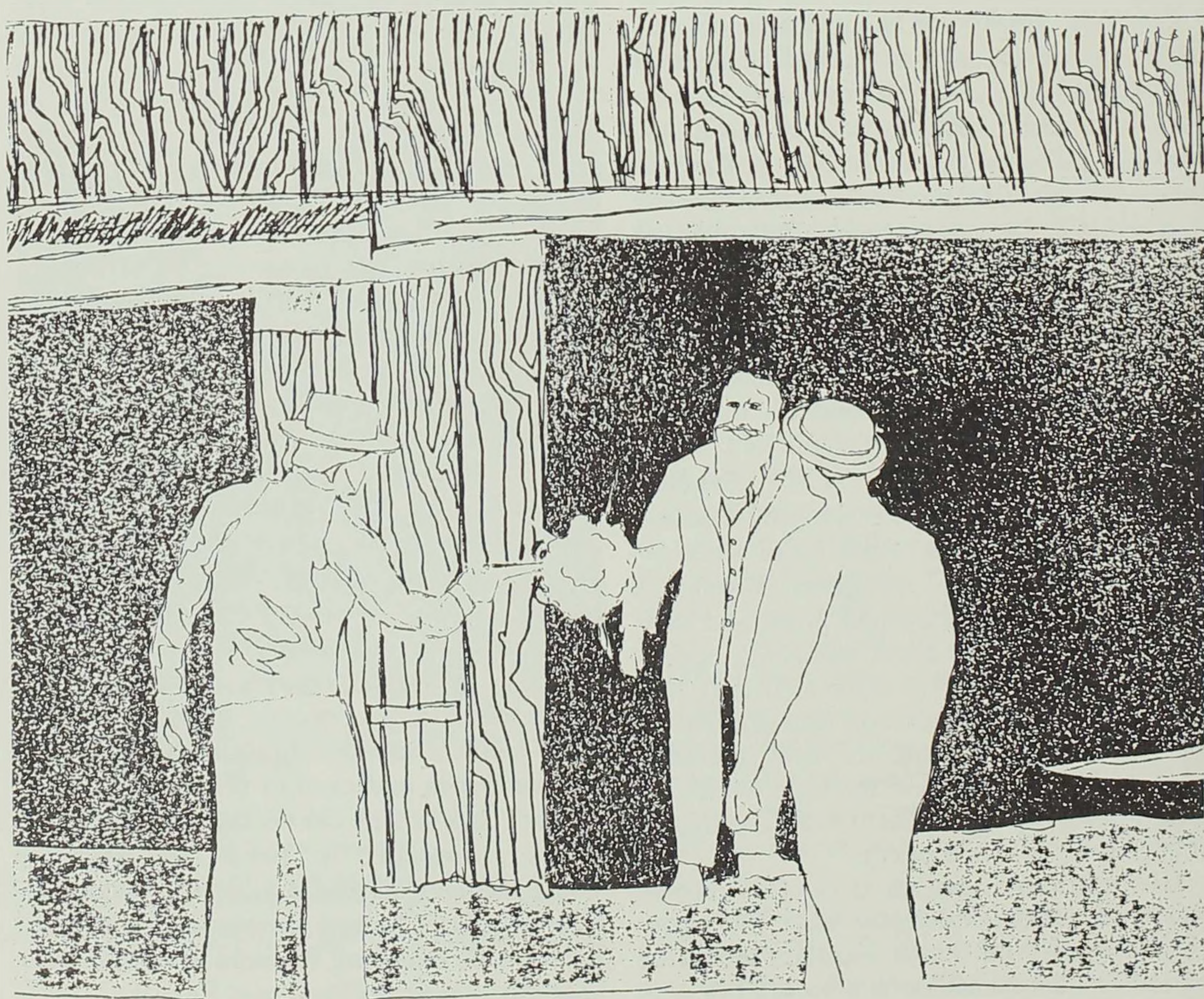


A Martyr for Prohibition

THE MURDER OF REVEREND GEORGE C. HADDOCK

BY THOMAS S. SMITH

ILLUSTRATED BY ROBERT D. DeHOET



Long before the national prohibition controversies of the early twentieth century, Iowa politics was sharply divided between determined "wet" and "dry" movements. During the 1870s and '80s many of the state's most volatile political controversies centered on the production and sale of alcoholic beverages. Moreover, disputes over the alcohol trade periodically overstepped the boundaries of politics and erupted into violence. The most famous example of this phenomenon occurred in Sioux City on August 3, 1886, when the Rev. George Had-dock, a Methodist minister who had been conducting a vigorous campaign to close that city's numerous illicit saloons, was murdered by an unidentified assailant.

