

# A Farm Family Enters the Modern World



ALL PHOTOS FROM GRABER COLLECTION, SHSI (IOWA CITY); ORIGINALS OWNED BY HAROLD GRABER



*by William Bernard Graber*



Threshing on the Christian and Fannie Graber farm in the 1880s near Lockridge, Iowa. In the next several decades neighborhood farming practices would change substantially.

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The wedding, a simple one in terms of ceremony and celebration, symbolized greater complexities under the surface. Dan Graber's marriage to Jennie Maxwell set into motion a series of changes that would be felt in their generation and the next two generations. The marriage represented an important step in a shift that was already occurring in the Graber family — from traditional ethnic-religious isolation to modern American mainstream. As a southeastern Iowa farm family, Dan, Jennie, and their descendants would face much change during the sixty years from 1892 to 1952.

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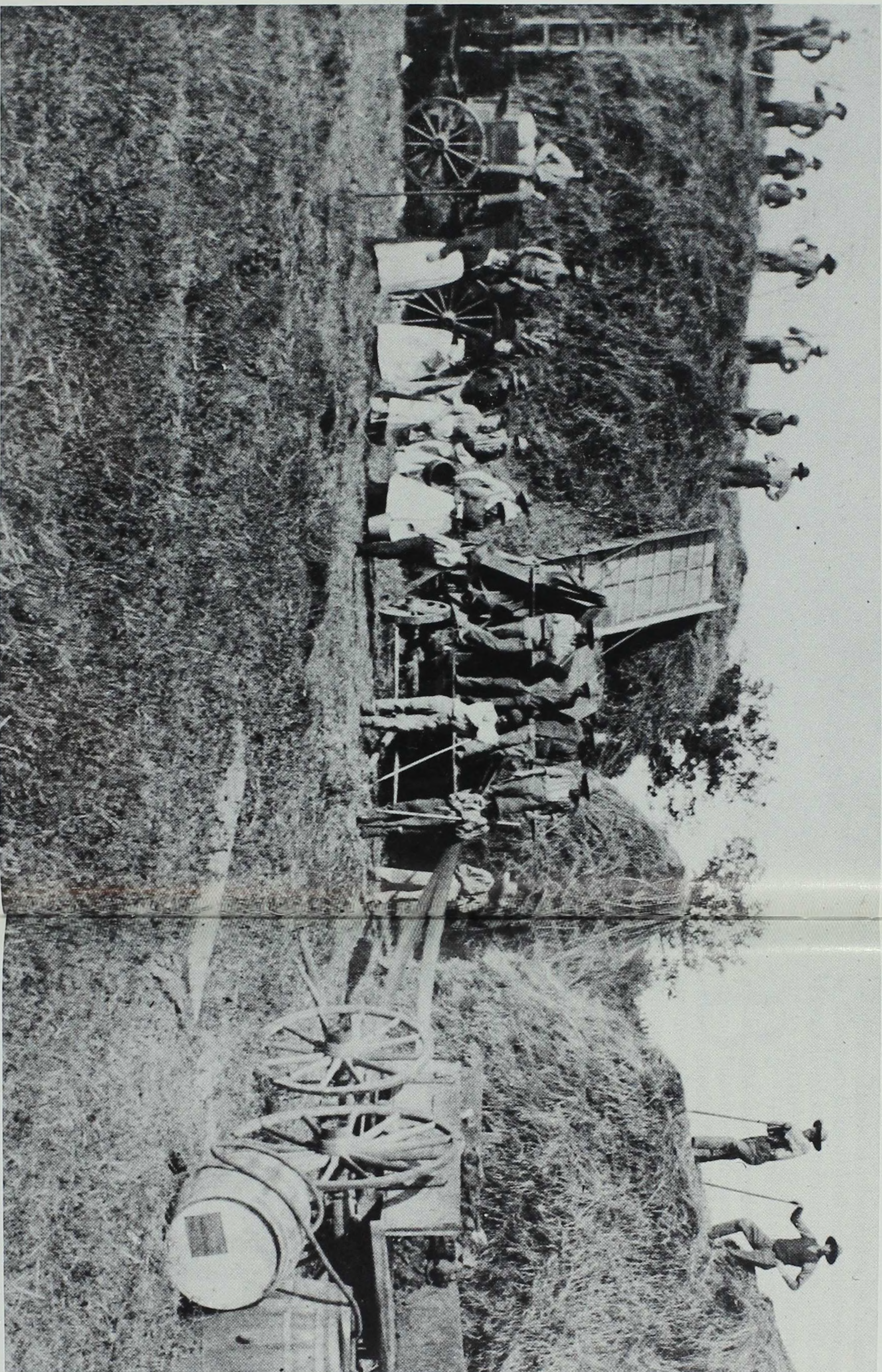
Jennie's father, Isaac Maxwell, came from a relatively old line of immigrants with a strong record of military service. Two of his great-grandfathers had fought in the Revolutionary War. The Scottish clan had farmed in Pennsylvania and Indiana for a century before loading the wagons for Jefferson County, Iowa, in 1849, when Isaac was three. His father and two brothers had volunteered to fight in the Civil War.

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Grand Old Party, as with other traditions, was likely influenced by the Maxwells.

