he didn't wait for me to ask if someone could explain it.

"That's easy," he volunteered. "It's RAT-C-C."

I was as surprised as the others, who asked, "What do you mean?"

"RAT-C-C," he repeated. "Use the preposition *cum* with the verb in the subjunctive mood for relative, adversative, temporal, conditional, and causal subordinate clauses." He had to memorize rules that the other lads sometimes forgot because he couldn't rely on combing through braille for review. His perseverance and courage were a real inspiration to me and we became good friends, but I didn't accept his invitation to his dorm spring dance. Maybe it would have been all right, but I wasn't sure if I could dance with a blind man. I declined, saying it was because I was a teacher and he my student.

**B**ECAUSE I was the graduate teaching assistant I was included in social events of the Classics faculty. Drs. Flickinger and E.L. Crum and Professor Franklin Potter were married men in their middle years; Dr. Miller was the elderly professor emeritus. Dr. Louisa Walker, a pretty, brainy young woman, shared her office in the seminar room with me. At dinner parties and club meetings I felt at ease with the faculty members because they resembled my parents'



academic friends whom I had known for years. It was nice to hear the faculty talk about authors I was studying, like Homer, Sophocles, or Aristophanes, as if they were old friends, and to listen to anecdotes about travels in Italy, Greece, and Egypt. They were my University of Iowa "family."

In their classes, held in the Hall of Liberal Arts, next to the Old Capitol, I was introduced to more frivolous literature than I had known before. Tibullus, Catullus, and Ovid wrote love lyrics and light verse (Ovid's infrequently, but sometimes, close to prurient). Through Plautus and Terence I was introduced to Roman comedy, which they had adapted from Greek.

Because Dr. Flickinger was an authority on Greek theater, it was a privilege to "sit at his feet" to translate tragedy and comedy. I was thrilled to receive an inscribed copy of his scholarly tome, illustrated with photos and diagrams of ancient amphitheaters. In his class I was introduced to Greek drama in the Golden Age, five centuries B.C. Of about twenty tragedies I translated four but was expected to know the contents of all. I visualized outdoor performances where male casts enacted scenes from mythology in which humans were propelled to disaster by unforgiving deities and the relentless force of destiny. Was the Fate that caught up with wayward Greeks something like the predestination in John Calvin's Protestant Reformation theology, I wondered. It seemed unfair to be punished as sinners for what your ancestors had done. I found classical literature so engrossing that I began to consider myself foreordained to teach. To be a teacher was a better fate than a sinner's.

Of the tragic poets Euripides was my favorite because he seemed the most down to earth, and I liked Aristophanes because he wrote comedies that made fun of generals and politicians. Tragedy heaped upon tragedy provided plots for many Greek dramas. Stories I had read in Homer in my undergraduate days were enriched with characterizations, details, and subplots that the tragic poets added. Greek drama inspired me because of the glorious tales of gods and mythical heroes, the sonorous rhythm of its poetry, the philosophical chants of the chorus, and the stagecraft of a remark-

able device called *deus ex machina*, used to explain how human actions were directed by divinity. No matter how laborious or time consuming were translations, the visions the tragedies and comedies inspired made hours of study worthwhile.

In a lecture course titled "Classical Art and Archaeology" Dr. Flickinger opened up a new world for me. Occasionally he may have projected three-by-four-inch glass slides, and each student had a bound volume of black and white "University Prints," rather fuzzy images of ancient buildings and sculptures. But what I remember most are the stories he told. He brought to life ancient artists such as Phidias and Praxiteles. Alone with such luminaries I vicariously walked the streets of ancient Athens, attended symposia, offered votive gifts in temples. In the same class we learned about the archaeological discoveries of Heinrich Schliemann at Troy, of the excavations of Sir Arthur Evans in Crete, and of Lord Elgin's transfer of the "Elgin Marbles" from the Parthenon to the British Museum.

Dr. Flickinger had all the graduate students meet with all the faculty in a weekly seminar to



Roy C. Flickinger, an authority on Greek theater, headed the Classics department and directed the author's thesis research on the playwright Terence.