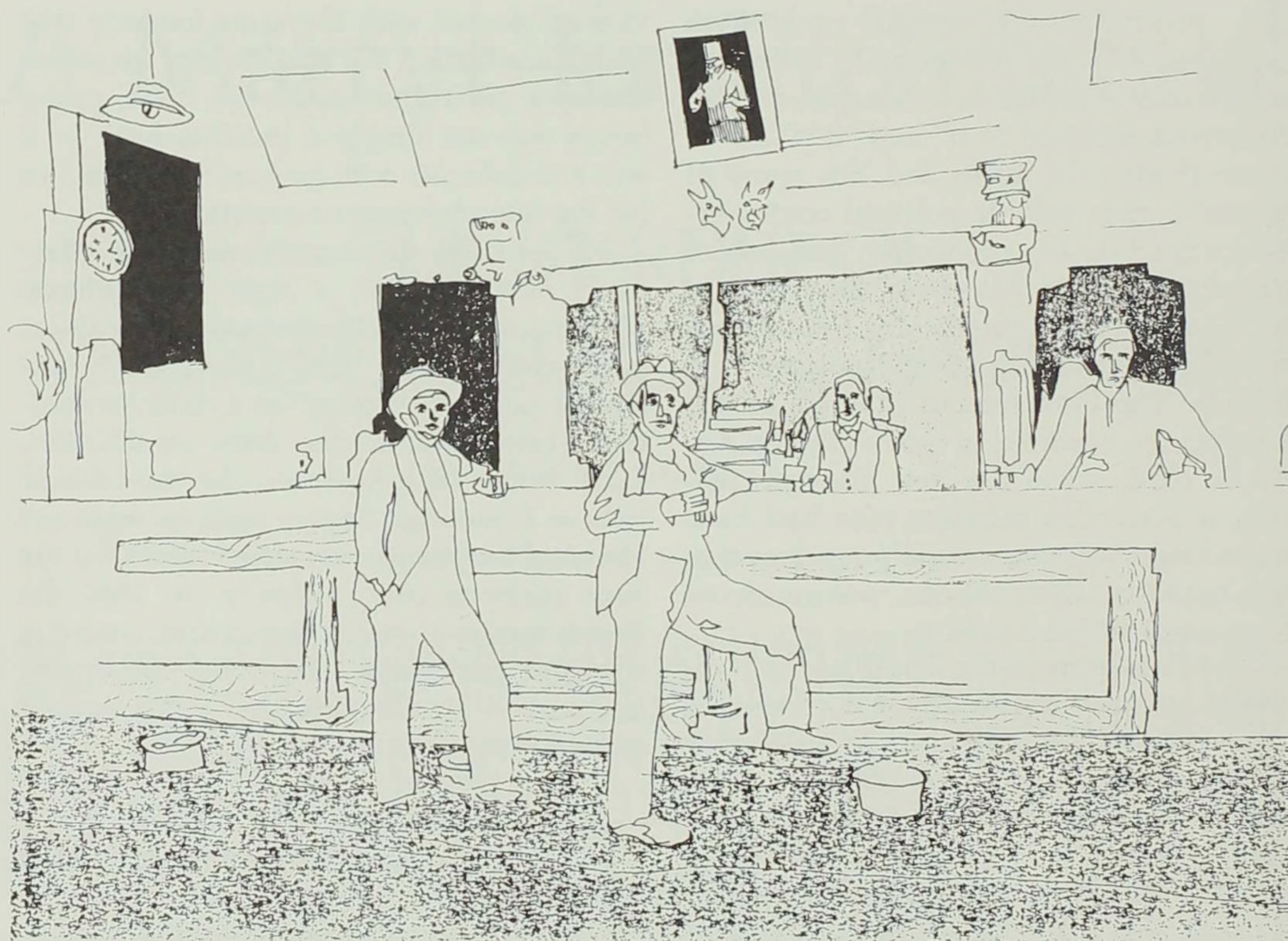
Before we examine the details of the Had-dock affair, it would be useful to review the context of prohibition politics in nineteenth century Iowa. In 1855 the Hawkeye State became officially "dry" when the state legislature passed a law prohibiting the sale or manufacture of intoxicating beverages within the state's boundaries. The law's impact was weakened, however, by clauses that permitted the production of ale, cider, and wine and their sale in quantities of no less than five gallons. Then, too, in the years after 1855 an unofficial form of local option adopted by compliant officials and businessmen effectively nullified the legislation.