In contrast to the Maxwell tradition of voluntary military service, Dan's grandparents and parents had fled Europe to escape military service that conflicted with their religious beliefs as Mennonites. When grandparents John Sr. and Catherine (Roth) Graber left their rented farm in the French province of Alsace in 1830, they were part of a wave of Germanic emigrants of many faiths to migrate following the Napoleonic Wars. The Grabers spent nine years raising children in their faith in the Mennonite communities of Wayne County, Ohio, before John Sr. and his eldest son trekked to Iowa in 1839 to purchase an initial six hundred acres in eastern Jefferson County. An elder in the faith, John Sr. helped found a Mennonite farming community in Lockridge Township as his family, who arrived in Iowa in 1842 or 1843, was joined by other families in that decade. As with the Maxwells, farming was an integral part of the Grabers' lives. But in other ways they differed: the Grabers voted Democratic, and they chose to partake as little as possible in the world outside their immediate community.

The Mennonite community in Lockridge Township prospered for some twenty years. Gradually, many of its members left for the larger Mennonite settlements across the Skunk River near Trenton and Wayland or were converted by Methodist circuit preachers such as Uriah Horton (whose son would later marry Dan and Jennie). The lack of a church and the early death of leader John Sr. about 1851 had weakened the incentive for Mennonites to stay in the diffuse Lockridge Township settlement; several of John Sr. and Catherine's children, too, left for Henry County. Though Dan's parents, Alsatian-born Christian and Fannie (Wyse) Graber, resisted both these tendencies — to move or convert — circumstances would eventually cause their own children to leave the faith and the community. These circumstances would affect Dan and his retention of the family's traditional culture.

Mennonite marriage customs and their consequences were one such circumstance. Following the Mennonite practice of men marrying late but still fathering many children, Christian was forty when Fannie bore their

first child in 1851. She bore him seven more children over the next eighteen years. Dan, the youngest, was nine when his mother succumbed to an early death in 1879. As Christian's health failed, young Dan was put into the care of a female relative and sent from the family's huge, patriarchal brick home in Jefferson County to live for three years in a bleak sod hut near Ogallala, Nebraska. The early death of his mother, failing health of his father, and geographical distance from relatives who could teach him the faith all contributed to the weakening of Dan's ties to the religion of his ancestors.

An inheritance dispute also affected the Graber siblings' ties to the family and community. Before the first field work of 1882 could be done, Christian sold 650 acres of his 892½ to his children for no more than the assumption of small mortgages. The division, however, was not equal. Although thirteen-year-old Dan and two unmarried sisters each received forty mortgage-free acres of timber for the sum of one dollar, and the middle siblings received somewhat larger amounts, the two eldest sons split 320 acres of the best land and squabbled over the 242½ acres retained by their aged father. The dispute ran so deep throughout the family that decades later two brothers who remained in the area and lived only one mile apart did not socialize warmly together. Only the eldest of the eight siblings remained a Mennonite his entire life; most of the others converted to Methodism and four moved away permanently. Not only did the "land grab" chafe family ties, as Dan related to his descendants years later, but it hastened the migration of family members to other communities.

Dan's marriage to Jennie in 1892 continued this shift of the Grabers away from traditional ethnic-religious isolation toward modern American mainstream. Dan was a first-generation American, and also a member of a generation that in Jefferson County married predominantly outside the traditional Mennonite community. After childhood he used little of the German dialect that his father continued to speak. His identification as a fully assimilated American was strengthened by his marriage to Jennie, whose ancestors had farmed in American since 1673.



Furthermore, the religious fervor of Jennie's mother, Sarah (Logsdon) Maxwell, herself a Mennonite who had converted to Methodism early in life, helped sustain Dan's new identification. Though Dan maintained warm relations with the two of his three siblings who remained in Jefferson County and occasional contact with Mennonite cousins in the neighboring county, his wedding appears to represent less the induction of Jennie into the Graber-Wyse family than it represented Dan's induction into the Maxwell-Logsdon family.

**B**Y THE TURN of the century Dan and Jennie were a fairly typical example of a successful young Iowa farm family. Dan had enlarged the farm to eighty acres with the purchase and mortgage of thirty-seven adjoining acres from Jennie's relatives. He continually supplemented farm income with seasonal labor in the coal mines near Coalport, a mile away. Jennie raised chickens and sold eggs at Glendale and Lockridge, two rural communities on the

nearby Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad. A large vegetable garden, sheep, hogs, and Shorthorn cattle (a beef-dairy mix) provided a variety of meals for them and their children (Zelta Mae, born 1894; Bernard, 1899; and Elda, 1903). Dan and Jennie sought to provide for the family's economic welfare and to raise their children to be good citizens and farmers. Their actions seemed to emphasize two traditional themes — the family and local community (often one and the same), and the work ethic.