F. W. KENT COLLECTION, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA ARCHIVES





"Iowa City of the late 1920s was graced by the rolling slopes along the Iowa River, big frame houses, the green of spring and summer after the frigid winters, and most of all, lovely shade trees everywhere."



review current literature, including scholarly articles and book reviews and news reports on archaeological discoveries. (The word *seminar* is rooted in Latin words meaning "seed plot." We students were like seedlings in a botanical nursery, needing cultivation for growth.) He wanted us to form the habit of keeping abreast of classical research. He urged us to read the *Classical Journal* cover to cover every month, because it was slanted for teachers, and the *American Journal of Archeology* for scholars. We also discovered that the *London Illustrated News* had excellent articles on excavations worldwide. Each student was responsible for one seminar by presenting a year's issues of a magazine and leading a discussion. This was scary because any professor could question our interpretation or criticism. I thought it was easier to review a book, even a long dry one, than an entire year of a magazine.

IOWA CITY of the late 1920s was graced by the rolling slopes along the Iowa River, big frame houses, the green of spring and summer after the frigid winters, and most of all, lovely shade trees everywhere. Graduate students rented rooms in private homes or rooming houses. I found a sunny upstairs bedroom in a gray frame house eleven blocks uphill from the Old Capitol Campus, in the home of Joseph and Louise Slavata. They were from Bohemia and he was a retired tailor. I shared the only bathroom with the owners and was not allowed kitchen privileges. In winter it was a long slippery walk over icy sidewalks banked with snow to the campus and business district for classes and meals, then back uphill for the night. I tried to make the round trip only once a day, eating at restaurants on school days or on Saturdays, when I spent long hours in the Classics Library. Across the street from campus was an old hotel with a small restaurant partly below ground level. It offered "home cooking" and I often ate lunch there for thirty-five or fifty cents, or dinner for a dollar or less.

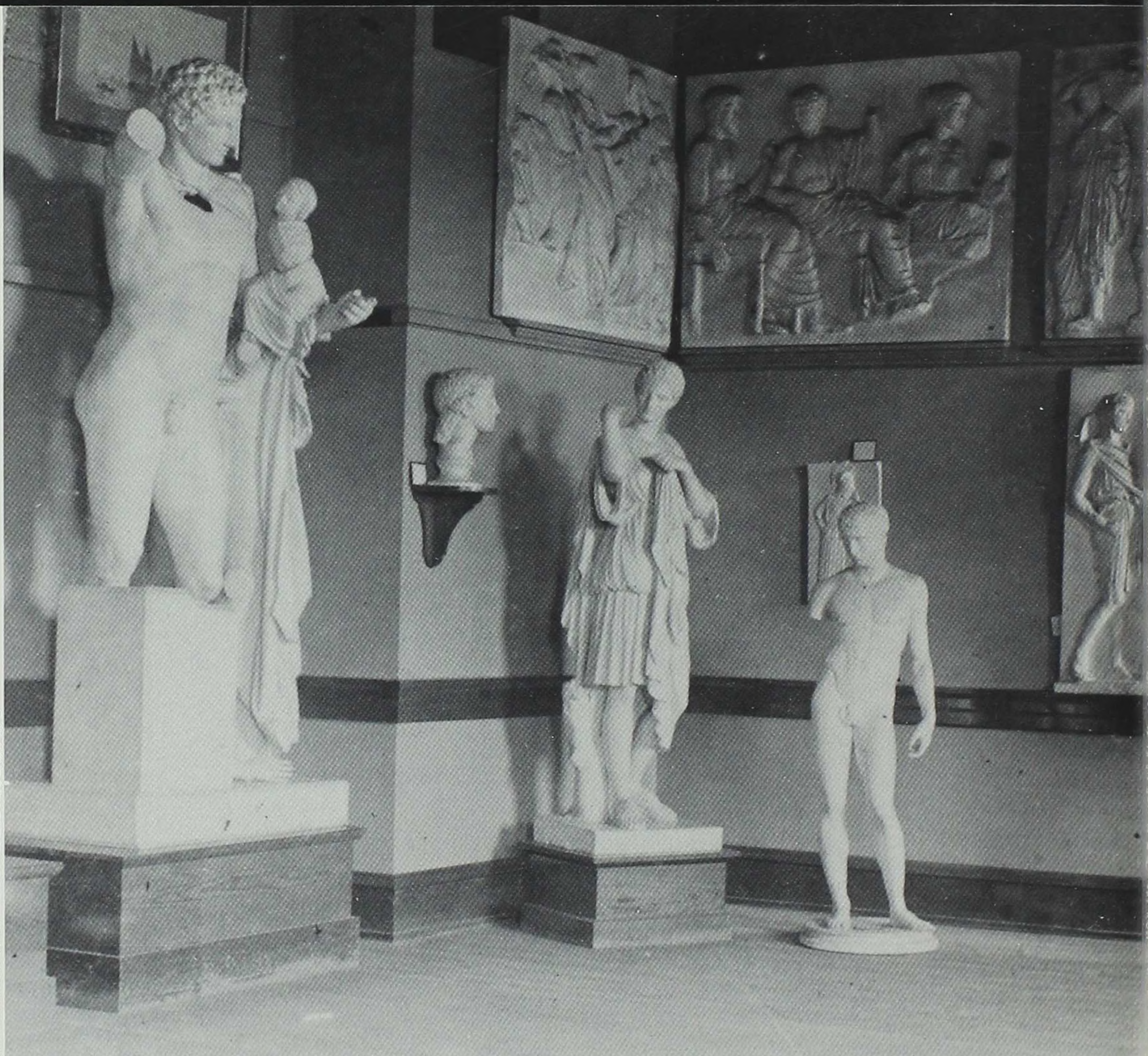
On Sundays, especially when a blizzard raged, I would "hole up" in my rented bedroom. I bought a recently invented combina-

