

Pantatorium Summer

by Debby J. Zieglowsky

FRED W. KENT — photographer, naturalist, historian, conservationist, and, to many, a very special Iowan. During his six-decade career as a photographer at the University of Iowa, he chronicled the history of the university, the bloom of Hawkeye athletics, and the growth of Iowa City. The following collection of photos records an early stage in this remarkable man's career of service. Kent took the photos when he was a college student.

Kent came to the University of Iowa in 1911 with a scholarship in his hand and a passion for nature and photography in his soul. Photography had been his avocation since 1908 when he had purchased his first camera (a Brownie) in his hometown of DeWitt, Iowa. On campus he quickly developed a reputation as a photographer. But it was a summer job in 1913 that was pivotal for him.

Like most college students then and now, Kent was looking for a summer job. Like many college students then and now, he was drawn to northwest Iowa, to the Lakes region, a naturalist's dream. Such a popular resort area as Arnolds Park and Lake Okoboji needed extra hands catering to the needs of the thousands of tourists who flocked there every summer. Ingenious students, not afraid of hard work, could profit from such a summer's labor. Fred Kent never lacked ingenuity; he turned his summers at Lake

Okoboji into something special.

He and his friend Arndt Syverud built a shack near Arnolds Park and named it the "K-S Pantatorium." Here they cleaned and pressed the tourists' summer finery. They slept in a tent behind the shack, swimming and canoeing every available minute and having "a wonderful time."

Of course, Kent took his camera with him everywhere. Photography was as natural and as necessary as breathing. Before the summer of 1913 was over, he added a tiny darkroom to the pantatorium where he could print his own photos.

Those photographs from the beginning of Kent's career offer hints of what was to come. He was remarkably gifted at capturing a mood, whether it was his friends' hijinks in a canoe or the waves lapping gently on the rocks at Pillsbury Point. Each photograph was composed with a clear purpose, to tell a story. As historical records, the photographs are extraordinary.

Kent returned to Lake Okoboji in the summer of 1914. Again he worked in the pantatorium. Again he explored the lakeshore in his canoe, birdwatching. He photographed the natural beauty

of Iowa's lakes — as well as the university professors and students at nearby Iowa Lakeside Laboratory, and the tourists at the amusement park and beaches.

After graduating in 1915 and serving in World War I, Kent returned to the university as its official photographer. Besides the many portraits of professors and coaches that he produced, he photographed many university events, such as former president Thomas J. Macbride striding down the street with his successor Walter A. Jessup, Nile Kinnick returning to campus in triumph with the Heisman Trophy, and the Hawkeye football team trekking to their first Rose Bowl.

Beginning in the 1940s Kent headed the university's Photo Service, where he continued to work after his retirement in 1962. He combined his love of nature with his photographic skills and conservationist efforts. He died in 1984, leaving a remarkable legacy of thousands of photographs, meticulously labeled and preserved — so many years after those two crazy summers of pressing clothes and taking photographs at Lake Okoboji.

"You Should Worry"

If Your Clothes Need Pressing
Take Them to the

**K-S PANTATORIUM,
Arnold's Park, Iowa**

Left: Arndt Syverud and Fred Kent (with pipe). Right: Business card.

Editor's note: In 1979 Fred Kent's granddaughter Janet interviewed him as they looked through several personal photo albums. Excerpts of the tape-recorded interview

accompanying photos from his 1913–1914 Okoboji albums appear here through the courtesy of Kent's daughter, Barbara Buckley, of Iowa City. The photo essay presents Lake

Okoboji and Arnolds Park from the perspective of a fun-loving college student who needed a summer job and who also happened to already be a very gifted photographer.



Fred Kent: I got acquainted with a guy named [Arndt] Syverud. . . . He was in dental school. He cooked an idea up that we go to Okoboji. So we went to Okoboji and bought lumber and built a shack near Arnolds Park and started a pantatorium.

