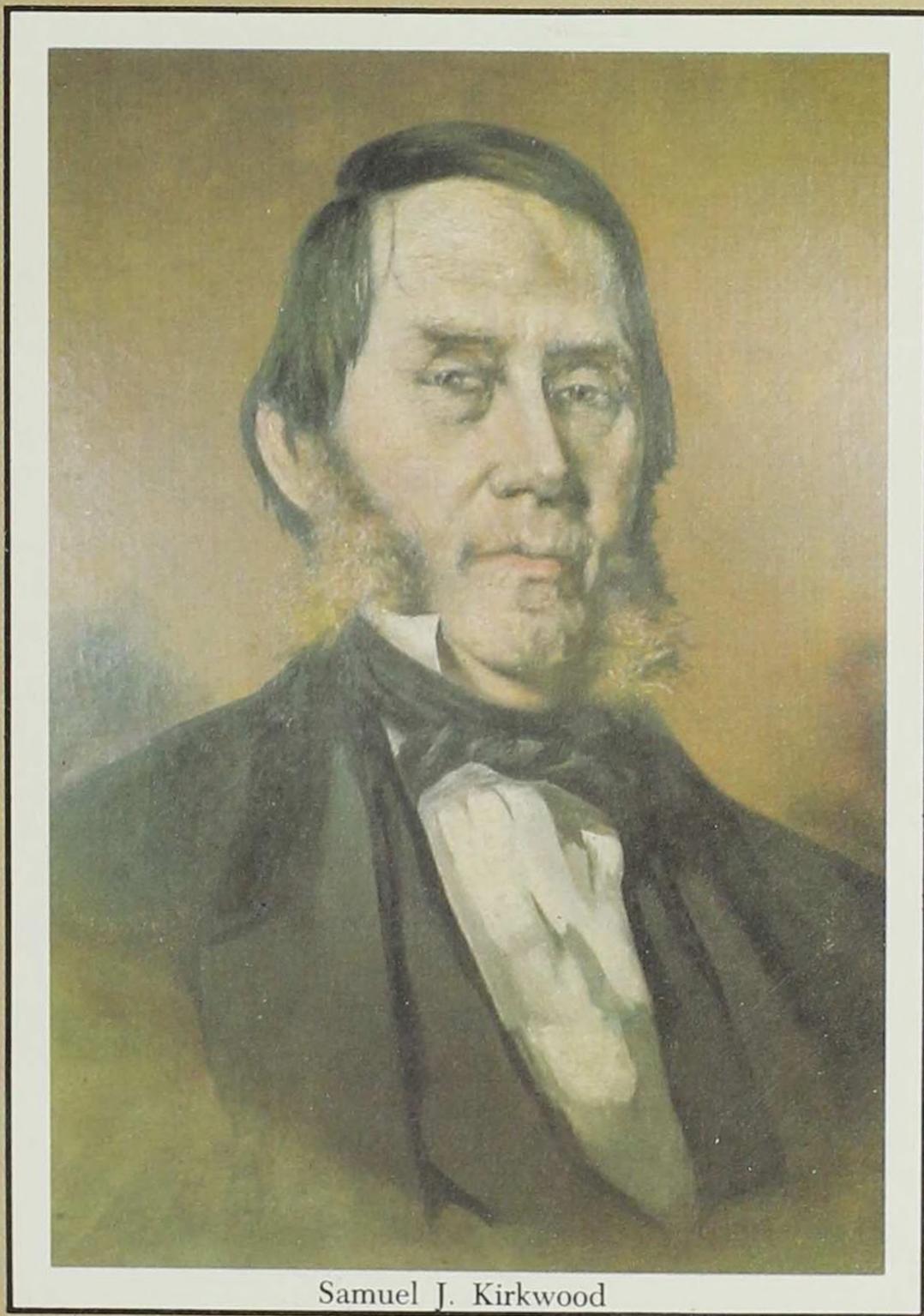


The  
Palimpsest

VOLUME 56 NUMBER 1

JANUARY / FEBRUARY 1975



Samuel J. Kirkwood

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

## A Message from the Director

When the format of *The Palimpsest* was changed two years ago, the Editor and Director felt that it would be fitting to recognize the Iowans who serve as members of the governing board of this institution by printing their names on this page. No governing board is listed in this issue. An explanation follows:

Prior to the implementation of a 1974 law, the Society had its own governing board of 18 Curators, nine appointed by the Governor and nine elected by the members of the Society. In June 1973, members of the Historical Society elected nine people to the then existent Board of Curators for terms lasting through June 1975. These Curators derived their authority from two sources: (1) a state law which was repealed June 30, 1974 (the same date terms of the Governor's nine appointees to the Board of Curators also expired), and (2) from the Articles of Incorporation of the Society. Prior to July 1974, state agency and corporate matters were coordinated during the regular board meetings and it was seldom necessary to think of two distinct entities.

The 1974 law established a State Historical Department with a Division of the State Historical Society, a Division of Historic Preservation (both located in Iowa City), and a Division of Historical Museum and Archives (located in Des Moines). The entire Department is to be governed by a State Historical Board of 12 people, half to be appointed by the Governor and the remainder to be elected by the members of the Historical Society by mailed ballot. The names of the six people whom the Governor appointed last August appeared in the last two *Palimpsests*. Because of legal complications and delays the Society has not yet elected its half of the State Historical Board.

Last September your Director was faced with the question of which governing board (or boards) to list on this page. Neither board was meeting at the time but the appointed members of the State Historical Board were making preparations to convene. Rather than including halves of two boards, I directed the names of the appointed members of the State Historical Board to be printed and the names of the elected Curators to be dropped. This decision caused some hurt feelings and some misunderstandings. For these I sincerely apologize. In their December 1974 meeting, the appointed members of the State Historical Board voted to discontinue the listing of the governing board (or boards) for the time being. Thus, no names appear here.

The above brings to focus the dual nature of the State Historical Society. For many decades there has been a good marriage between a state agency and a corporation. The two partners share the same name, they hold property in common, and their finances are intertwined. How does the corporation of the State Historical Society now relate to the Division of the State Historical Society? How do the nine elected Curators relate to the governance of the Society and to the State Historical Board once the latter body is fully constituted? These and a series of related questions are currently unresolved by law or precedent. Will the 1974 legislation necessitate a separation or even a divorce? I sincerely hope not and I plead for patience, sensitivity, and conciliation on the part of the people who must resolve the issues.

*Peter T. Harstad*  
Director

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# The Palimpsest

VOLUME 56

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L. Edward Purcell, Editor

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Cover: The oil portrait of Kirkwood on our cover shows him as he appeared in the late 1850s. The painting by Marshall Talbot, a contemporary of Kirkwood's, is distinctly different from the dignified portrait by George Yewell on p. 13. Both paintings hang in the Portrait Gallery of the Division of Historical Museum and Archives in Des Moines and are reproduced here through the courtesy and assistance of that Division.



### 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.

# THE POLITICAL FIRECRACKER: SAMUEL J. KIRKWOOD

by Herbert V. Hake

On January 13, 1876, Samuel J. Kirkwood was inaugurated for a third term as Governor of Iowa. The domed Statehouse on Grand Avenue was still under construction, and the temporary brick capitol was too small for gala events such as inaugurations. The ceremony was therefore held in the Opera House. On January 14, 1876, the *Des Moines Leader* carried the following story:

The inauguration of Governor Kirkwood was in progress at the Opera House. The last sweet strains of 'Listen to the Mocking Bird' had died away when Governor Kirkwood commenced his address. Just at this moment, a fiery ball came whirling down through the air, and, striking upon the top of one of the hacks between the Opera House and the Savery, bounded off into the street, where it lay for several moments, crackling, hissing and burning its way into the frozen ground. The terrified hackmen and bystanders looked on in astonishment at the strange sight, and wondered whether it were a slice of the Day of Judg-

ment or the fire of Prometheus, while the frightened horses careened and jumped about and champed their bits in terror. . . . Aside from a dent in the top, the carriage sustained no damage. Finally, the spluttering ceased, the mass cooled, and was speedily broken up and carried away by the curious.

The meteorite was a fitting salute to the first man in the history of the state who had been elected to a third term as Governor, who would soon be elected to a full term in the United States Senate, and who was destined, in five years, to be Secretary of the Interior in the Cabinet of President James A. Garfield. He didn't look like a political firecracker. Indeed, the opposition press neglected no opportunity to picture him as an untidy clodhopper. John Irish, a staunch Democrat, filed a story about a campaign speech by John A. Kasson at which the Governor introduced the speaker. He wrote: "Kirkwood, with the omnipresent 'chaw' in his cheek, and distilled nicotine dripping on his variegated shirt front, presented Kasson to the audience." But the facts could not be distorted. His explosive career in politics made him unique in the annals of Iowa history.