By the 1870s a second major wave of prohibitionist sentiment — spearheaded by the Iowa Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Iowa State Temperance Alliance, and the Prohibition party — swept through the state. The Prohibition party was particularly important in this drive because it could serve as a siphon to drain off votes from the dominant Republican party if the GOP refused to adopt a sufficiently rigid stance. Prohibitionists

viewed alcohol with the same loathing that had characterized the abolitionists' attack on slavery a generation earlier. To them, prohibition was not simply a political issue — it was a moral crisis with profound implications for the fate of American society.

By the 1870s the Republicans were effectively committed to a rigid prohibitionist platform, while the Democrats adopted a local-option position. In 1872 Iowa voters ratified by popular referendum a strict prohibition amendment to the state constitution. Later in the year, however, the amendment (whose House and Senate versions were not identically worded) was struck down by the state supreme court. Finally, in 1884 the Republican-dominated legislature passed a stringent prohibition law. The well-organized and politically potent dry forces seemed to have won their crusade.

But if prohibitionist sentiment possessed a great deal of political clout, the tradition of local option, particularly in Iowa's urban centers, served to check effective enforcement of the new law. A particularly strong example of this can be found in Sioux City, which had undergone dramatic population growth beginning with the arrival of the railroad in 1868. Sioux City had emerged as a booming river town filled with new Irish, German, and Scandinavian workers attracted to the area by an expanding economy. The social ferment of a boom town, combined with the cultural backgrounds of German and Irish workers — for whom access to alcohol and a neighborhood saloon were valued community traditions — both worked against the establishment of a local consensus in support of the new legislation. Moreover, Sioux City businessmen tended to support illicit liquor sales, arguing that local option was necessary for continued urban growth. By the early 1880s, all of these factors contributed to a



"A rotten dive on Pearl Street"

thriving trade by the city's numerous "hole in the wall" saloons.

But in October 1885 Sioux City's prohibitionist forces were strengthened by the arrival of fifty-five-year-old George Haddock to head a local Methodist congregation. Haddock, a native of upstate New York who had held numerous pastorates in Wisconsin and Iowa, was a man fervently committed to putting a stopper on the flow of the liquor trade.

"The saloon oligarchy," Haddock declared, "is absolutely indifferent to the nature of this or any government as long as it is undisturbed." A man like Haddock who believed that "there is no medium grade between universal anarchy on the one hand and universal obedience on the other" could hardly be expected to remain quiet in the

face of Sioux City's widespread disregard for state prohibition laws. He summarily dismissed any attempt to justify the toleration of alcohol on libertarian grounds because, he said, the "appeal to natural justice is the bitter irony of freedom. The appeal to personal liberty is the tragedy of toleration. The appeal to reason is the burlesque of intelligence." Haddock thundered that "the question of right assumes terrible significance. It is as impossible for George C. Haddock to keep silence as for Jeremiah of old or Savonarola at Florence or Luther at Wittenberg and Leipzig."