Janet Kent: What is a pantatorium?

Fred Kent: [A place for] cleaning clothes. We'd get jobs from that hotel next door, nearby, and other places. And we had a pan out in the backyard with gasoline in it, and we'd dunk the stuff in it, clean and press them, and take them back. I finally built a little cubby-hole in it to do photographs, so I started taking pictures, processing film — and stayed all summer and had a wonderful time. . . . The next summer [my friend] Jim Gurney went too.

Janet Kent: "K-S" Pantatorium?

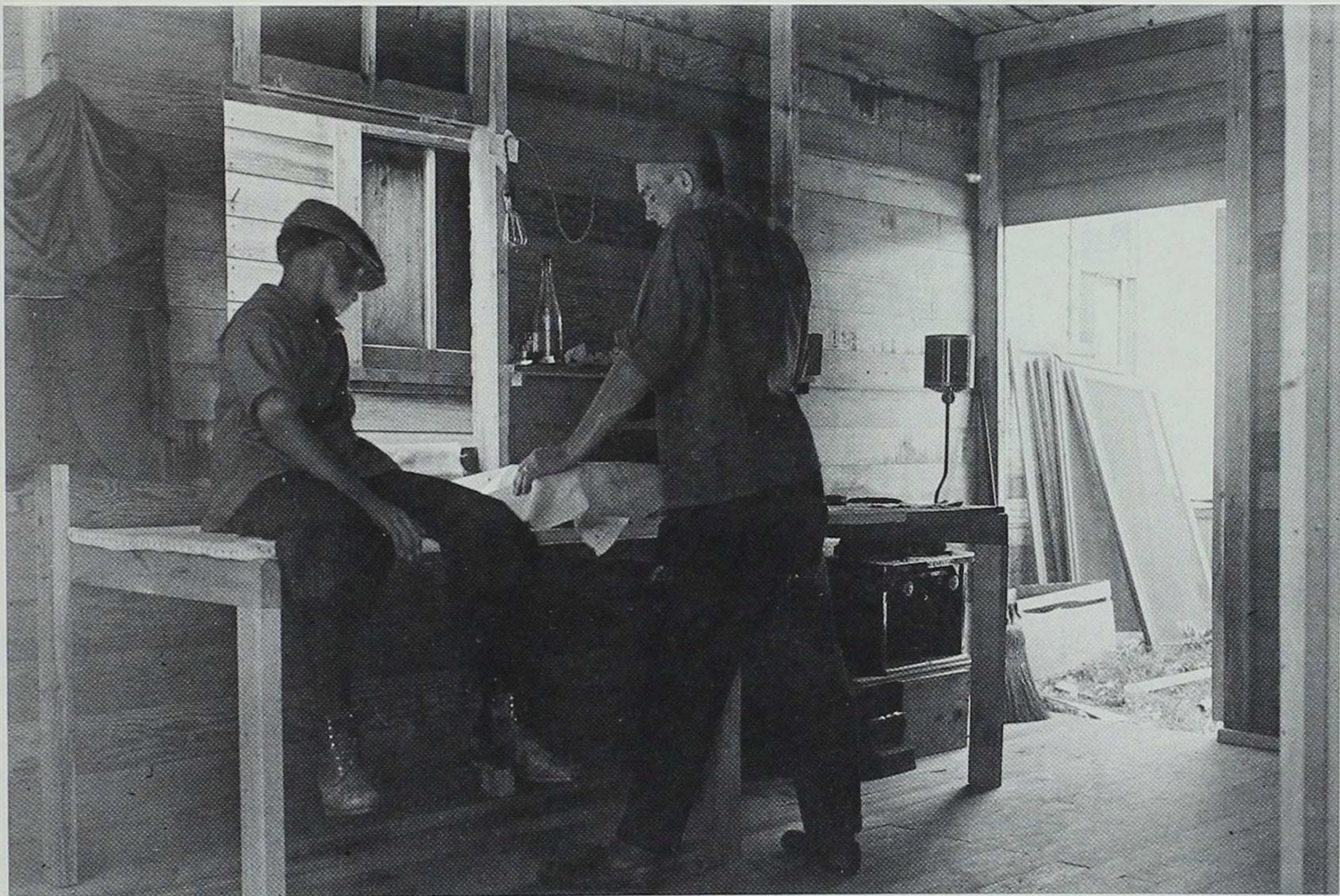
Fred Kent: [For] Kent-Syverud. [Here we are] hard at work inside, pressing. Had an old kerosene heater with a big old sad iron. . . .