On June 9, 1887, Kirkwood wrote a summary of his early years in a letter to J. C. Cabell. The data was submitted for the *World's Fair Biographical Dictionary*. Of his pre-Iowa life, he wrote:

1. My full name is Samuel Jordan Kirkwood.
2. My father's name was Jabez Kirkwood.
3. My mother's name was Mary Alexander. When she and my father were married,

she was a widow. The name of her first husband was Wallace.

4. I was born on a farm in Hartford County, Maryland, on December 20, 1813.
5. I am not a 'graduate.' What education I had was at an academy kept in Washington City by John McLeod. My attendance ended when I was about fourteen years of age.
6. I went to Ohio in 1835—read law there and was admitted to the bar in 1843. Was Prosecuting Attorney of Richland County, Ohio, for four years, 1845 to 1849.

7. Was a member of the Convention 1850-1 that formed the present Constitution of the State of Ohio.

8. Removed to Iowa in 1855 and engaged in milling and farming.

Dan Elbert Clark, who wrote the story of Kirkwood for the Iowa Biographical Series, told how the erstwhile Ohio attorney now "became a full fledged Iowa miller and farmer, wearing the dusty coat of one and the soil-stained boots of the other." Kirkwood purchased a part inter-



The scene of Kirkwood's gala and the crash of the fireball, Fourth Street in Des Moines, shown here in 1875 one year before Kirkwood's third inaugural. The Opera House is on the right, the Savery on the left.

est in a flour and grist mill at Coralville on the Iowa River and in a farm of about 1200 acres adjoining the mill site. He had married an Ohio girl, Jane Clark, in 1843, and it was because of enthusiastic letters from Ezekiel Clark, Jane's oldest brother who was operating a mill and farm near Iowa City, that the Kirkwoods decided to move to Iowa and to form the partnership of Clark and Kirkwood.

Samuel Kirkwood had been a Democrat in his young manhood, but, as Leland L. Sage has observed in his book, *A History of Iowa*, "he was shocked and disillusioned by what he saw as a youth of the slave trade in Washington, D.C., and was completely won over to anti-slavery views during his residence in Ohio before coming to Iowa in 1855, so could not in good conscience remain a Democrat." He was a delegate from Johnson County to the Convention called in Iowa City on February 22, 1856, for the purpose of organizing the Republican Party in Iowa. His speech in the Stone Capitol was so decisive an influence upon the other delegates to the Convention that he was no longer permitted to remain in quiet seclusion at his mill on the Iowa River.

In later years, the *Iowa City Daily Republican* recalled that,

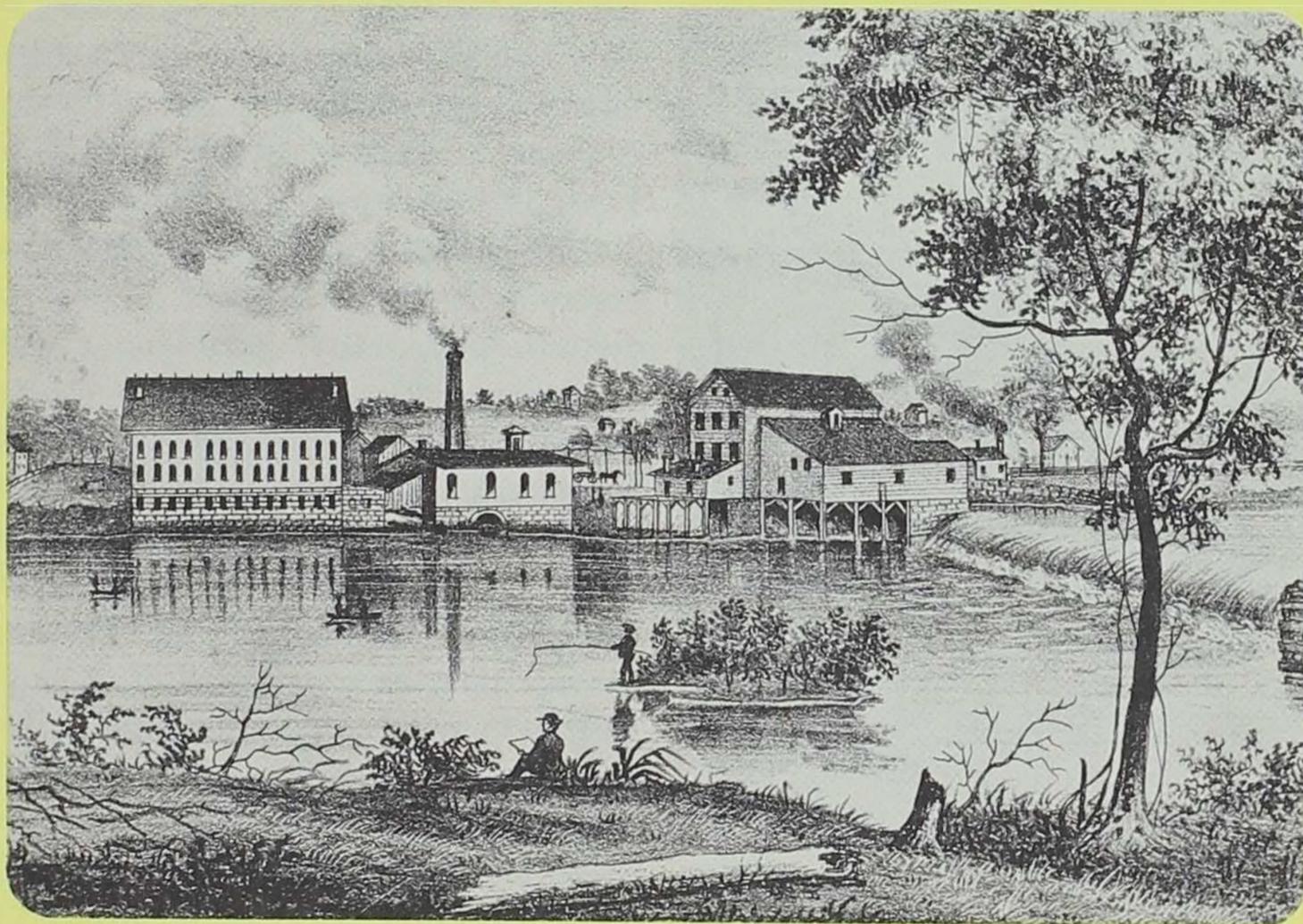
a delegation of prominent citizens of Iowa City drove up the river a couple of miles and, halting before an old grist mill, called out a rugged, flour-covered man named Samuel J. Kirkwood and informed him that the people of Johnson County had nominated him for the State Senate. Taking a seat on a convenient log, the miller promptly explained why he could not be a candidate, winding up with a declaration that the music of the dam and the hum of his machinery were more agreeable to him

than the contentions of politics. "But you MUST run," said the emphatic Bob Finkbine. A few more enthusiastic expressions, followed by the widespread favor with which the nomination was received throughout the county settled the question, and Mr. Kirkwood entered the legislature and public life in Iowa.

The year was 1856. The fuse of a political firecracker had been lighted.

The casual dress of the State Senator, his lack of ostentation and his outspoken opposition to slavery made "Sam" Kirkwood, as he was known by then, a successful candidate when he sought the Republican nomination for Governor in 1859. His opponent on the Democratic side was Augustus C. Dodge. *The Bloomfield Clarion* unwittingly gave Kirkwood a campaign asset by referring to the Republican candidates for state office as the "Plough-handle Ticket." The two candidates for Governor were scheduled for a joint appearance in the little city of Washington, Iowa. Dodge's supporters groomed four white horses to pull the finest carriage in town for a triumphal entrance by their candidate. The Republicans countered this elegance by bringing Kirkwood to the speakers' stand in a lumber wagon drawn by a yoke of oxen. The inference was unmistakable. At the end of the campaign, on October 11, 1859, Samuel Jordan Kirkwood was elected Governor of Iowa by a majority of 3,170 votes over Augustus Caesar Dodge.

