

The PALIMPSEST

Volume 68, Number 1

IOWA'S POPULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE

Spring 1987



Inside —



The place was specific: Grant's Department Store, Clinton, Iowa. But the style was common coast to coast. In the 1920s skirts rose, hair lengths rose, and buildings bespeaking prosperity rose. A look at Cedar Rapids in the Twenties begins on page 32.



The Meaning of the Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete, and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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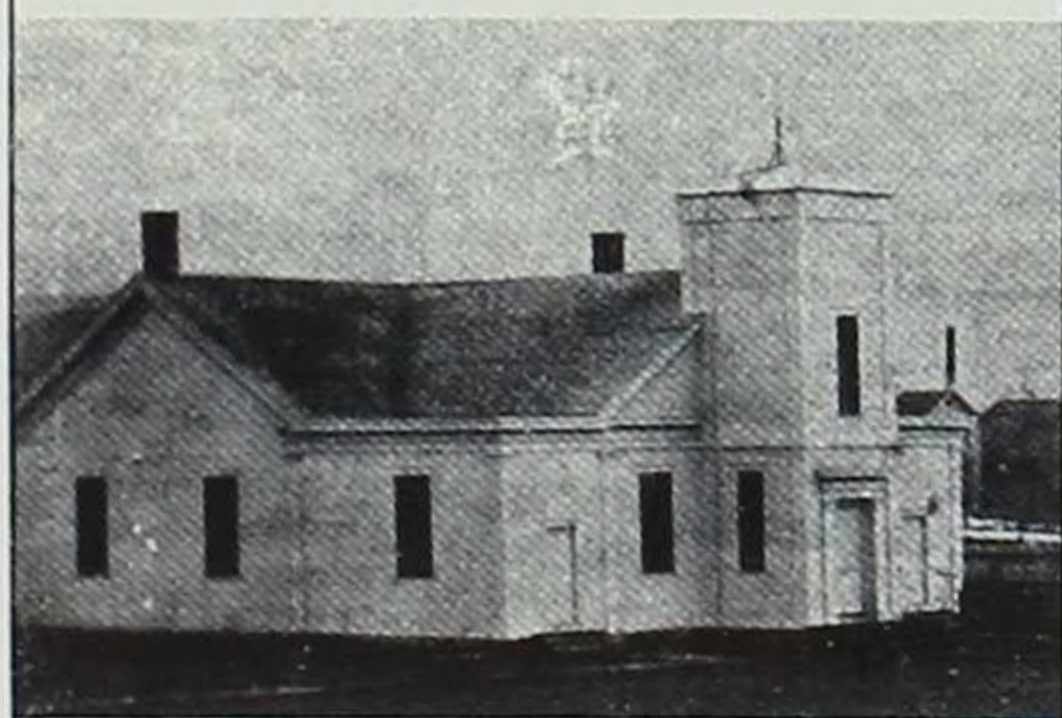


Julia Preston in Fort Dodge 2



Parlor City

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Churchyard confrontation 12

COVERS: (Front) teacher Sarah Gillespie Huftalen and her students mend a fence at their Page County rural school around 1910. (Back) students burn brush in the schoolyard. Beginning on page 22, a photo essay reveals that Sarah Huftalen taught her students much more than the Three Rs.

The PALIMPSEST

IOWA'S POPULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE

Ginalie Swaim, Editor

VOLUME 68, NUMBER 1

SPRING 1987

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More than eclipses and clouds of grasshoppers darkened the days of Julia Preston and her family as they settled in Iowa. Her memoirs yield fascinating vignettes of life in and around Fort Dodge of the 1870s.

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When male fugitive slaves enter the village school, tensions erupt, revealing a common nineteenth-century fear in America — that equality would bring miscegenation.

22 An Acre of Hill

"It was a school home not a school house. It was where we all wanted to be." A photo essay about a southwestern Iowa rural school shows why.

32 Cedar Rapids in the Roaring Twenties *by Clarence A. Andrews*

Bursting with new schools and skyscrapers, new ways to travel and relax, the "Parlor City" roared into the 1920s. Clarence Andrews writes about Cedar Rapids from the street-corner vantage point of a boy selling newspapers.

Washtub Over the Sun



by Julia Antoinette Losee Preston

Editor's note: Using her journals and diaries, Julia Antoinette Losee Preston (left) completed her memoirs in 1936, at the age of ninety-five. Her great-granddaughter, Barbara Bradfield, recently shared Chapter 19 of the unpublished memoirs with the *Palimpsest* staff. The following excerpts from that chapter (edited slightly for publication) begin in 1869, when Julia and Peter Preston decide to move to a farm near Fort Dodge, Iowa. (Illustrations are from late nineteenth-century advertisements, magazines, and books in the SHSI collections.)

Born in New York in 1841, Julia Preston lived in Canada, Michigan, Ohio, and Illinois before moving to Iowa. Preston's memoirs are brimming with detail and metaphor; everyday objects and events become symbols for personal struggles and victories as the family makes Iowa their home. As the excerpts reveal, in documenting her own life Preston created fascinating, sometimes intimate vignettes of life in north central Iowa in the 1870s.



RUMORS OF GOLDEN opportunities for farmers out West reached us daily, and to Peter they brought new hopes and new visions. Stories of cheap and fertile lands to be found in Iowa drew him like a magnet. One day we heard of a farm, right on the Des Moines River with a fine house and barn, and already under cultivation that could be had for reasonable rental. . . .

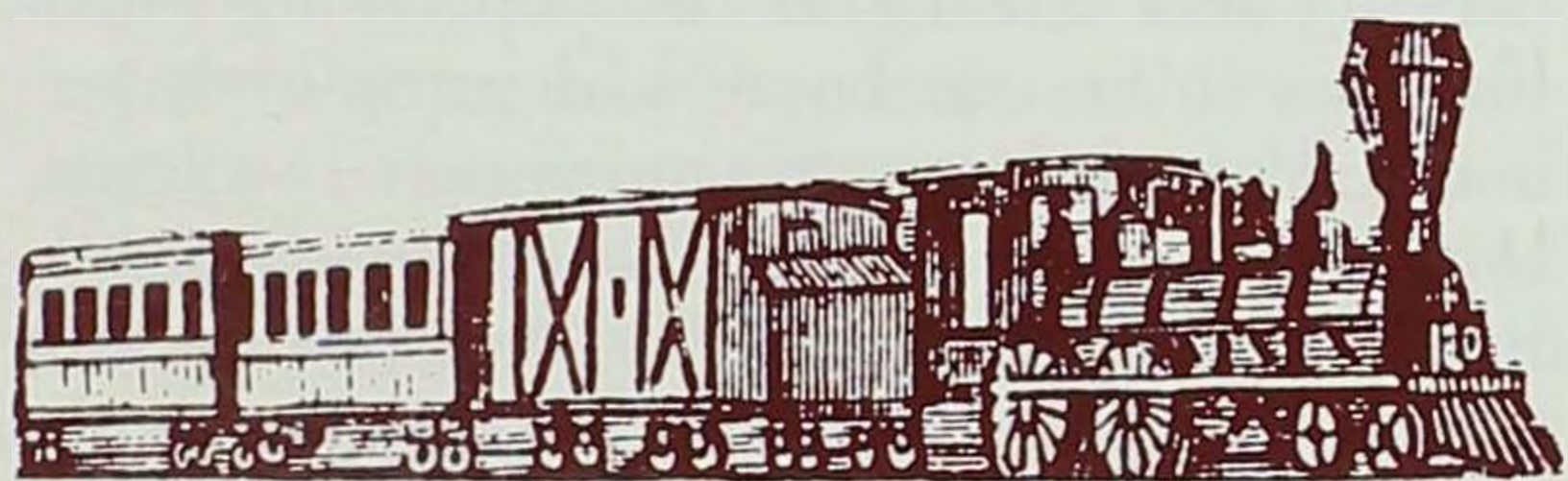
Inquiries revealed that the railroad ran to Webster City which was twenty miles from our destination and that a stage was operated between this town and Fort Dodge, a little village only four and a half miles from our farm. Peter decided to go ahead with our household belongings in the covered wagon and to have

[daughter] Carrie and me follow a month later on the train. . . .

. . . Peter gave the tall clock his father had brought to Illinois from New Jersey to two neighbor boys "to tinker with." I could not keep back the tears when he said we must sell the haircloth sofa, the lampstand, the table with the scalloped edge, and the big rocker, but I realized that [there] was no space for them. Into the wagon went two bedsteads, two stoves, a washtub, my small sewing rocker, six flagbottom chairs and a carpet. We put in some empty bedticks to be filled later with straw and corn husks, and also Mother's good feather bed, rolled with pillows and quilts and carefully baled. In addition we took tools, extra

harness, and provisions for us and for the horses.

At dawn one April morning in 1869 I watched Peter drive off on his heavily loaded wagon. . . .



WE KNEW IT WOULD take the better part of a month for Peter to drive those three hundred miles [from Altona, Illinois] to Fort Dodge. Although we had no word from him, on the last day of April we said goodbye to [sister] Esmerelda and [her husband] Nye and the good friends who had gathered at the station to see us off.

Travel in those days was not easy. The rails were not well laid and the roadbed was far from smooth. Wherever the steel rails were joined, the wheels hit with a clatter and bang. The cars swayed from side to side. The smoke and cinders kept us dirty and dusty. We had packed our food for the trip, and enjoyed the first meals but soon our lunch basket became uninteresting. Tiresome and uncomfortable as was our journey on this passenger train out of Altona, it was as nothing compared with that on the freight car to which we had to change at Iowa Falls.

We were a queer lot, the passengers in that car. Most of them were men, undoubtedly out to seek their fortune wherever the railway led them. There were four other women, all thin and haggard. We all had to sit on the floor on our baggage. The one dirty little window was nailed shut, and not a breath of fresh air was to be had. We bounced and swayed about until we were bruised and sore. [Three-year-old] Carrie was as good as gold, but Jane [my sister, who had decided with her husband, Wilson, to move to Iowa also] had a time with her five children, for little Adelia, her youngest, wasn't yet a year old, and cried a good deal.

The passengers did what they could to while away the time. The men played cards and

swore the air blue about their luck and the discomfort of the trip. In those days people who played cards were considered on the high road to perdition and it was probably because of the card playing that two of the women fell on their knees and prayed and wept. One poor soul who fell asleep looked so white with her eyes closed that we thought she had died.

At last we came to Webster City, the end of the railroad. We got off in the thickest, stickiest mud I had ever seen, just in the gray dawn, and waited for a stage to take us the rest of the way [to Fort Dodge]. . . .

After some difficulty, Wilson had succeeded in finding rooms for us in a miserable little one-horse hotel. Although we were three in a bed — on lumpy straw ticks — and the corded ropes, which in those days served for supports instead of the springs of modern beds, cut deep ridges into our bodies, we were so tired we could have slept anywhere, on anything.

Looking backward, I realize, time is measured not by minutes and days but by what happens to us. Thus, the two events which stand out in my memory of those first Fort Dodge days are our arrival and Peter's coming. A week intervened between them, and I know now it must have been a long, tiresome, anxious one, but details have completely left me. I have a vague memory of rains, of poor food and miserable coffee, of wretched quarters, and of Wilson's discouraging search for work.

Then Peter came! I can see him now — standing at our door in the early dawn — his dear face haggard and worn, his clothes soggy and wet, and his arms outstretched to me. . . .

Wilson decided to stay in Fort Dodge to look for work, but I was thankful to be leaving the discomforts of the town for the pleasant home that I was sure awaited us out on our farm. . . .

Our road lay across the river and as we jogged along, I noticed that the ground, though rutted and caked from recent rains, seemed increasingly dry and unpromising. Last year's coarse, bristling grass covered the prairie like a brown garment. . . . When I realized we must have covered the four and a half miles from town, I began anxiously to search for the pretty white farmhouse of my dreams. The only sign of habitation was two old weather-beaten houses — one older, more deserted looking

than the other. Toward these Peter headed the horses. On that last stretch of road, nobody spoke. . . .



I THOUGHT OF THE OLD Preston Homestead [where we had lived, near Altona], with the big, white house, the shady yard, the fruit trees and the level well-tilled fields. How different from this forbidding hut, with its one downstairs room of rough logs, stained with water and smoke, and the low raftered attic above it. There wasn't a shelf or a closet, except for a few rough boards in a sort of cubbyhole of a buttery just inside the door. In the corner next to the crude stairway was a recess just big enough to hold a bedstead with a curtain in front of it. . . .

First, we got our bed up. Then we took our heavy carpet and laid it on the floor of the attic, which was too low for bedsteads and on this Jane put her straw ticks. Here she and her five children were to sleep. I folded my mother's feather bed double and laid it on the floor near our bed. It made a soft nest for little Carrie. . . .

In the early evening, as I went to call Peter to supper, big black clouds rolled up from the west. Through them the lightning flashed ominously. The wind died down and then rose again. Before we had finished our supper the storm was upon us. . . . Then the rain came down! It seemed to pour out of the sky in bucketfuls. Soon we found it was coming in along the ridgepole on Jane's beds upstairs. Standing on the top of the stairs I held the lamp above my head while Peter and Jane dragged the damp ticks to dry corners. The sound of the heavy drenching downpour was interrupted

only by the frequent roar of thunder.

Jane's children cried and Carrie crept up on her feather bed and hid her face. I think if the grownups had given way to their feelings, they would have joined in the children's wails. The long, strenuous journey and the work of unpacking and settling in the depressing hovel that was to be our home had completely exhausted us, and now the unexpected violence of the storm threatened to unnerve us all. Ready to drop in our tracks, we crawled into bed and lay there, too worn and spent to sleep. We rolled and tossed, scarcely able to breathe in the hot oppressive air.

Toward dawn the rain stopped and we fell asleep. Then came the mosquitoes! Buzzing about our ears, they drove us almost crazy with their stinging. Peter could see the funny side of things and made me laugh when I wanted to cry. I remember he said, "These pesky things are so strong they could poke their bills through an iron pot and clinch them on the other side."



A S SOON AS WE could get seeds into the ground, Peter planted enough oats and corn for winter feed for the horses, while Jane and I worked away at the tough grass roots, trying to make ourselves a vegetable garden. Green shoots began to peep up at last. The cucumbers thrived, so did the beans, but nothing else amounted to anything.

Infrequent messages from Wilson were not encouraging. He was always on the track of a job paying a good salary, but somehow he couldn't seem to catch up with it. . . . Though Jane had much to contend with, she was never

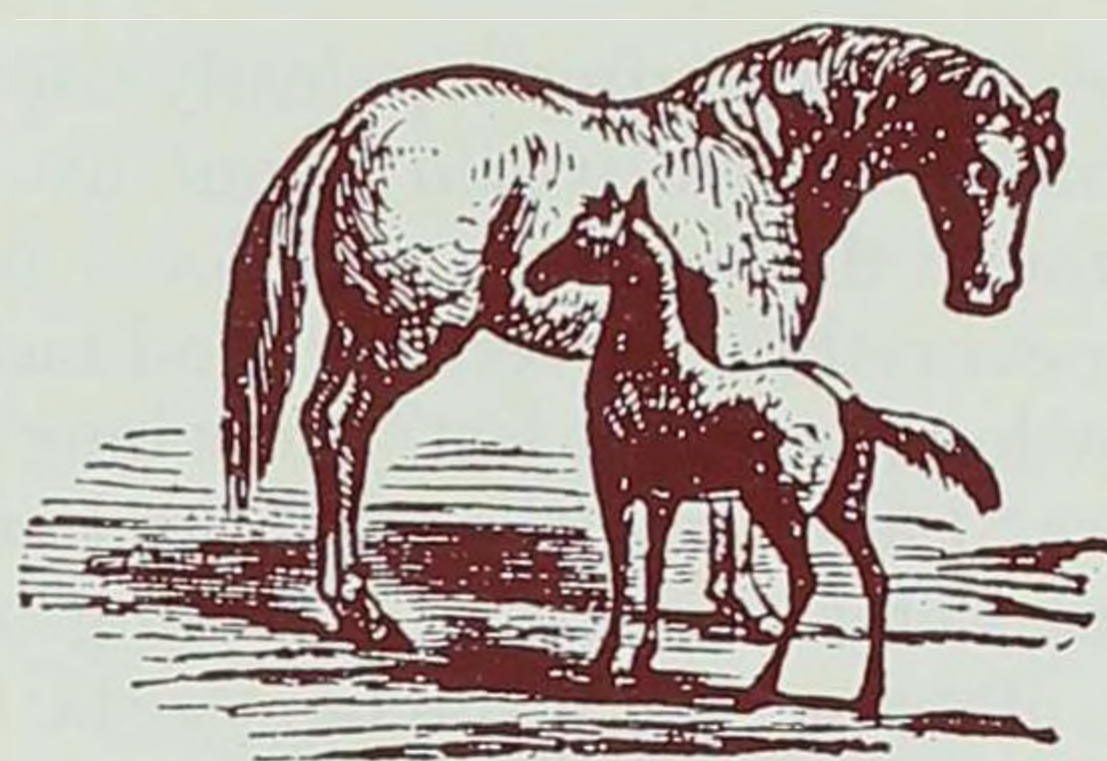
down long, for she had real character and courage. She had one habit, however, that Peter could not abide. She carried a snuff box. One day as she was snuffing for a good sneeze Peter said, "Jane, if you knew how that snuff will serve you, you'd never take another pinch. It is making a yellow old woman out of you."

Jane was proud of her looks and loved to be admired. Peter's criticism touched her most vulnerable spot. She stood tapping her snuff box for a minute without saying a word. Then she went to the door and threw it as far as she could into the tall grass. The habit was strong and we knew how hard it often was for her when the craving came, but she never took a pinch after that. Some days she would walk back and forth, back and forth, but she never gave in. The snuff box was never picked up from the prairie where she threw it.

At three o'clock one afternoon in August the sun began to cloud over. All around us there was a queer darkness different from twilight. The thought possessed me, "Is the world dying?" Peter drove the restless horses in from the fields when they neighed. It seemed as if a washtub was being slid over the sun. The stars came out. . . . Even [Peter] was truly awed as he assured us that it was a total eclipse of the sun, caused by the moon's passing between the earth and the sun, and that it would not last long. . . . We heard afterward that many people had been almost scared to death and that some had fallen on their faces praying for forgiveness for they believed the end of the world had surely come.

One day not long after this as Jane and I were finishing the midday dishes, Wilson Mentor came driving into the barnyard in a high-wheeled buggy. As dapper as ever, he greeted Jane with a fond embrace and said, "Pack your bag, my love, and call in the children. Prepare to be mistress in your own home. You see before you a successful man with a job!"

He spoke the truth! He really did have a job as depot agent, with comfortable living quarters over the station. And Jane! What a bustle as she packed her things and crowded the children hurriedly into the stylish buggy. Then off they went as happy as kings to be through with our old log house, leaving us three standing there looking after them.



DURING THE LATTER part of the summer two fine colts were born. Peter rejoiced over the sturdy little creatures, and Carrie and I enjoyed standing at the pasture fence and watching their awkward antics. The weather, too, became better, and I busied myself with wild fruit, the one redeeming thing about the whole place. . . .

At last the time came to harvest our garden stuff. Beans that year brought four dollars and a half a bushel. We had four bushels to sell. Our few cucumbers we put down in brine. After they had been in salt a few weeks, we looked at them and found them soft. We cut one open and there in the stem end was a fat, white worm, still alive in that strong brine. The cucumbers had looked so plump and perfect but every one of them had spoiled.

On Sunday, Peter always pastured his team out on the prairie, bringing them into the barn in the evening. One Monday morning he found one of the horses dead in its stall.

Without a team he could not carry on the farm work, nor could he earn anything for us during the winter as he had hoped to do. We talked it over and decided we must take the rest of our savings to get another horse. The mud on the road was hub-deep when Peter went off alone on horseback but in the evening he came home leading the new horse.

"He looks like a fine animal," I said cheerfully, for I saw Peter looked worried.

He shook his head sadly, "He cost a hundred dollars, Julie, I had only seventy-five, and, in order to get him, I had to mortgage both horses, the wagon, and harness."