tion toaster, skillet, and egg poacher, a compact gizmo about the size of an eight-inch cube. Plugged into a light socket, it could fry a slice of bacon, cook eggs, or heat a can of soup. It was an ingenious little contraption, and Mrs. Slavata didn't complain about my weekend cooking on a card table. Rather aloof when I first moved in, Mrs. Slavata became more friendly as the year progressed. By the end of the school year, she treated me like a daughter.

A social life with my fellow students was nearly non-existent, aside from occasional activities for our Classical Club. In addition to teaching first-year Latin, I was expected to help plan programs for the club. Dr. Flickinger was pleased when I suggested culminating the school year with a Roman banquet. He knew it couldn't be expensive because most students lived on the proverbial shoestring. I was happy when the cook-owner-manager of the dining room in the nearby hotel consented to close her little restaurant to the public for one evening and to help prepare a meal resembling a Roman banquet. I knew the guests couldn't recline on Roman couches — we'd have to use traditional chairs — but the tables could be pushed together to form a "U." I bought royal purple cheesecloth for the "slaves" (or waiters) to wipe off the tables between courses. Diners could arrive dressed as ancient Romans. The professors and few male students draped themselves in sheets for togas. The professors' wives and female students fashioned vari-colored dresses out of two long pieces of yardage pinned over the shoulders with large safety pins (remarkably similar to ancient bronze *fibulae*.) Ribbon girdled the robes and held the folds in place. (Since the front and back pieces weren't cut into, the yardage could later be salvaged for a modern summer frock.) Ladies wore *stolas* and several strands of glass or pearl "Roman jewels." After a meal centered around *porcus et vinium* (ham and grape juice), the professors entertained the guests with speeches quoting witty epigrams from antiquity or even corny Iowa jokes. The Roman banquet was acclaimed a great success.

I also attended an occasional get-together at the old red brick Presbyterian church near campus. At that church I met the assistant pastor for student services, who wanted to help





Replicas of classical sculpture and art, in what may have been the Museum of Art and Archeology, directed by Roy Flickinger and housed in the Hall of Liberal Arts.

anyone with a problem. My problem was finding a job after I received my master's degree. He took an interest in me and suggested that I apply to teach at the Women's College of Roberts University in Constantinople, a mission project of the Presbyterian Church. I had never heard of it, but it sounded like a wonderful opportunity. I couldn't imagine that a mission school would need a teacher of Latin or ancient Greek, which was all I knew. He said I might be asked to teach English and I would have to sign a two-year contract. That would be fine with me because during the summer holiday I could go to Greece and visit Athens, Delphi, Delos, the Cyclades and probably visit

Italy and Rome, too. The itchy feet I had inherited from my Grandpa Coltman tingled in anticipation. The young minister said he would recommend me and find out how I should apply to the mission board.