In 1860, Governor Kirkwood gave Abraham Lincoln his wholehearted support at the Republican National Convention in Chicago even though he realized that the nomination of Lincoln for President might aggravate the breach between the North and South. After Lincoln was elected,



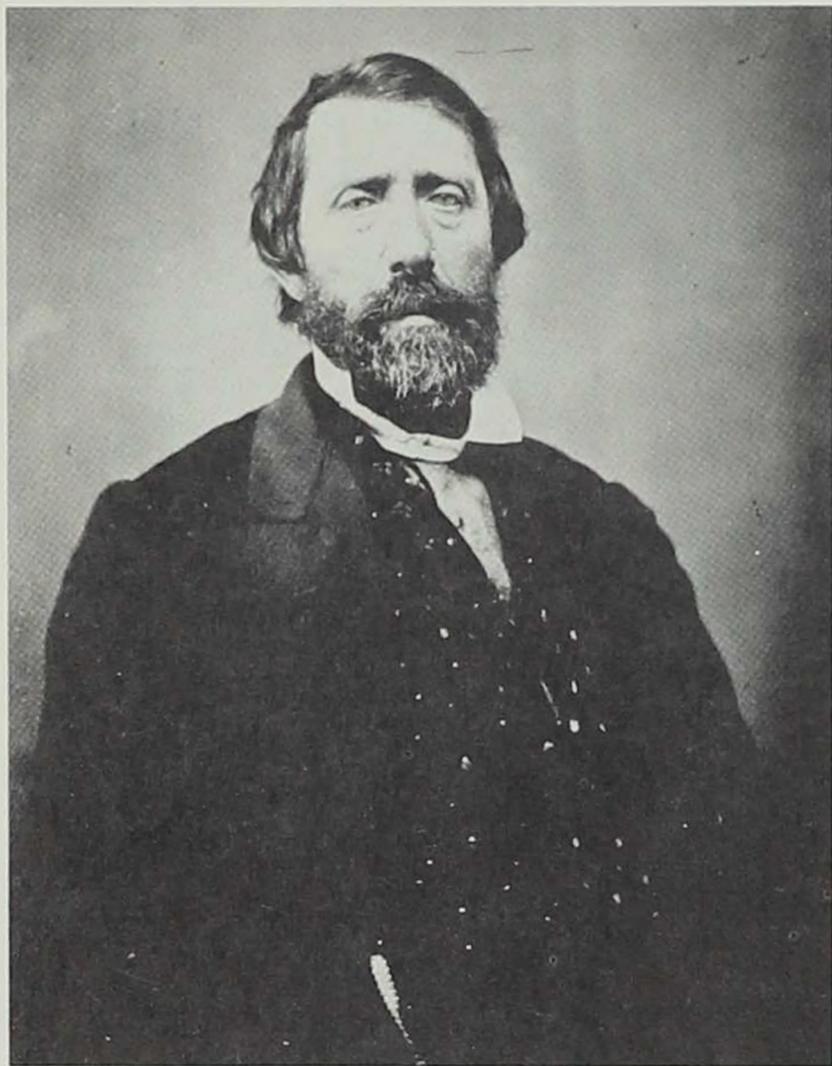
*Kirkwood's Mill in Coralville, on the right. The other buildings were a paper mill (center) and a woolen mill (left).*

Kirkwood made a trip to Springfield, Illinois, to call upon the President-elect before his departure for Washington, D.C. What the two men said to each other was not recorded verbatim, but it is known that the Governor gave Lincoln his unqualified pledge of allegiance. Later, he journeyed to the nation's capital to witness the inauguration of his friend from Illinois.

When the firing on Fort Sumter began the Civil War on April 12, 1861, Kirkwood received a request from the President for one regiment of men. The telegraph line from the east did not extend beyond Davenport at that time, and William Vandiver, then a member of Congress, took the first train to Iowa City and delivered the telegram to Kirkwood in person. He found

the Governor in boots and overalls working in his garden. When he read the message, Kirkwood exclaimed: "Why, the President wants a whole regiment of men! Do you suppose, Mr. Vandiver, I can raise that many?" His misgivings were soon set to rest. In less than 24 hours, the services of 15 or 20 companies had been offered to Kirkwood. The Governor found himself embarrassed because there were more volunteers than the War Department could outfit with arms and clothing.

The obligations of the Iowa "War Governor" were not limited to enlisting regiments for service on distant battlefields. There were also hazards at home which had to be faced. In the early summer of 1861, the First Regiment of Iowa Infantry was



*Samuel J. Kirkwood*

sent down the Mississippi River to St. Louis—ultimately to fight at Wilson's Creek, and the Second Iowa Regiment was being mobilized in Keokuk. Kirkwood had been urging the War Department in Washington to send arms for the military equipment of these volunteers. On August 1, 1861, he finally got some action. Thirty-five tons of supplies, including rifles and ammunition, arrived in Keokuk. News of this shipment reached the ears of Missouri guerillas led by a Confederate officer named Martin Green.

Green decided to attack the town of Athens, on the northern boundary of Missouri, where Colonel David Moore had set up a recruiting base for the Union. Directly opposite Athens, on the Iowa side of the Des Moines River, was the railroad town of Croton. If the attack on Moore succeeded, the guerillas would wade across

the shallow river and commandeer a train which would take them to Keokuk, where they would confiscate the entire shipment of arms. It didn't work out that way.

Rumors of the rebel plan spread quickly, and a company of volunteers called the Keokuk Rifles reinforced Colonel Moore's force in Athens. The attack by the guerillas on August 5 failed. The rebel cannons were aimed too high, and several cannonballs arched over the river and fell harmlessly on Iowa soil. But the guerillas did not follow them. They retreated in such disorder that the cannons were left where they had been fired. As a result of the guerilla activity, Governor Kirkwood ordered Colonel Grenville M. Dodge to organize a regiment of infantry to protect the southern counties in Iowa. But there were no more attempted invasions. Evidently, the guerillas had learned their lesson.

In 1862, there was a threat to Iowa from the north. The Sioux Indians were on the warpath in southern Minnesota. Several whites were killed in the farming country around New Ulm. Settlers in northwest Iowa abandoned their homes and fled to the more thickly populated areas of the state. It was only five years after the Spirit Lake Massacre, and there were fearful expectations of renewed danger from the Sioux. Governor Kirkwood issued orders for the organization of five companies of state troops to protect the frontier. They were called the Northern Iowa Border Brigade.

The Battle of Athens in Missouri and the Sioux raids in Minnesota had been threats to Iowa borders. There were also dangers within the state. One of these was disloyalty to the Union. In various parts of

Iowa, Confederate sympathizers pondered ways to secretly help the South. An outspoken leader of a group in Keokuk County was a Baptist preacher named Cyfert Talley, who had come to Iowa from Tennessee. The Union victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg in July of 1863 had prompted the so-called "Copperheads" to become increasingly active in gathering arms and ammunition for shipment to the Confederacy. On August 1, 1863, Talley and some of his followers held a meeting in a grove near South English. After the meeting, they drove their wagons through town on their way back to their homes in the Skunk River valley. Loyal supporters of the Union taunted the "Copperheads," and, in the heat of argument, a shot was fired. Shooting by both sides followed, and, either by accident or design, Cyfert Talley was shot through the head. He died instantly. This had a sobering

effect upon everyone, but the followers of Talley vowed they would return to South English for vengeance.

News of Talley's death spread through "Copperhead" country, and more than a thousand Talley sympathizers from Keokuk, Wapello, Mahaska, and Poweshiek Counties organized the "Skunk River Army." The people of South English appealed to Governor Kirkwood for help, and the militia was ordered into Keokuk County. The Governor went in person to Sigourney, the county seat, and made a speech from the courthouse steps. The speech was impromptu, but it was forceful and direct. Kirkwood left no doubt that he would use the full powers of his office to stop the rebellion. By morning, the "Copperhead" camp was deserted.

Years later, Kirkwood received a letter from N. P. Chipman, who had been a member of the staff of General Curtis. Chipman wrote:

There are many incidents & events in the history of Iowa to be told hereafter by the Biographer and historian of less importance than that little campaign. For your promptness & vigor in quenching that spark, the people of Iowa should be thankful. There was a good deal more danger in that rebel camp of a thousand men than was generally thought.

The year 1863 marked the close of Kirkwood's second term as Governor. No one before him had ever served two consecutive terms as chief executive of Iowa, and the anti-third-term position taken by George Washington as President was thought to be mandatory for a Governor as well. Kirkwood still had political aspirations, but these did not include a third term as Governor. Accordingly, William M. Stone was chosen as the Repub-

#### Note on Sources

This article is based upon Henry W. Lathrop's *Life and Times of Samuel J. Kirkwood* (Iowa City, 1893), which was personally approved by Kirkwood before publication; an autobiographical letter written by Kirkwood to J. C. Cabell on June 9, 1887, preserved in the Manuscript Collection of the State Historical Society in Iowa City; a letter written by N. P. Chipman to Kirkwood on May 18, 1865; autobiographical material which Kirkwood included in his 1883 *Report on a Completed Section of Oregon and California Railroad*, preserved in manuscript by the State Historical Society of Iowa; and the book on *Samuel Jordan Kirkwood* written by Dan Elbert Clark for the Iowa Biographical Series (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1917).