This was not simply blustery pulpit rhetoric. Haddock was quickly dubbed "Informer Haddock" by saloon patrons for his zeal in gathering evidence to support a series of in-

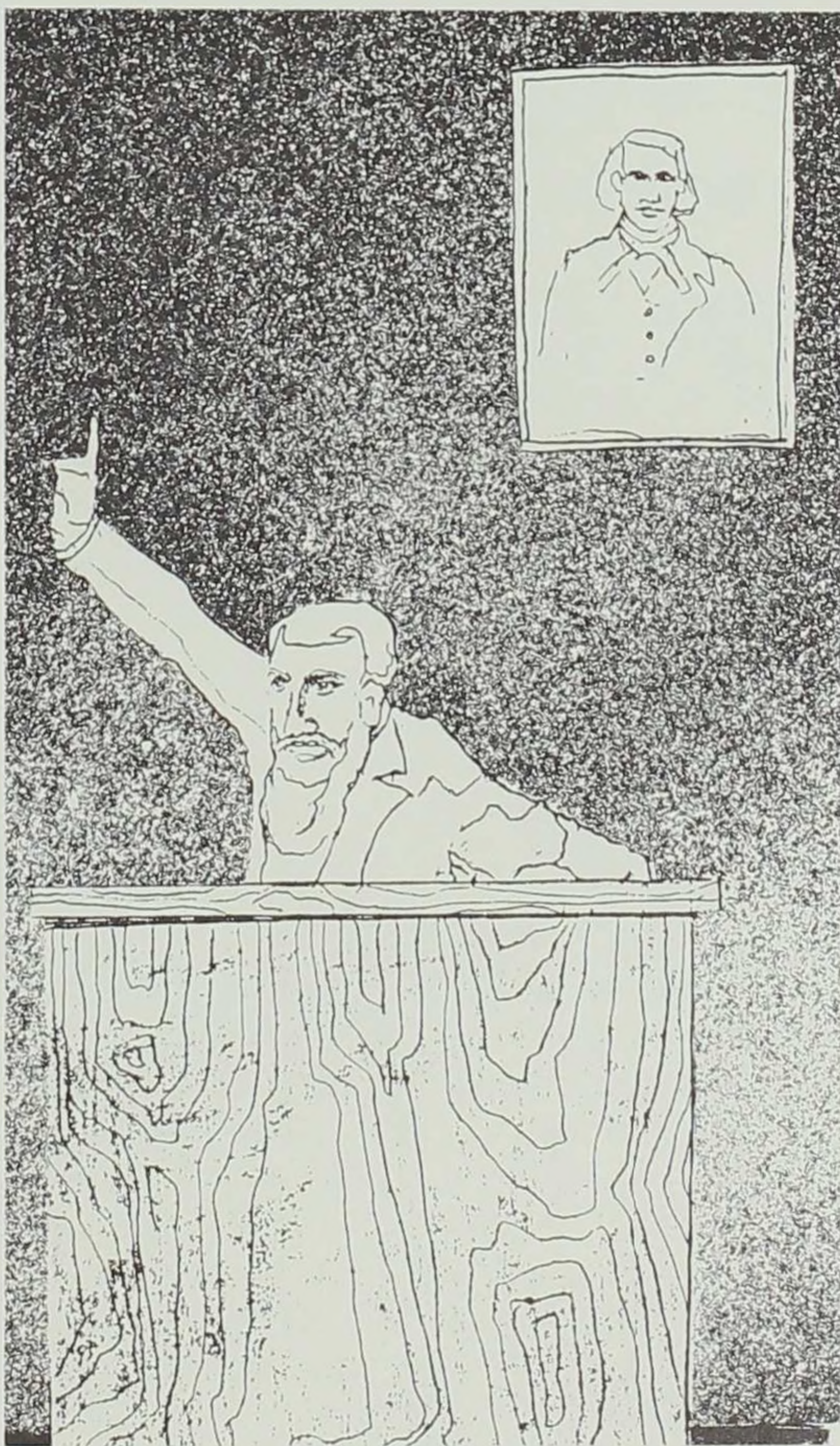
junctions against illegal bars.