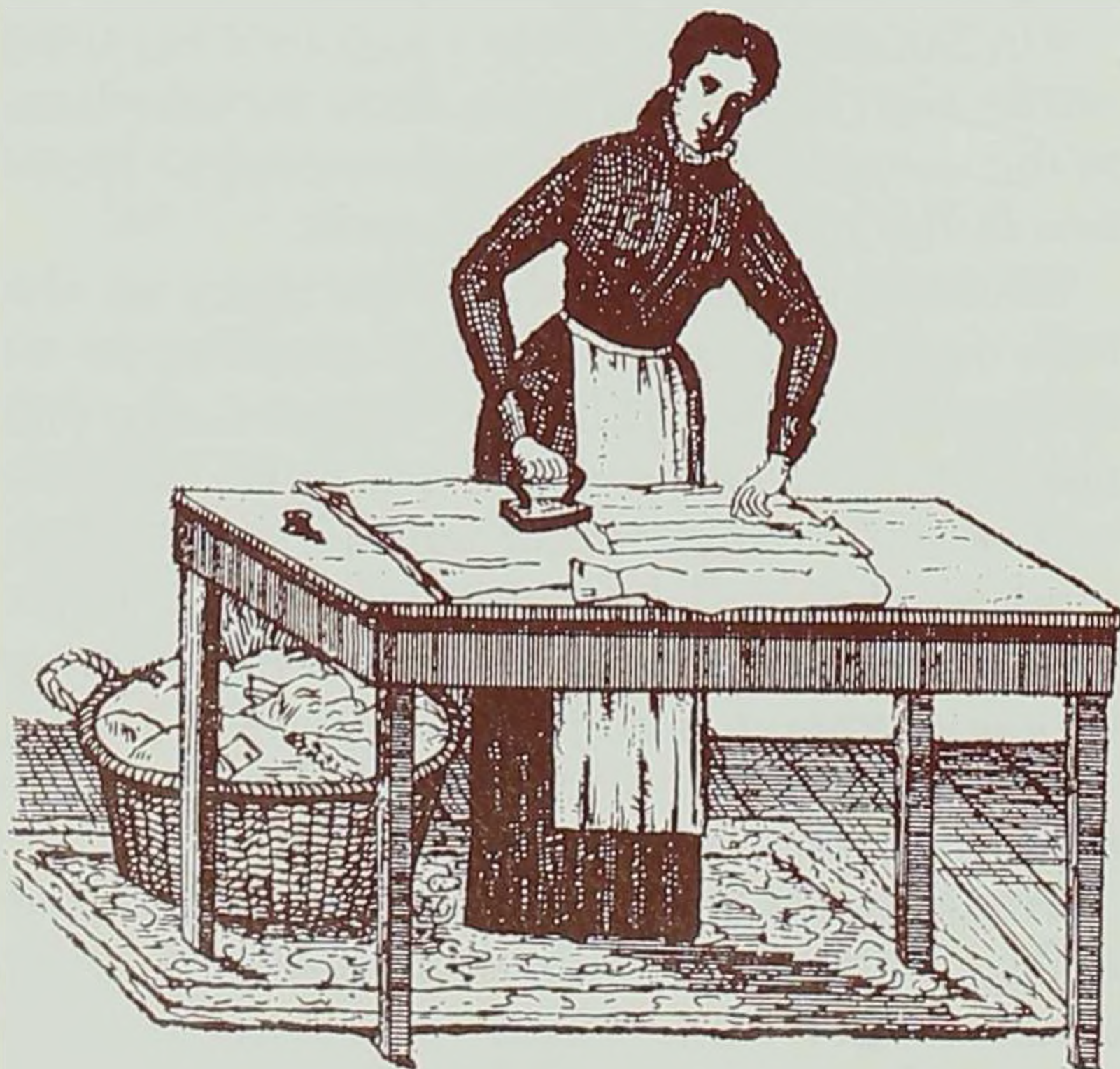
. . . In contrast to the wet summer, all through November, the weather was dry and cold. Dust storms raged over the prairie. Day after day, though he always tried, Peter could do nothing outdoors. He would come back to

the house, and sit staring hopelessly out at the impenetrable brown world about us. Dust sifted through the windows and doors and lay heavy on everything. Even our food tasted of grit. How long would it last? How long could we endure? I felt I was almost at the breaking point, but Peter broke first. Coming in one morning, after caring for the horses, he threw his hat on the table. "No more farming for me, Julie," he said. "We'll pack our few sticks and try our fortune in town. There's surely work there for a willing man to do."

Inwardly I felt a sense of relief but said, "Are you sure you really want to go? Maybe things will be better another year."

"No, I'm beaten, Julie. I can't go on."

I can't tell you how glad I was. We started right in loading the wagon. We had little enough stuff to move, but I was thankful for my old cane-seated rocker and my mother's good feather bed. Peter went with me to the loft to get the straw ticks and the carpet. When we lifted the carpet, it broke in pieces. Well, this was a pretty kettle of fish! It had been so often soaked and dried, and lately frozen, and dust filled, that the life of it was gone, though it had been made to last for years.



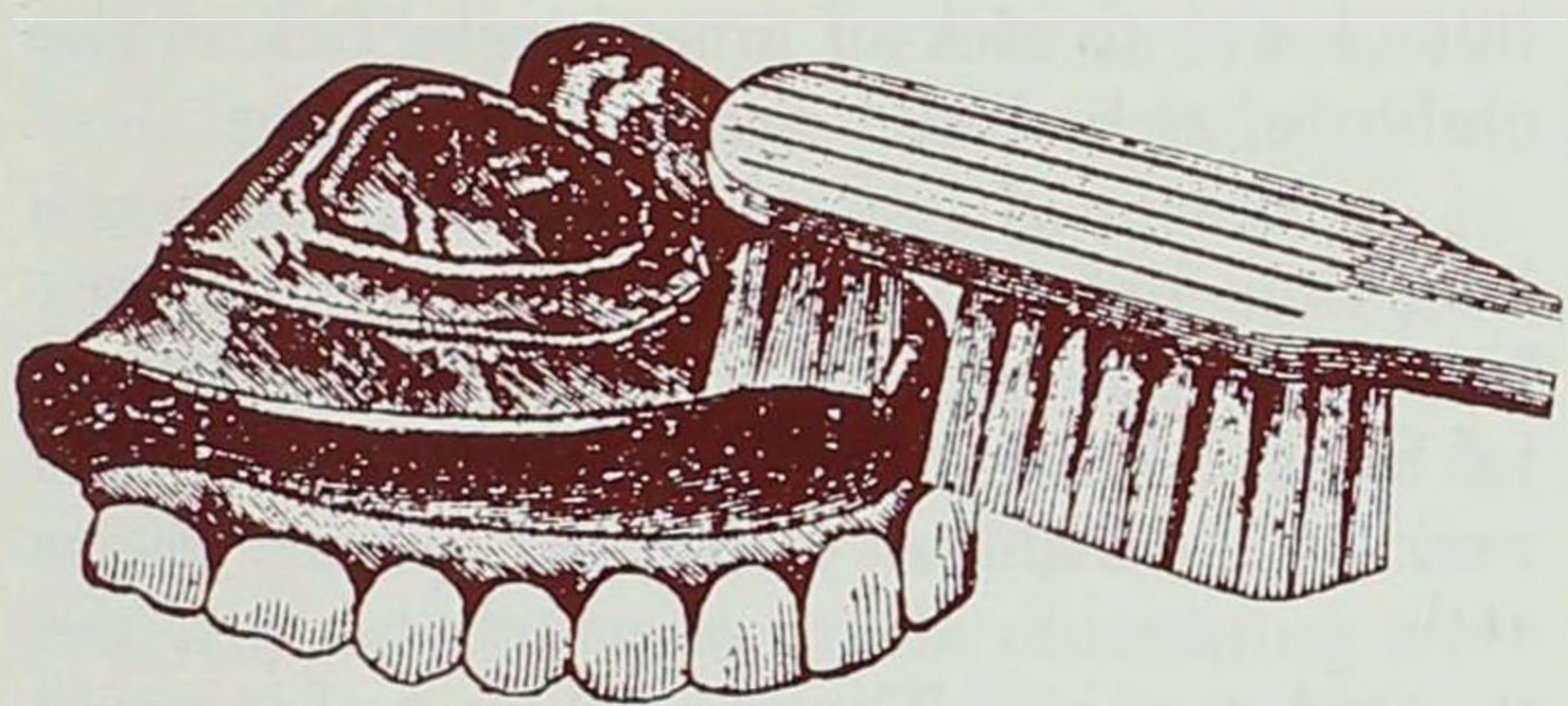
THE LITTLE TOWN of Fort Dodge seemed far more inviting to me in November than it had in the spring. We found a three-story old brick house on the south side of town near the rail-

road tracks. I looked forward eagerly to a lot of space and a real home again. That year the Illinois Central Railroad was built through Fort Dodge. The town was so crowded with newcomers, hoping to find money on bushes, in the wake of the railroad, that anyone with an extra room had to rent it, and I found myself with but one room to call my own. In every room in the house was a separate family. The rent we received was small but sufficient to pay for the whole house. Sometimes, however, we were unable to collect in full, and then we had to make up the difference. In our one room we washed, ironed, cooked, and slept. . . .

. . . Situated on the Des Moines River, originally [Fort Dodge] had been a fort, a true frontier outpost. [In 1853 the government had abandoned the fort, moved troops north to the Territory of Minnesota,] and sold the former site to Major Williams, the camp sutler. . . .

The old parade grounds had been left as they were in the days of the fort. Later, they became the town square, where farmers came to trade and where the town activities centered. Around the square were the few buildings of the early town: a blacksmith shop, a grocery, a shoeshop, a livery stable, and the town hotel, the Duncombe House. Since in those days, newspapers were rare, news, especially of the Civil War, was read from the steps of this hotel. Along the one street of the town were many nice residences, for most of the early settlers had brought means with them when they came.

Though life was not as hard as on the farm, it was not easy sledding in town. Peter hauled wood that first winter and did all sorts of jobs requiring a team. There were times when we could hardly keep the wolf from the door. Like most of the newcomers we suffered want and poverty, for money was scarce. Often after we had eaten our breakfast we did not know where our next meal was coming from, but it always came. Again and again Peter had to earn it before we could eat it. If he did make a decent day's wages, the grocer would charge ten prices for the food. But even so, our lot was not nearly as bad as that of many. Some, we heard, were forced to burn greased rags in saucers for light, or lacking grease, had to go to bed in the dark.



MY TEETH, which had always been so good, began to go to pieces during the summer on the farm. Now they would hold out no longer and I had to have them pulled out. Here I was, just a young woman, and toothless as an old crone! I had to put my vanity in my pocket and be thankful that toothache wouldn't keep me awake whole nights at a time as it had for months. Fortunately even at that early time, dentists had learned to make teeth, and good ones, too. Doctor Slate made me a set for twenty dollars that has served me my entire life. How we managed to scrape that twenty dollars together, I do not know, but it was a case of using what we needed for real necessities, of "robbing Peter to pay Paul."

Long before spring came Peter had scraped up the last of the feed in the bin, and knew the time had come when he must sell his team. A man, drawing good wages from the railroad, offered one hundred and seventy-five dollars for the whole outfit, to be paid in monthly installments. When Peter went to the holder of the mortgage, he refused the offer, demanding his twenty-five dollars at once, but the prospective buyer could not raise this amount, and so the old rascal sold our team to a man who paid him his twenty-five dollars down and gave Peter a note payable in three months, for the difference. Both Peter and I were simply sick when a little later the man who bought the team left town for parts unknown, robbing us of all hope of getting our just dues.



WITHOUT A TEAM and [with] no job, the only thing for us to do was to move in with Jane. . . . Peter found enough work to enable us to contribute our share of the food. In less than a month he came home one night, happy and full of enthusiasm [announcing his new job as car inspector for the railroad, with a salary of thirty-five dollars a month].

. . . Once more we set up housekeeping by ourselves [in a four-room house up the hill from the depot]. The house was set on blocks of wood, and the wind swept under and through the floors, chilling our feet and, on cold winter days, freezing the drinking water in the pail, but there was no happier home in Fort Dodge than ours.

Such difficulties as washing with so much steam in the kitchen and thawing out the bread dough in the morning were not too hard to bear. The clothes, though they froze stiff as boards when I hung them on the line, always dried, and the bread would rise and bake perfectly. Nor did we greatly mind the frequent congregation of pigs and dogs which sought shelter under our house, though many a mid-

night Peter had to get up to drive them out with a long pole and send them squealing and howling down the hill.



ONE FEBRUARY night after we had gone to bed, we heard someone pounding on the door. When Peter answered, there stood Jane's oldest daughter, Nell.

"Ma wants you to come over right away, Uncle Peter. Adelia is sick and cries for you to hold her. I guess she ate something."

Peter dressed hurriedly, for little Adelia was the apple of his eye. I would have gone with him but Carrie had a cold and I did not dare take her out into the freezing night air. I was so worried that I never slept a wink.

Peter returned in the early morning with word that the baby seemed better.

"Jane's just about to pieces," he said. "You'd better hurry over as soon as you can."

When I arrived, I found Adelia up and dressed, but still not at all well. Jane, who was expecting a new arrival, seemed completely unnerved and incapable. During the days that followed I spent most of my time with her, and each evening Peter came directly from his work. When he came, Adelia would laugh and call him "My Wumple Peter" and beg to be lifted into his lap. She died in his arms.

Jane had been unstrung before, but now she was completely beside herself. She threw herself on the bed, moaning and writhing in agony of body and mind.

"It's God's judgment!" she wailed. "I was wicked. I didn't want Adelia. I didn't want to

live. I was so sick of housework, sick of the children, sick of life, sick of everything. . . ."

. . . Finally she became calm, but it was a long time before she could lift up her heart. Jane had managed to keep up a bold and cheerful front, but her troubles and difficulties had rankled and festered within her. There was so little in pioneer days on which to turn the thought outward. Those first years of married life — always expecting or nursing a baby — of disillusionment that comes when actuality proves so different from cherished dreams of love — had built a barrier between Jane and Wilson that time only made larger.

Though they were living in the same house, their mental worlds were as far apart as the North Pole is from the South.



FOUR YEARS moved swiftly by. . . . [Carrie was now eight, and her new brother Billee was eighteen months old. We had built a new, six-room house at the foot of the hill on Sixth Street.]

. . . By the middle of the summer, our yard blossomed with bright flowers and we were enjoying tender fresh vegetables of our own growing. Then, one afternoon, as I was putting Billee down for his nap, Carrie came in white-faced and frightened. "Ma, there's a terribly funny sound in the air, and something like a black dustcloud is coming in from the prairie."

As she spoke, I could hear a low hissing and whining that grew louder as, together, we ran out the door and down the path. Carrie pointed and there ahead was a great rolling black cloud. In fear we hurried back to the house. The whine and hiss now became a roar and just as we reached the porch the cloud descended and broke into millions of buzzing, hurtling grass-

hoppers. The impact of their bodies stung like hail. Inside of the house, the door tightly shut, we stood panting with fear! In terror we listened to the clatter and pounding upon the house, and above it the continued rumble and roar of beating wings. We made our way to the windows, but before we reached them, they became sheeted with a mass of hopping gray-green things that shut out the light and all the view. Time dragged slowly by. There seemed nothing to do but wait and listen — listen to that ceaseless droning and rattle and din.

At train time, we heard the engine slide to a stop, with a skidding, grating sound. If Peter would only come! At last he did, bringing word that he was helping sand the tracks. "The crushed grasshoppers have made the rails slick as grease," he said. "I'll have to go back before the next train is due."

The scourge lasted until one o'clock the next afternoon, and then rose in a cloud which again hid the sun. Long after it passed, we could still hear the sound of beating wings.

We went out into the garden and stood, Carrie and I. "Oh, Ma, our flowers — our pretty, pretty flowers!" Carrie sobbed.

There wasn't even a shoot of green. Our little crabapple tree was stripped of leaves and bark. The trunk stood bare and scarred with the sticky sap still flowing. Our clothesline had been eaten away — not a shred was left. The house corners were worn round, and the fence posts gnawed and chewed bare of paint.

The prairie, which before had been green with grass and patches of tender young corn, now lay stripped, and brown as in winter.

The farmers had no harvest in Fort Dodge that year. . . .

OPERA HOUSE.

FORT DODGE was fast becoming quite a town. Gradually the center of business moved away from the old square. Gates' Dry Goods Store.

. . . occupied the first brick building, as I remember it. On the second floor was the Opera House, very up-to-date in those days. I remember the plays given there, "Uncle Tom's Cabin," "Ten Nights in a Bar Room," and "Box and Cox," and others.

I'll never forget when Mr. Gates equipped his store with cash boxes which ran on wires to the cashier's desk. These were indeed a novelty and a great drawing card. Every time I think of them the picture of the little "umbrella lady," as we called her, comes to my mind. At all times during the summer, the "umbrella lady" carried a tiny parasol of ruffled lace, which she did not close when she came into the store. One day she carried her miniature sunshade a bit too high over her head for it caught on the cash box wires. The clerks and other customers had a hard time concealing their amusement while Mr. Gates found a step-ladder and released the parasol for the diminutive lady who sputtered loudly about his new-fangled contraptions.

. . . With the new growth in population and business, educational and cultural opportunities were offered. How happy we were when the town established a library in a room donated by Bassett and Johnston, Attorneys. Peter and I were great readers and already subscribed for *The Youth's Companion*, *Century Magazine*, which was something like *The Atlantic Monthly*, and two newspapers, *The Chicago Record* and *The Fort Dodge Messenger*. The continued stories in the newspapers and magazines were so fascinating we could scarcely wait for the next installment. I wonder why such captivating tales are no longer written! When the opportunity came to get real books, we were overjoyed and every week Peter and I walked up to the library together and came home with a book apiece to read by the living room lamp after the children were in bed. . . .

. . . The most disagreeable part of Peter's work was the irregularity of hours and the fact that often night found him far from home. He was called out in every kind of weather, at all times of the day and night, but wherever he was, he tried to get back at night. Knowing that he would come if he possibly could, I always waited up for him, with a good fire and a hot

meal. Once in the early winter of 1881, he and two others walked from Manson, which was twenty miles. All trace of the road had been obliterated by a deep snow and they walked along on the thick icy crust, guided only by the telegraph poles. When they came to trestles and bridges, they had to crawl on their hands and knees for fear a single misstep would cost them their lives.

There were many days and nights like that in Peter's life as a railroad man. At one time in the middle of the night, Peter was called to go out to a place in the country where a terrible collision had occurred. The engineer, a dear friend of Peter's, had been killed. Peter alone, of all the men gathered there, had the courage to pick up the mangled bits of body and carry it back to town.



THE FALL that Carrie turned fifteen, Billee and I went to visit Esmerelda. I had seen her only once since we moved from Altona, when she had brought her two babies, Janette and Nell, to visit us in Fort Dodge. . . .

. . . Soon after my arrival I was told to go into the pantry to look at a large tin funnel fastened upon the wall.

"Put your ear up to it, Julie," Esmerelda said.

Remembering my youngest sister's mischievousness of yore, I feared a trick, and refused.

"Go on, Aunt Julie," urged the children, who stood looking on suppressing eager, excited giggles. "It won't hurt you — honest!"

I could not resist their earnest appeals. Esmerelda put her mouth to the funnel and called, "Ready, Nyrum," and then thrust my

ear against it. To my amazement, I heard — plain as day — Nye's voice come back: "Is that you, Julie?"

"Tell him yes," Mary, Esmerelda's oldest daughter, prompted.

Esmerelda twisted my mouth to the funnel. "Yes, it's Julie," I managed to say. "Where are you?"

"Down at the shop," came his words. His shop, I knew, was a number of blocks away, and I could not believe him.

"Quit your tomfoolery," I scoffed. "I'll warrant you're down in the cellar."

He was not in the cellar, but really in his shop, as I afterward learned. This contraption was a sort of telephone that Nye himself had made. Always interested in mechanical things, he had read about the telephone invented by Alexander Bell a few years before and already being used some in the East. Guided by the information he could get about it, Nye had made and set up an instrument of his own between his shop and Esmerelda's pantry. At each end was a large tin funnel which served both as a mouthpiece and as a receiver. These funnels were connected by wires. It was through this homemade instrument that I had my very first experience with the telephone and many another person received his first introduction to this convenience in Esmerelda's pantry or at Nye's workbench, for people came from far and wide to see and marvel at it.