The references to the Northern Iowa Border Brigade are in Jacob Van der Zee's "Forts in the Iowa Country," *The Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 12 (1914), 199. The nomination of Kirkwood for a third term as Governor was described by Jacob A. Swisher in "A Convention Stamped," *The Palimpsest*, 9, 10 (October 1928), 349-56, and *The Iowa City Republican* for July 7, 1875. The disenchantment of Kirkwood with the Democrats was noted by Leland L. Sage in *A History of Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1974), 123. As indicated in the text, the author has also quoted from newspapers published during Kirkwood's public career.

lican candidate, and the Democrats picked James M. Tuttle as their standard-bearer. It was significant that both candidates had been soldiers and therefore had the glamor of war heroes.

Since he was not running for anything, Kirkwood was in a position to speak only as a vigorous incumbent. In Dubuque, where disloyal sentiments had often been expressed, the Governor gave notice that he would be no "lame duck" for the remainder of his term in office. He had heard rumors that a mob might be raised in Dubuque if the draft were instituted. "I tell you," he said, "I will see to it that any mob that is started shall be put down." Then he told his audience how the uprising in Keokuk County had been suppressed. "It commenced on Saturday," he said. "I received word of the position of affairs on Tuesday, and by Wednesday night I had five companies and one piece of artillery on the ground, and by Thursday night five more companies and another piece of artillery; and there was not a blank cartridge there. And I tell you if it becomes necessary for me to come here to Dubuque on the same errand, I shall not bring a blank cartridge here." It was not necessary for him to come to Dubuque on the same errand.

Endorsement of the Kirkwood ultimatum was instantaneous. "I cannot permit a day to elapse," wrote William Duane Wilson, "without telling you the intense satisfaction I had in reading your 100-pounder speech in Dubuque. Its telling effect upon the Copperheads in the State will be equal to a standing army of 5000 men, well armed."

President Lincoln had been pondering ways to reward the valiant Governor of

Iowa for his two terms of loyal service. In his autobiographical letter to J. C. Cabell, Kirkwood noted the nature of this reward: "Was appointed by Pres. Lincoln & confirmed by the Senate as Minister to Denmark, session of 1863-64, but declined the appointment as I thought I could do better service as Gov. of Iowa. Mr. Lincoln very graciously held my declination open until the expiration of my term as Governor in January 1864 & then I made my declination final." Kirkwood had no interest in a job on foreign soil. He had his eye on the United States Senate. The political firecracker still had some charges of powder which had not yet exploded.

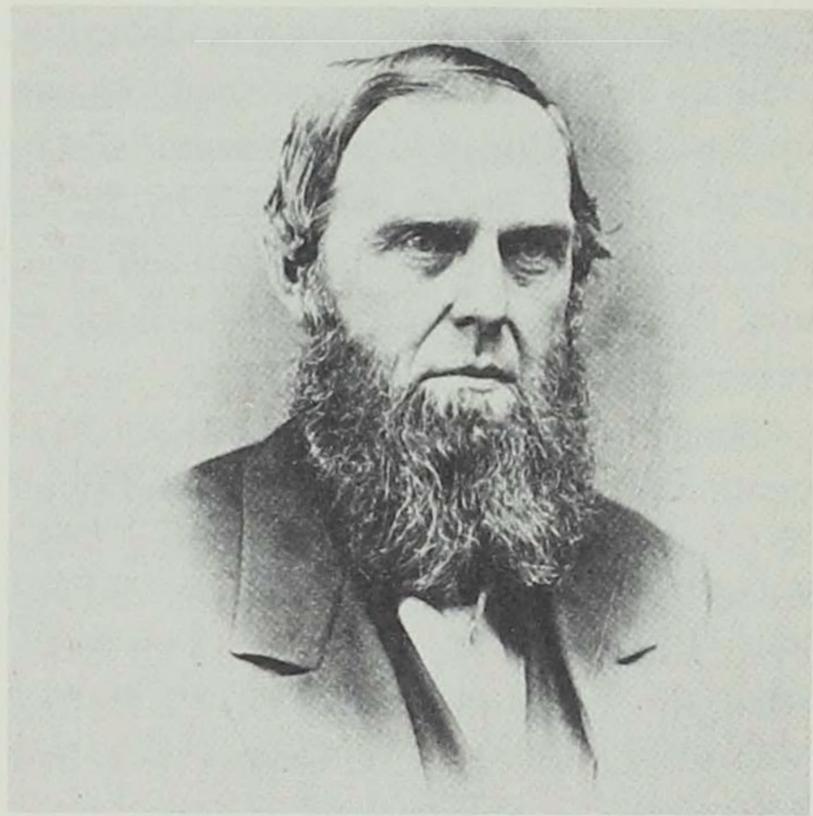
Until the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified in 1913, United States Senators were not elected by direct vote of the people as they are now. They were chosen by the state legislatures. Kirkwood had enough influence with the Iowa legislature to be reasonably certain that he could give his friend, James W. Grimes, some anxious moments if he decided to be a candidate for Grimes's seat in the Senate. However, Kirkwood regarded Grimes as a valuable public servant, as well as a close friend, and he asked that no efforts be made to jeopardize the reelection of the incumbent.

In 1865, after President Lincoln was elected to a second term and had been inaugurated for a second time, he appointed James Harlan as Secretary of the Interior. Lincoln's son, Robert Todd Lincoln, had become engaged to Senator Harlan's daughter, Mary, and the Senator was suddenly admitted to the Inner Circle. In order to accept the Cabinet post, Harlan had to give up his seat in the Senate, and a successor needed to be chosen. The pros-

pect of a senatorship was just as attractive to Kirkwood in 1865 as it had been in 1863, when he refused to run against Grimes. Kirkwood was the obvious choice, but for some obscure and, perhaps, politically motivated reason, Governor Stone did not appoint Kirkwood to fill the vacancy. He preferred to wait until the legislature convened in January of 1866.

In the meantime, President Lincoln had been assassinated, and Harlan, after brief and reluctant service in the Cabinet of President Andrew Johnson, decided to go back to the Senate, both for the remainder of his unexpired term and for the new term beginning in 1867. When the members of the General Assembly converged upon Des Moines in 1866, the Republican caucus did its preliminary work in the Savery Hotel. The Republicans were in overwhelming control of the Assembly, and their decision on candidates was tantamount to election. Harlan pulled enough patronage ropes and claimed enough Methodist support to give him an edge over Kirkwood. When the General Assembly met in joint convention, the "War Governor" was elected to the short term ending on March 3, 1867, but Harlan had collected enough political debts to win election for the full six-year term beginning on March 4, 1867.

On January 20, 1866, Kirkwood's credentials were received and filed in the Senate, and on January 24, he was formally presented to the members of the upper house by his colleague, James W. Grimes. As a Senator with a term of only a little more than a year to serve, Kirkwood did not play an especially significant role, but he was by no means a silent partner to Grimes, and he raised the eyebrows of the



*James Harlan (courtesy Division of Historical Museum and Archives)*

Establishment by crossing swords with Charles Sumner, the perennial Senator from Massachusetts. However, no one took him very seriously, because it was generally known that the familiar presence of James Harlan would again grace the Senate in 1867. When the 39th Congress adjourned on March 3, 1867, Kirkwood returned to Iowa City, where he remained in private life for the next eight years.

During this period of watchful waiting, Kirkwood resumed the practice of law, attended a convention held in St. Louis for the purpose of considering the relocation of the national capital at some point in the Mississippi Valley, was briefly involved as President of an ill-fated venture known as the Iowa and Southwestern Railroad Company, became a member of the Board of Trustees of the Iowa State Agricultural College at Ames, and rejected an appointment as Minister to Turkey.

In 1872, his recurring wish to win election to a full term in the United States

Senate was set aside by his friendship for William Boyd Allison, who wished to move up from the House of Representatives to the seat in the Senate occupied by James Harlan. In this bitter contest, Allison won, and it was Harlan's turn to go back to private life.