By May 1886 a full-scale anti-drink crusade was being organized in Sioux City. Groups of ministers and prohibitionists regularly gathered in the rooms of the Rev. C. C. Turner, the Iowa Temperance Alliance emerged as an active force in the community, and a "Committee of Ladies representing 460 husbands and fathers and 1,060 children" signed a highly publicized petition calling for a halt to the liquor traffic and for the use of injunctions against saloons. Their activity climaxed on July 31, when the injunction cases (mainly based on information gathered by Haddock) finally received a court hearing. In case after case, permanent injunctions were obtained against the saloons. When an exasperated defense attorney asked Haddock on the witness stand "What is your business?" the minister shot back "To fight the Devil." The self-righteous, zealous, dry forces were now locked in a life-or-death struggle with brewers and saloon-keepers, whose livelihoods depended upon a continuation of local option.

During the injunction fight, prominent dry figures like Haddock had received numerous threats, but this failed to temper their zeal. As events proved, however, there were zealots on both sides of the prohibition struggle. On the evening of August 3, following their injunction triumph, Haddock and Turner drove a hired buggy into downtown Sioux City to gather information against the "Greenville" saloon. Shortly before ten o'clock, Haddock dropped off Turner at his home and proceeded back to Merrill's Livery Stable on Water Street to return the rig. When Haddock emerged from the stable, he saw that a crowd of men had gathered at the corner of Fourth and Water streets. Haddock strode towards the crowd armed with a heavy cane and a chain wrapped around his right fist, determined to walk home unhindered. Two men stepped forward and a pistol shot rang out. Haddock, wounded in the

neck, toppled forward and lay face down in the gutter. His carotid artery had been severed by the blast. Within hours the minister was dead.

Sioux City reacted furiously to the crime. The *Journal* reported that a large crowd representing "all classes and conditions of citizens" had gathered at the Sioux City courthouse to condemn this "wild offense which has disgraced the good name



"There is no medium grade between universal anarchy on the one hand and universal obedience on the other."

of this good city." A typical expression of feeling came from Sioux City's Law and Order League, which declared: "We shall push forward . . . in the name of God, in the interest of the homes of our city, with increased determination, yielding our lives, if need be, in the struggle." But demands that the murderers be punished could not compensate for the lack of hard evidence as to who actually killed George Haddock.

After a prolonged investigation, a coroner's

jury recommended the arrest of Harry Leavitt, the proprietor of what one observer termed "a rotten dive on Pearl Street where whiskey was free at a high price and virtue easy at a low price." Leavitt had fled to Chicago, but Frank Hill, business manager of the *Sioux City Tribune*, journeyed to Chicago and obtained a confession from him that accused John Arensdorf, an immigrant from Belgium and foreman of the Franz Brewing Company, of Haddock's murder. Indictments

Liquor Legislation in Iowa

The pendulum of prohibition has swung back and forth through Iowa history, ranging from a position of only moderate regulation to one of almost complete prohibition of the sale of alcoholic beverages. The driving forces behind the swings have been the intense, sometimes violent, emotions the issue has traditionally provoked among the state's citizens. The origins of the prohibition question can be traced back to the earliest years of settlement. Indeed, only a year after Iowa achieved statehood in 1846 its citizens were asked to decide whether liquor should or should not be sold in the state. The *Bloomington Herald* warned its readers that the liquor question was "one of the most momentous questions on which you were ever called to act." Iowans apparently took such prohibitionist warnings to heart; only Keokuk County voted in favor of liquor sales.

One might conclude from this that all the liquor dealers would have to close their doors and leave the state, but in fact liquor sales went on as before. It was not until 1855 that Iowa passed its first law prohibiting the sale of alcoholic beverages. Meanwhile, the temperance and prohibition forces were gathering steam. Organizations like the Sons of Temperance spread across the state, while local "dry" forces sought their own

solutions to what they saw as the liquor problem. In Mt. Pleasant, for example, they rounded up all the liquor in town and deposited it with a few local physicians to do with as they saw fit. In Dubuque, local prohibition forces went to the source of the problem, meeting in a Dubuque brewery.

The 1855 prohibition law placed fairly stringent restraints on the sale of liquor in Iowa, but the law was never very strictly enforced. Iowans' fervor for temperance waned over the years, and the prevalent attitude became one of apathy and disregard for the 1855 law. An unofficial local-option policy prevailed — in which each town set its own standards for liquor control — and bootlegging became common. The prohibition pendulum was swinging far in the direction of lenient enforcement.