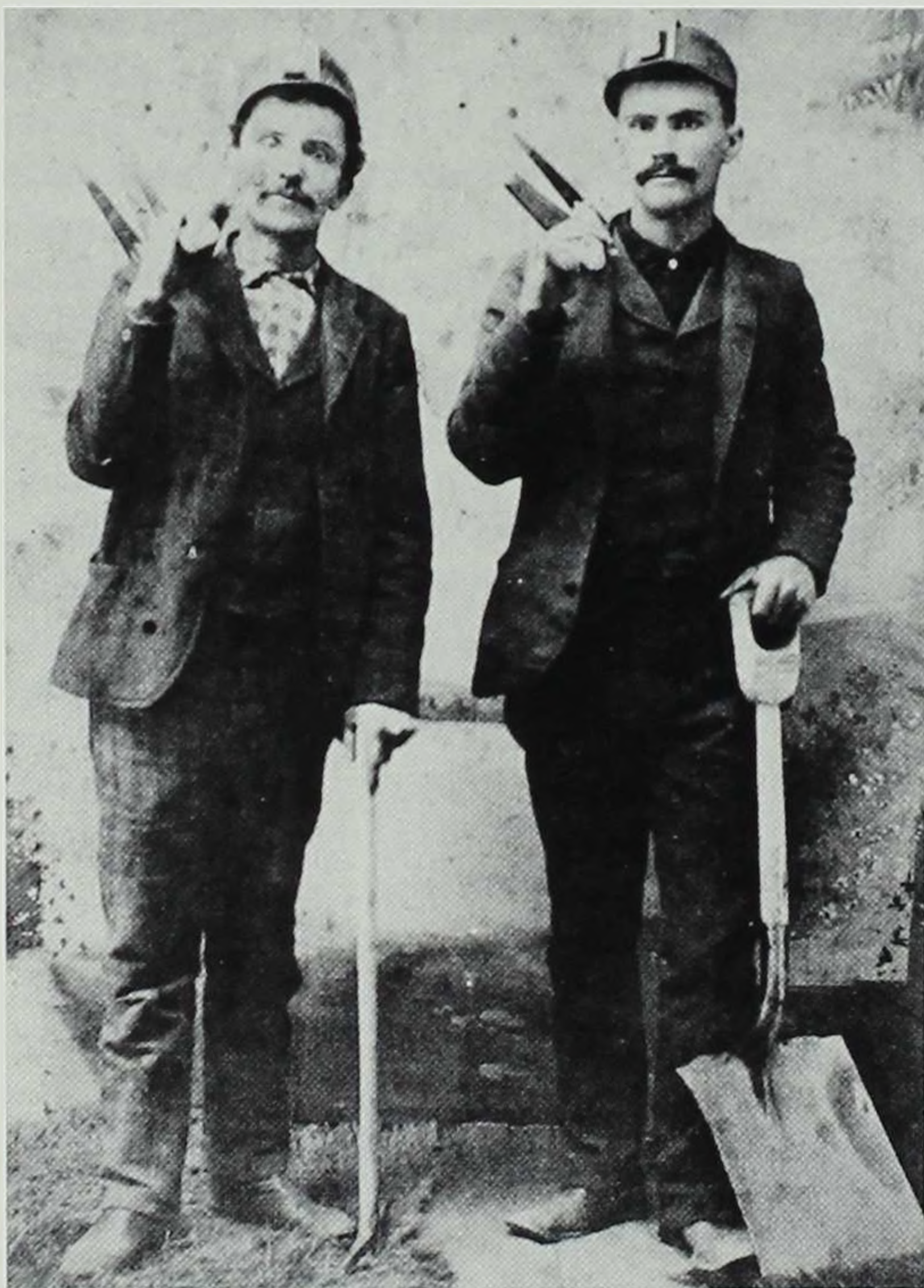
To Dan and Jennie, the extended family was the focal point of their social world. Jennie's relatives were spread across Lockridge, Round Prairie, and Buchanan townships. Her brother and sister both farmed within a mile of Jennie and Dan. Early on, Jennie's mother, Sarah, may have had some influence on Dan and Jennie's efforts to space births and to limit the size of the family to three children, the same number she had had, thus giving each child greater opportunities considering the family's limited means. Starting in 1911 Sarah lived



Christian and Fannie Graber's children: (left) Nancy, Fannie, Mary, Lydia, John, Christian, Peter, and Dan.



Dan Graber (right) often added to his farm income by mining coal at nearby Mystic or Coalport. Above, he and brother-in-law Billie Bankhead pose with mining gear.



with Jennie and Dan for fourteen years (following the deaths of Sarah's husband and father). Grandma Sarah contributed to the children's perception of family by taking them to visit "shirt-tail cousins," whose kinship might have been otherwise forgotten. Under Grandma Sarah's guidance, "Sundaying" with relatives was a frequent event, and family contacts were strengthened.

Although most of Dan's siblings had left Jefferson County in the years following his family's land grab, Dan and Jennie did maintain close contact with his sister and brother-in-law, the Bankheads of Coalport. (Billie Bankhead and Dan had worked together in the coal mines at Mystic, and Billie later hired Dan to work in a Coalport mine.) They also remained close to Dan's brother, Chris, even after he and his family moved away. Nevertheless, most of the families between Glendale and Lockridge were relatives of either Jennie or Dan, and it was this broad swath of farms along the railroad

tracks that they considered their rural neighborhood.

Throughout the 1910s and 1920s Dan and Jennie were fairly active in this rural neighborhood. They socialized at the Coalport Free Methodist Church, of which Sarah's father was a pioneer charter member, until about 1912. But when the coal mines began to decline (because of a deadly fire in 1904 in the main mine and increased competition from more economical mines in central Iowa), so did Coalport and its Free Methodist Church. At Sarah's instruction Dan and Jennie transferred west to Parsonville Methodist Episcopal Church, another long-time prestigious church, at the cost of an extra one-and-a-half-mile trip. Sarah always expressed strong Methodist convictions and Jennie sometimes declared herself a Methodist to the census takers, but Dan never expressed a religious preference. To Dan, church — when farm work and weather permitted — was for socializing.

This alludes to the other traditional theme that Dan and Jennie passed on to their children — the work ethic. The farm provided a good, honest living and taught the children the importance of hard work and cooperation. To Dan, the farm was less of a business than a way of life. He and Jennie were fairly typical examples of successful middle-class farmers in Iowa in the early twentieth century. Although Dan did not have the seven to eight hundred acres by now owned by his older brothers, he had purchased a sister's forty acres in 1913. Dan and Jennie's assets were about average (a 120-acre, \$12,000 farm in 1915), their debts relatively low (\$2,200 mortgage), and the small number of offspring cut down on expenses and assured that the family farm would not be split into inconsequential pieces when the parents died. A modest income (\$600 in 1914) allowed the family to purchase in Glendale or Lockridge the clothes and few foodstuffs not produced at home. Dan's average-sized farm provided plenty of field work for one man and his only son. (Oldest child Zelta Mae had died in 1908, leaving only Bernard and Elda.)