Then came the Republican State Convention of 1875. There was a ground swell of party enthusiasm for nominating Kirkwood as Governor, but Kirkwood did his best to ignore it. He was primed for 1876, when the legislature would elect a United States Senator. James W. Grimes, who had helped to save President Johnson from impeachment, had resigned his seat in the Senate because of ill health. In 1870, James B. Howell of Keokuk had been elected to fill the unexpired term of Senator Grimes, and George G. Wright of Keosauqua had been elected for the regular term following the short term of Howell. Wright was not interested in running again, and both Kirkwood and Harlan saw in this development a chance to go back to Washington. Kirkwood, who had his heart set upon a full term as a Senator, did not wish to do anything which might eliminate him from the senatorial race in 1876. He therefore announced that he would positively refuse to accept the nomination for Governor, even if it were tendered to him.

But the nomination of Kirkwood was unanimous. Jacob A. Swisher wrote the story of what happened:

To Kirkwood came a telegram from John H. Gear, William Larrabee, Ed Wright, R. S. Finkbine, J. G. Foote and J. Q. Tufts: 'All candidates withdrawn in your favor. You are nominated by acclamation. You must accept. It will come out all right.' And

from Nathaniel B. Baker, Adjutant General during the Civil War, came the friendly assurance, 'It could not be helped. It was the only road out. And now, I think it does not hurt you on U.S. Senator.' R. S. Finkbine was even more certain on this point, for he was confident that Kirkwood's election as Governor would give him 'a hold on the party for the Senatorship which neither Hell nor Harlan could defeat.'

A lone locomotive had raced over the Rock Island railroad from Des Moines to Iowa City on the day before the Convention. Besides the engineer and the fireman, it carried Senator William B. Allison, his private secretary, Joseph Morgan, and Jacob Rich, a veteran Iowa journalist—all of Dubuque, prominent figures in the Republican party and intimate friends of Samuel J. Kirkwood. They were afraid that James B. Weaver of Bloomfield—with a record of distinguished service in the Civil War—would be nominated for Governor. His support came principally from the Temperance element of the party.

Kirkwood apparently had told the ambassadors of the locomotive expedition that he would accept the nomination, but he was slow in responding publicly. "Why in thunder don't you accept? Answer!" read an impatient telegram from Ed Wright. Finally the candidate, with an air of reluctance, wired his consent: "If I must, say yes for me."

Within five days of his inauguration as a third-term Governor, he was elected to serve a full six years as United States Senator, but, as he would not take his seat in the Senate for more than a year (on March 4, 1877), he served a little more than one-half of his third term as Governor before he resigned that office.

Just before the 46th Congress opened,



Robert S. Finkbine (courtesy Division of Historical Museum and Archives)

James G. Blaine was in Des Moines and, meeting his old friend, R. S. Finkbine, he asked him what kind of a Senator Governor Kirkwood would make. Finkbine's answer was: "Some day when you least expect it, when the matter is before the Senate involving a Constitutional question, he will get up, apparently without any previous preparation, and, in a speech of no great length, will discuss that question and present every point so clearly, illustrating it so aptly, that you will all wonder why you have not taken the same view and reached his conclusions."

On June 21, 1879, Mr. Blaine again met Mr. Finkbine, this time in Washington, and he said to him: "Your prediction in regard to Governor Kirkwood has been verified. The Constitutional question has arisen. The speech has been made. His solution was the true one. And it has been adopted."

In his brief autobiography, Kirkwood noted that,

I was elected United States Senator for a full term commencing with Mr. Hayes' administration in March, 1877. I resigned the 4th or 5th of March 1881 to enter the Cabinet of Mr. Garfield and served until April 1882. Of course, Mr. Arthur wished to be surrounded by persons of his own choice, just as Mr. Garfield had been.

Garfield died of an assassin's bullet on September 19, 1881, so it is obvious that Kirkwood did not resign his Cabinet post immediately. There was no friction with the new President. Kirkwood left the Cabinet because he honestly believed that President Arthur would prefer a man of "his own choice."

During Kirkwood's career in government, he had been elected three times as Governor, twice as a United States Senator, and once appointed to serve as a member of a President's Cabinet—the only man in Iowa history with this combination of honors.

Returning to Iowa City at the age of 70, still robust in body and alert in mind, he accepted the office of President of the Iowa City National Bank. *The State Press* of November 11, 1885, had this illuminating sidelight on banker Kirkwood:

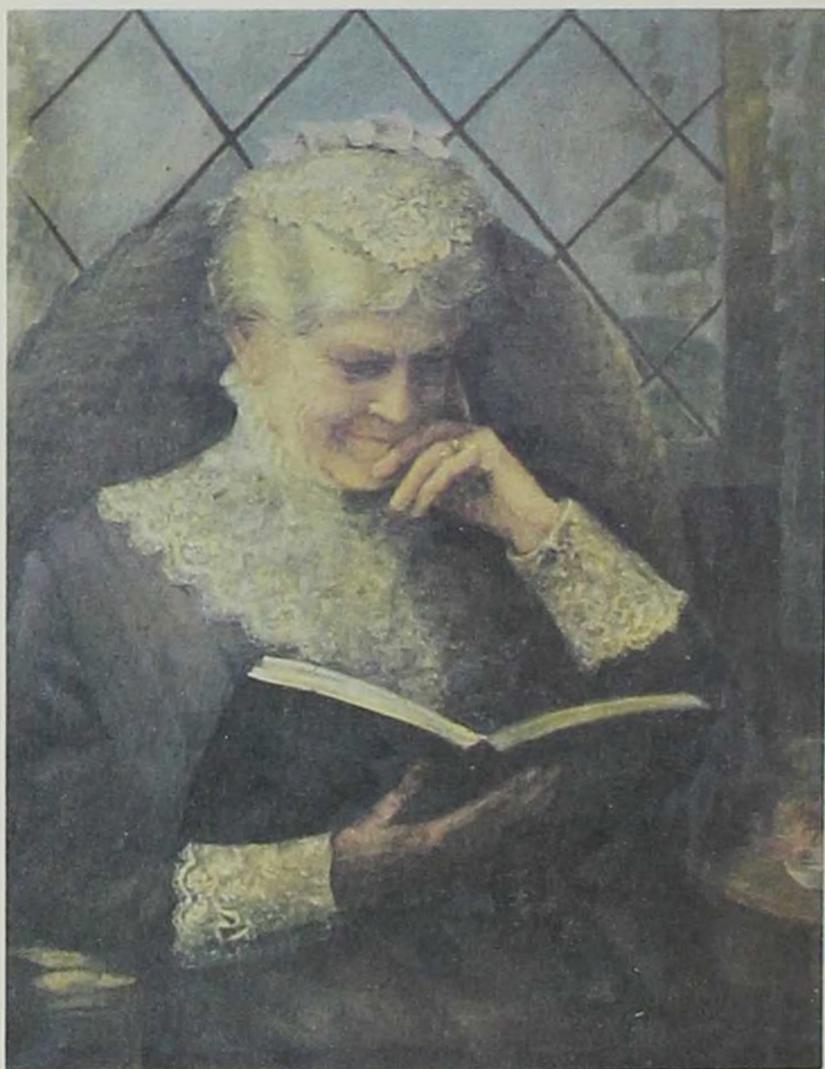
It is not an everyday occurrence to see a bank president who has also filled the highest political offices in the country, out on the street soliciting money for a poor man; yet an errand of that kind brought Governor Kirkwood into stores and offices on Monday. 'Now, you know little Jimmy Donohoe down on the bottom,' said the Governor. 'He's been very sick all summer and is fast losing his eyesight; indeed he's quite blind now, and his wife is very feeble! . . . Does someone say, 'Why didn't the Governor give the money out of his own pocket?' Shame upon the thought. The Gov-

ernor is almost a poor man himself. He never wasted money, he never saved it for his own use. In the true Bible sense, he is a steward.

Although it had been Kirkwood's highest ambition to serve a full term in the United States Senate, he took the greatest pride during his retirement years in being known as "Our War Governor." Looking back upon this time of crisis in the nation's history, it was his firm conviction that Iowa regiments had been among the most decisive forces in winning the War Between the States. At the Reunion of the 22nd Iowa Regiment, held in Iowa City on September 10, 1890, Kirkwood spoke to the 168 members present. The full text of the speech has been preserved. It is quoted, here, only in part:

I want to say a few words to you on a subject of which I have thought much, of what was done by the Army of the West and the Army of the East; if you have not thought of it, think of it now. When the war broke out, all the southern states and the border states of Missouri, Kentucky and Tennessee to a large extent were in rebellion. The eastern armies fought bravely and well in a small space in Virginia, and stayed there until the war was over. You went to work and quieted Missouri. Perhaps you were not at Wilsons Creek (cries of 'Yes!'), but you went from Cairo to New Orleans, cleared out the Mississippi river and opened it to navigation. You had some discussion with the rebels on the way, but you opened the river to the sea and met your comrades at Vicksburg. You cut off from rebeldom all of Missouri, Arkansas, Indian Territory, Texas and western Louisiana, and their supplies of men and materials for strengthening the rebel army.