But in the years after the Civil War the forces of temperance marched into battle again. The Ohio Woman's Crusade (which soon spread westward to Iowa) turned to religion to drive out its foe, storming local saloons to pray them out of existence. In Cincinnati it was reported that "the result of eight days of prayer and song was the closing of all saloons." The 1870s in Iowa saw the rise of the Blue Ribbon Movement, in which lecturers fanned out over the state to

were finally handed down against both Arensdorf and Leavitt, as well as Paul Leader, Fred Munchrath, Luis Plath, Alvin Koschnitski, George Treiber, and Sylvester Granda.

Arensdorf's trial commenced on March 23, 1887. The prosecution's case centered on the testimony of Leavitt and Koschnitski (alias "Bismarck," a fixture in Sioux City's saloon circuit) that Arensdorf had fired the lethal shot. In response, chief defense attorney G. W. Argo

of Le Mars attacked the integrity of prosecution witnesses and presented Arensdorf as the dual victim of the public's obsession with finding Haddock's killer and local bigotry against Sioux City's immigrant population. Trial testimony was so contradictory that the Davenport *Democrat* commented: "If cities were punished for their wickedness in these times, a disastrous earthquake might be predicted for the vicinity of Sioux City. The ability of one witness to contradict another has never been

call on Iowans to "take the pledge" and to wear a blue ribbon as a sign of their action. "Thousands are taking the pledge," one Des Moines observer noted, "and donning the colors of abstinence and self control." A Blue Ribbon Jubilee, complete with a grand procession and fireworks, was held in Marshalltown and fifteen thousand people attended.

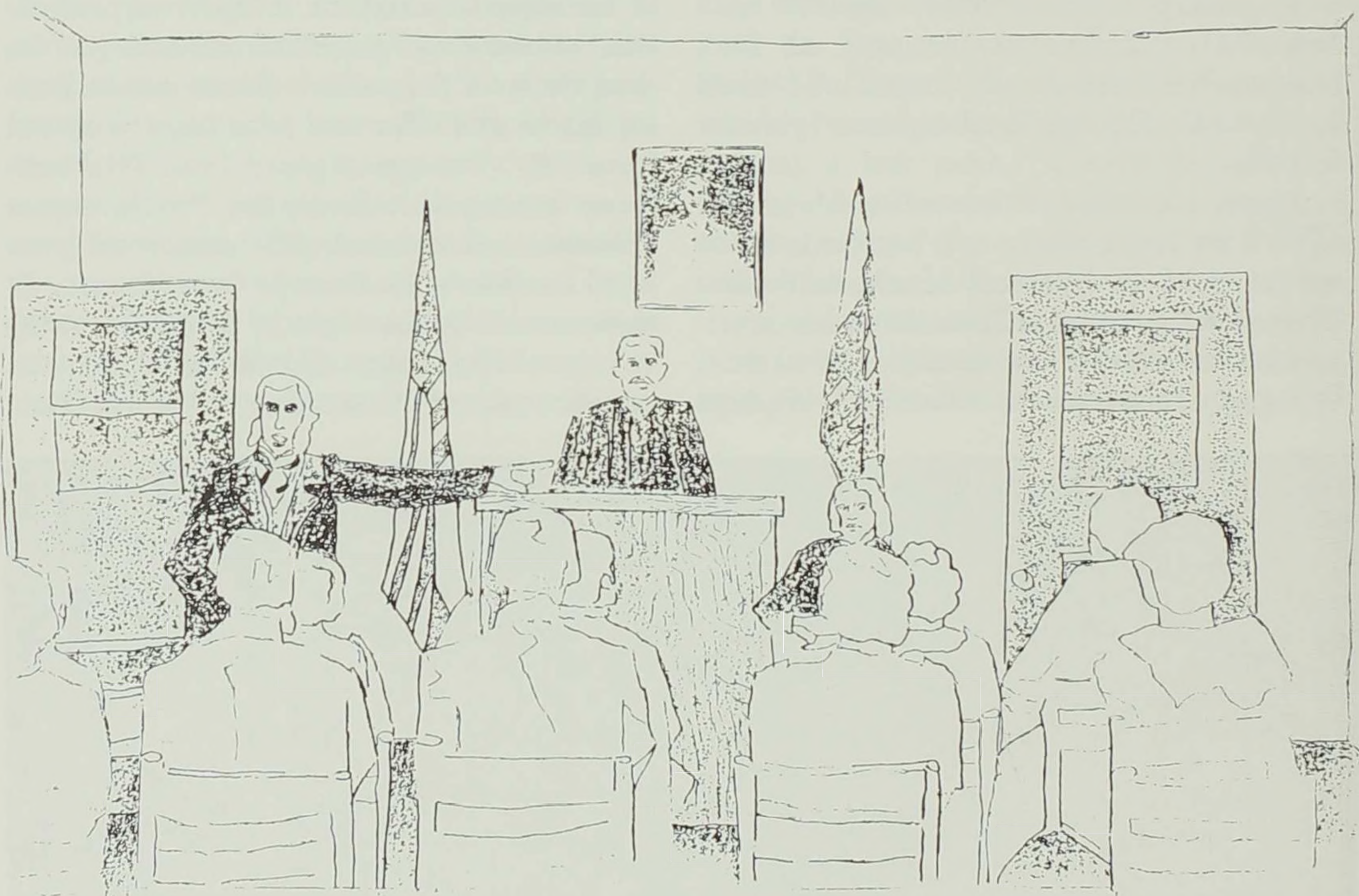
By the 1880s the forces of prohibition were strong again, and the result was the passage in 1885 of a more stringent law regulating the sale of alcohol. But the unofficial policy of local option had a long tradition behind it by then, and the "wet" forces opposed to statewide prohibition laws were not insignificant. The closing of an illegal saloon in Iowa City brought on a riot, and the outraged mob, in its zeal, broke into the cellar of the local brewery to express its dissatisfaction. South of Iowa City, a prosecuting attorney who tried to enforce the 1885 law was tarred and feathered.