. . . I soon began to long for Peter and for Carrie, and planned to return to them sooner than I had anticipated. In spite of repeated urgings to remain, I made ready to go and was really glad to be on my way home. My trip had taught me one thing. Ever since leaving the old Preston homestead, I had cherished the idea that there was no place in the world like Altona, never so true a home as that dear old farmhouse. Now I knew that home is not in any one house, not in any one place, but always and ever, home is where loved ones live together in piece and contentment. My home was with my children and with Peter and toward them I was happily speeding. □

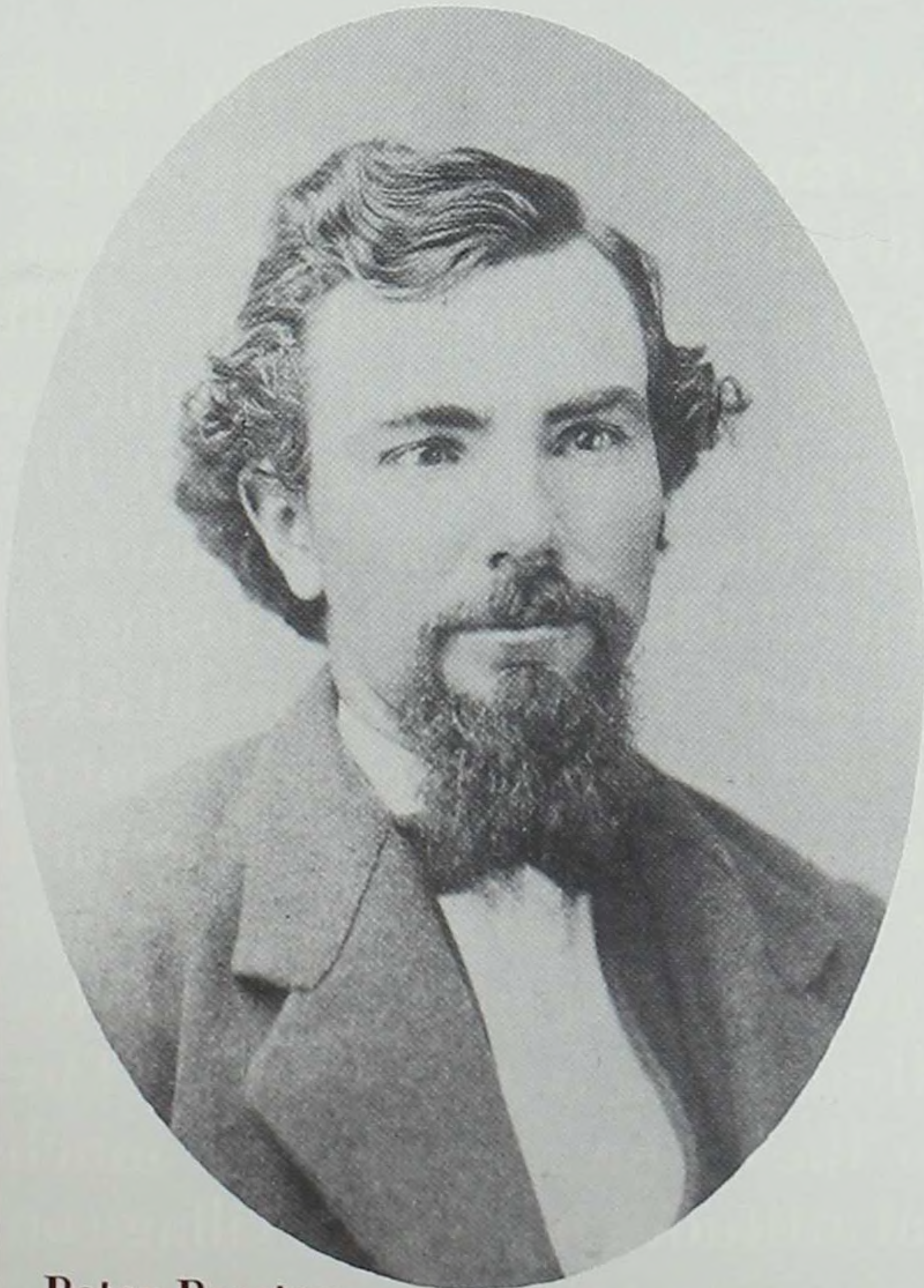
A Preston family album on next page.

Family Album



Billee Preston

Left: Julia Preston (far left) and
her sisters, Jane and Esmerelda



Peter Preston



Carrie Preston

COURTESY BETTY RUE KREITINGER

Men Were Too Fiery for Much Talk

The Grinnell Anti-Abolitionist Riot of 1860

by Thomas A. Lucas

During the 1859-60 school year the abolitionists of Grinnell, Iowa, enrolled a fugitive slave girl in the village's public school. Later that year they enrolled four adult male fugitives. The black girl was able to attend the school unharassed, but the enrollment of the black men resulted in a two-day riot which forced the closing of the school and the expulsion of the blacks. Why did school integration cause a riot in Grinnell, a town founded as an abolitionist community? And why did a riot occur after the enrollment of black men, but not after the enrollment of a black girl? The answers to these questions reveal much about racial attitudes in an Iowa village on the eve of the Civil War.

MANY ANTEBELLUM Americans firmly believed that the emancipation of blacks from slavery would lead to the merging of the races. Indeed, scholar Winthrop Jordan asserts that this belief was "nearly universal" in the United States by the end of the eighteenth century. In his study of northern anti-abolitionist violence, scholar Leonard Richards observes that "for many Northerners, the probable alternative to slavery and African colonization was *either* race war *or* miscegenation. For Northern anti-abolitionists, this alternative was as immutable as the law of gravity or the Ten Commandments: if slaves were freed, it followed that the two races must completely separate or wholly merge." Because of this belief, anti-abolitionists interpreted the abolitionists' call for emancipation and racial equality as an advocacy of miscegenation. And to anti-abolitionists, miscegenation meant the debasement of their posterity. As it happened, miscegenation declined after emancipation, and that fact perhaps makes it difficult for us today to appreciate that many antebellum Americans were unable to separate black freedom and equality from miscegenation.

It is important to recognize that the anti-abolitionists' fear of miscegenation centered on the black male. Anti-abolitionists certainly opposed unions between white men and black women, but what truly frightened them was their conviction that the free black man would assert his new status by demanding access to white women. As historian Ronald Takaki points out, "What probably worried northern whites most [about blacks] was their image of the Negro as a sexual threat to white women and white racial purity." Anti-abolitionists often portrayed the black man as a potential rapist.

Fear of miscegenation (or "amalgamation," as it was called before the Civil War) pervaded the law and politics of the antebellum North. Historian Eugene Berwanger identifies this fear as one of the factors that led the western states to pass "black laws" restricting the civil rights and immigration of free blacks. Mid-

western whites, writes Berwanger, "feared that the unlimited immigration of free Negroes would result in miscegenation. The point was too often raised to be overlooked."

During the 1850s and 1860s the Democratic party tried to profit politically from the widespread fear of miscegenation by portraying the Republicans as amalgamationists. In one Democratic parade in Indiana, for example, young women carried a banner reading, "Fathers, save us from nigger husbands." In an anti-Republican parade in New York, one float showed a black man embracing a white girl; another depicted a black man leading a white woman into the White House. The Republicans found it politically essential to declare their opposition to miscegenation. Abraham Lincoln assured a Springfield audience in 1857 that he and Stephen Douglas were in perfect accord on the issue: "Judge Douglas is especially horrified at the thought of the mixing of blood by the white and black races: agreed for once — a thousand times agreed." Republican senator James Doolittle of Wisconsin suggested that "down with amalgamation" would make a good party slogan in the 1860 campaign.

Few issues were more likely to arouse cries of amalgamation in the antebellum North than school integration. Historian Leon Litwack observes that "the possibility that Negro children would be mixed with white children in the same classrooms aroused even greater fears and prejudices than those which consigned the Negro to an inferior place in the church, the theater, and the railroad car. This, indeed, constituted virtual amalgamation." One delegate to the Iowa Constitutional Convention of 1857 insisted that school integration would result inevitably in miscegenation: "Put your white children in the country, upon an equality with the negro, in the schools or the social circle, and I undertake to say that it is the very thing to lead to amalgamation. Teach them that the colored population are just as good as they are by nature, and equal in every sense of the word, and that [i]s the inevitable consequence." When they attempted to integrate the Grinnell public school in 1860, then, the Grinnell abolitionists had chosen an issue that

was particularly likely to cause an eruption of the powerful and widespread fear of miscegenation.

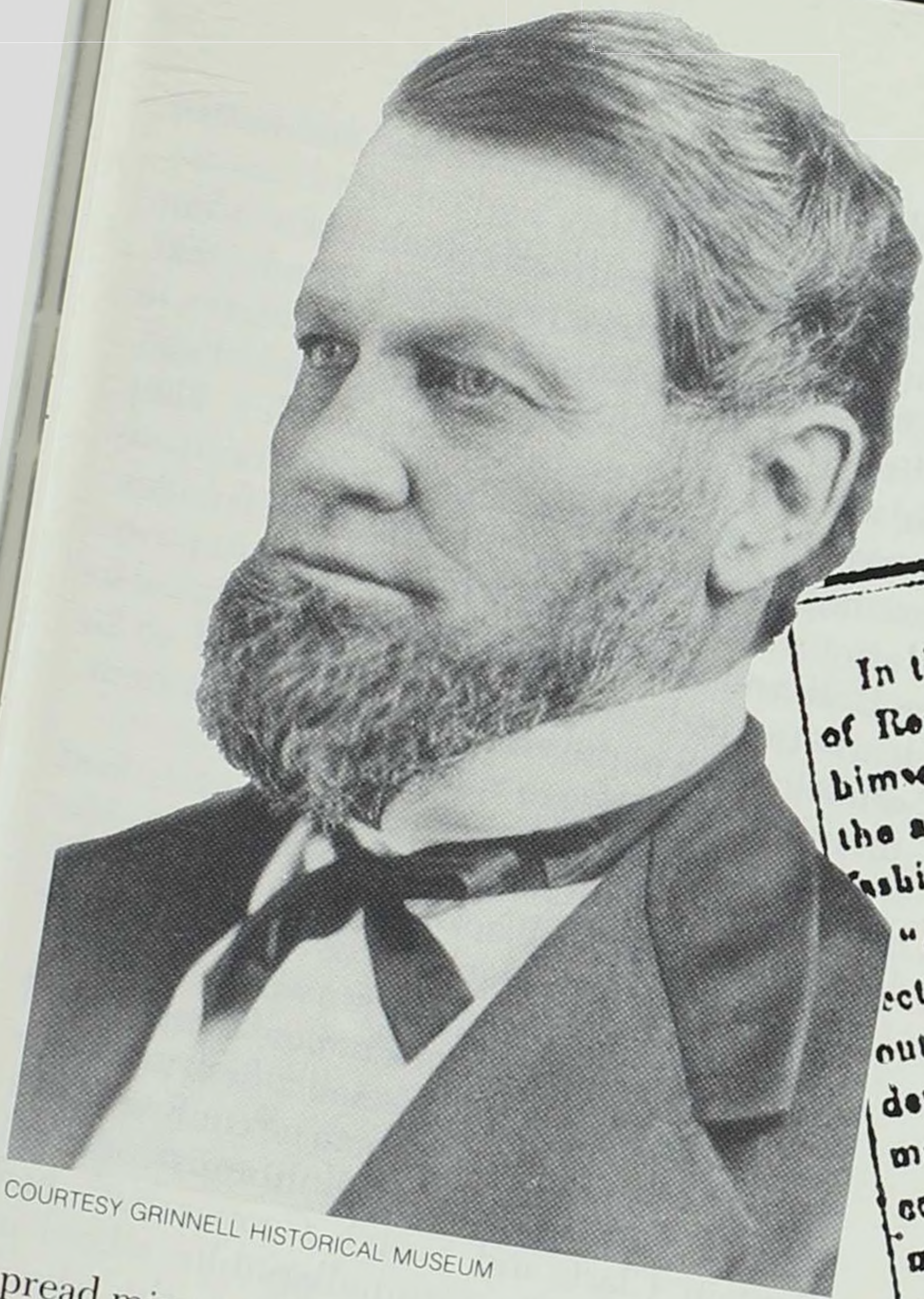
THE VILLAGE of Grinnell was founded in 1854 by Josiah Bushnell Grinnell, a Congregationalist minister and political abolitionist from Vermont. Like other New England ministers who founded towns in the Midwest, Grinnell's aim was to build a "city upon a hill": a morally righteous community bound together by common ideals. Grinnell dedicated his town to abolitionism, prohibitionism, Congregationalism, and education. Believing firmly in the advantages of a homogeneous population in the village, Grinnell expelled persons who did not share his views. Grinnell sold town lots with the proviso that they would revert to him if liquor was sold on the premises. Proceeds from the sale of the lots went into an educational fund, and the preparatory department of Iowa College (now Grinnell College) opened in Grinnell in 1859. Grinnell started a Congregational church and tried to keep other churches out of the village, believing that they would divide the community. In the early days of the village everyone was expected to attend Grinnell's church. Members were required to oppose slavery "earnestly and actively." John Brown spoke in Grinnell's church in February 1859, and Grinnell took up collections for fugitive slaves who passed through the village on the Underground Railroad.

Despite J. B. Grinnell's efforts to achieve ideological unity, dissent arose in the village. The most divisive issue proved to be racial equality. The Grinnell settlers of the 1850s came chiefly from New England, the Western Reserve, and western New York State. They brought with them the antislavery sentiment of those areas, but most did not share J. B. Grinnell's abolitionist commitment to racial equality. The results of the election of August 1857 illustrate this fact. Among the issues in the August election was a proposal to extend the suffrage to blacks in Iowa. One hundred and twenty-two men went to the polls in Grinnell Township and, as usual, voted overwhelmingly for the Republican candidates. But only 18 of

the 122 voters cast ballots on the black suffrage proposal — 8 in favor and 10 against. As one villager later put it, "While we were in fact an anti-slavery community, there were sharp differences among us as to the proper limits of agitation." Racial equality was evidently beyond these limits for the vast majority of Grinnellites in 1857. In fact there was a wide range of racial attitudes in antebellum Grinnell. At one extreme stood a group of abolitionists, who were committed to racial equality. At the other extreme stood a former sea captain named Nathaniel Winslow Clark, who viewed blacks as property and denounced the abolitionists for promoting "negro-stealing" and "negro-equality."

The Grinnell abolitionists who were most prominent in support of school integration in 1860 were J. B. Grinnell, Leonard F. Parker, Samuel F. Cooper, and Amos and Augusta Bixby. Grinnell, Parker, and Cooper were all graduates of racially integrated, abolitionist colleges. Grinnell had attended the Oneida Institute in Whitesboro, New York, in the early 1840s. Leonard Parker, Samuel F. Cooper, and their wives, Sarah and Jane, had been classmates at Oberlin in the late 1840s and early 1850s. Parker was the head teacher in the Grinnell public school in 1860 and Cooper edited the county newspaper. Amos Bixby, a lawyer and a "radical reformer," had come to Grinnell from Maine with his wife, Augusta.

The Grinnell abolitionists believed that slavery, not freedom, was the cause of miscegenation. Standing the anti-abolitionist argument on its head, they portrayed the white slaveowner, not the free black, as the sexual aggressor. J. B. Grinnell used this tactic in an 1857 attack on Benjamin M. Samuels, the Virginia-born Democrat who was running for governor of Iowa: "The Slavery Candidate for Governor from Virginia, the State whose greatest business is having and breeding, men, women and children for the market, would drive us to his support, by alarms as to amalgamation, &c., when there is none of it in the State nor any mingling of the races in prospect." Samuel F. Cooper agreed, printing in his *Montezuma Weekly Republican* a speech by Representative James Ashley of Ohio, in which Ashley asserted that slavery had "corrupted the blood . . . of millions in the South." Wide-



COURTESY GRINNELL HISTORICAL MUSEUM

spread miscegenation between white men and black women, Ashley argued, was one of the "practical effects of slavery." "Isn't that right to the point!" exclaimed editor Cooper.

Teacher Leonard Parker also accused slave-owners of sexual licentiousness. In a speech given many years after emancipation, he asserted that female slaves had been kept for sexual purposes. According to Parker, Southerners bought male slaves for their fields and female slaves for their "harems." Amos Bixby took the same view. From 1858 to 1860, the lawyer and his wife employed a fugitive slave girl named Frances Overton in their home. Frances confided to the Bixbys that she had been sexually abused by the sons of her Missouri master. Amos Bixby believed that Frances's experience was typical: "Hers was but the unhappy lot of slave girls since the world began."

Such charges of sexual misconduct in the South were, of course, typical of abolitionists. As scholar Ronald Walters has shown, these charges were more than an attempt to deflect the anti-abolitionists' attacks. Abolitionists believed that the absolute power of the slave-

Negro Equality.

In the course of a speech in the House of Representatives, Gen. Ashley, of Ohio, himself a native of Virginia, raked down the advocates of Negro Equality after this fashion:

"And now, sir, what are the practical effects of slavery, as exhibited in the working out of this much talked of and universally denounced negro equality and amalgamation of the races? Has not slavery corrupted the blood, to say nothing of the morals, of millions in the South? If it has not, whence spring the octoroons, the quadroons, and the myriads who are tinged with the blood of the dominant race, in every Southern State? Sir, it is in the land of slavery you must look for amalgamation, and that terrible, degrading negro equality, which is inseparable from such amalgamation. But for a negro equality all over the South, that must be nameless here, there would be no blue eyed, light-haired octoroons, the children and descendants of African slaves, in every Southern city, and in every neighborhood, appealing to the liberal, as we see them almost daily here in this Capitol, asking for aid to purchase their right to that which God gave, not only to them, but to all the human race, the right to themselves. Sir, that Mormon levity, about which even Southern representatives professed to be so shocked, the

Josiah Bushnell Grinnell (upper left) denounced the argument that freed slaves and integrated schools would lead to miscegenation. Editor Samuel F. Cooper agreed, printing and attacking a congressman's anti-abolitionist speech in his *Montezuma Weekly Republican*.

ified and children be entitled to property which is secure children of the first marriage, this system is an involuntary, force compelling concubinage, from which no escape, if the victim desires no law to punish the aggressor of this If the

owner led to sexual licentiousness. And abolitionists, like other antebellum reformers, saw unrestrained sexuality as a threat to civilization.

THE CHAIN OF EVENTS leading to the riot over school integration began in 1858. In that year Frances Overton, a sixteen-year-old escaped slave from Missouri, arrived in Grinnell on the Underground Railroad. Amos and Augusta Bixby took Frances into their home, where she worked as a maid. Frances was illiterate when she arrived in Grinnell, but she was eager to learn. Augusta Bixby instructed her at home, and three months after her arrival Frances won a Sunday school prize for reciting the greatest number of Bible verses. This accomplishment "caused offence to some white competitors."