While the western armies brought back states into the Union, the fighting at Richmond, heroic and good though it was, did not produce the results achieved by the Army of the West. . . . We were the invading force, and it was our business to



*Mrs. Kirkwood*

conquer the South. . . . There is a reason why the western army accomplished so much and the eastern army so little. I don't say that all their generals were western men, but there is a reason somewhere and history will someday find it out.

At the close of his Railroad Report, which contained a brief autobiography, Kirkwood wrote: "My life has not been an eventful one at all, and I congratulate myself that I have got along through my three score years and ten as well as I have. My ambition nowadays is to keep my name out of the papers." But he remained in "the papers" for the rest of his life. In 1892, ex-Governor Buren R. Sherman organized a gathering of old friends in Iowa City to honor the "War Governor" at his home on Kirkwood Avenue. In 1893, there was another ceremony—this one in Des Moines—but Kirkwood was too feeble to be in attendance. The ceremony, fully

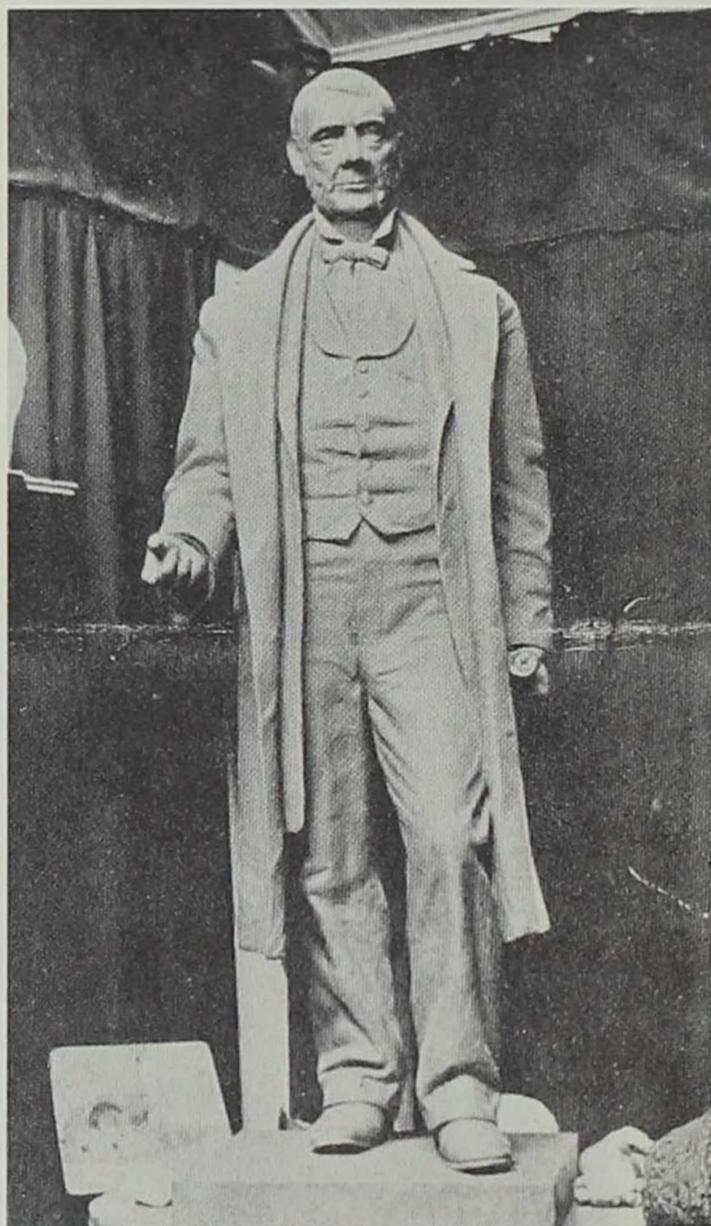


*The George Yewell portrait of Kirkwood, showing the politician in his dignified old age (courtesy Division of Historical Museum and Archives).*

reported in the newspapers of the state, marked the presentation of a large oil portrait of the old Governor painted by the distinguished Iowa artist, George H. Yewell. Again, there were speeches praising the elder statesman of Iowa. Again, the flowers of appreciation were bestowed upon the old man while he could still smell them.

But his time was running out. On September 1, 1894, after a brief illness, Samuel Jordan Kirkwood passed away, calmly, as though falling asleep. There were eulogies in the press throughout the state and the nation. And his physical presence was preserved not only in the Yewell portrait, but also in a life-size bronze statue in the Capitol at Washington, D.C. In 1864, the old House Chamber of the Capitol had been converted into a gallery for statues of distinguished Americans. Each of the states was allotted space for two statues. In the fullness of time, the people of Iowa chose James Harlan and Samuel Kirkwood to represent them.

Fifteen years ago, the author was wedged into a group of ticket-holders being conducted through Statuary Hall. The guide offered to identify any of the heroic figures in bronze if the sheep following him would bleat the names of their home states. There was a self-conscious pause, at the end of which the author timidly identified himself as a visitor from Iowa. The factotum gave me a supercilious look and raised his hand with dramatic deliberation until his index finger pointed toward the statue immediately behind him.



*Samuel J. Kirkwood by Vinnie Ream Hoxie*

Holding his arm outstretched for a moment of impressive tableau, he finally spoke the name of the Iowa statesman whom I had failed to recognize. It was not the name of the man whose daughter had married the son of Abraham Lincoln and who had insisted on repossessing his seat in the Senate after growing weary of a Cabinet post. It was the name of Iowa's political firecracker. The one word rang through the Hall like a cannon shot, "Kirkwood!" □

# FORT ATKINSON

## ARTIFACTS

by Marshall McKusick

For the archaeologist and the historian the most commonplace objects of everyday life become, with the passing of time, valuable artifacts of the past. This maxim is well demonstrated by household goods recovered from a most unglamorous place—the officers' privies of old Fort Atkinson.

The military post was established in the early nineteenth century to deal with problems of Indian policy. The Sioux, living in what is now southern Minnesota, periodically fought the tribes to the south—the Sauk, Fox (Mesquakie), and Ioway. In an effort to bring stability to the Indian country, the federal government attempted to define more clearly the tribal territorial boundaries. In 1825, the government arranged for the survey of a line across northeastern Iowa, beginning at the mouth of the Upper Iowa, which then entered the Mississippi through a slough considerably south of its present location. From this point the line ran southwest to the Cedar River and west to the Des Moines. The tribes ignored the boundary and the government subsequently arranged in 1830

for the tribes to cede land for 20 miles on both sides of the line. The 40-mile-wide strip from the Mississippi to the Des Moines was named the Neutral Ground, and by treaty, hunting was permitted, but fighting forbidden. The tribes on both sides ignored the provisions of the agreement, and the government was without means of enforcement.

Meanwhile, the Winnebago of Wisconsin were relocated in the eastern half of the Neutral Ground, providing a buffer between the Sioux and the tribes in Iowa. In theory this seemed to be a reasonable solution, but the Winnebago were reluctant to move and place themselves between their enemies. In 1840, despite protests and delays, the Winnebago were finally settled in northeastern Iowa along the Turkey River in Winneshiek County and provided with an Indian agency and school. A company of infantry was sent over from Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien to establish a military camp, later named Fort Atkinson after U.S. General Henry Atkinson. Troops were needed to protect the Winnebago from their Indian enemies and also from trespassing whites. The next year, a company of dragoons—mounted infantry—joined the other troops. Correspondence from the Fort shows they were needed to bring back discontented Winnebago who periodically attempted to return to Wisconsin.