The growth of anti-prohibitionist sentiment, in fact, led to a new easing of Iowa's liquor law in 1894. The Mulct Law, passed in that year, allowed Iowa's counties to decide for themselves whether to allow the sale of alcoholic beverages. Saloons would, in effect, be allowed to violate the provisions of the state prohibition law in return for the payment of a \$600 tax to the local county government. The provisions of the law proved popular; by 1906 forty-three of Iowa's ninety-nine counties allowed taverns to

operate within their boundaries.

But in the twentieth century the pendulum began to swing back once again to strict enforcement. Rising opposition to liquor sales led to the repeal of the Mulct Law in 1915, and in 1919 Iowa joined the rest of the country in nationwide prohibition under the provisions of the famous Eighteenth Amendment, the culmination of decades of struggle by the prohibitionist forces.

The victory for temperance was short-lived. One of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's first priorities when he took office in 1933 was to put into motion the repeal of national prohibition by means of the Twenty-First Amendment. Nationwide repeal did not, however, throw Iowa wide open to the liquor trade. In 1934, the state legislature passed the Iowa Beer and Liquor Control Act, which placed the State itself in the role of the wholesaler, so that wine and liquor could legally reach the consuming public only through official channels. There have been a number of challenges to the state liquor stores' monopoly on wine and liquor sales, but — with the exception of the legislature's repeal of the ban on the sale of liquor by the drink in 1963 — Iowa's liquor laws have remained largely unchanged. The fervor of prohibitionist and anti-prohibitionist emotions has calmed, and the pendulum now rests at the point of moderate regulation. — Julie E. Nelson



"About the only thing that has not been disputed is that Haddock is dead."

more successfully shown than during the murder trial there. About the only thing that has not been disputed is that Haddock is dead."

On April 17 the jury finally deadlocked at 11 to 1 for acquittal. Charges of bribery were immediately hurled by both sides, with juror John O'Connell (the single vote for conviction) claiming that the defense had asked him to name his price.