We got some doozies from the hotel — fancy clothes we didn't know what to do with.

Janet Kent: Any disasters?

Fred Kent: Probably.

Three pantatorium scenes — pressing and dry-cleaning. Jim Gurney on bottom right.





Fred Kent: I got a job there with a fellow [L.F. Williams or Williamz?] who had a photographic shop. I spent most of the summer processing films and making postcards. Jim got a job at an eating place. [We would get] up in the morning and take a swim. And "Syv" had an old eighteen-foot, and we used that a lot. I got one picture with twelve people in it.

Janet Kent: Surprised it didn't sink.

Fred Kent: Well, we tipped it over on purpose.

We went over to Miller's Bay where the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory has their summer classes. I took quite a few pictures there and sold them to them.

By the end of the summer Jim Gurney and I and Little Jim decided to go for a trip, and we got the sail up in the canoe. We sailed in a southwest wind clear to the other end of the lake, five or six miles, and went just whewwwwwww, and it took us all day paddling against the wind to get back. Couldn't sail back in the canoe because there's no keel on it.

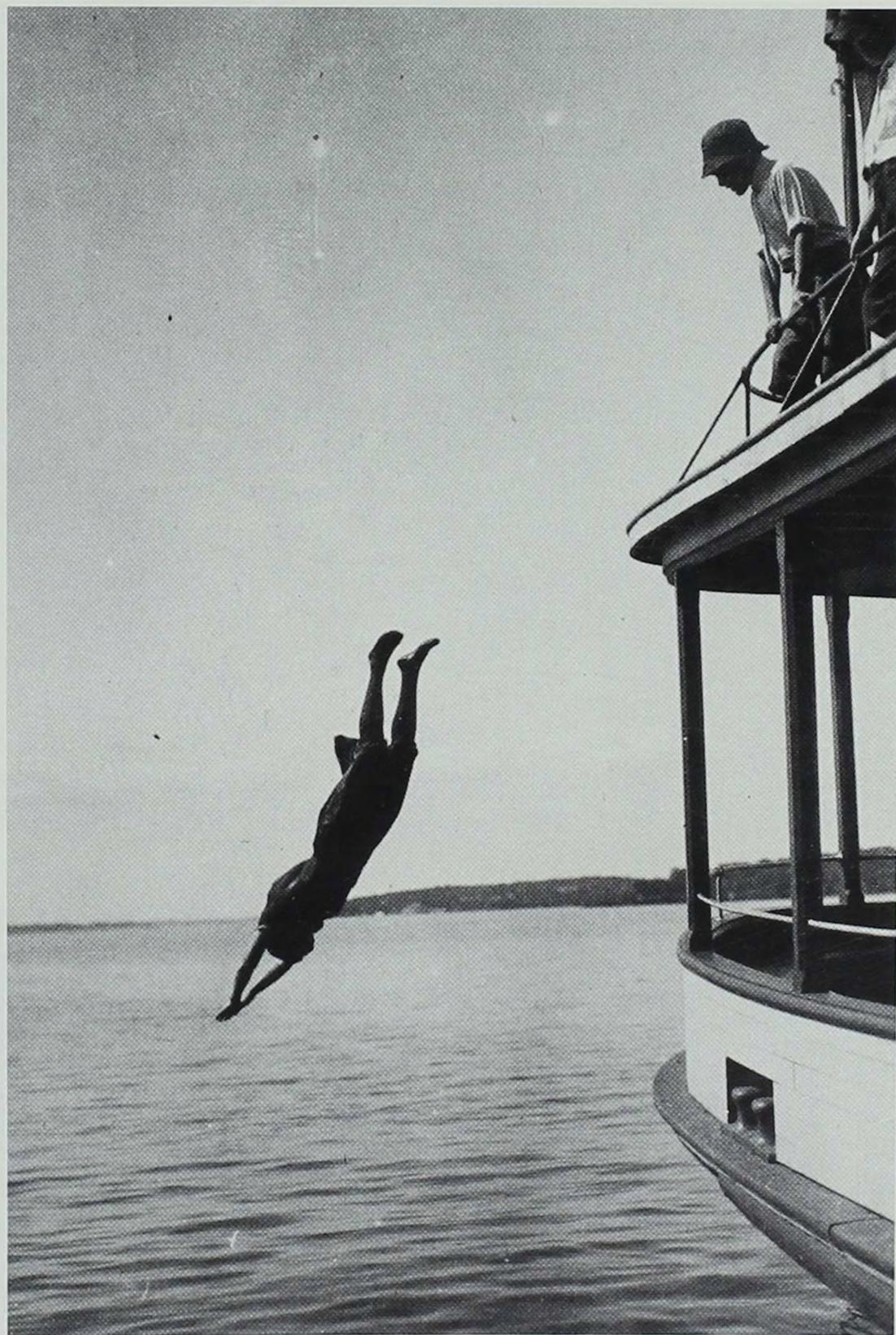
Oh, we had a wonderful time up there. We'd go out in the evening in the canoe and go over outside the inn and listen to the dance band playing. So I spent two summers there. . . .