The major buildings, stockade, and fort well were built between 1842 and 1845. Limestone, quarried in the area, was used extensively, since it was believed at the



*The surviving barracks building at Fort Atkinson, now a museum.*

time that this would be a permanent military post. Masons and carpenters were employed to assist and direct the soldiers, so the stone and timber buildings had a much more elaborate appearance than the usual frontier fort. A military road began at the ferry landing on the west side of the Mississippi, below what is now Effigy Mounds National Monument, and traces of this road can still be seen. It usually took two days for supply wagons to reach Fort Atkinson, so a half-way house was built on the road. Just after the Fort was completed, the Mexican War began in 1846, and the regular U.S. Army troops at Fort Atkinson were withdrawn to join the conflict. They were replaced by volunteer Iowa troops which garrisoned the Fort until 1849. By the mid-1840s, the settlers in



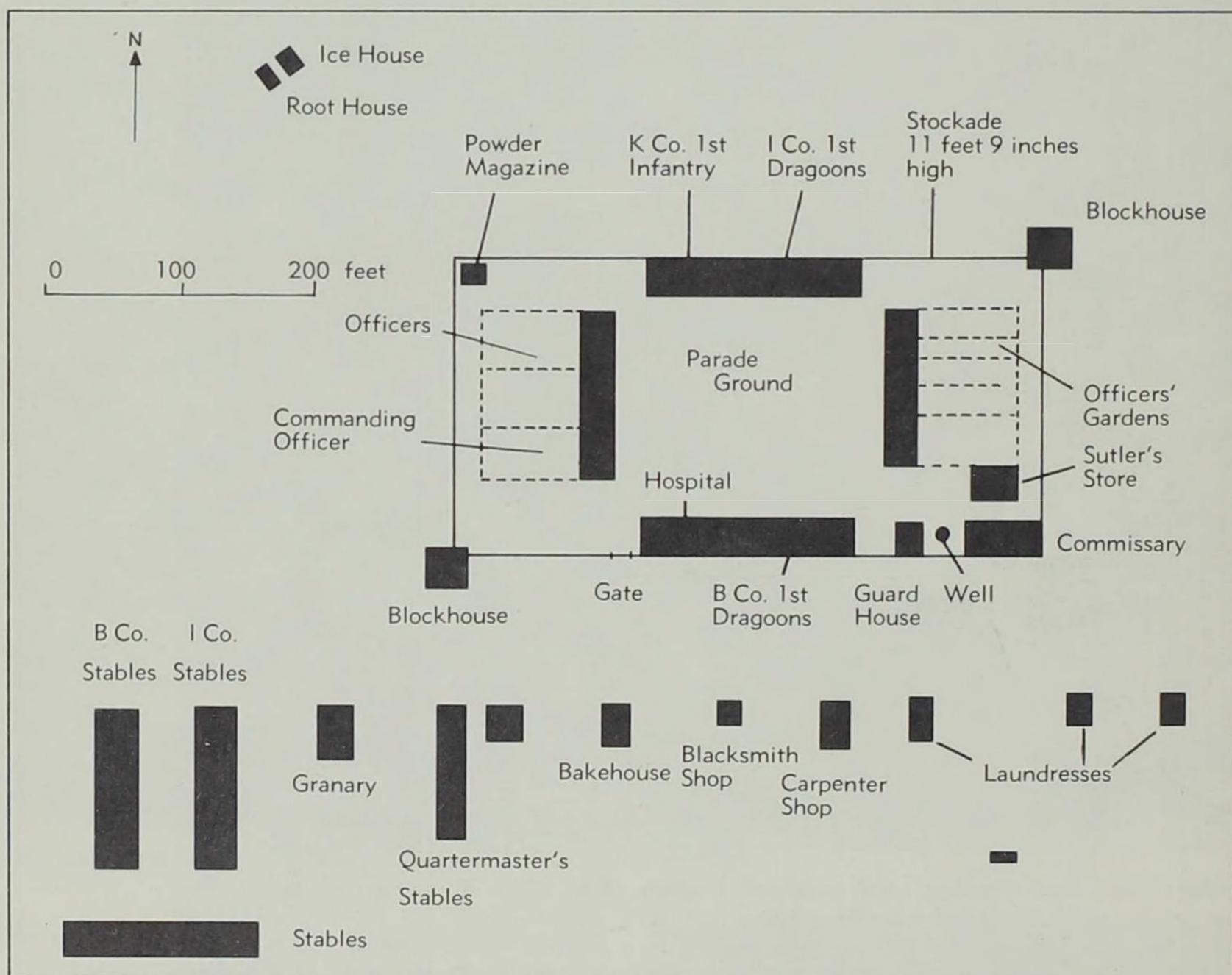
*One of the officers' privies with the Fort's powder magazine in the background.*



Officers and their families used imported English china, often of very good quality. Broken pieces were discarded into the privies, leaving a jigsaw puzzle for archaeologists 120 years later. The china shown here includes plates, a teacup, and a covered chamber pot. The miniature teapot was most likely the property of a child. To the right of the silver teaspoon is a special inkwell with a reservoir for use of a quill pen. When the cork of the inkwell was removed, ink trickled slowly into the shallow basin below.

A plain white water basin contrasts with the bold design of a cottageware chamber pot and blue striped coffee mug. These are typical of pieces discovered in the privies of Fort Atkinson.





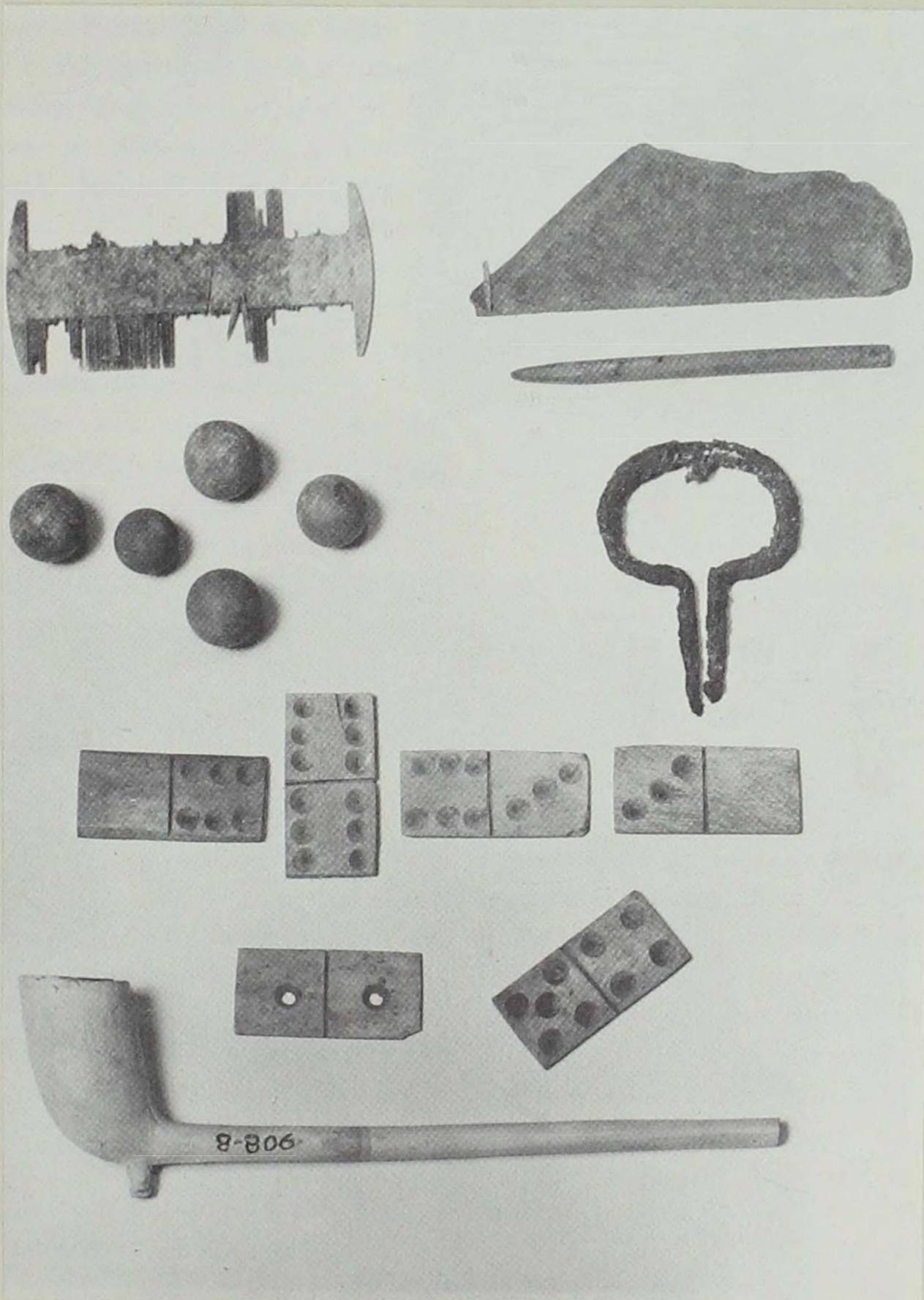
A map of Fort Atkinson, redrawn from a plan by Lieutenant Reynolds, 1842.

northeast Iowa put increasing political pressure on the government to relocate the Winnebago once again and open the Indian lands to settlement. The Winnebago were shifted north to Minnesota in 1848. The troops were disbanded, and a caretaker left at the Fort.