Though Dan had never fully accepted Mennonite religious beliefs, he did retain throughout his life some of the Mennonite cultural aspects, and these help to explain his strong



sense of self-sufficiency and resistance to change. In the Mennonite tradition, self-sufficiency on the farm was a way of life. The farm provided sustenance for the family and food for their livestock. Fruit trees, gardens, beehives, butchering their own livestock, and hunting provided variety to their meals. A farmer needed only enough surplus for taxes and a few goods that could not be produced on the farm.

Yet Dan may have recognized that farmers' ability to be self-sufficient was declining and that farmers could be much affected by the fluctuations of commodity markets. Dan valued cash earned in the marketplace for the security it could give his family, and his operation was in important respects also a commercial one that produced more than his family needed. He normally raised about fifty hogs a year, but by the time winter came in 1914, he had reduced his livestock holdings by selling those ready for market. His barn was filled with

hay, oats, and unshelled corn to feed what remained — about fifteen hogs, fourteen cattle, and seven horses (for labor and transportation). Egg production from Jennie's two hundred chickens decreased with the cold weather, but she still had extra eggs to sell in Glendale or Coalport. Dan had a blacksmith shop on his farm, mostly for his own needs, but he also did blacksmithing jobs for neighbors.

By now their son, Bernard, was growing up. That winter, as a graduate of eighth grade, the fifteen-year-old worked in the Coalport coal mines with his dad. Bernard and Dan felt fortunate to have the extra work. In addition to a small wage, they received free coal for Jennie's kitchen stove, the only source of heat in the home.

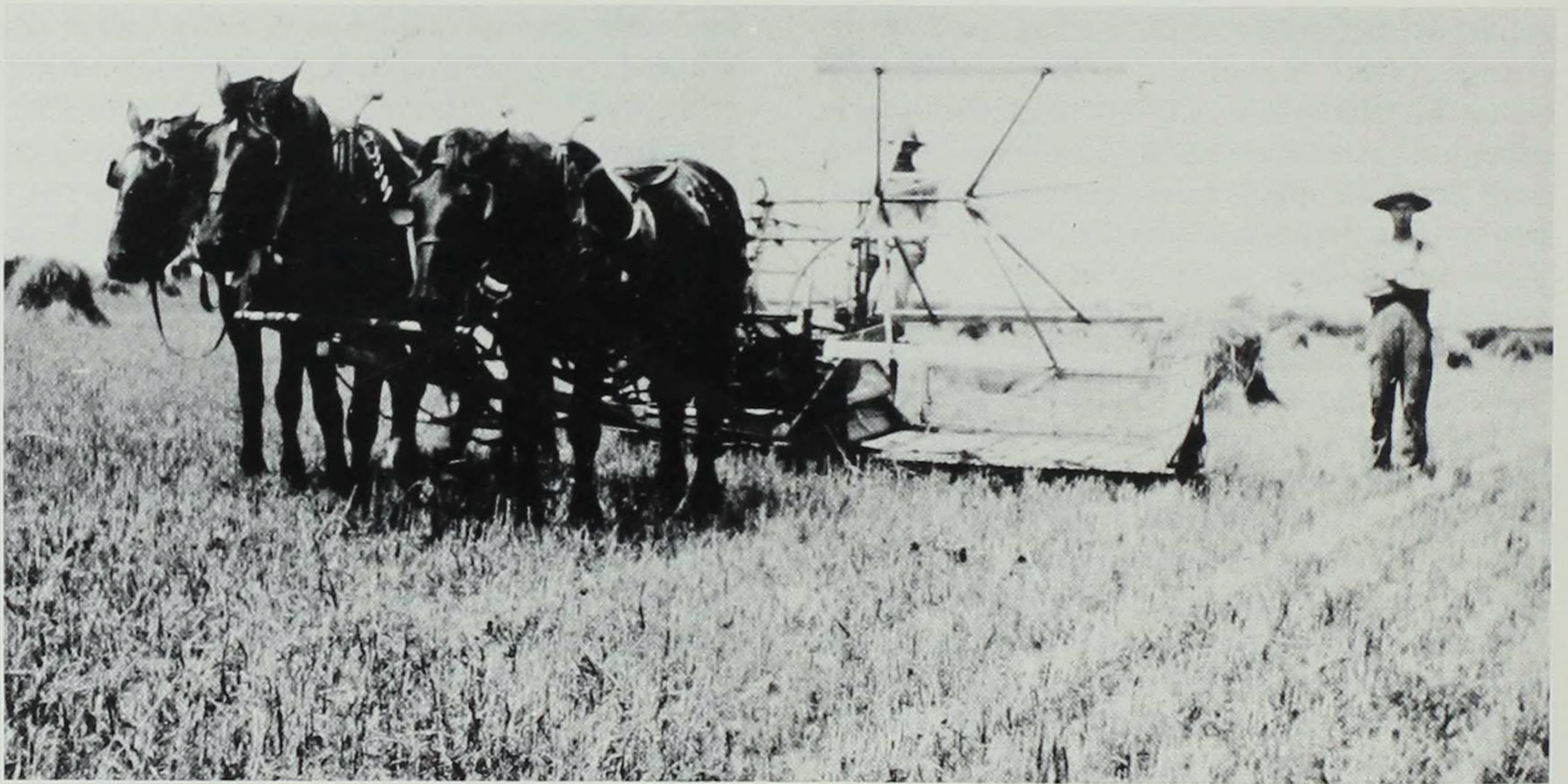
**M**EANWHILE THE TWENTIETH century was bringing many changes to America. In the cities, waves of new immigrants sought jobs in burgeoning factories. New forms of transportation allowed urbanites greater access to a city's central business district and cultural attractions. A shortened workweek and the proliferation of movie theaters heightened interest in new leisure activities. Rural areas, too, were changing, albeit at a slower pace. Increasingly, agriculture was becoming a commercial enterprise (as Dan was learning), expanding in response to strong market demands and suffering in periods of slack demand. Many of the young were no longer satisfied with farm life and fled in droves to the cities. Rural neighborhoods weakened, while seasonal laborers for hire became scarce.