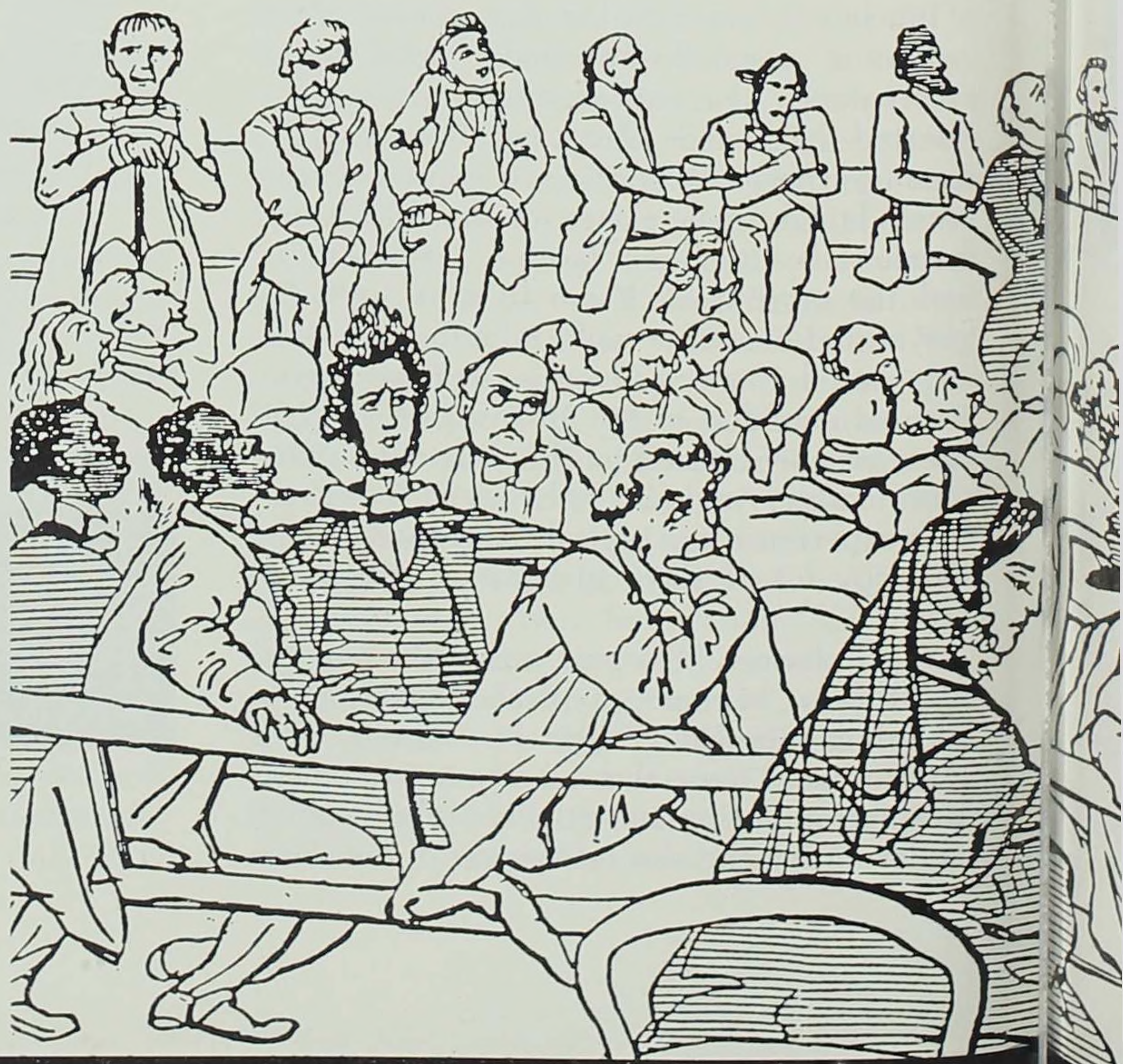
More than a year after Frances came to Grinnell, Amos Bixby decided to enroll her in the public school. He first asked J. B. Grinnell what he thought of the idea. The town founder's reply was characteristically combative: "Send her to school, and if any one dare oppose her, he can't stay in the town twenty-

four hours, any more than if he had committed a rape."

Frances had been attending school for "some time" when, in February or early March 1860, a Quaker brought four more fugitive slaves to Grinnell. All four fugitives were "finely built, big men" in their early to mid-twenties. They decided to remain in Grinnell temporarily, as two hoped to return south to free their families. Various Grinnell families boarded the fugitives and offered them work. The fugitives wanted to learn to read and asked if they could go to school. Some of the villagers encouraged them, and the blacks began to attend.

While the black girl, Frances Overton, had been able to attend school unhindered, the enrollment of four black men aroused immediate and angry resistance. The resistance was led by Captain Clark, whom we met earlier, and by Samuel "Scotch" Cooper, a grocer and farmer who became Grinnell's first mayor in 1865. (Scotch Cooper is not to be confused with Samuel F. Cooper, the abolitionist editor.) Captain Clark and Scotch Cooper both had daughters in the Grinnell public school in 1860. Clark had four daughters in the school, who ranged in age from nine to fifteen years, and Cooper had three, aged five, eight, and

A *Harper's Weekly* portrayal of abolitionists in council, May 1859 (location of council unknown). In the village of Grinnell, despite founders' efforts to create a community bound by common ideals, the issue of racial equality sharply divided the citizenry. Enrolling four fugitive male slaves in the public school was the spark that ignited the argument into riot.



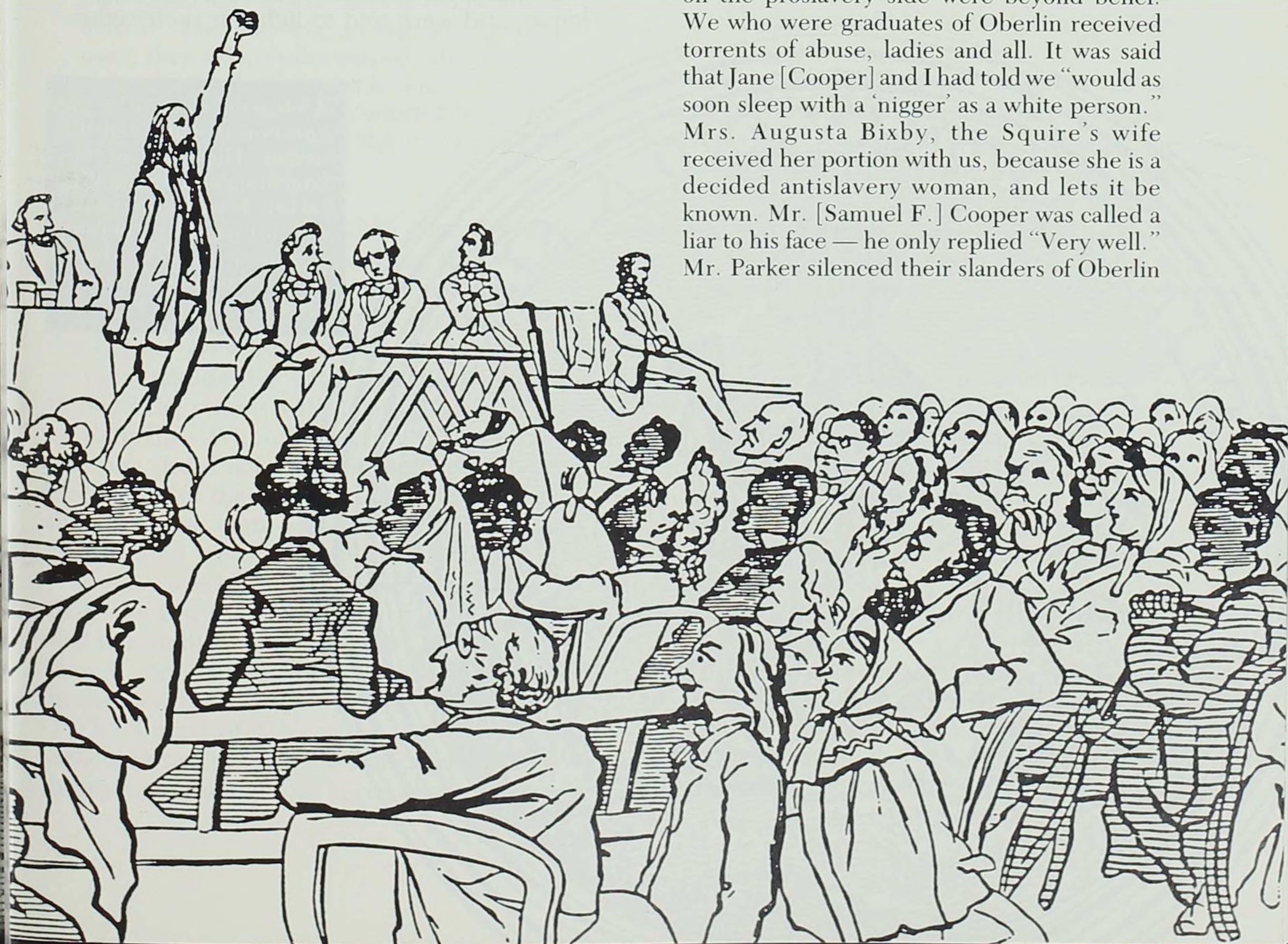
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Tensions mounted between the abolitionists and their opponents. Leonard Parker recalled that "the niggers must go," had trembled angrily on the air. "The negroes may remain," had been breathed from Puritan thought and purpose." Both sides turned out in force at the annual school meeting on the evening of Monday, March 12, 1860. Avoiding the racial issue at first, one of the anti-abolitionists moved that "foreign students" (that is, students from outside the village) no longer be admitted to the school. (The school served as the preparatory department of Iowa College and so had attracted students from other counties.) Leonard Parker sprang to his feet and argued that the effect of the motion would be to deprive the school of several hundred dollars a year in tuition paid by the foreign students. Some classes in the school contained only one

Grinnell native, and might therefore have to be cancelled. Faced with these facts, even the anti-abolitionists could not support the motion, and it was defeated.

The mover then broached the real issue. "But we didn't say exactly what we wanted," he protested, "We want to exclude the niggers." A motion was made to that effect and "the feeling on both sides was intense." The motion was defeated by five votes out of a total of about fifty. The anti-abolitionists demanded a second vote, and the motion was defeated again, this time by eight votes. The frustrated anti-abolitionists then exploded, unleashing a flood of insults at the abolitionists. Sarah Parker described the scene in a letter to her mother:

One man arose in a frenzy of passion, exclaiming, "They *shall never enter those* doors unless over my dead body." Another says — "I go with you." — and still others said the same, telling the antislavery men they must come prepared to defend them if they sent the negroes on. The proceedings of the meeting on the proslavery side were beyond belief. We who were graduates of Oberlin received torrents of abuse, ladies and all. It was said that Jane [Cooper] and I had told we "would as soon sleep with a 'nigger' as a white person." Mrs. Augusta Bixby, the Squire's wife received her portion with us, because she is a decided antislavery woman, and lets it be known. Mr. [Samuel F.] Cooper was called a liar to his face — he only replied "Very well." Mr. Parker silenced their slanders of Oberlin



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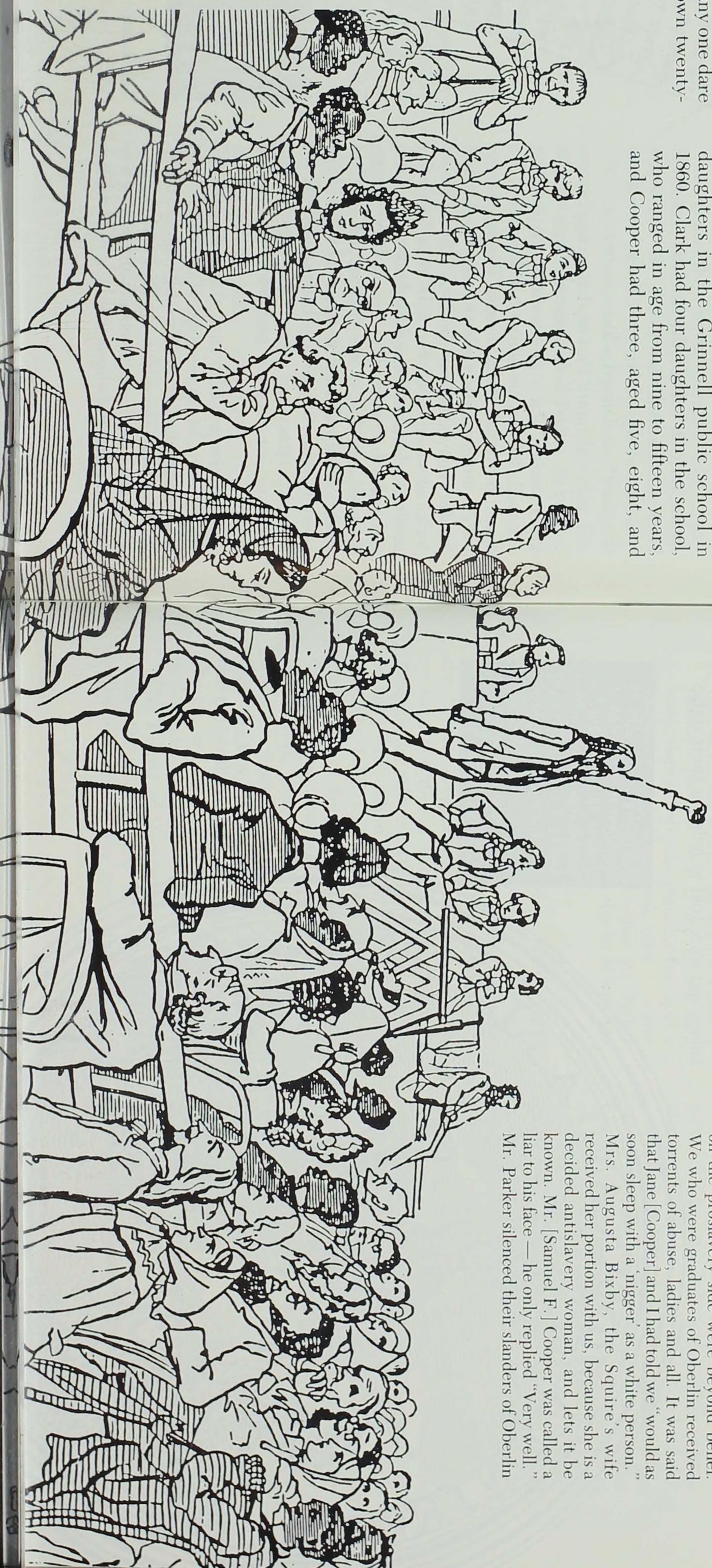
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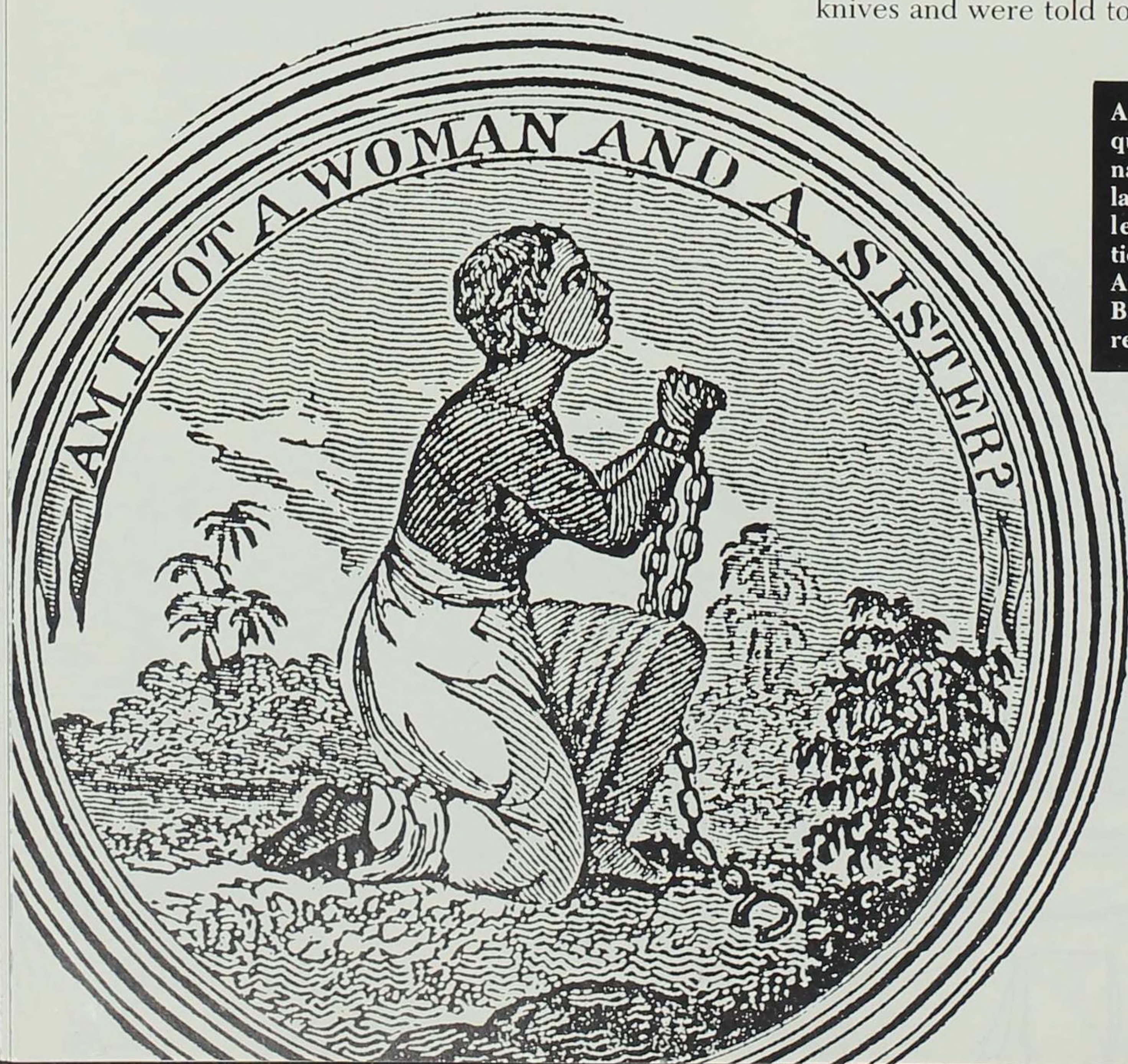
by giving them the facts. It was feared the meeting would not end without fighting — but it did.

Anxieties about miscegenation had surfaced again. In their crude attack on Sarah Parker and Jane Cooper (Samuel F. Cooper's wife), the anti-abolitionists revealed their refusal (or inability) to distinguish between black equality and miscegenation. In their view, anyone who favored school integration must also favor miscegenation.

After the stormy meeting, some of the villagers armed themselves with pistols, knives, and clubs. Leonard Parker expected violence. He later wrote that "there were determined men on both sides, men, too, who had been not unfamiliar with scenes of violence, men whose muscles and weapons were as plucky as their words." Early the next morning Parker went to the schoolhouse carrying a stout oak club selected from his woodpile. Between eight and nine A.M., a mob, led by Captain Clark and

Scotch Cooper, arrived at the school. The blacks had not yet come, and Parker himself confronted Clark and Cooper when they entered the building. The two announced that they had "come to put those niggers out of school." Parker replied that he would defend all of the students against attack. Clark and Cooper demanded, "Do you mean you will fight for the niggers?" Parker answered, "I mean what I say. I shall defend every student who has a right to be here against every assailant." Clark and Cooper then withdrew to intercept the blacks before they reached the school. A crowd of armed and excited citizens gathered. A young witness later remembered that "those in favor of the negroes attending school were in the majority but a large and determined party made up the other side."

Meanwhile Amos Bixby's brother, Amasa G. "California" Bixby, armed the blacks and sharpened a knife for his own use. One villager remembered seeing the blacks in front of a store near the school: "These negroes were lined up and were armed with revolvers and knives and were told to fight for their rights."



A chained slave asks the question that divided the nation. This emblem (enlarged) appeared on an 1841 letter from Congregationalist minister Ephraim Adams, part of the Iowa Band, who preached social reform.

The blacks then started across the churchyard adjoining the school "with loaded revolvers in their pockets." There they were met by the crowd. One of the blacks climbed onto a pile of lumber and told the crowd that he and the other fugitives were ready to die right there if they could not be free. According to Leonard Parker, "the danger of bloodshed was extreme."

Bloodshed was averted, however, when the blacks were persuaded to withdraw by their friends in the crowd. Sarah Parker described the scene in a letter to her mother:

As the blacks approached, the leaders of the mob went to the schoolhouse steps with clubs, and it is supposed, concealed weapons. By much persuasion, the negroes were prevented from attempting to meet them, but it was their preference to fight their way through. They would probably have killed the leaders. Then the mob called on the officers to disarm [the blacks], but they would not, for [the blacks'] lives had been threatened and they would not deprive them of the means of defense. Riot ran wild in our streets until noon, then a short calm ensued. Meetings for counsel were held on both sides — secret meetings by the mob, in which Mr. Parker and the negroes were the objects on which to vent their wrath.

The next day, Wednesday, March 14, the anti-abolitionists again took to the streets. Sarah Parker wrote to her mother that "Wednesday forenoon was as exciting as the day before. Desperate deeds were meditated — men maddened with hate and rage ran through the streets with insulting words ever on their lips. When I bade my husband good morning, I did not know but he would be the first victim of the fury. . . . But we all live — though knives were whetted for hand to hand encounters, guns loaded and pistols made ready." A week later, on March 22, she wrote that "the town is not settled yet." She feared that the conflict would split the Congregational church, since several of its members had been in the mob.