I was so excited that I wrote home immediately to tell Mamma and Papa what my hope was. At this time my siblings, Mary and Charlie, and I didn't write each other. We all wrote home and Mamma recirculated any important news. She must have written my sister and brother immediately that I wanted to go to Europe for two years, and she must have enlisted their help in dissuading me, for they both wrote me that Mamma was worried and I should give up the idea. I don't know what my Victorian mother had learned about foreign men during her trans-Pacific voyages or while





as a bride she lived in China, but she acted as if all European men were licentious monsters, lying in wait to corrupt innocent young women. Her letter to me only said that she and Papa would worry about my going so far from home. Mary and Charlie both wrote that our parents were growing old and implied that since I was still single it was my responsibility to look after them. I resented their letters. Mary had a husband and a baby to look after, but she had married against Mamma's wishes and chosen her own life pattern. She was doing what she wanted to do. Charlie had a geology job in Texas and he was doing what he wanted to do. Why should they try to stop me from doing what I wanted to do? I was twenty-three years old and would decide for myself.

When the application form arrived, it cov-

ered both sides of a legal-sized sheet and asked numerous questions about my nationality, age, education, church connections, employment, social service — a real resumé of my life. I completed the front page as accurately and neatly as I could, turned to the back page, and progressed thoughtfully to the last line. A question preceding the blank for my signature stymied me: "Whatever duties you assume, if appointed, will you consider that your primary function is to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ?"

"You have to be honest, Helen," the little voice inside me whispered. "You know you're not a missionary. You want to go to Turkey because it's near Greece. It's because you want to travel that you want that job. You want it because you want to see the Parthenon and the Lion's Gate at Mycenae; you want to go to Delphi and Corinth. You think it would be exciting to live in Constantinople. You know you've questioned some of the miracles in the New Testament, like feeding a multitude of five thousand people on five loaves of bread and two little fish. Your faith isn't strong enough for you to tell other people what they should believe. You'd be a hypocrite to sign the application. You have to be honest with yourself. You're not a missionary."

I stared at the paper until all the words blurred to blankness. I didn't sign the bottom line. After a while I crumpled the sheet and threw it in the waste basket. Then I sat still for a while longer. My family hadn't kept me from the job. I had made the decision myself.

**B**ESIDES teaching first-year Latin, attending my own classes in Latin and Greek, and reading for the seminar, I had to write a thesis. I didn't know what subject to choose so Dr. Flickinger suggested that I research entrances and exits in Terence. To start I had to read all of his plays. Fortunately only six had survived, and I had reached the point that I could almost read Latin direct without translating it into English. (Professor Potter had told me he dreamed in Latin. I remarked to another student, "That's no dream; it's a nightmare.")

In my research I had to keep track of every



time an actor came on or off stage. If he said he was going to the forum and went out by the right wing, dramatic technique required his return by the right wing unless he reported he had also gone somewhere else. It wasn't hard to keep track of, only tedious. I made notes on three-by-five-inch cards until I had a large stack. My thesis was titled "Dramatic Technique and the Originality of Terence." I was supposed to show how closely Terence followed Menander, an earlier Greek playwright. Dr. Flickinger thought this was important enough for a master's thesis, and my concern was to satisfy him. He was particular that my footnotes identify other scholarly studies about Terence and that I meet format requirements for publication. I suspected that my findings wouldn't be important enough to set the scholarly world on fire, but I realized that I was being drilled on how to prepare a research paper for publication. Before I could merit a master's diploma, I would have to have the thesis approved by every classics professor and submit several perfectly typed copies to the University of Iowa Library.

Finally, I would have to pass an examination in one foreign language and take an oral examination in which I might be asked anything about Greek and Latin history (including wars and government, triumvirates and emperors), about Greek or Latin literature including lives of authors, content, style, or philosophy of their works, plus incidentals such as semantics and syntax, prosody or panegyric. In short, I had to be ready to answer *any* question about *any* thing that happened between about 600 B.C. and the collapse of the Roman Empire in 476 A.D. I had to read, *read*, READ, take notes, make outlines, and memorize facts, *facts*, FACTS.