During Arensdorf's second trial, which began on November 14, 1887, Argo accelerated his attacks, accusing Leavitt, who in the months following the first trial had established himself as the manager of a brothel in downstate Michigan, of being the murderer. Moreover, the defense conducted a scathing assault on the "fanatical" prohibition movement, going so far as to attack the "conspiracy of Haddock" against prosperity and

growth in Sioux City. Following a repetition of testimony from the first trial, the jury voted for acquittal on the first ballot.

The trial of Munchrath, the scion of a prosperous local German family, also attracted a good deal of press coverage. In his October 1887 trial, which followed the pattern of conflicting testimony that had become the hallmark of the Haddock case, Munchrath was accused of "inciting deeds of violence to the man some assassin shot." The jury eventually handed down a guilty verdict, and Munchrath was sentenced to four years at Ft. Madison for manslaughter. The *Sioux City Daily Journal* jubilantly declared that "at last, after over a year's weary waiting, justice has overthrown one of the parties." Munchrath's conviction was not, however, perceived by many as a triumph for virtue and justice; in 1890 Demo-

cratic Governor Horace Boies commuted Munchrath's sentence.

Though the Haddock murder was never solved, Sioux City prohibitionists could take satisfaction in the subsequent community backlash against the liquor interests. Arguments that prohibition stifled urban growth were swept aside as the legacy of the martyr Haddock was used to galvanize dry sentiment. But if the prohibition forces won a battle in Sioux City, by the late 1880s they were beginning to lose the statewide war. In 1889 William Larrabee, a Republican dry, was replaced by the Democrat Boies, a former Republican who had abandoned the GOP because of its rejection of local option. Sentiment for less stringent liquor legislation began to develop, particularly among Iowa's German population. The state GOP, fearing a voter backlash that would outweigh militant dry support, began to soften its opposition to local option. Passage of the Mulct Law in 1894 essentially returned the state to the local-option policy that had been in effect between 1855 and 1884, and the liquor traffic resumed in Iowa's metropolitan centers and German-oriented counties. This policy prevailed until 1915, when a third major dry offensive restored a strict prohibition law to the statute books.

The image of the nineteenth century prohibitionist cause in Iowa that emerges from the polarization and violence that wracked Sioux City in the 1880s is one of a crusade whose inflammatory impact rivaled that of the abolition movement in the years before the Civil War. It is perhaps no coincidence that the dry

forces invoked the dead Haddock's name in the same sentence with that of John Brown. Both men served as part of the iconography of devoutly Protestant voters who were committed to a utopian vision of a Hawkeye State filled with sober workmen and empty jails. By the 1880s, however, an all-inclusive prohibition law was simply not tenable in Iowa. Population growth contributed to a growing cultural and ethnic diversity quite alien to the puritan visions of men like Haddock. If the Haddock case demonstrates that determined organization could overcome entrenched local-option sentiment, it also shows that the potential for intense and eventually violent opposition to prohibition was also present. In this sense, Haddock was martyred not simply by a few thugs but by his own vision of a culturally and socially homogeneous Iowa that never existed. □

Note on Sources

Newspapers consulted for this article included the *Sioux City Daily Journal*, the *Sioux City Daily Tribune*, and the *Davenport Democrat*. Monographic sources included: George W. Argo, *Who Killed Haddock?* (Minneapolis: Harrington and Smith, 1888); and Frank C. Haddock's biography of his father, *The Life of Rev. George C. Haddock* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1887). An excellent short survey of the Iowa prohibition movement can be found in: Ballard C. Campbell, "Did Democracy Work? Prohibition in Late Nineteenth-Century Iowa: A Test Case," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8 (Summer 1977): 87-116. For a survey of the demographic and social history of nineteenth century Sioux City, see: William Silag, "City, Town, and Countryside: Northwest Iowa and the Ecology of Urbanization, 1854-1900" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Iowa, 1979).

The editor wishes to thank William Maddix for his help in conducting the research for this article. Most of the information used by Julie Nelson in "Liquor Legislation in Iowa" was found in pamphlets issued by the Iowa Beer and Liquor Control Commission.