This weakening of rural neighborhoods could be seen in population trends in Lockridge Township. In 1870, the year after Dan Graber was born, the township population had peaked at 1,680. By 1900, it had plunged twenty-seven percent, to 1,227 — despite the growth of the town of Lockridge, the largest town between Mt. Pleasant and Fairfield, the county seat. By 1915 the township population was barely one thousand. Improved machinery and altered methods of farming account in part for the decrease in rural population. New jobs in Fairfield, which grew about fifty percent between 1870 and 1915, also drew on the rural



Sarah Maxwell (left) strengthened kinship ties by encouraging daughter Jennie Graber (right) and her family to maintain contact with Maxwell relatives. Middle: Sarah's grandson, Bernard.





population. Except for perhaps a slight aberration in the early 1930s, rural depopulation in Jefferson County would continue throughout the first half of the century.

The effects of rural depopulation were varied. It meant the decline of the farm service centers of Wooster, Four Corners, New Sweden, Beckwith, Parsonsville, and Glendale. As businesses left these small towns (which had sprung up in the nineteenth century to serve an immobile local market), farmers had to travel farther to sell produce and purchase goods. The mining service center of Coalport also declined and was overtaken by an expanding Lockridge a half-mile east. Depopulation closed rural schools and, combined with aging congregations, closed churches such as Sarah's Coalport Free Methodist. A side effect of declining population was higher local taxes, as fewer taxpayers remained to share the burden. Many of Dan's neighbors bought land on credit, which would have grave effects when farming soured.

Still, the 1910s were sweet years for farming. A steady rise in crop prices after the 1890s had been accompanied by a threefold increase in local land values, between 1880 and 1910, to \$95 per acre. World War I brought desperate shortages of meat and grain that led to a further jump in crop prices and a doubling of land values by 1919.

But the effects of World War I in Jefferson

Dan Graber, here on a horse-drawn reaper, passed the work ethic on to son Bernard (left), who would add tractors and cars to their farming operation.

County went beyond rising land and crop prices. The *Lockridge Times* in 1917 reported that "there is such a great call for active participation in the matter of providing food [to the soldier at the front], that those who are left at home in charge of this work have a responsibility placed upon them fully as great as has the man at the front." Its pages were saturated with articles on preserving eggs, milking practices, stock breeding, and pleas to farm more land. The paper also published draft numbers and spoke of an "anxiety" as local boys were sent to the trenches.

Three months after the United States declared war on Germany, the newspaper carried the story of a Joseph Graber who was arrested in Pennsylvania on charges of being a German agent. Despite their German-sounding name, the Grabers, it seems, experienced little wartime discrimination, perhaps because they had come from France, lived among neighbors and relatives of British descent, and appeared fully assimilated into the local culture. Dan was too old to be drafted, and Bernard, though initially too young, may later have received an exemption as the only son of a farmer. He volunteered in 1919 but was never called up to serve. The family demonstrated their patriotism through Bernard's volunteering, a large victory garden,



and diligent farming to help win the war through food production.

**T**HROUGHOUT his life, Dan tended to believe that the outside world had rather limited effects on him and his family. Tradition put great emphasis on the family, the farm, and the local community. Even the Great War had only limited, primarily economic effects on his family. Dan would never have electricity, running water, nor indoor plumbing. The one major invention to grace his home before the New Deal was the telephone, which he got about 1900 when he and a dozen neighbors supplied "homegrown" telephone poles for the cooperative. He never bought a car, truck, nor tractor.

In contrast, his son Bernard saw the importance of joining the modern world. Bernard's first love was carpentry, but he felt obligated to keep the family farm. Demonstrating the work ethic learned from his parents, Bernard held a series of jobs while farming as a partner with his father. He and his sister Elda switched from

the prestigious Parsonsville Methodist Episcopal to the Lockridge Baptist Church, which had a more active young people's group.

Through part-time jobs mining coal he helped support his family and kept himself in spending money, enjoying the luxury of buying a camera for himself. In 1917 he bought a Model T Ford and, with great pride of ownership, took local damsels on drives through the country. The car was an important factor in the family's joining modern America, because it gave them ready access to Fairfield and Mt. Pleasant, eleven and fourteen miles away. (Dan, however, never learned to drive a car.) Along with Bernard's switch to Lockridge Baptist, the car strengthened Bernard's ties to Lockridge (the nearest supply of gasoline). These ties would remain strong throughout his lifetime.

The end of the Great War in 1919 and replanting of European croplands brought eco-

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As Jennie Graber watches from the farmhouse porch, her son Bernard ignores winter weather to show off his new Model T with the top down, around 1917.





Bernard (middle) supplemented the family's income through jobs on the CB&Q railroad and in area coal mines.



conomic depression to midwestern farming communities such as Lockridge. Crop prices fell, precipitating a thirty percent drop in local land values by 1925. Some local farmers were unable to meet loan payments and lost their land. A few elderly farmers, despondent over the loss of their farms, took their own lives.