From the zenith of elation to which knowledge gained in Dr. Flickinger's classes had raised me, I sank to the nadir of despair at the prospect of tasks still to be completed. My research had been exacting but not really rewarding. What did it matter where Terence's characters came from and where they went? I had come from Chicago, via Duncan, Oklahoma, and where was I going next? After months of unremitting study I was tired, tired, TIRED. Depressed, discouraged, and *tired*.

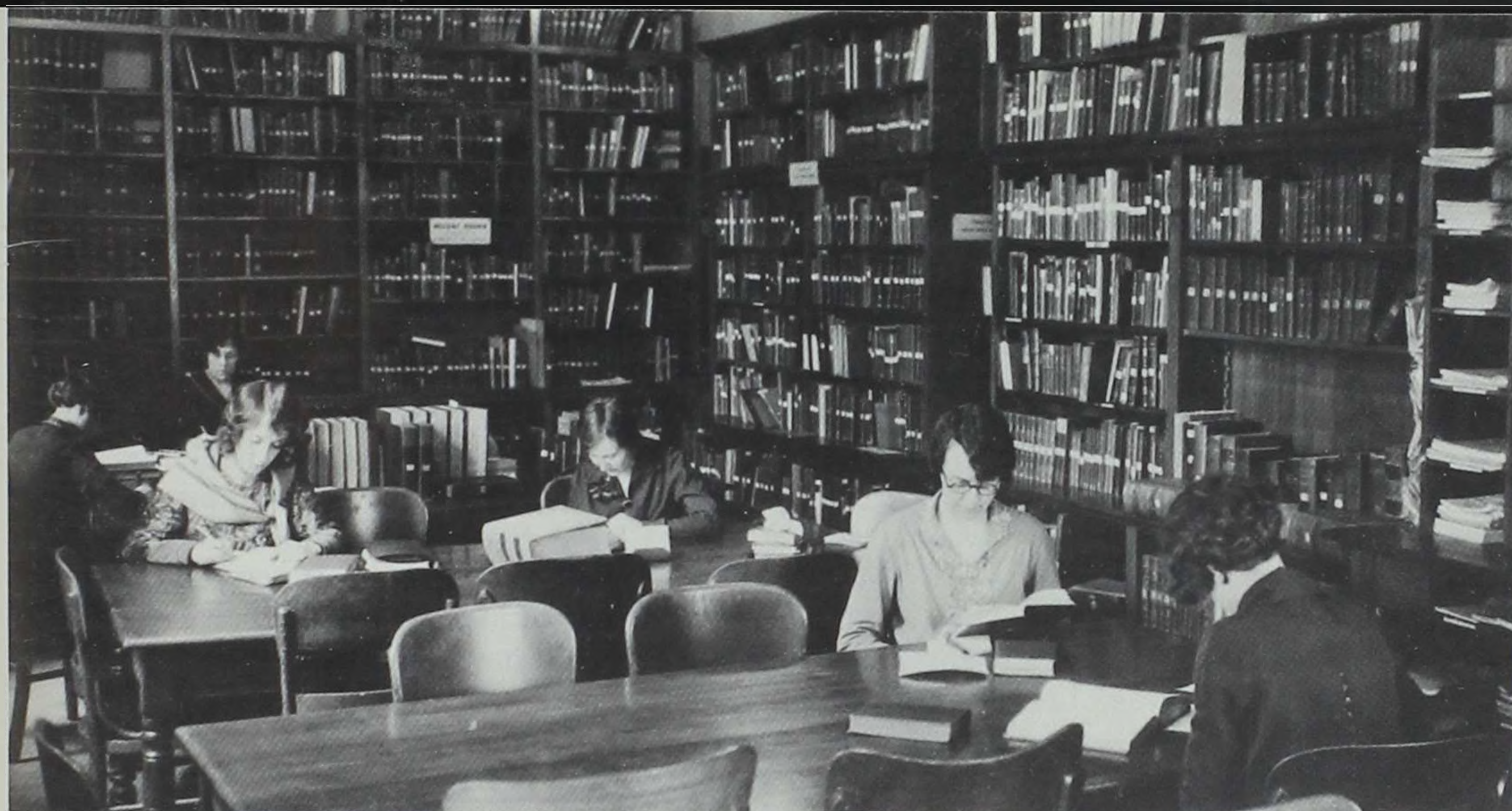
I'm sure I wouldn't have thought of suicide if I hadn't read a news item about an instructor who had taken his life by poison. The paper didn't say why he had done it. I wondered what cataclysm of catastrophes could have driven him to such desperation. He must have been under terrible pressure or hopelessly discouraged. His body was found where he had driven his car to a wooded place outside of Iowa City. Because of the poison his skin was blotched green and yellow. I wondered what kind of poison did that; I wondered where he had gotten it — maybe from the Chemistry Department. I thought of death as an escape from pressure that was just too much to take. I wondered if that instructor's suicide might start an epidemic. For a while I seriously considered suicide. I was so tired and my life seemed pointless. Within a few weeks I had to submit my thesis, properly typed, and take my "finals." Then what? How important to the world was it for me to teach Latin? Did I really want to anyway? Where would I get a job? I was so tired.