The Board of Directors of the Grinnell School District closed the school when the riot broke out, ending the term about ten days

early. The four elected members of the school board met on Saturday, March 17, and instituted a set of rules that were obviously intended to make it more difficult for fugitive slaves to enroll in the future. Under the new rules, students over the age of twenty-one and students from outside the township were to apply for admission to the secretary of the board. They were also required to pay half of their tuition in advance. Fugitive slaves, of course, were unlikely to arrive in Grinnell with tuition money in their pockets. And even if the abolitionists were willing to pay the tuition, the new rules still prevented fugitives from enrolling without the board's consent.

THE ANTI-ABOLITIONISTS had triumphed. When the public school reopened in April, the four black men were still in the Grinnell area, but there was no attempt to enroll them. Instead, Sarah Bixby, Amos Bixby's aunt, opened a separate school for blacks in her home. The expelled blacks attended, as did other fugitive slaves.

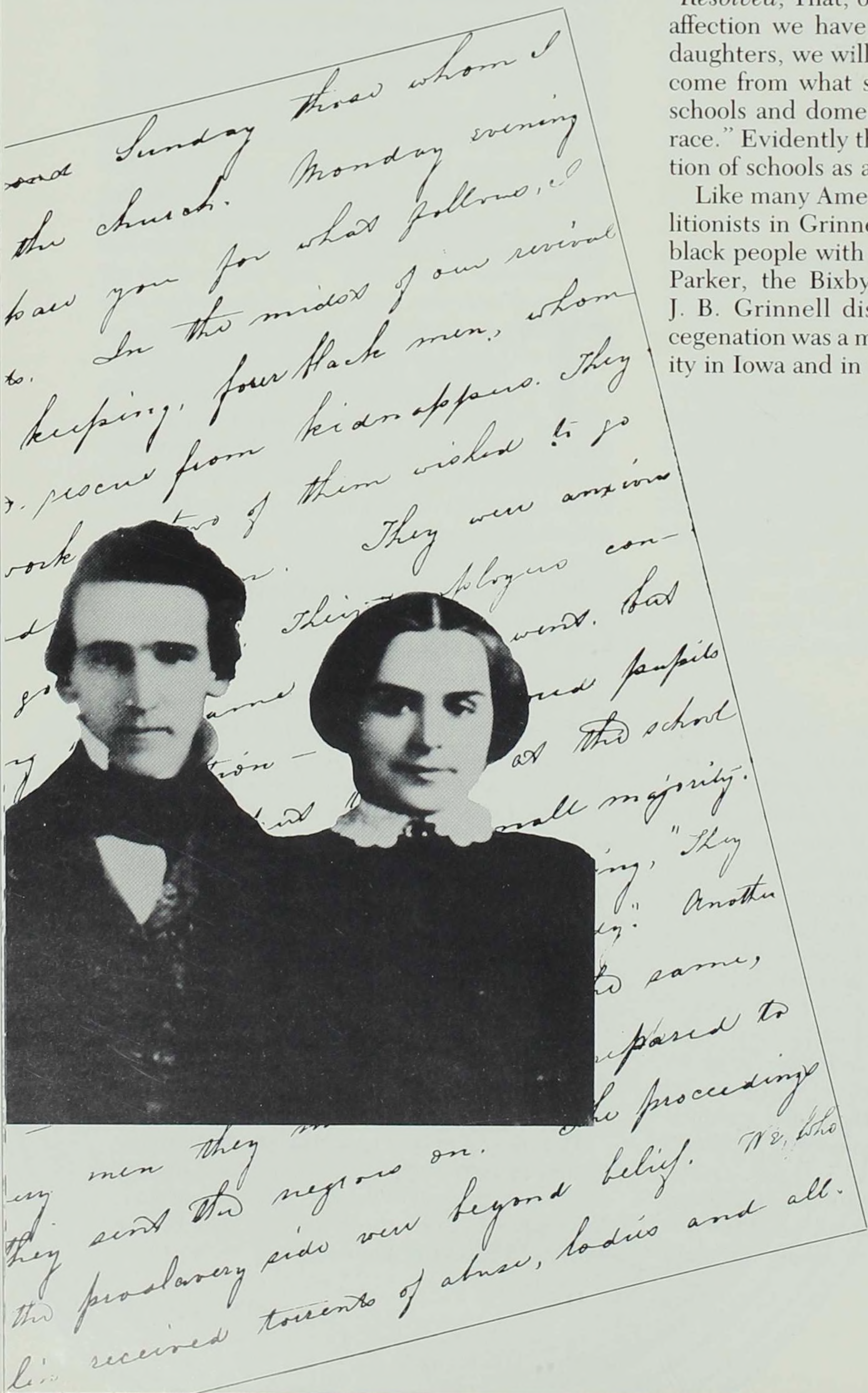
But Captain Clark had not finished with the blacks or their abolitionist friends. Signing himself the "Opposition" and "Justitia," he wrote a series of letters to the *Iowa State Journal*, a Democratic newspaper in Des Moines. In these letters Clark revealed all that he knew of the Grinnell abolitionists' participation in the Underground Railroad. In one letter Clark told the *Journal's* readers that at least thirty-seven fugitive slaves had passed through the village during the two years ending in September 1860. According to Amos Bixby, Clark had met with a slave catcher at a stage coach station south of Grinnell and supposedly had written to Frances Overton's master in Missouri. Fearing that Clark's campaign against the fugitives would draw slave catchers to Grinnell, the abolitionists sent Frances and the four male fugitives out of the village for their own safety.

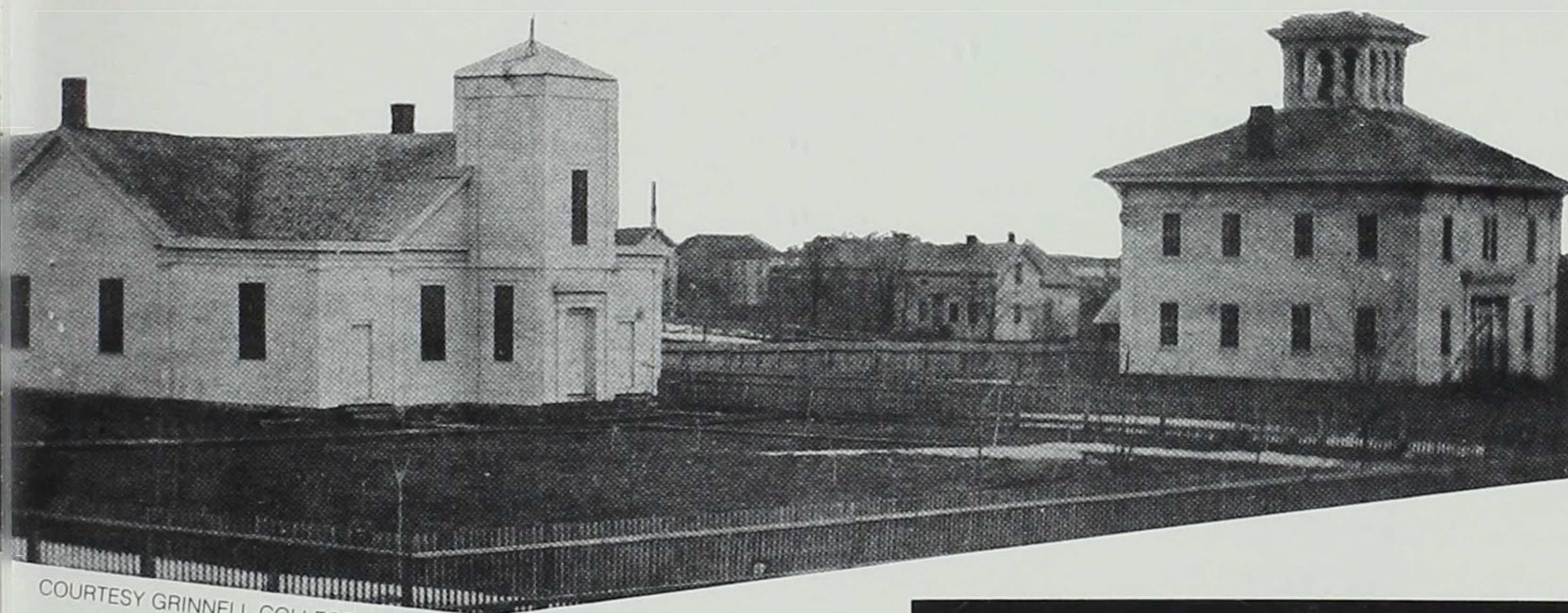
The controversy over school integration continued to have repercussions in the Grinnell area during the Civil War. On January 17, 1863, shortly after the Emancipation Proclamation, a group of Democrats from northern

Leonard F. and Sarah Parker. Leonard was the teacher at the public school where the blacks were enrolled. Sarah recorded the tense events following the explosive March 12 school meeting in letters to her mother (shown in background).

Poweshiek County (which includes Grinnell) met to declare their determination to keep blacks out of that part of the county. Among the resolutions adopted by the meeting was one that addressed the school integration issue: "Resolved, That, on account of the respect and affection we have for our wives, sisters, and daughters, we will resist all schemes, let them come from what source they may, to fill our schools and domestic circles with the African race." Evidently they also interpreted integration of schools as a threat to white females.

Like many Americans of their day, anti-abolitionists in Grinnell had equated freedom for black people with miscegenation. As Leonard Parker, the Bixbys, Samuel F. Cooper, and J. B. Grinnell discovered, this fear of miscegenation was a major obstacle to black equality in Iowa and in the North in 1860. □





COURTESY GRINNELL COLLEGE ARCHIVES

In the churchyard of the Old Congregational Church the crowd confronted the black students on March 13. The public school is on the right.

NOTE ON SOURCES

The author thanks Christopher McKee, Randolph Roth, and Wade Thompson for comments on earlier drafts. Primary sources in the Grinnell College Archives include manuscripts by Leonard F. Parker, Jesse Macy, and David S. Morrison, and letters from Amos Bixby to Parker. Special Collections at SHSI (Iowa City) hold the Leonard F. Parker Papers (including Sarah Parker's letters to her mother) and an undated manuscript, "Colonel Samuel Freeman Cooper." Montezuma and Des Moines newspapers, largely from 1856 through 1863, provided much material. Major sources on Grinnell in the 1850s and 1860s include Josiah Bus[h]nell Grinnell, *Men and Events of Forty Years: Autobiographical Reminiscences of an Active Career from 1850 to 1890* (Boston, 1891); *Proceedings of the Old Settlers' Association of Grinnell, Iowa: Annual Meetings, 1896-1901*; Leonard F. Parker, *History of Poweshiek County, Iowa* (Chicago, 1911); and Joanna Harris Haines, "Seventy Years in Iowa," *Annals of Iowa*, 27 (Oct. 1945). Other sources include Henry M. Hamilton, *A Historical Sketch: A Chapter in the Early History of Grinnell by One of its Founders* (Grinnell, 1892); Grinnell school board records from 1860; Henry M. Gleason, *Reminiscences of Henry M. Gleason*. . . (Berkeley, 1961); Richard Lingeman, *Small Town America: A Narrative History, 1620-the Present* (New York, 1980); Page Smith, *As a City Upon a Hill: The Town in American History* (New York, 1966); and the secondary sources listed in "For Further Reading." Origins of Grinnell settlers were gleaned from the 1860 federal census, proceedings of the Old Settlers' Association, and the *Grinnell Herald*. The title of this article, "Men were too fiery for much talk," is taken from a Parker manuscript. An annotated version of this article is on file in Special Collections, SHSI (Iowa City).

FOR FURTHER READING

For a broader understanding of the issues of abolition, slavery, and miscegenation in American history, consult this reading list.

Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana, 1967).

Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York, 1970).

Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, 1968).

Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago, 1961).

Leonard L. Richards, "Gentlemen of Property and Standing": *Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York, 1970).

Ronald Takaki, "The Black Child-Savage in Ante-Bellum America," in *The Great Fear: Race in the Mind of America*, ed. Gary B. Nash and Richard Weiss (New York, 1970).

V. Jacque Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal: The Midwest and the Negro During the Civil War* (Chicago, 1967).

Ronald G. Walters, "The Erotic South: Civilization and Sexuality in American Abolitionism," *American Quarterly*, 25 (May 1973), 177-201.



An Acre of Hill



Above: "The new teacher and her crew of happy, intelligent, and industrious ambitions. Just now making walks to well and fuel house out of old desks. Hard wood, hard nailing. Also spading for hyacinth and tulip beds."

"I HAVE BEEN weaning myself from my beloved 'Arbor Vitae Summit' all the year. In the early mornings before the children came I have gone from window to window and looked out long and silently on my little yard and trees. I planted my love in their rootlets. I felt sad but brave not to show it. Sunny day."

In late May of 1909 Sarah Gillespie Huftalen, age 43, wrote the above passage in a small notebook labeled "1904-09 at Arbor Vitae Summit School. Oneida, Delaware Co." For five years Huftalen taught in the northeastern Iowa county, bringing her students in the one-room rural school up to her educational standards. Steadily she added her touches outside too, planting trees and flowers until the schoolyard became worthy of the new name she painted on the newly constructed wooden arch: Arbor Vitae Summit.

Then in late August of 1909 Huftalen signed a contract to teach in Tarkio Township, Page County, Iowa. When she arrived at Norwich School in southwestern Iowa, she realized she would have to start all over again. Her description of the school reveals the challenge: "The ground contained an acre of hillside sloping somewhat steeply from west to east; the north side having a double row of trees; back of which was a board fence that had been repaired with barb wire (against the law). At the west close to the building there was an untrimmed hedge of Osage Orange at least 20 ft. in height. At the east and foot of the hill there was no fence although there were remnants; also along the entire south side where two or three posts still remained, remnants of barb wire lay along the ground in the dead grass. Outside in the road sweet

clover as high as a cow's back was thick and thrifty in bloom. There was a board (large) gate lying on the ground. A stile stood lonely at the top of the hill in front of the building. No well.

"... There was a fuel house; the outbuildings were so old and decrepit as to be past describing and the lower third of the ground was covered with coarse horse weeds as high as our head. More than a wagon load of ashes and broken glass lay underneath the porch at the east and another load likewise under the hedge at the west.

"A vision came quickly to mind of the possibilities of the whole of that long hillside with the building perched on its top. What to be done inside and outside remained to be seen."

What remains to be seen on the following pages is how Huftalen turned her vision into reality, with the help of students, parents, and others in the community. The following photos of Norwich School (perhaps taken by a Reverend Nichols from Yorktown), the captions Huftalen wrote beside each photo, and the notes and reports are from scrapbooks and notebooks in the Sarah Gillespie Huftalen Collection, SHSI (Iowa City). (Captions and notebook entries have been edited slightly for publication.)

— *The Editor*



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Left: "Lulu Smith and Myrtle Wallace mowing weeds with hand sickle and stacking up to help beautify the yard. Girls take a hand in the cleaning game at one corner of the large school yard."

Right: "John [Snyder] says he knows how to empty ashes better than anybody else. They go a scattering on the highway, not on our yard under the porch or by the hedge or fuel house."

Huftalen invited every man in the school district to a "School Yard Improvement Bee" to cut, grade, and seed a level playground out of the hill. She noted that "scrapers were borrowed from the county." A Shenandoah business dug an 80-foot well and "built a flower bed as a bonus." Huftalen listed the improvements in a scrapbook: "Terrace wall built 1910. 96 ft. long, steps 12 feet long. Level play ground 96 ft. \times 48 ft. Soft ball & tennis, etc. Lower terrace sodded. We also put up a graduated steel flag pole and May pole having colored lines with rings & snaps. These poles were equipped with pulleys & children appointed in turn to be custodians. Also had 3 swings, 2 seesaws, 2 croquet sets; these on upper grounds above terrace wall. We hauled a load of ashes and debris from under the porch, another load from where the alyssum bed now is, and a load of old iron, wagon loads, mind you, and we cleaned up and it looked better."



Right: "Mildred and Beulah Hall looking at a little tree which they planted on the school grounds in the spring, watched and hoed it during the summer and are now loving it through the winter."



Left: "Hazel Gwynn and Dallas Copeland. Bordering our tulip bed with bricks. Team work such as helps build for citizenry and Democracy."



Above: "Glenn Lawson and Elmer Lingo, May 1911. Proud of our new cement rimmed flower bed! Picture shows fence we repaired, trees [John] trimmed and top of cement wall and steps. Lawn mown. It was a school home not a school house. It was where we all loved to be."



Left: "A corner of the sand pile where many happy hours of constructive work in thought and action were indulged. These primary children imitated the 8th grade geography class by building a map of [South America] — large and shapely. They formed the school grounds and their farms and yards. Ever building."

Right: "Elmer Lingo, John Snyder, Philip Smith, Wallace, Philip King. Still at it. An acre that has never been cared for, an acre of hill at that, is quite a job."

Far right: "Beautiful and useful: back side or front." (The caption of another photo of the arch reads: "Our new arch with seats on either side and new hitching post at the front in place of a board gate that was rotted flat on the ground, and a decrepit stile.")

An excerpt from a report by Mary Smith, age 10:
 "We made an arch and have seats fastened to the posts on either side and we planted a Wistaria vine and a syringa. We have a very nice lawn mower named Daisy. We got it at Clarinda. And we have a nice lawn. We have made it smooth by the use of the lawn mower. We all cleaned up the yard and piled the rubbish in a corner and the boys got dry goods boxes and hauled it away. All of us worked with willing hands. We have been at work on the grounds and the school house two years and we hope to make it more beautiful and useful."





Selected entries from Huftalen's diary reveal long hours and slow progress — and a schoolteacher perhaps too exhausted at day's end to worry about complete sentences or correct capitalization.

Apr. [1910]. Scrubbed floor and cleaned — this used me up — 30 pails of water.

May 26. Sow alyssum around cannas. Staked the canna bed. hoed weeds, mustard! Put in 3 doz. gladiolus. also sow petunias, pansies, bachelor buttons, phlox, poppy etc. Took up tulip bulbs.

June 2. Mr. Huftalen spaded large, deep, round bed near

well. I put in castor oil beans, cypress, poppies, sunflowers, etc. in beds and at west side of building and around trees. Hoed trees — and mustard!! Hoed roses. Chickens scratch out some gladiolus and flowers coming up.

June 3. Cut mustard with sickle — all west of walk and building — hard. from coalhouse to north fence.

June 4. Took up daffodils and hyacinth. poor place for bed. I cut mustard!!! hoed mulberry and put stakes around beans and cypress bed. Set trumpet creepers at two east corners of coal house. . . .

June 7. Philip King cut *mustard*. I mended back board fence.

removing barb wire and limbs and brush and putting on boards.

June. Philip mend door lock. I go nearly every day to weed. Weeds are so bad they require continual attention.

June 29-30-July 1. Philip King 18 hrs. to help make the arch to go on posts in front, to patch roof with shingles, and mow weeds. I paid him \$2.70. I furnished lumber for arch \$1.75. . . .

Aug. 22. Children and I weed one afternoon — very warm. Did a lot — all under trees at north. . . .

Aug. 26. Have been over every day to hoe and pull weeds.

Sept. 5. School began. 1st week. pull weeds. 2nd week. hoe and

pull weeds. break up brush.

Sat. 24. John came at 7 a.m. & about 8:30 Phillip Smith went too and then I about 8:15 and we worked until 5:30 We were *tired*. I sawed boards most all day. wet, poor saw, & no place to hold them. Got the outbuildings enclosed & sills laid ready for floors & roof to board and shingle.

Tues. 27. . . . I can only wonder some times why God sent me to this old neglected school yard and buildings. If I had the means I would donate the whole thing

because it costs such an effort for me to ask for anything. I worked at school from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. tired.

Mar. 13 [1911]. Mon. p.m. Raked the yard. 1/2 da.

Apr. Clean up shingles all over yard and brick etc. such a mess. Dallas & Phillip spade, stake & rake flower beds.

Apr. 14. Pick up little sticks and stones and shingles. 10 daffodils and hyacinths begin to bloom.

May 9. cut weeds. hoe flower bed S. of house. Children put in some wild flowers last week. . . .

Inside we are getting ready for last day, exam. finishing studies, reviewing and making special language booklets. Very busy always.

May 18. Have things in pretty fair shape. Boys mow yard with lawn mower. scrub outhouse. Girls ditto. And hall. carry chairs etc. tired.