I worked for [Williams again] the next summer. He had the negatives, and I printed them by the hundreds. . . .

See, here's the gang in that canoe.

Janet Kent: Two, four, six, eight, ten, fourteen people — a little low in the water!

Fred Kent: Yeah. There's where they tipped it over.



Upper left: Kent and a friend head back toward their tent. (Kent often included himself in photos by using a cable release.)

Lower left: At Scrogg's Landing.

Above: Diving off the deck.

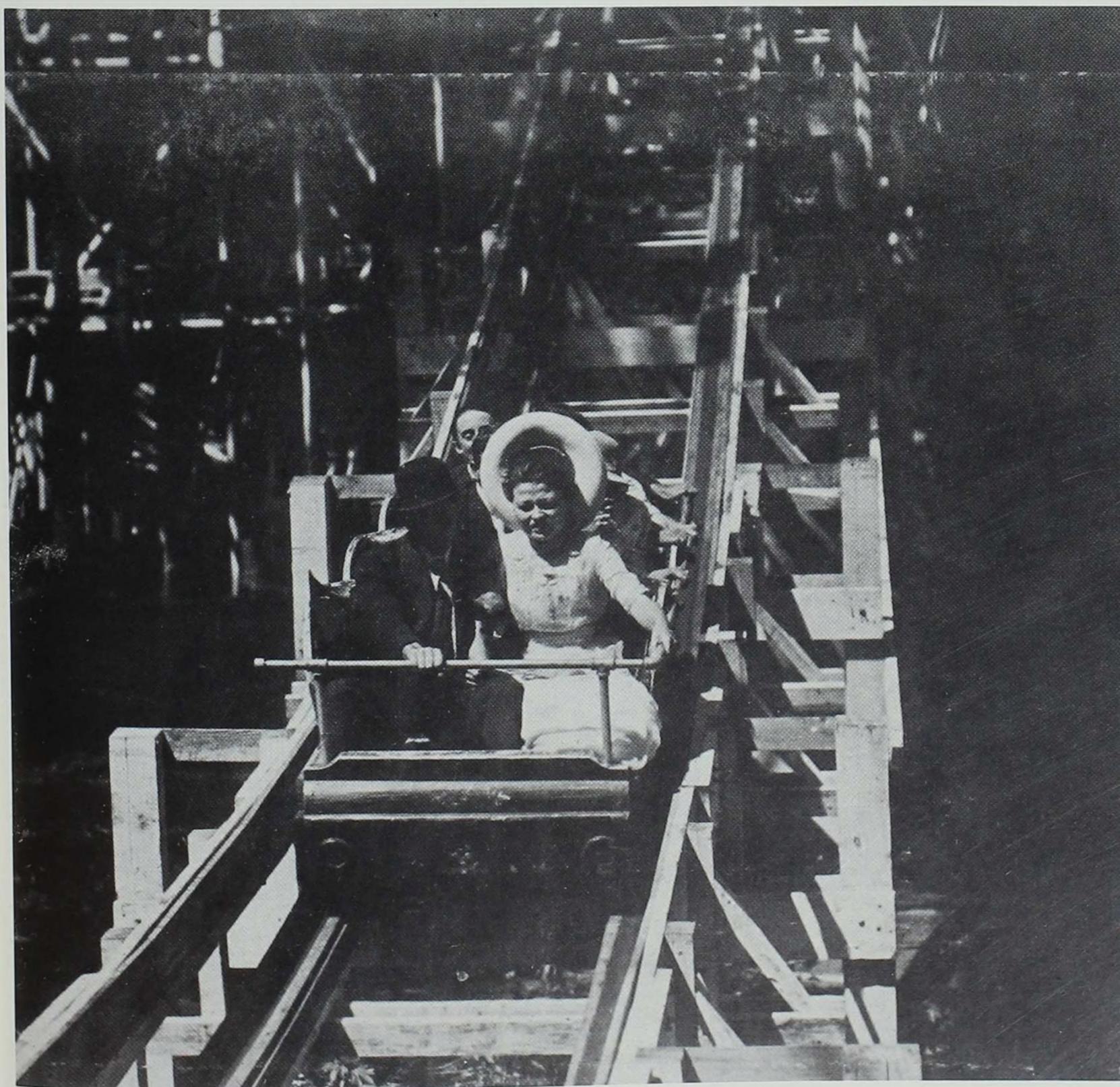


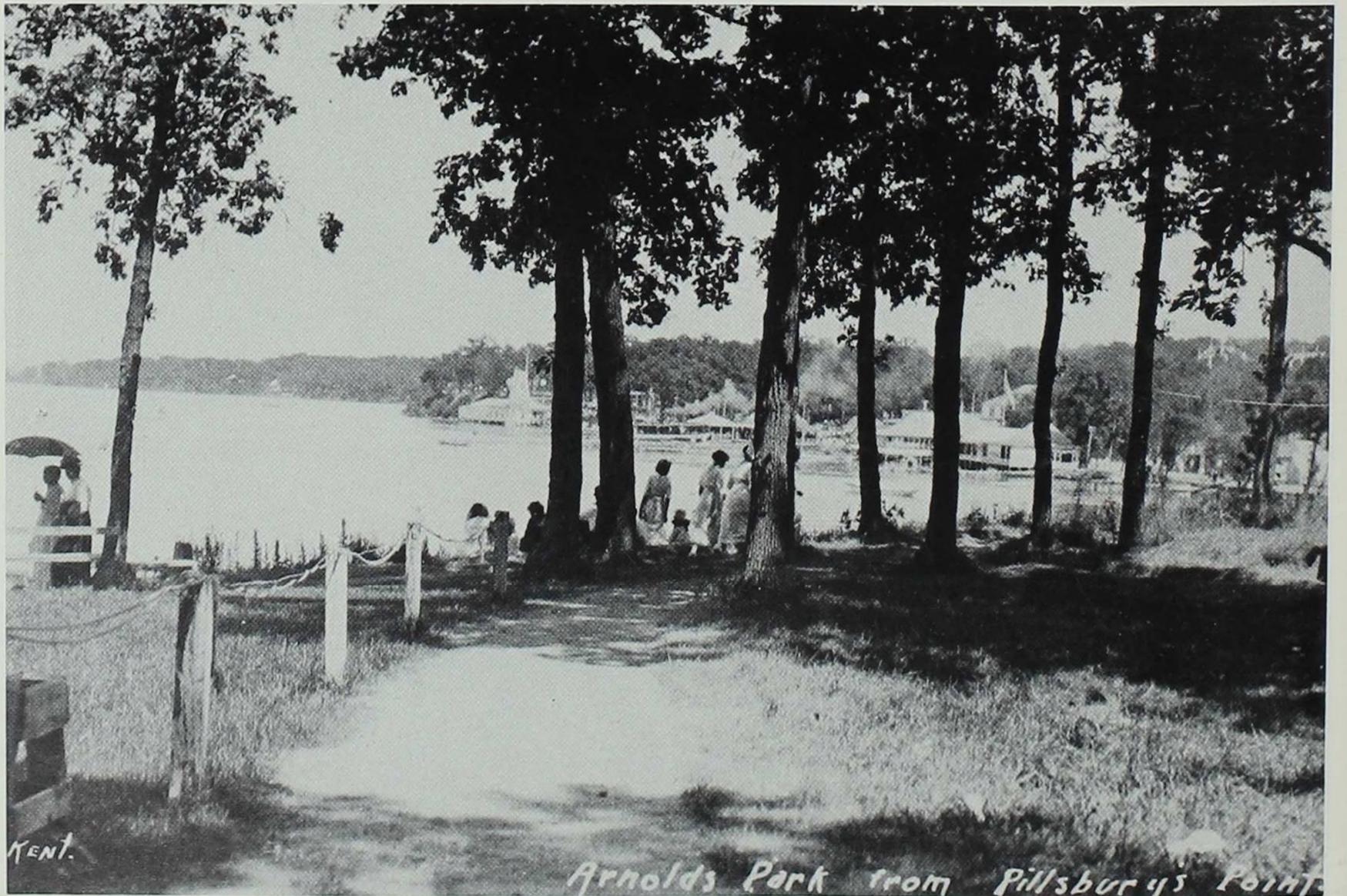
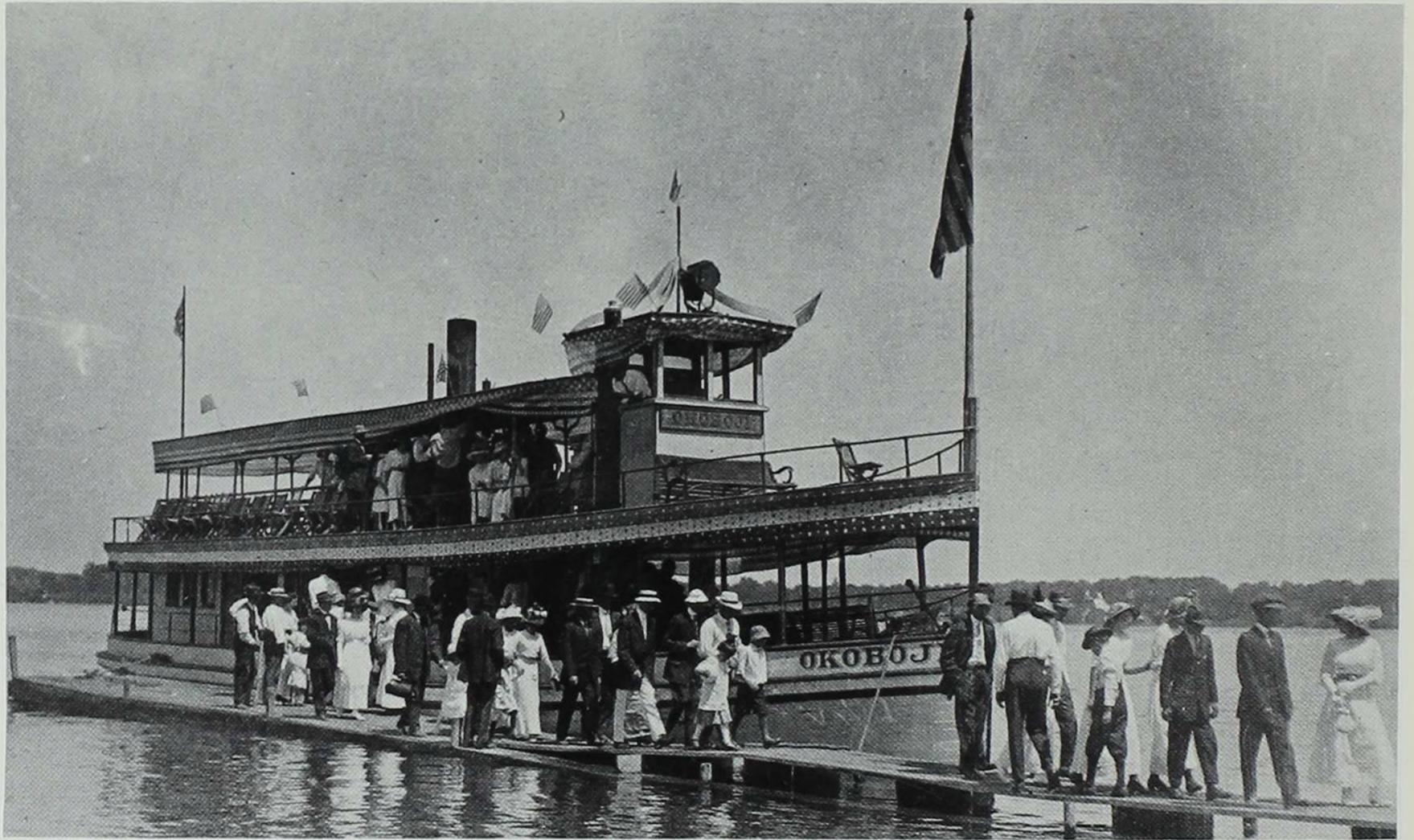
Fred Kent: Muskmelons, watermelons. Oh, yes, there was an ice cream factory next door [to the pantatorium]. I suppose I ate a lot of it. The barrels [were used for carrying] the ice cream around to places. They would make them up in containers, and make the ice in the wintertime.