**I**N THE WEEK between the end of spring term and beginning of summer school I went back to Chicago, planning to type my thesis on Papa's Hammond typewriter and hoping for a change of pace, maybe some dates for theater, even dancing. Nothing turned out right. It was four years since I had graduated from the university and my school friends had scattered. I had never had a typing lesson so I had problems with my "peek and poke" procedure — even before the typewriter broke down. That was the last straw. Papa's typewriter had changeable type so he could use mathematical symbols, but because the typewriter was more versatile than most, it also got out of order easily. Papa phoned the agency about repairs and was told it would take a week. I had to be back in Iowa City with my thesis typed by the end of the week. Later I read Mamma's cursory entries in her diary:

June 1: H arr'd Englewood. O & H to Typewriter Co afternoon. P.M. Helen hysterical.

I was frantic. I kept thinking about suicide, but how? We had iodine in the medicine





F. W. KENT COLLECTION, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA ARCHIVES

The author recalls "long hours" in the Latin Library.

closet, also some hydrogen peroxide. To drink either could be fatal. When peroxide was poured on an open wound I knew it boiled up. If it did that to my throat and stomach, I'd be in agony. I wouldn't know how to buy poison from a drug store. A vision of myself as a green-and-yellow-striped corpse was horrible. Death was permanent. If I drank poison, I couldn't change my mind; and I knew I was a coward. Besides, the worst part would be how I would hurt Mamma and Papa. After all they had done for me, I couldn't commit suicide. That would be a coward's way out.

- June 2: H took typewriter to Co. again, They fixed it better. P.M. she went to show with Kennedy.
- June 3: All to Armour Baccalaureate [Papa's school]
- June 4: H typing thesis
- June 6: To Field's. H bought new suit for next fall.
- June 7, 8, 9: More typing
- June 10: H corrected her typed copy; packed, left at 5 p.m. for Iowa City.

I had regained control over my emotions and had won the battle of the thesis. Yet sometimes I wonder what was important enough about all those actors' in's and out's in Terence's comedies to eat up more than eighty typed pages of research.

THE ORAL EXAM was the final step, scheduled at ten o'clock on Saturday morning, July 14, 1928. I was so nervous that I arrived at the department library at nine o'clock, thinking I would study until I was summoned. I wore my nicest summer sport dress, determined to make a good appearance. I thumbed through my notes, couldn't concentrate, gave up, paced the floor by the windows. At nine-thirty Dr. Flickinger looked in. He said the student scheduled for nine o'clock had burst into tears and had run out of her exam; if I was ready, the examining committee could take me. That another student had given up, cried, and run away was foreboding, but I did as requested.

Now it happened that the student who had fled was Professor Potter's protégée, as I was a protégée of Dr. Flickinger. It also happened that Professor Potter apparently resented Dr. Flickinger because he had been called from Northwestern University to head Classics at Iowa when Potter was already on the Iowa faculty. People said he had wanted to be department head himself but he didn't have a Ph.D. (That was why he was called Professor Potter instead of Dr. Potter.) Anyway, I guess he was embarrassed that his student had performed poorly and he didn't want me to outshine her. I found out about college politics that morning. He couldn't fight Dr. Flickinger, but he could give me a hard time.