May 19. finish studies & practice for social. House *full*. Good program.



Above: "The teacher and her flock eager for work or play."



**"How We Beautified
Our Country School House
and Grounds"**

(a school report by Opal Wallace, age 12)

Well, I don't hardly know where to begin. But I can tell you what we have done. First when our teacher came the yard was a weed patch. The weeds were higher than her head.

Every summer a man would come and mow the weeds down just before school began. Then when we came to school we would stub our toes and cut our feet. Teacher said when she first saw it her heart went to the bottom of her shoe, but she said it will look nice when it is cleaned up.

We took rakes, hoes, spades, saws and other things and cleaned till the yard was clean. Then we began to make flower beds and plant flowers. We earned a prize map for greatest improvement so I think what is worth doing is worth doing well. When school was out we all promised we would

Students wrote reports about their improved school-yard. Left: A greeting card pasted on construction paper frames the title of this report. Below: In Huftalen's words, "We loved our new welcoming front."

come and work in the summer. After school was out quite a while each family received a card which said, "You may come and help pull weeds. Bring your lunch and hoes. I have asked the rest." And so we did and pulled every weed in sight. But before this we took down our old rickety, rotten stile and put up an arch instead. Teacher painted on it "Norwich School" in black letters upon white.

When the next term began we had a program and got us a lawn mower. Two years ago we came over and mowed the lawn and kept the yard in shape. Men came with teams and scrapers and fixed us a terrace 48 ft. by 96 ft. level for a play ground and a cement wall 97 ft. long and steps and one cement flower bed.

Teacher and our big boys made the two outbuildings and the arch.

Now we have a fine school yard.

First when we raked the yard it took us three days. The second time it took us one day and the third three hours. We are improving, aren't we?



Cedar Rapids



by Clarence A. Andrews



THE CEDAR RAPIDS to which I came in May of 1919, fresh from a year on the high arid plains of central Montana, but weary from riding seventy-two hours in wooden coach seats on three different railroads, was my second Iowa home. I had been born in Waterloo, fifty miles north, in a house on the bank of the old Red Cedar River in 1912. The two cities were much alike, industrial towns in the Corn Belt, with east and west sides centered on the river. Both had developed because of the potential waterpower in

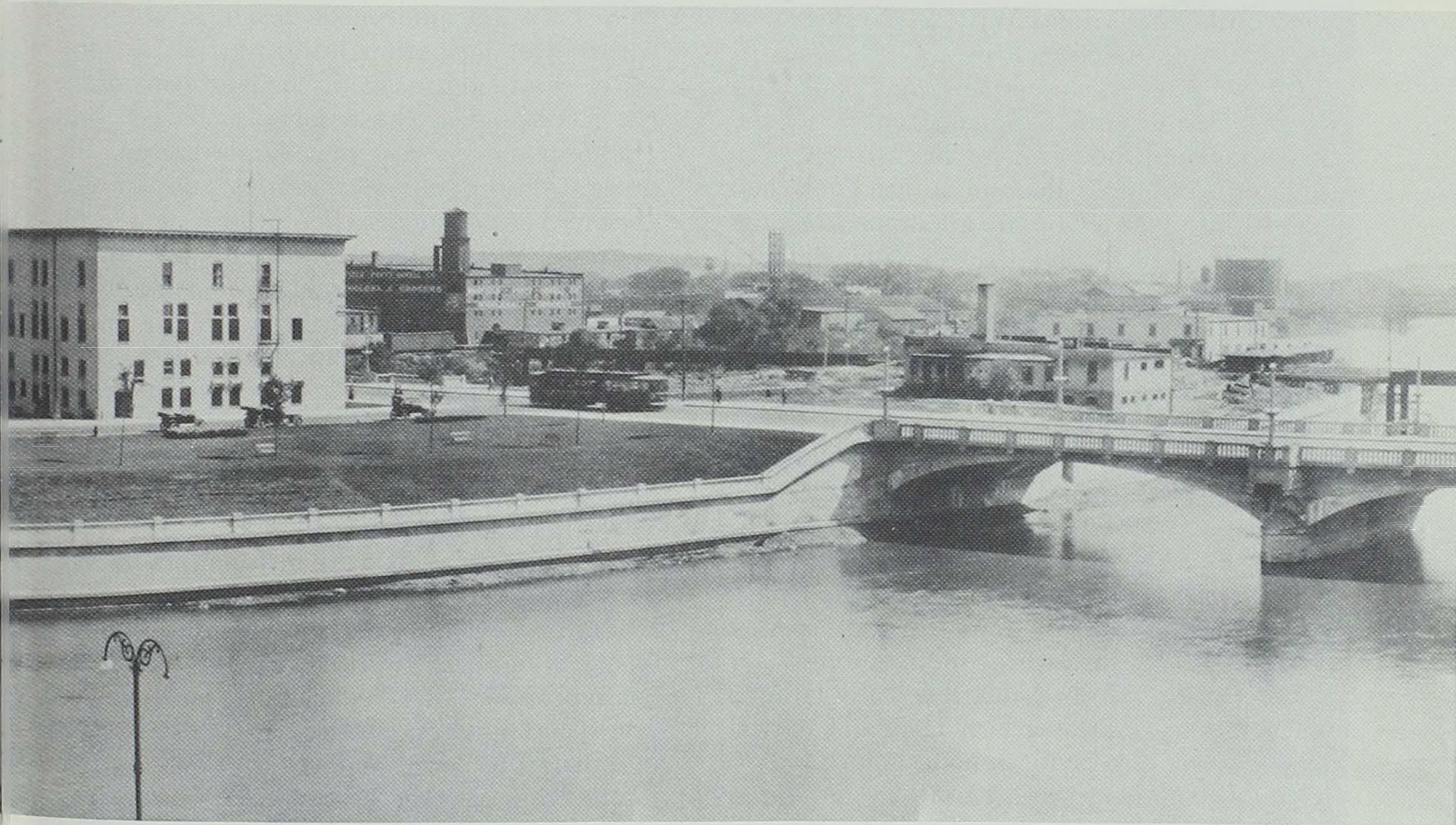
the river, because they were surrounded by some of the world's most fertile farmland, because of good railroad transportation, and because of a surplus rural population which produced a pool of workers looking for means to support themselves in the cities. Their factories were agriculturally oriented, producing implements and tools for farmers and converting farm surpluses into food for the nation and the world.

The 1920s were to be boom years for the two cities as well as for the nation. But the Parlor City (as Cedar Rapids called itself, imitating such civic sobriquets as Chicago's "Windy City," Cincinnati's "Queen City," and Philadelphia's "Quaker City") was to embark on a period of growth which eventually would make it Iowa's second largest urban area.

The nickname "Parlor City," suggesting a middle- to upper-class residential image rather

Above: A Cedar Rapids panorama shows May's Island, stretching under three bridges, before the new construction of the 1920s. Boxed line drawings inset throughout article are from the 1928 *Acorn* yearbook, courtesy of Coe College.

in the Roaring Twenties



than a working-class image, was well chosen. Cedar Rapids was a city of many fine homes, including Brucemore (the three-story mansion of the Douglas family, set on eighteen acres of landscaped ground) and the Robert Armstrong home, designed by artist Grant Wood. (Armstrong was to be a driving force in Cedar Rapids for the next seven decades.) When an English visitor was being shown Cedar Rapids, he asked at last to be shown the city's slums. He was told by his guide that the working-class homes he was looking at came as close to a slum area as the city had.

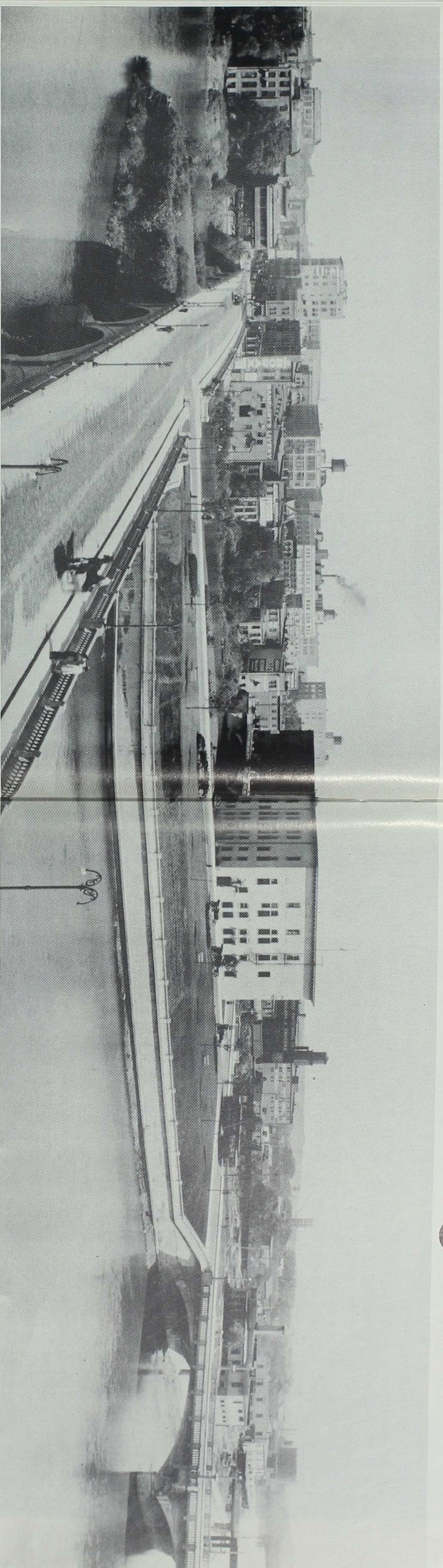
Each quarter of the city had its own park, including one adjacent to the downtown business district, another with a zoo, and another which stretched for almost a mile along the river. It had an outstanding four-year college, an auditorium, a nationally famous opera house, the "world's largest cereal mill," and

the nation's largest Masonic library.

Like the rest of the United States after the end of "the war to end all wars," Cedar Rapids was in an expansionist mood. Of 363 business leaders interviewed by the *Cedar Rapids Gazette* for a daily column in 1926 and 1927, two-thirds were Republicans but were not standpat Republicans. Although most admired President "Silent Cal" Coolidge, they were not marching in place. One of those hard-headed Republicans, David Turner, son of a Cedar Rapids pioneer, became the patron for Grant Wood, subsidizing him with a home, studio, and funds so that Wood might have the time and a place to work. When Frances Prescott, a principal at both Adams and McKinley junior high schools, hired the uncertified Wood to teach art classes, the school board backed her.

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poems (the *Gazette* printed them on its editorial page) as for his business acumen. This same Jay Sigmund inspired a young Paul Engle to become a poet also, and eventually head of the world-famous Iowa Writers' Workshop at the nearby University of Iowa.

Luther Brewer, a newspaper and book publisher, was attracting national attention for the books he published and for his astuteness in building a unique collection of rare books and manuscripts focused on the great poets of England's Romantic Period. Brewer had installed a huge bed in an upstairs bedroom to accommodate occasional visits from his oversized friend, former president William Howard Taft.

In March of 1929, the Carnegie Corporation chose Cedar Rapids as the midwestern city in which it would subsidize a "Little Gallery" of art and pay the salary of Edward Rowan, the gallery's first professional director.

I arrived in Cedar Rapids just in time to hear the roar of the explosion which blew the Douglas Starch Works sky high on the night of May 22, 1919, killing forty-three men, among them the workman who had just taken my father's place fifteen minutes earlier. That fall I started school at the old Taylor School; before I completed schooling in January of 1930, I attended almost every west-side school. My family moved often.



THE CEDAR RAPIDS schools in 1920 included Washington High School, a three-story Gothic stone structure across the railroad tracks from the Union Depot. The *Gazette* usually referred to it as the Cedar Rapids High School, even though there was a newer high school on the west side. That was the Grant Vocational High School, intended to train west-side students in the manual arts which led to factory jobs. To west-siders the implication was clear — the east side was cultured, upper class; its students would go to college and become the city's leaders.

So in the early 1920s, west-side citizens, egged on by their children, rebelled against this discrimination. They demanded and got the same liberal arts program that the east-side school had. The first liberal arts class at Grant

was a class in dramatic art.

The city had fourteen grade schools in 1920, ten of which were nineteenth-century two- and three-story red brick buildings, three of which were new and modern in design, and one of which was a wooden building (in "Stumptown," south of the city on the west bank of the river). Several of these schools offered eight grades of instruction plus kindergarten; the others offered only six grades and kindergarten. The fourteen schools were named for deceased United States presidents, beginning with Washington; the school in Stumptown was Pierce School. Each school had a "principal teacher," often simply called the "principal." These persons, all women in the 1920s, were also the school disciplinarians. In addition there were four Catholic schools, two on each side of the river, a Lutheran primary school, and a Catholic academy.

The public schools were fortunate in having an able, progressive superintendent, Arthur Deamer, and progressive-minded school board members. In 1920, Deamer and his board proposed that Cedar Rapids mortgage its future and build one or two new grade schools to replace obsolete buildings, and several new junior high schools. The new junior highs would change the school system from an 8-4 basis of grades to a 6-3-3 basis, a relatively new concept at that time. One hope was that with this system, students who might otherwise drop out at the end of eighth grade might be encouraged to complete ninth grade. For a time in the 1920s, Madison School on the west side was the site of classes for fourteen- to nineteen-year-olds who had dropped out and then returned.

Bolstered by support from women voters, who had just won the right to vote in August, the proposal carried by a landslide. Work on McKinley Junior High School and Buchanan grade school got under way at once. Roosevelt, Franklin, and Wilson junior highs followed in turn. Wilson opened in September of 1925.

In 1923 the school board ordered a program of "accelerated classes" which would allow some students to complete seventh and eighth grades in a year and a half. Students were to be selected for the program on the basis of test scores and their grade point averages for fifth



Known as the "White Bank," American Trust and Savings Bank was where Cedar Rapids schoolchildren deposited pennies on Bank Days. As students practiced thrift, new multistory buildings downtown reflected prosperity.

and sixth grades. In the fall of 1924, I was one of six southwest-siders selected, three girls and three boys.

But Jennie Post, principal at Van Buren and later at Wilson, a woman with a mind of her own, would have none of this newfangled nonsense and refused to admit us. So for two weeks we trudged across the river to McKinley (with the exception of the Douglas girls, who were chauffeured, all students walked to school then). There Frances Prescott, the principal who had hired Grant Wood, welcomed us. But two weeks later Jennie Post relented and we were back in Van Buren.

Five mornings a week all the grade schools and junior high schools performed mandated opening exercises — the pledge to the flag (minus the words “under God”), the “American’s Creed,” the first verse of “My country ’tis of thee,” the Lord’s Prayer and the Twenty-third Psalm. Never mind that some of our names were Kozberg or Leibsohn or Kacere or Haddad, we all recited in unison. It was the melting pot principle at work.

Something else afoot then in the school system was THRIFT. Ben Franklin’s axiom that “a penny saved is a penny earned” had become a solid rock in America’s foundation. (Of course, in the 1920s a penny bought a stick of forbidden chewing gum, or a lead pencil, or an all-day sucker, or a stamped postal card which could be used to send a message to a distant relative.) Every Tuesday, as part of the opening exercises, we also had Bank Day, the brainchild of Thrift, Incorporated, a Chicago firm. We were all encouraged — almost ordered — to make a deposit every Tuesday even if it was only a penny. If every one of our class made a deposit, we were allowed to parade through the school singing the “Thrift Song,” and we received a banner to display beside the American flag all week. The class with the highest percentage of deposits at the end of a school year was awarded a painting by Thrift, Inc.

To ensure high educational standards, the school system had subject supervisors who regularly came to our classrooms. Emma Beenk made sure that we were all learning the Palmer Method of Penmanship, invented by Austin N. Palmer of Cedar Rapids. Unhappily for left-handers such as I, the Palmer Method was de-

signed for right-handed students, and I invariably got a failing grade in penmanship because of my messy papers.

Because the system intended that we would receive a broader education than the Three R’s alone permitted, the system also had supervisors for art, Emma Grattan, and music, Alice Inskeep. We loved Miss Inskeep and we wouldn’t let her end her periodic visits without a performance of the “Rooster Song,” each stanza of which ended with a rousing “Cock-a-doodle-do!”

And every spring we were visited by Effie Burton, Grant High School librarian, who handed out free packets of vegetable seeds obtained from the federal government, and encouraged us to plant our own gardens in plots furnished by the school district.

To ensure that our tastes in music would range beyond the then-popular “Barney Google with his Goo-goo-goo-gly Eyes,” the ungrammatical “It Ain’t Gonna Rain No More,” and “Show Me the Way To Go Home,” we had music memory classes. Once a week we listened to phonograph records of such classics as the “Turkish March” or Haydn’s *Surprise* Symphony, and we clipped stories about these compositions, printed weekly in the *Gazette* as part of the program. Those of us who assembled neat scrapbooks of the clippings (mine were messy), or who could remember all of the record titles when portions of the music were played back at the end of the semester, were awarded free tickets to concerts by the visiting St. Louis Symphony or Minneapolis Symphony. My lifelong affection for classical music began in music memory classes conducted by Dorothy Stoflet at Taylor School and Ruth Larson at Wilson. Miss Larson even dug into her slender schoolteacher’s purse to pay for carfare for those of us southwest-siders who lived a long way from Coe College’s Sinclair Memorial Chapel, where the concerts were.



MEANWHILE, outside our classrooms Cedar Rapids was bursting at the seams as a growing population required new housing far beyond the trolley-car lines



ORIGINAL OWNED BY ED ZASTROW, SR.

Small-town car dealer H. Hagge and Son (Andover, Iowa) lines up new Fords. In larger towns like Cedar Rapids, "automobile rows" of service stations, dealerships, and repair shops lined major streets.

which had been built in the 1890s. In 1926, by ordinance, the city added thirty-one square miles to its previous fourteen square miles.

In addition to the city's growth into former cornfields and pastures — which now bore the persuasive sobriquets of Rompot Acres, Worthing Acres, Casper Schaefer Heights, Fruitland Heights, Belmont, East Highland, Northwood, and Ridgewood — new commercial buildings were springing up all over the city. The nineteenth-century mansions immediately east of the downtown business district, which had once been occupied by the Douglasses, the Sinclairs, the Bevers, the Van Vechtens, and the Brewers, were replaced by or remodeled into industrial and commercial buildings.

In 1920 the Penick and Ford Company of Louisiana bought the debris-covered site of the former Douglas Starch Works and began building a new and larger starch works — one that stank up the town even more than the former plant had. Veterans just home from World War I and veterans of the Civil and Spanish-American wars were petitioning the city to erect a building memorializing the Cedar Rapidsians who had given their all in those conflicts. In 1919, Linn County residents (most of whom lived in Cedar Rapids) had voted to move the county seat from Marion, where it had always been, to Cedar Rapids, so plans were under way to demolish the police station, the city hall (which had once been Smulekoff's furniture store), a storage building, and a bathhouse above the city's bathing beach — all on May's Island in the Cedar River. The island had also

had a large vacant area where traveling carnivals and itinerant medicine shows had set up shop in the heart of the city. But the new courthouse and county jail would take up all that space.

Construction of the courthouse and jail was followed on the north end of the island by the Memorial Building, with its eight-story south tower supporting a concrete replica of a soldier's bier, and its controversial Grant Wood window of stained glass — controversial because it had been fabricated in Germany, where so many Allied soldiers had died in the recent war.

Other 1920s buildings were the Merchants National Bank, at that time the city's tallest "skyscraper"; the Dows office building; the Iowa and the Capitol (later Paramount) combination theater and office buildings finished within ninety days of each other; major additions to the Quaker Oats and National Oats plants; an eight-story Churchill Drug warehouse; the Harper-McIntyre warehouse (announced by the fattest edition of the *Gazette* ever published); the Colonial Bakery; the Consistory and El Kahir Shrine Temple buildings (the Shrine Temple immediately replaced the aging Auditorium as the major Cedar Rapids entertainment center); the Roosevelt Hotel; the Ausadie and Commonwealth apartment buildings; and several new churches. At the end of the decade, plans were made for a new downtown post office and federal building on the riverbank, where the Sunshine Mission and the *Gazette* office had been. The *Gazette* also erected a new building.