The Grabers were not so hard hit by the agricultural depression of the 1920s. With money saved from wartime crop years, Dan and Bernard purchased a horse-drawn thresher and combine. Dan expanded his home and deposited money at Lockridge Savings Bank. Bernard had enough money to drive to Missouri and Davenport, as well as to Fairfield and Mt. Pleasant, to visit relatives.

In 1919 Bernard had begun courting fifteen-year-old Nellie Hollander, one of seven children of a Swedish insurance agent from Salina. During this seven-year on-again, off-again courtship, Bernard and Nellie dined with parents and relatives and drove in the country with friends. Together they went to barn dances and county fairs and enjoyed sleigh rides and ice skating. In the early 1920s, Nellie worked as a maid for a Fairfield banker and Bernard worked seasonally on the CB&Q replacing railroad ties. In anticipation of his mar-

riage and with the railroad wages, Bernard secured a bank loan and contracted for a five-room house to be built on his aunt Nancy's old forty acres just a quarter-mile from Dan and Jennie's home. In the spring of 1926, in the presence of their parents, Bernard and Nellie were married in the New Sweden Lutheran parsonage.

As the rural crisis merged into a nationwide depression after 1929, the little credit available to rural areas shriveled up. Farm bankruptcies (primarily affecting second mortgages) led to the demise of the uninsured Lockridge Savings Bank in 1931. Dan and Bernard lost several hundred dollars. They nearly lost their farm too. Their problem was compounded by the custom of cosigning loans for relatives. When a brother-in-law could no longer keep up payments, creditors started to foreclose on the Graber farm as well. A short-term loan from Nellie's father bought time to refinance through the Federal Land Bank in Omaha. Several nearby farmers lost considerable amounts of land — one to two hundred acres. Others were able to bail out by selling for a fraction of their investment. Most who stayed on the land lived on the brink of bankruptcy.

Many American farmers looked to the gov-



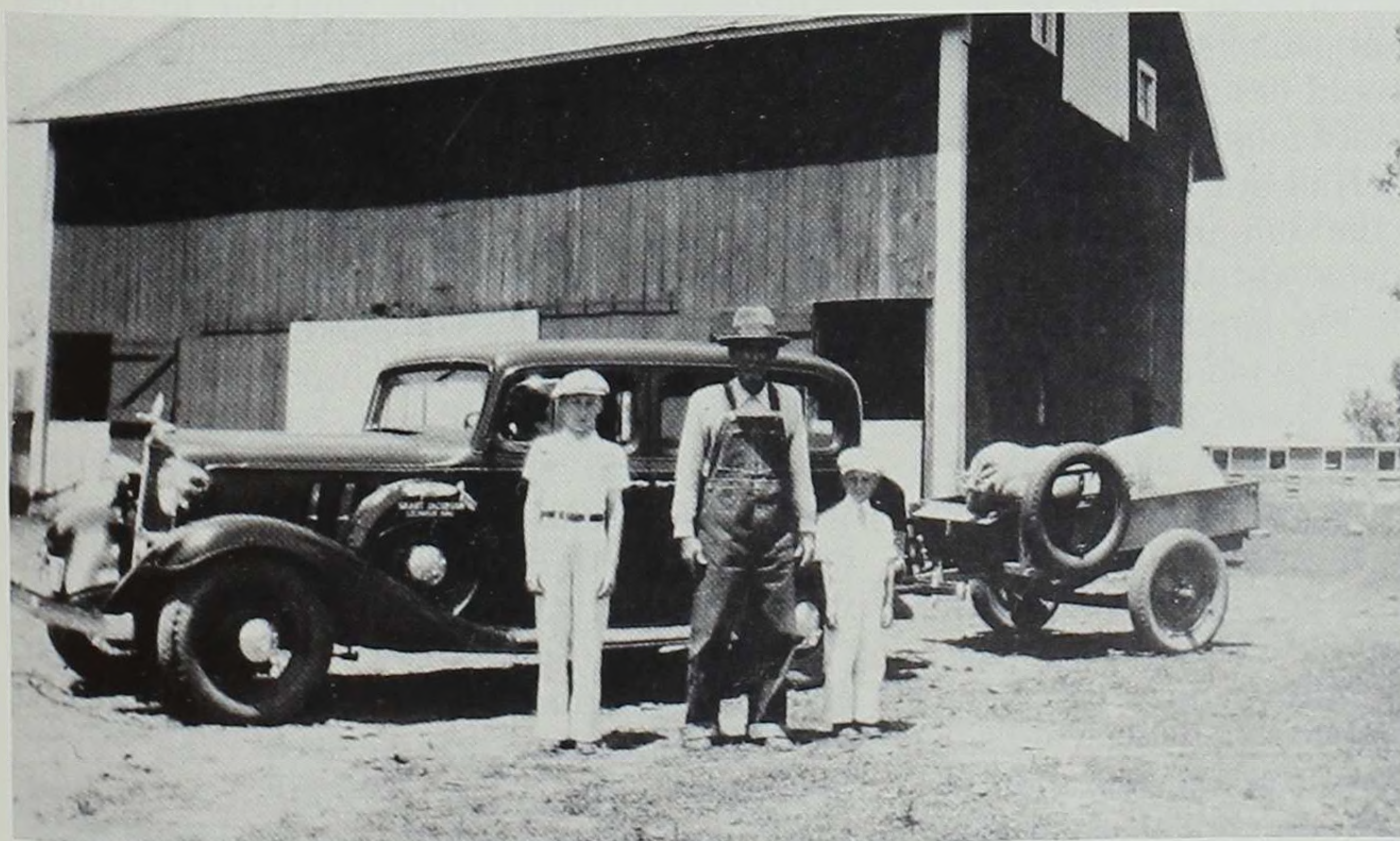
ernment for relief. In 1932, even though Franklin D. Roosevelt carried President Hoover's home state, Dan and Bernard could not quite see themselves voting for the New York Democrat — and didn't. They tended to vote for the individual candidate, but identified mostly with the Republican party. Yet in 1936 and 1940 they may have grudgingly cast their ballots for the Democrat who had helped them so much. (Judging from their lifestyle and machinery purchases in the mid-to-late 1930s, they surely benefited from the Agriculture Adjustment Acts of 1933 and 1938.) At the local level, however, their party loyalty held fast, and in the 1940s they would again vote Republican on the national level.