The exam was supposed to last an hour so I



thought mine would end at ten-thirty instead of eleven. However, since the third exam wasn't scheduled until eleven, they kept me for an hour and a half. After I had defended my thesis and had been quizzed on material related to my course work, Professor Potter changed the subject by saying, "When I was a lad in Sunday School, I was given a book with a picture of the Roman Colosseum that was labeled 'Where Nero persecuted the Christians.' Would that have jarred your archaeological sensibilities?"

It didn't, but I knew there had to be a catch. I had done my best to be prepared to answer *any* question about any *thing*, but what was he getting at? Silence prevailed as that masculine foursome focused expectantly on me. I had to say something.

"No, Professor, it wouldn't jar *my* archaeological sensibilities; it might jar *yours*."

Dr. Flickinger suppressed a smile. Professor Potter looked annoyed. He hadn't made me cry or run away. He pushed further.

"Well, Miss Clifford, if I told you that the Colosseum was built under the Flavians, would *that* mean anything to you?" His speech sounded like, "I hope it won't! I hope it won't!" but he had actually thrown me a lifeline. I survived because I had memorized the names and dates of all the Roman emperors. Nero had fiddled while Rome burned, 54-68 A.D. The Flavians, Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian, ruled 79-96 A.D.

"Oh, thank you, Dr. Potter," I chirped happily. "I see what you mean. The Colosseum wasn't there in Nero's time." And I quoted the dates. He looked disappointed. I knew he didn't like to be called "Dr." but I was excited and it popped out. I always thought of professors as doctors. He may have thought I meant to rub it in that he didn't have a Ph.D.

Dr. Flickinger smiled broadly, looked at the clock, and said, "Please wait outside until we call you back."

In the hall I bumped into Laura Potter, who was hanging around to find out who passed their exams, I guess. Professor Potter's daughter was about my age. She was also a graduate student — a nice girl but the last person I wanted to meet at that particular moment.

"Did you pass?"

"I don't know. I'm waiting to find out."

"Was it hard?"

"Not very," I muttered and walked away.

Then Dr. Flickinger came out and said, "Congratulations." I was over the top.

I received my M.A. at the end of summer school in a convocation held in the Iowa Memorial Union, the university's handsome new building. I was sorry that Mamma and Papa didn't come from our summer home in Colorado for the convocation. It was too expensive to travel so far just to see me receive a diploma, but it would have been nice if they had been there.

**S**HORTLY BEFORE I was to leave Iowa City, Dr. Flickinger called me to his office. He said he had been notified of a vacancy for a college Latin instructor in "the most foreign city in the United States." The salary would be two thousand dollars. He said he knew I was disappointed not to go to Constantinople, but I was young and he understood my mother's feelings. This would be an opportunity to spread my wings without leaving the United States. He would recommend me for the position if I was interested. "Think it over tonight and tell me in the morning if you want it," he said. "I don't want to recommend you unless you will accept the position if it is offered."

"I can tell you now. I want it."

"Very well then, I'll propose your name. But I haven't told you where it is. Where do you think you'll be going?"

"Why, San Francisco, of course," I replied, envisioning its Chinatown.

"It's a good thing I asked, but I can see why you thought of San Francisco. Actually it's in New Orleans. Would that make a difference? The opening is at Sophie Newcomb College for Women, which is part of Tulane University."

San Francisco or New Orleans — to me it made no difference. With my two years' teaching experience and a master's degree I was ready to say, "Have requisites, will travel." If teaching was my predestination, Latin would provide the wherewithal to explore wider horizons. □



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A profile of **Henry A. Miller** appears on page 15 of this issue.