Everywhere streets were being paved with brick or concrete, or else coated with oil or covered with asphalt to answer the complaints of citizens who had bought new black Fords, Buicks, "Chevies," Hupmobiles, Velies, air-cooled Franklins, or, like some well-to-do matriarchs, Milburn Electrics, and whose cars were now bogging down in the mud. The iron-and-wood First Avenue bridge over the Cedar had burned in 1919 and was rebuilt as a six-lane concrete bridge to handle the expected increase in traffic.

Up until the 1920s, the trolley cars with their tracks radiating out from the loop to all corners of the city, the interurbans running at regular intervals to Waterloo, Iowa City, and Mount Vernon, and points between, and the railroads were the only practical ways to travel. Cedar Rapids had direct connections with all the major midwestern cities. When Cedar Rapids booster groups, promoting local business or the local rodeo, toured through eastern Iowa, interurbans and trains took them to every town worth visiting.



THE AUTOMOBILE would change all that. Proving fatal to businesses in small towns, the automobile brought farmers and small-town residents to the city for shopping and entertainment. In 1920 a Cedar Rapiidian could buy any one of over fifty makes of automobiles from any one of 250 dealers within a thirty-mile radius. Ninety percent of these were black "touring cars" with cloth tops and side curtains to attach in case of rain. Seven years later there were fewer makes and fewer dealers, but Americans owned three times as many automobiles as they had in 1920, most of them "closed" (with hard tops and glass windows), and a few even in bright colors. The automobile had come of age — in the words of a popular song, "Henry [Ford] had made a lady out of Lizzie."

A significant part of the 1920s business boom in Cedar Rapids (we called it "prosperity") came from the sale or service of automobiles. One Ford salesman sold a car a day in 1923. "Automobile rows," consisting of side-by-side car dealers, service stations, and repair shops,

developed along Second and Third Avenues East, replacing the mansions of an older generation, and along First Street West. Service stations also sprang up at major intersections, especially along the Lincoln Highway, a national road which ran from east to west through the city, and along the Red Ball Road, which ran from south to north.

With the automobile, Cedar Rapids policemen no longer walked eleven-hour beats six days a week, but patrolled in radio-equipped cars, following an innovation first tried in Detroit — which had become "the Motor City." Virgil Powell, the first black policeman in Cedar Rapids, rode a motorcycle through the business district doling out tickets to cars parked too long in one place.

Many of the calls police now got had to do with stolen cars — or even car parts. One Cedar Rapiidian stole a car, then used it to haul stolen merchandise to his house. But the car bogged down in a muddy street, and the man was arrested by police responding to neighbors' calls about a car blocking traffic. Whereas in the nineteenth century Jesse James and his kind had ridden into small towns to stick up banks, bank robbers now used automobiles — more often than not cars which had been stolen, so the robbers would be more difficult to trace.

Automobile accidents became a major cause of human death and injury. The gory statistics — "five killed in weekend crashes" — replaced newspaper stories about runaway teams of horses. A police car smashed into one of the newfangled traffic lights which had unwisely been installed in the center of the intersection at First Avenue and First Street East. A prominent Cedar Rapids woman and her three children died from exhaust fumes filtering into the family's closed car.



AUTOS BEGAN producing significant changes in our social patterns. Young lovers who had once conducted their courtships under the watchful eyes of parents or grandparents now retired to side-curtained cars in dark streets. Young ladies who had once written to advice columnists asking when it was



With tongue in cheek, the 1929 Coe College yearbook staff began the "Women's Athletics" section with a cartoon suggesting a new sport.

proper to kiss a young man for the first time were now climbing willingly into backseats to smoke forbidden cigarettes, sip illicit "hooch," and to "pet" or "neck," whatever those words meant.

I was witness to all of this social change because of the *Gazette*. Cedar Rapids also had another good newspaper, the *Republican*, published by Luther Brewer, but although for a time it had a Pulitzer Prize-winning writer, MacKinlay Kantor, I rarely read it. I didn't read the *Tribune* either — it was a union labor paper — or the *Listy* — which was printed in Bohemian (we rarely used the term "Czech," and I knew only two words of that south-side idiom — "kolaches" and the word for belly-button).

I began reading the *Gazette* when I was six years old, spreading it out on the floor because my arms were too short to hold it. I had dis-

covered that the newspaper was using the same words that I was learning in school and, with the coming of Prohibition in 1920, words such as "white mule," "hooch," and "alky runner" ("alky" and the other two terms being slang for prohibited alcohol).

Moreover, in the summer of 1920, I went into business on my own — I became a "newsie" for Cedar Rapids's best-known citizen, Alex Fidler, who in addition to being the *Gazette's* street sales supervisor was also an automobile salesman, a promoter and referee of boxing and wrestling matches at the Auditorium, and concessionaire at the baseball park on E Avenue West. Every evening I sold *Gazettes* on a downtown street corner.

It was a good business. I bought the papers for one cent each and sold them for two cents — one hundred percent profit and no overhead! (The *Gazette's* circulation was 16,000 and how it stayed in business on the 160 dollars that was its daily share was beyond me.)

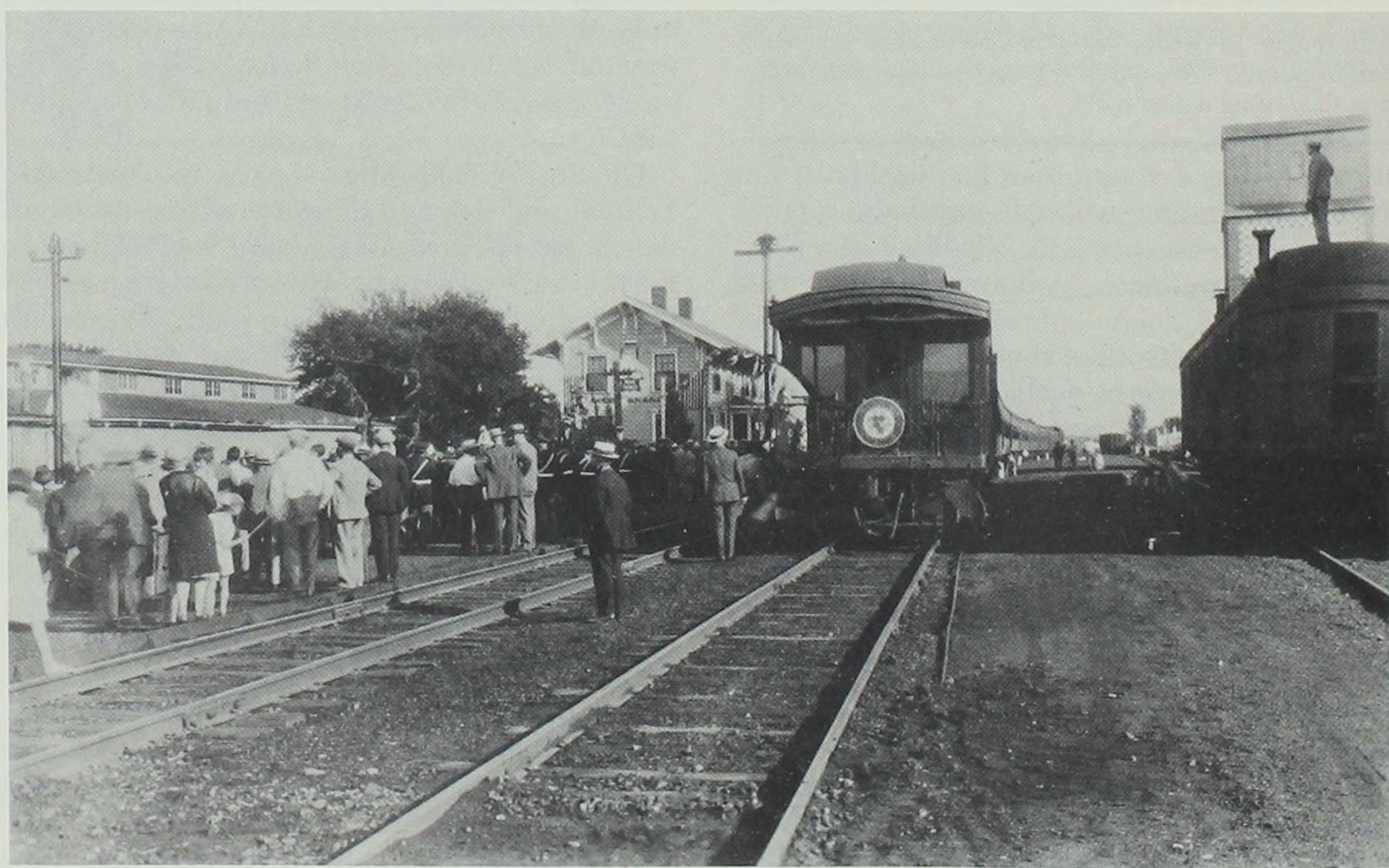
My chief competitors were the three adult Kiebel brothers, who sold newspapers and magazines from early morning until late at night on the post office corner at Second Avenue and Third Street East, and Johnny Kinrade, the crippled newsie who was working his way through Grant High School selling papers on the corner of Third Street and Third Avenue East.

On Sunday mornings, I sold the *Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Herald and Examiner* on the corner of Third Avenue and Second Street East. I'd sell as many as a hundred of each and I kept a nickel for each one sold. Die-hard Republicans bought the *Tribune*; Democrats and sensation-mongers bought the *Herald and Examiner* with its lurid cartoons of businessmen in silk hats taking advantage of common people.

In 1922 the *Des Moines Register* began circulating its Sunday edition in Cedar Rapids, and after I had sold all my Chicago papers my brother and I delivered papers from E Avenue West all the way out to Ed Sheftic's Boathouse at the beginning of Ellis Park. There we dug the corks out of Coca-Cola bottle caps, looking for the magic word *Free* printed on the inside of some caps that entitled us to a bottle of Coca-Cola at no charge.



A big news story in 1928 was the kick-off of Herbert Hoover's campaign in his hometown, West Branch. Andrews and his brother tried to sell newspapers to the crowd as they left the huge tent after the speech. "Why buy a paper?" spectators asked. "We just heard the speech." Below: A crowd waits at the West Branch depot.



My enterprise led to my first brush with the law. By city ordinance, children had to be fourteen years of age to work at any job, including selling papers. Newsies had to buy a badge for six cents from A. L. Bailey, the truant officer for the public schools, but he wouldn't sell me one because I was only half that age. So one morning I found myself with Alex Fidler in the municipal courtroom of Judge Thomas B. Powell, looking up into the face of a man accustomed to dealing with hardened criminals such as alky runners and underage newsies. He lectured Alex and me on our errant ways, then turned us loose with a final word to Alex — "Keep that kid off the streets." We went out the door and as we parted, Alex looked down at me with his infectious smile. "See you tonight, kid. And keep hustling, will you?" ("Hustling" was a respectable word to be applied to young entrepreneurs in the 1920s; it hadn't yet moved to the world of the demimonde.)



AS A NEWSIE I looked every night for great stories that would sell newspapers to businessmen on their way from offices and stores to the yellow trolley cars that circled the loop and then rattled off to various sections of the city. The biggest story of the 1920s was the nonstop flight of Charles A. "Lucky" Lindbergh from New York to Paris in May 1927. Other stories that sold papers were the daily reports in 1925 of Floyd Collins trapped in the Kentucky cave where he died; the Scopes "monkey trial" in Tennessee; any of several notorious murder cases, such as the Hall-Mills case with its "Pig Woman" testifying from a stretcher; the disappearance in the southwestern desert of evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson; any World Series baseball game (Ring Lardner, one of the better sports-writers, called it "the Worlds Serious"); or any Jack Dempsey boxing match.

Some spectacular stories, such as "the strange death" of President Harding in San Francisco in the early morning of August 2, 1923, were reported in "EXTRA!" editions of the *Gazette* which sold for five cents. (The last *Gazette* extra was issued May 28, 1949. By then, most people got news of fast-breaking,

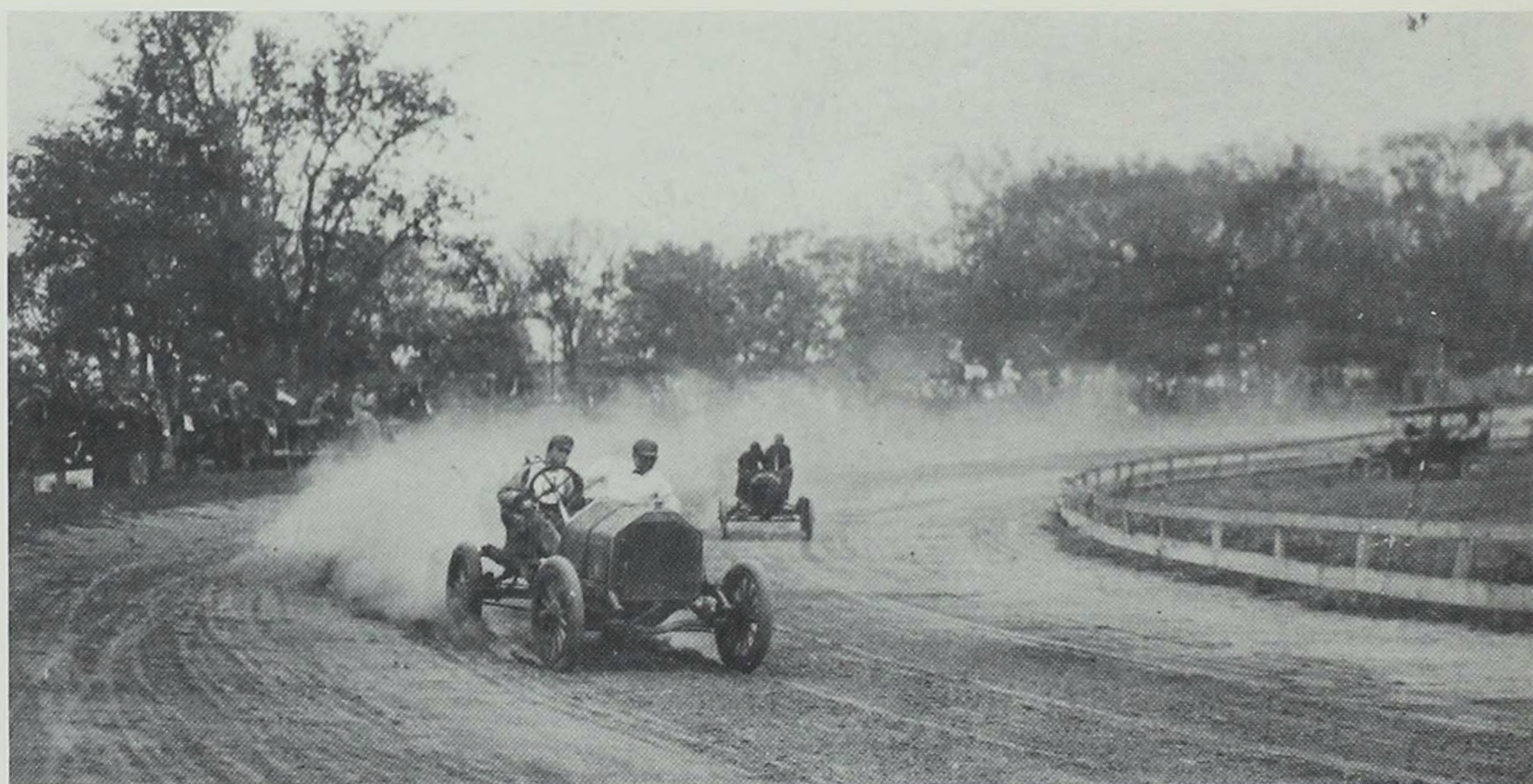
spectacular stories on radio.)

Locally the big stories were the murder of Patrolman Francis Wilson in the Carnegie Public Library in July 1921; the arrival of the Harding funeral train on August 7, 1923; the murder of six-year-old Kathleen Forrest by a neighbor boy in September 1927; and the beginning of the Herbert Hoover "front porch" presidential campaign in Cedar Rapids and West Branch in August 1928. (On that occasion the *Gazette* sent my brother and me to West Branch by train to sell papers there.)

But drawing more attention than all of these together was the death in late 1929 of Hoover's secretary of war, James Good, a Cedar Rapids native who had been instrumental in persuading Hoover to begin his campaign in the area. For almost ten days, beginning with Good's fatal illness in Washington, D.C. and ending a day or two after his burial in the Oak Hill cemetery on the east side of Cedar Rapids, the *Gazette* carried multiple pages about Good in every issue.

A continuing news story each fall in the early 1920s reported the football successes of the Washington High School Tigers under the coaching of Leo Novak with the ubiquitous Alex Fidler as trainer. Modern Cedar Rapidsians, accustomed to intracity rivalry and the crowning of a city champion, may find it hard to believe that the school district officials would not allow Grant and Washington to play each other, while at the same time permitting Washington to schedule games with high schools as far west as Sioux Falls and Lincoln, and as far east as Chicago, Toledo, and Harrisburg, and to allow scheduling of postseason games (two in one year) for the so-called national championship. (Grant High won the 1929 Iowa state championship by beating a hitherto unbeaten Sioux City Central High School team on the old Coe College athletic field in a blinding Thanksgiving Day snowstorm. I was a cheerleader there — but no one was in the stands.)

For World Series games and major football games, the *Gazette* erected "playographs" and "gridgraphs" outside its old building on the riverbank, later outside its new building at Third Avenue and Fifth Street Southeast. While action was simulated on the big green



and white scoreboards, an announcer would megaphone the details to crowds which overflowed into the streets, blocking traffic. Jack Dempsey boxing matches would simply be megaphoned to the crowd.



SHORTER WORKDAYS and five-day workweeks gave us more time for recreation in the 1920s. We motored (that was a new word) to Iowa City to watch the air-mail planes land or to watch Iowa play football in the university's new west-side stadium. On summer Sundays we trolleyed out to Ellis Park to gaze at the ducks in the duck pond or, after 1924, to swim at the new beach; or we trolleyed out to Bever Park to picnic near the zoo or the new water reservoir which stored our drinking water. Both the Cedar Rapids Country Club on the east side and the Cedar View Country Club on the west side had new clubhouses, and the east-side club had a dandy new outdoor pool as well. One memorable day at the east-side club I caddied for Congressman Cyrenus Cole, whose weekly letters to the *Gazette* appeared on the same editorial page as Jay Sigmund's verses, and who wrote an Iowa history titled *I Remember I Remember*. That day, though, he drove the other members of his foursome batty because he was wearing a just-purchased sun

visor, and its oversized price tag, still attached, kept fluttering and snapping in the breeze.

On summer nights at the old circus grounds on Fourth Street and Twelfth Avenue Southwest, we watched touring tent shows such as those owned by J. Doug Morgan or Hila Morgan, two of Cedar Rapids's own. These road companies presented a different play each night of the week, but the star attraction was always a red-haired, freckle-faced, gap-toothed "Toby" character. Despite his ungainliness, he always managed to triumph over the city slicker (usually a banker's son) by the end of the play.

Or in the early 1920s, we might watch Ethel Barrymore or George Arliss in stage plays at Greene's Opera House, or topflight vaudeville at the Majestic, or first-run movies at the Lyric, the Crystal, the Palace, the Isis, the Strand, the Rialto — theaters whose names and marquees promised to carry us far from our workaday world into the illusory world of such films as Iowa's own Emerson Hough's *The Covered Wagon* or Douglas Fairbanks's *The Thief of Bagdad*. We went to movies in those years to see ourselves as we might be, not to see ourselves as we were.

The Olympic on the southeast side and the Colonial (we called it "the Clink" — don't ask me why) on Third Avenue West showed second-run movies and westerns at lower prices.

Left: The lead in a Cedar Rapids-Marion auto race leaves a competitor in a cloud of dust. Below: Mechanics rode with drivers for on-the-spot tire changes and repairs. Popular in the 1920s, auto racing nevertheless preceded the decade; the first Indianapolis 500 was held in 1911.

Theaters showed two or three new films a week. No manager showed the same film on both Saturday and Sunday because on those two days we all went to the movies. Really big films — *Broken Blossoms* with Lillian Gish and Richard Barthelmess, or *The Kid* or *The Gold Rush* with Charlie Chaplin, or *Safety Last* with Harold Lloyd — might be kept for a solid week, but no longer. We didn't want to see the same film over and over; we wanted to see the same actors in new films. Hollywood in the 1920s

produced more films in a month than are produced nowadays in a year or more, and there were "more stars than there are in Heaven" — from Fatty Arbuckle to Zasu Pitts.