Over the years, as Bernard had watched yields and crop prices rise and fall, he had sought stable income — first in the coal mines, then with the railroad, next through diversification and carpentry work. In the 1920s he had expanded his father's small flock of sheep to sell wool. Near the end of the decade he worked on a local carpentry crew. About 1930 he purchased a dairy herd to provide income when the croplands were not profitable. When Lockridge Savings Bank failed in 1931 and the custom of cosigning loans for relatives nearly cost the Grabers their farm, their livestock helped keep them solvent. Though they sold or kept for breeding the cattle and hogs normally slaughtered for the mealtable and relied more

than ever on the garden, Bernard's far-sighted business move helped keep the family farm in the family.

By 1935 family snapshots show Bernard and Nellie Graber's pride in what they had accomplished. Sons Harold, eight, and Carl, four, pose in their Sunday best with their parents before driving to services at Lockridge Baptist Church. Their house is neatly painted with a white fence in front and a cement sidewalk leading to the front door. The lawn is trimmed and accented with rose bushes, peonies, and tulips. Bernard had just bought a black 1933 sedan and soon would buy a steel-wheeled Fordson tractor. Bernard and Nellie used the car to take dressed hens and eggs to sell in Fairfield and to pull a two-wheeled cart loaded with hogs to Burlington two or three times per year.

Neither Dan and Jennie nor Bernard and Nellie had electricity (it wouldn't reach this part of Jefferson County until 1946), but Dan purchased a battery-powered radio in 1936 and Bernard followed in 1938. The children would sit in the parlor in the evenings with their parents and grandparents listening to "Fibber McGee and Molly," "Mr. District Attorney," and "I Love a Mystery." Finding time to participate in the community, Bernard supported the Farm Exchange Cooperative in Lockridge, belonged to the Farm Bureau, and served on the local telephone board. The Grabers were



Right: Grandsons Harold (left) and Carl flank grandfather Dan as their mother, Nellie, prepares to drive a cart of wool to market. Nellie's husband, Bernard, expanded livestock holdings and diversified farm income, which helped keep the farm in the family through hard times.



successfully sailing the rough seas of the Great Depression.

**T**HE DEPRESSION BROUGHT many changes in the way Americans thought. The powers of the federal government expanded as Americans believed it was the duty of the government to take a greater role in the welfare of its citizens. Labor unions became stronger as Americans realized the importance of collective bargaining. For a time, the tenets of "cultural democracy" flourished as Americans sought to enrich the common culture with art, music, and literature. The Depression also brought greater appreciation of the value of an education.

Bernard was more interested in the work ethic, however, than in education. But his views were tempered by his wife, Nellie, who had completed the twelfth grade. Young Harold and Carl received support at home and were encouraged to work hard in school (the same country school their father had attended, and later the two-story brick high school in Lockridge). Although Carl Dean was more intrigued by machines than books, Harold was a particularly eager student who especially enjoyed geography and mathematics. Education, Nellie assured her sons, could open a whole new world.

By 1940 the world outside the Lockridge community was not the placid one in which the boys had spent their childhood. In the *Lockridge Times* they read of panzers, blitzes, and Dunkirk. Soon they would read of Pearl Harbor and kamikaze. Bernard took the boys to the Lockridge Community Hall in the winter and to circuit tent shows in the summer on ten-cent Wednesdays to see movies, many of which related to World War II. The family listened to FDR's Fireside Chats on the radio and bought war bonds. Beginning in March 1941 Bernard worked during most of the war at the Iowa Ordnance Plant in Burlington, for what he considered an incredible starting wage of sixty cents per hour. Although the wages were good, the risk was high: several local men who worked there suffered injuries and a brother-in-law was badly burned.

As the Grabers followed the war news in the *Lockridge Times* they also watched grain prices

rise throughout Jefferson County. In World War II higher crop prices did not lead to new automobiles or farm machinery because steel consumer goods were difficult to obtain and maintain. But Bernard used his increased income from the farm and wages from the Iowa Ordnance Plant to retire his mortgages. He also bought war bonds and built a bank account at the insured Iowa State Bank in Fairfield.

Rationing had relatively minor effects on the Grabers. As rural dwellers they had sufficient land to grow a large garden full of tomatoes, strawberries, and vegetables. They raised meat for their own table and sold more to neighbors, thus bypassing the need for meat ration coupons. They used little chemical fertilizer at the time, preferring to spread nature's own. Even gas rationing did not affect them all that much. Bernard was entitled to a "C" gas card (allowing almost unlimited mileage) because of his defense job in Burlington, thirty-five miles east. The family did eliminate or decrease trips to visit relatives in Davenport and Missouri, and they likely had difficulty finding extra rubber tires for the Farmall F-20 tractor (its steel wheels had been converted to rubber just before the attack on Pearl Harbor). Yet for the Grabers rationing led only to inconveniences and minor changes in lifestyle.