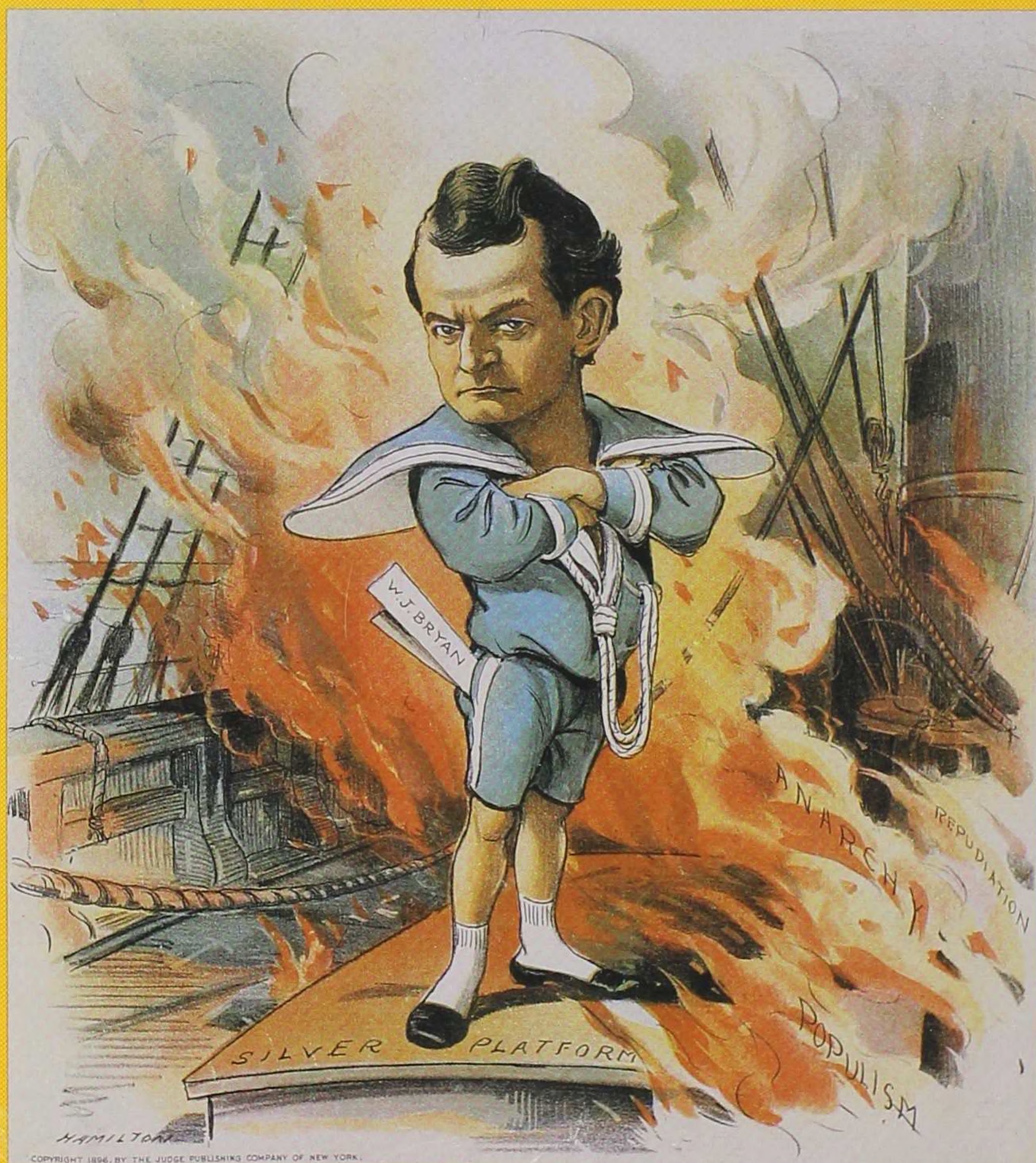
**Carole A. Spencer** is pursuing a master's degree in history at the University of Iowa. As part of her bachelor's degree in clothing and textiles, she completed a two-month internship at the State Historical Society. She worked with the museum collections of quilts, coverlets, and flags and researched crazy quilts.

## 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.





"THE BOY stands on the burning deck whence all but him have fled," reads the August 8, 1896 cover of *Judge*, a nineteenth-century satire magazine. William Jennings Bryan and his free-silver position were frequent targets of *Judge*. This *Palimpsest* reveals how the silver issue fueled a quarrel between Iowa editors.

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