Until early 1928, the films were silent (dialogue was printed on the screen) although there was anything from a player piano using paper rolls to a full-blown orchestra in the pit beneath the screen. Then, on March 7, Al Jolson came to the Strand in *The Jazz Singer*, and suddenly out of the accustomed stillness came the marvelous voice of "the world's greatest entertainer." The movies' long silence had ended.

When we wanted more action, those of us who didn't belong to a country club danced at the Auditorium, the Green Parrot, Frank



PETE C. PETERSON COLLECTION, SHSI (IOWA CITY)

Brookhiser's Dreamland (later Danceland, in a new location) and, in the late 1920s, at the Memorial Building or the Shrine Temple. In summer we danced at Cedar Park or Chain Lakes, or else we canoed from Sheftic's Boat-house upriver to Brookhiser's Manhattan on an island in the river. Later, we floated back downriver to a mandolin playing "Whispering" or "Just a Song at Twilight" or "Juanita."

When we stayed at home there was the victrola or grafonola, or the player piano, and other songs: "I'm Always Chasing Rainbows," "There's a Long, Long Trail," or "Smiles." In the 1920s, everyone could have music in their homes. Pianos or victrolas could be bought for five dollars down and a dollar a week.

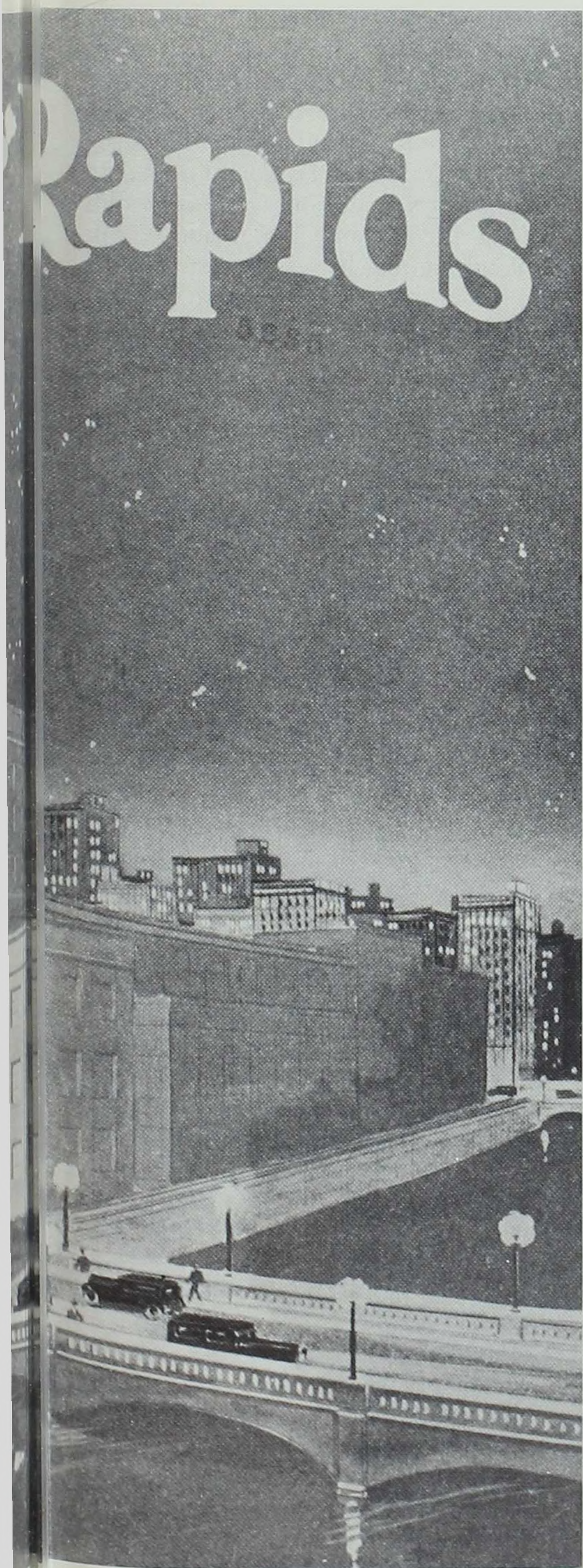
In 1925, Frontier Park (now Hawkeye Downs, south of Cedar Rapids) opened with a full-scale rodeo: boy and girl bull riders, calf ropers, bronc busters, steer wrestlers, and the Roman Races, with riders of both sexes, each standing on a pair of horses galloping side by side around the half-mile track.

On Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and Labor Day, the track was taken over by auto racers, chief among them our own local favorite, Gus Schrader, who on weekdays repaired autos at his garage on Ellis Boulevard and who had once bought Sunday *Registers* from me.

And there were the Bunnies of the old Mississippi Valley minor baseball league. The postwar decade was a great sporting era, and watching or talking or reading about sports became a national craze — whether it was golf, tennis, the Kentucky Derby, football, marathon dancing, or baseball. The names of Bobby Jones, Helen Wills ("Little Poker Face"), Zev, "Red" Grange, and Babe Ruth slipped trippingly from our tongues. When the Bunnies were in town and playing Davenport or Waterloo teams at Belden Hill Park, we went out there on sunny afternoons (no night games) — the adults to sit in the grandstand shade to watch the likes of Bill Speas, fleet-footed Cletus Dixon, or ex-Coe College athlete Midge Makeever, the kids to get in free in the unshaded bleachers by shagging baseballs fouled

Memorial Building, set in a sleek, starlit metropolis — as pictured in this Chamber of Commerce promotional book from the end of the 1920s.





out of the park. Sitting in those bleachers, many of us got our first taste of another 1920s innovation — an Eskimo Pie.



ALTHOUGH ALL of these events and many more were reported by the *Gazette*, none were reported on radio until later in the decade. In 1920, radio was primarily a device by which ships at sea could warn each other of derelict icebergs or floating mines left over from World War I. But early in the decade, kids in Cedar Rapids and other towns began making crystal sets out of empty Quaker Oats boxes, a few strands of copper wire wrapped around the box, and a crystal and earphones bought from D. M. "Tex" Perham's electrical shop at 322 Third Avenue West.

Coe College had a small broadcasting station in 1920, and in 1921 a Cedar Rapids radio club was organized. In 1922, Perham cleaned out his electrical goods and set up his own broadcasting station, WJAM. He fabricated his own transmitter (later called a microphone) and covered the walls with heavy drapes to eliminate echoes.

WJAM was a one-man station. Tex would look up local talent — perhaps soprano Helen Kacena Stark or violinist George Cervenka — and invite them in to sing or play for a time. When the performance was over, he would shut down and go looking for more program material. I was one of a group of schoolchildren invited to sing one afternoon. Tex couldn't crowd us all into his studio so we crowded around the door where Tex stood holding his transmitter.

On August 4, 1923, Tex rigged up a telephone hookup to the Strand Theater's orchestra pit and began broadcasting "live" music three times a week. The following year he rigged a hookup to Frank Brookhiser's new Danceland and broadcast three hours of dance music twice a week.

On March 3, 1925, Cedar Rapids schoolchildren assembled in their buildings heard President Coolidge promise us less government and greater prosperity. For the first time, millions of Americans heard the voice of a president.

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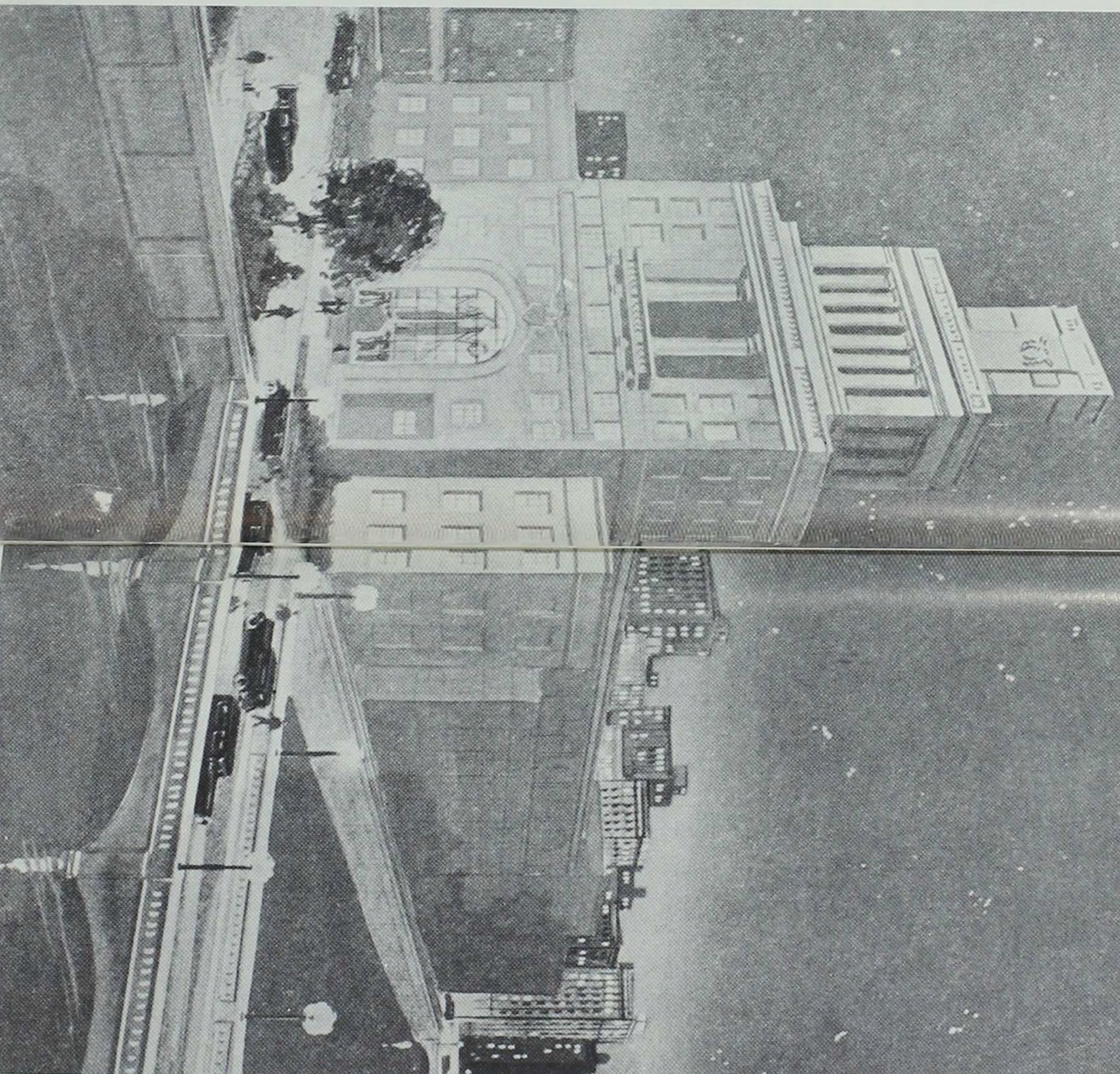
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column with listings of national broadcasts, and some were wondering how soon "radio movies" (television) would follow. Two years later, we had the first national hookups, the predecessors of today's networks. Commercials soon followed.

Meanwhile, Harry Parr had begun KWCR in his home at 1444 Second Avenue Southeast. Late he moved the station to the former Greene's Opera House building (most of the building was being used for storing autos of overnight guests of the Roosevelt Hotel across the street). In his new location, Parr began inviting vaudeville entertainers at the Capitol and Iowa theaters to do broadcasts advertising their shows. I was fascinated by the opportunity for closeup views of nationally famous performers, among them Bert Wheeler and Bob Woolsey, Ole Olsen and Chic Johnson, and the blonde child star, Jean Darling. But I was even more fascinated by the two rattlesnakes in the terrarium on the table next to Parr's microphone. On occasion, KWCR lis-

teners heard some unusual sound effects.

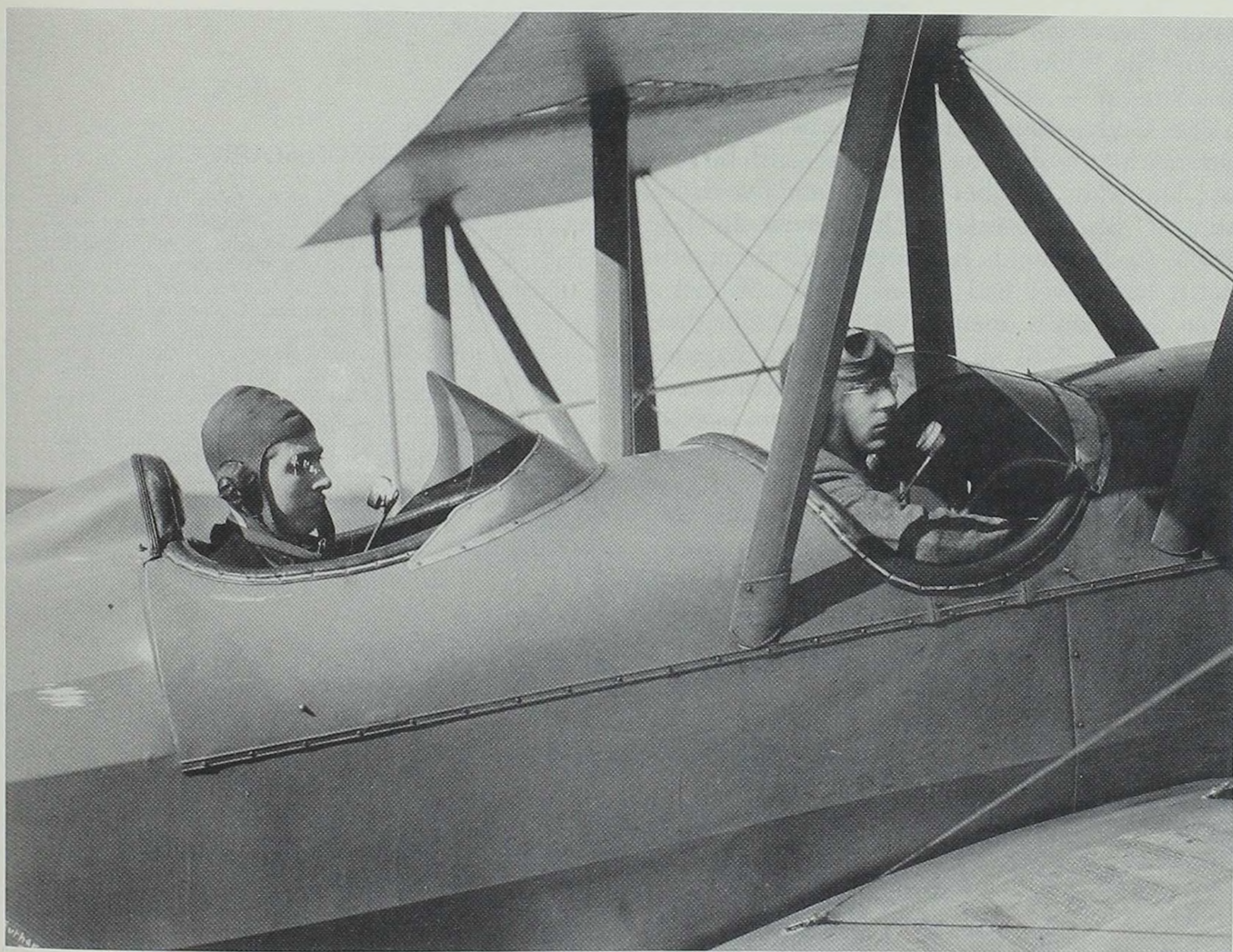
Cedar Rapids's best-known radio figure was Arthur Collins, son of Merle H. Collins, whose farms with their all-white buildings and rail fences circled Cedar Rapids. Arthur Collins began with a crystal set he fashioned from auto parts in 1919, when he was only nine years old. At fifteen, in 1925, using homemade equipment he had designed, he was almost the only radio operator in the United States to communicate daily with the MacMillan-Byrd expedition to the North Pole — the first such expedition to use airplanes. Collins was at the dock in New York when the expedition embarked; he had been invited by John Reinartz, the expedition's radio operator who knew of Collins's abilities. The *Gazette* of August 11, 1925, reported that Collins was receiving messages every day and forwarding them to Washington, D.C.

News of Collins's achievements spread among amateur radio operators, and soon people were writing to Collins asking where they could buy equipment like his. In May 1926, *Radio Age* published an article he had written about his equipment.

Collins began building sets in the attic of his parents' home. Later he took over the base-

Three thousand listen to Coolidge's inaugural address brought to an Iowa campus by radio. Cedar Rapids youngsters heard the radio speech in school assemblies.





ment. In 1932 he moved into his first small facility on First Avenue East. I sold him some second-hand office furniture, which he paid for with a postdated check. My employer was furious, but the check was good. A decade later, in 1944 and 1945, I flew on C-47s, B-17s, B-24s, and B-29s, all of which had Art Collins's equipment on board. By then he was Iowa's largest manufacturer.

Cedar Rapids was slow to catch on to the potential of the airplane. Our aviation equivalents of Tex Perham were Dan Hunter and Paul Shaw who, after World War I, began flying war surplus planes. Hunter established his first airport in 1920 south of Cedar Rapids. But four miles was too far out for people to come on Sundays to take a three-minute ride for five dollars so he moved to Simpson's pasture at the top of the Third Avenue West hill opposite the Chandler home.

Commenting on this move, Verne Marshall,

Barnstormer on weekends, Cedar Rapids car salesman on weekdays, pilot Paul Shaw (right) was instructing students in his Eagle Rock by 1930. Pilots like Shaw gradually showed Americans that planes were useful commercially, beyond air circus stunts.

the influential editor of the *Gazette*, commented that "the horse will be with us for a long time." Cedar Rapidians were still agreeing with him nine years later: they voted down a proposal for expanding the airport to permit passenger and mail service. So Iowa City got the eastern Iowa airmail and passenger plane stops, and on dark nights Cedar Rapidians could look to the south and see the reflection of the Iowa City beacon in the sky.

Nevertheless, in 1921, the *Gazette* paid the airmail fare of 24 cents an ounce to "airmail" a 150-pound *Gazette* reporter from New York to San Francisco — 2,356 miles, 14 days elapsed time, 33 hours actual flying time. But Cedar Rapidians who could take the train to Chicago,

watch the city's own Earl Whitehill pitch against the White Sox, and return home — all on a Sunday — were not impressed.

The Cedar Rapids boom years (and the nation's) hit the skids on my seventeenth birthday, Thursday, October 24, 1929, and five days later on "Black Tuesday," October 29. In the 1920s, Cedar Rapids had repeatedly bragged that it had never had a bank failure (in fact, three new banks opened for business in the decade). By 1933 all but two Cedar Rapids banks had closed, Merle Collins's farm company, which owned all those white farm buildings and fences, was bankrupt, and even all of us who had thriftily deposited our pennies each Tuesday throughout our school years lost all our savings.

But the Roaring Twenties, for all their problems and scandals, were great years to be alive in America. There has never been a decade to compare with it since. □

NOTE ON SOURCES

Examination of daily issues of the Cedar Rapids *Gazette* from January 1920 through December 1929 augmented the author's own experiences in Cedar Rapids during that decade. Three Cedar Rapids histories proved useful: Ralph Clements, *Tales of the Town: Little-known Anecdotes of Life in Cedar Rapids* (Cedar Rapids, 1967); Janette Stevenson Murray and Frederick Gray Murray, *The Story of Cedar Rapids* (New York, 1950); and Ernie Danek's *Cedar Rapids* (Woodland Hills, Calif., 1980). The author also referred to considerable miscellaneous material collected personally, including material given to him by Grace Walsh Van Winkel, a Cedar Rapids classmate who now lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The author interviewed Paul Shaw concerning his own aviation experiences in Cedar Rapids and Iowa City (where he now lives). A similar paper was read at the Cedar Rapids Public Library in 1985.



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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 (such as 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). Although standard length of a *Palimpsest* manuscript is twenty double-spaced, typewritten pages, the editor nevertheless is interested in reviewing shorter or longer submissions for possible publication. 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 enquiries to Ginalie Swaim, Editor, *The Palimpsest*, SHSI, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.



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