After high school graduation in May 1944, Harold worked the summer with a roguing crew, weeding out mutant stalks in the cornfields near Durant, Iowa. That fall, he started as a stockboy at the Loudon Machinery Company in Fairfield, manufacturer of automated feeder barns and monorail conveying systems for assembly lines. He did not necessarily expect to forge a career at Loudon; he was more interested in enlisting in the U.S. Navy as soon as he turned eighteen — and did, a year later. Trained at Great Lakes Naval Station in Chicago, Harold eventually was based at Jacksonville, Florida. Though he had entered the service too late to engage in combat in Europe or the Pacific, he did train in the Caribbean and western Atlantic for antisubmarine warfare.

Entering the Navy, Harold later said, was about the best thing he ever did. Harold lived and trained with men from all over the United States and of various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. As a young man who had never





Bernard (above) passed on his fascination with carpentry and metalwork to sons Harold and Carl.

previously been more than one hundred miles from home, he traveled to Chicago, Boston, Florida, Bermuda, and Guatemala. The Navy introduced Harold to new cultures and broadened his view of the world outside his home community.

During the war years the family lost the two whose union had triggered the shift toward mainstream America. In 1943, a week before their fifty-first wedding anniversary, Jennie died. Dan died two years later. Eighty acres of the farm had previously been transferred to Bernard, and Nellie used her inheritance from her own father's will to purchase the remaining forty acres. Bernard began building a beef herd and after the war traded in the old Farmall tractor for a newer Allis-Chalmers from a Lockridge dealer. The dealer was also his brother-in-law, evidence that the family network was still in operation.

Carl, still in high school, acted on his interest in machines by working part-time as a mechanic at the same dealership. He continued to work with metal and machinery in addition to farming the land. He later moved

into Dan and Jennie's old place and, in 1952, married Florence Stewart. (In the coming years his job experience at the dealership would give him a start in establishing his own farm-related business.)

In 1946 Harold was mustered out of the Navy (though he would serve in the reserves for the next eight years). He returned to Jefferson County and his old job as a stockboy with Loudon Machinery Company. He attended Parsons College part-time and moved up into office work, eventually becoming head of the billing department at Loudon. In 1950 he met Grace Conrad and they married a year later.

**D**URING THE SIX decades following 1892, Dan and Jennie Graber and their descendants were fairly typical examples of successful middle-class farmers in the Midwest as they moved from rural isolation toward greater participation in the outer world. The Grabers expanded their farm early in the period, resisted further expansion during speculative times, carried low debts, and fought the Great Depression with diversification and jobs off the farm. They shunned active participation in political movements, preferring to socialize in their rural community and to farm unbothered by the winds of politics. They did not see themselves as isolated; local concerns were of greater importance to them. It took a second world war for them to realize fully the importance of the outer world.

Dan was the son of immigrants who sought happiness through a lifetime of hard work both on and off the farm. Conservative boyhood traditions taught him to resist change and to be skeptical of attempts at modernization. Like many farmers of his generation, he never bought a tractor, car, nor truck and continued farming in the way of his parents. His greatest contributions to the eventual modernization of his family were his successful marriage to a Maxwell and the farm partnership with his son, Bernard.

Bernard carried the family further along the path of modernization with his relative openness to change and his treatment of the farm as a business. He had a strong desire for the inventions of the outside world that could ben-





efit the farm: cars, tractors, and farm machinery. He changed the farm from little more than subsistence level to a profitable, diversified business, one that could withstand even the Great Depression. He emphasized hard work and closeness to the earth over education, but married a woman who believed in the importance of a formal education for their children.

Bernard's oldest son, Harold, benefited from the broadening experiences of the Navy and travel but chose to settle in Fairfield after the war, working his way up through the ranks of a local industrial equipment firm. He shared his father's love of carpentry and remodeled older homes in Fairfield before eventually building his own home in the country.

Bernard's younger son, Carl, followed in his father's and grandfather's footsteps with the farming business, expanding to some five hundred acres over the quarter century after World War II and starting a tractor dealership and service center on his farm.

Although Dan and Jennie were not there to see all this, their family had entered the modern world. □

Evidence of continuing strong family ties: In 1945 Bernard and Nellie moved their farmhouse a quarter-mile to a site just across the road from Dan and Jennie's farmhouse. A 1953 aerial shot shows Bernard and Nellie's farmyard.

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

"When I began this project," the author notes, "I did not realize that I would be able to piece together so much information about a husband and wife who began their lives together nearly three-quarters of a century before my birth." Family photo albums, scrapbooks, and genealogy records were extremely valuable in reconstructing the rural neighborhood and lifestyle of the Dan and Jennie Graber family. The *Fairfield Tribune*, *Fairfield Daily Ledger*, and the *Lockridge Times* expanded the author's understanding of the era. The author consulted county histories, courthouse records, plat maps of Jefferson County, and state and federal township censuses and census manuscripts for Iowa. Other particularly useful secondary sources included *The Mennonites in Iowa* by Melvin Gingerich (Iowa City, 1939); various years of the *Iowa Yearbook of Agriculture* and the *Iowa Agricultural Census; A Fair Field* by Susan Fulton Welty (Detroit, 1976); and *Three Generations in Twentieth Century America* by John G. Clarke et al. (Homewood, Ill., 1982). This article was developed from a paper written for a University of Iowa undergraduate history seminar directed by Ellis Hawley, chair of the history department, whom the author thanks for his inspiration and detailed suggestions. The author also thanks his father, Harold D. Graber, and uncle, Carl D. Graber, for interviews, interest, and excellent recall.