. . . I was into taking pictures — anything to make a change. The roller coaster out back of us made a hell of a racket. Listen to it!

Far left: Melons and ice cream.

Below: Amusement park roller coaster.





Fred Kent: There were three boats that operated, the *Okoboji*, the *Queen*, and the other one. Way at the other end of the lake they made contact with the *Orleans* where the Rock Island Railroad let people off. They'd get on these boats and come down to these various places. They were great fun.

Janet Kent: What's this, a slide to slide into the water? Pillsbury Point?

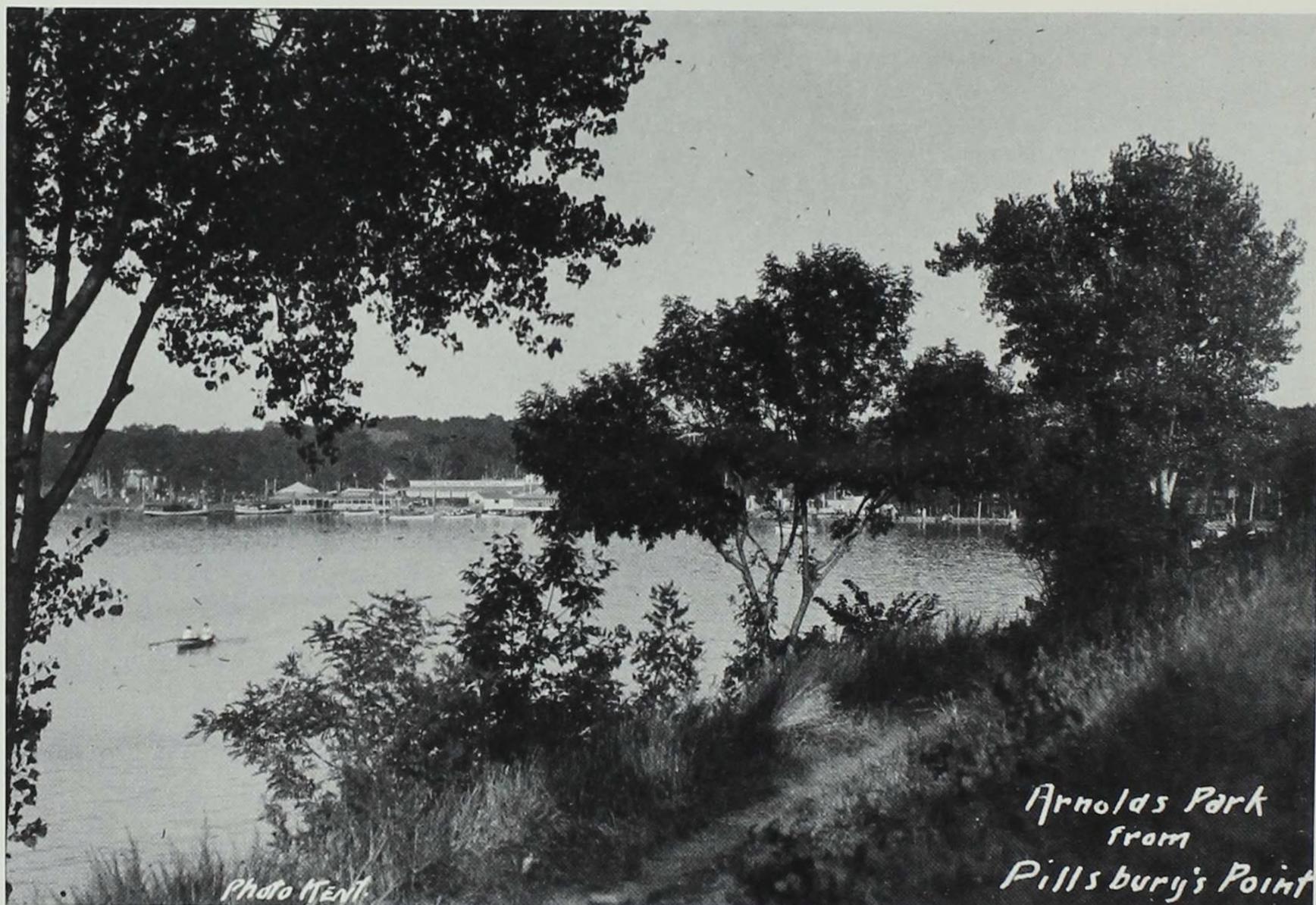
Fred Kent: Yes, and [Pillsbury Point] — beautiful spot. It had a rocky point and the waves would break over it. Beautiful lake.

Top left: Arriving on the *Okoboji*.

Bottom left: Arnolds Park from Pillsbury Point.

Below: Water slide and bath house.







Janet Kent: Now the next book: Arnolds Park. Did you go over there and ride very much?

Fred Kent: No. I liked taking pictures of water and sailing pictures. Nice compositions. I finally got a postcard-sized camera. Can't remember how much money I made in a summer or how many postcards I sold. □



Upper left: Arnolds Park from Pillsbury Point.

Above and far left: Otto (Arndt Syverud's nephew).

Left: Fred Kent.