In 1848, when plans were made to vacate Fort Atkinson, the Iowa State Legislature passed an act requesting Congress to donate the site for a state agricultural college, to be a branch of The University of Iowa. The appeal was ignored, as were later requests in 1851 and 1853. The Fort was auctioned off in 1853 to private own-

ers. One barracks was partly dismantled and remade into a farmhouse, the east barracks accidentally burned down, and most of the other buildings were torn down. The stone and timbers were reused, and can still be seen today in buildings near the Fort and in the town of Fort Atkinson.

By the 1930s, when the State Conservation Commission acquired the Fort, the only original buildings still standing were the powder magazine, southwest blockhouse, and part of the north barracks. The northeast blockhouse was rebuilt in the late 1920s by volunteers from the town and the vicinity. The Commission hired a



Discarded everyday household objects provide a glimpse of life at frontier Fort Atkinson in the 1840s. The bone lice comb with close set teeth is a common frontier artifact. A piece of a slate tablet and slate stylus were used instead of scratchpaper. The jew's harp and handmade bone dominos, used for off-duty diversion, are commonly found at frontier forts. The clay marbles were probably a child's toys. The pipe shown here is almost intact. Thousands of broken fragments of imported English pipes were found in the fort buildings.



*The two large bottles may have contained pickles; the small vial was for medicine. The two ink bottles had glass stoppers, and a large, hardened ball of dried ink is visible inside one.*

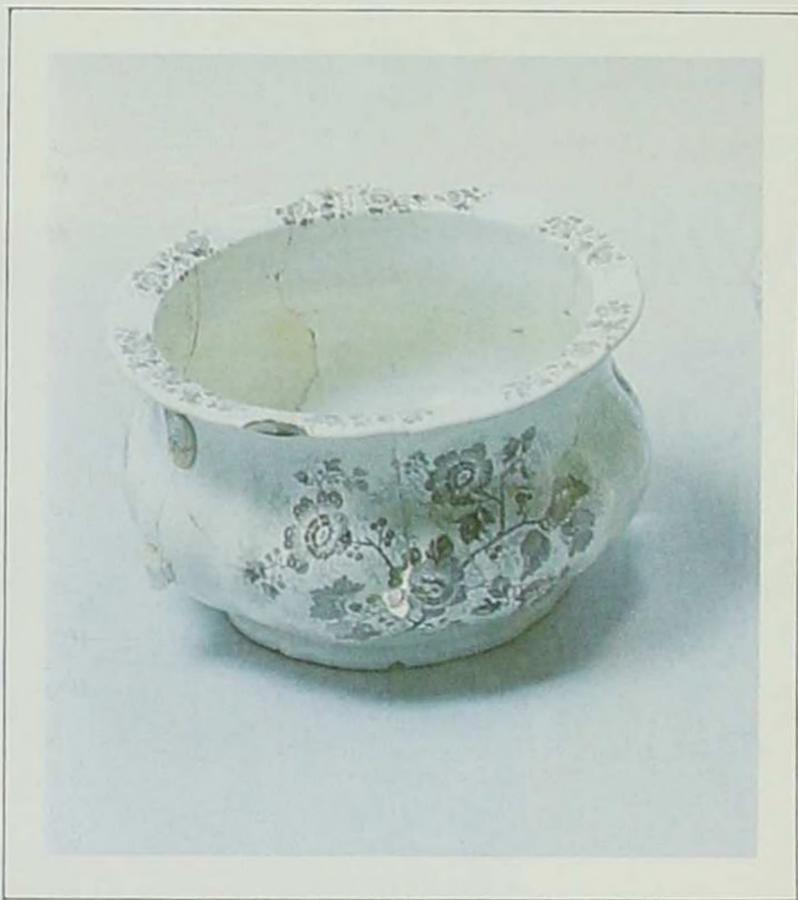


*Bottles were standard throw-away items at Fort Atkinson. The variety shown here are typical. From left to right, contents were champagne, wine, olive oil, and brandy. Imported French wines were common at frontier forts, and the olive oil bottle has a glass seal proclaiming its French origin.*

Luther College professor, Sigurd Reque, to undertake archaeological and historical investigations. From 1939 to 1941, he cleared the building foundations surrounding the parade ground, and part of the stockade was reconstructed in a more or less authentic fashion. The Commission also contracted with another man to restore the surviving barracks and develop the museum exhibits which are now on display. Unfortunately, Reque never wrote the report on his investigations.

In 1966, the Office of State Archaeologist made subsidiary excavations to bring Reque's work to a conclusion. After studying the artifacts from the main buildings, it was decided they dated for the most part from the period when the barracks were reused after the troops left.

An interesting contemporary collection of china, glassware, and other artifacts used at the Fort was obtained by excavating the officers' privies, where the officers and their wives routinely discarded broken household objects. Many of these items have now been restored and will be put on exhibit when the Conservation Commission remodels the Fort museum. The collection, including small fragmentary pieces, is of considerable historical



*One of the necessities of life, a chamber pot, used to avoid a night journey to the privy.*

and archaeological interest because it will be useful in identifying remains from other, less well-documented frontier sites. The investigation of 1966 also completed the mapping of all buildings, located the line of buildings outside the stockade, and brought together the unpublished notes and Fort correspondence. The artifacts provide an archaeological dimension to the Fort history. □

#### Note on Sources

The 1966 excavations are briefly described in an article by Marshall McKusick and David Archie, "Tale of Two Forts: Exploring Old Fort Madison and Old Fort Atkinson," *The Iowan Magazine*, 15, 1 (1966), 10-33ff. The most significant historical study of Fort Atkinson appears in a book by Bruce Mahan, *Old Fort Crawford and the Frontier* (Iowa City: State Historical Society, 1926), but a number of other sources are of interest, all listed in William Petersen's *Iowa History Reference Guide* (Iowa City: State Historical Society, 1952). The artifacts shown are in the Archaeological Laboratory, Office of State Archaeologist, Iowa City. None of the illustrations accompanying this article have been previously published.

WALTER CRAWFORD  
 HOWEY: FORT  
 DODGE'S MOST  
 FAMOUS JOURNALIST

by Paul H. Stevens

Hildy Johnson, a crack reporter for the Chicago *Herald-Examiner*, has said his farewells and moves to the door of the pressroom. He and his fiancée are leaving Chicago to be married in New York. But the voice of Hildy's boss, managing editor Walter Burns, stops him.

"Hold on! I want you to have something to remember me by," Burns exclaims.

He gives Hildy his watch, which has Burns' name inscribed on it.

"If you'll look inside, you'll find a little inscription: 'To the Best Newspaperman I know.' When you get to New York, you can scratch out my name and put yours in its place, if you want to."

Protesting at first, Hildy finally accepts the gift and a lump comes to his throat: "Well, this is the first and last thing I ever got from a newspaper."

The couple leave, and when they are well out of earshot, Burns calmly walks to the telephone, heaves a huge sigh, and speaks:

"Duffy," he says to a subordinate at the newspaper's office, "listen. I want you to send a wire to the Chief of Police of La Porte, Indiana . . . That's right . . . Tell him to meet the twelve-forty out of Chicago . . . New York Central . . . and arrest Hildy Johnson and bring him back here . . . Wire him a full discription . . . The son of a bitch stole my watch!"

This scene brought down the curtain on *The Front Page*, a Broadway hit of 1928 and made into a motion picture in 1974. The original sent many shocked theatergoers on their way vowing that they would never allow their sons to become journalists.

How true-to-life was the play's portrayal of the irascible Walter Burns and a rowdy band of newspaper reporters? Very accurate—if you're speaking of cut-throat Chicago journalism in the early 1920s. And what about Walter Burns? Was he real, or was he a fictitious character dreamed up by playwrights Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur?

Answers MacArthur, "I worked for him for ten years in Chicago. His real name is Walter Howey."

Walter Crawford Howey, born in Fort Dodge and editor of one of its newspapers while in his teens, stormed into Chicago at the turn of the century where his bravado and guile earned him eminent positions in the Hearst newspaper organiza-



The final scene from the original 1928 Broadway production of *Front Page*. Osgood Perkins (on right) played the role of Walter Burns, Howey's alter ego. Lee Tracy was reporter Hildy Johnson and Frances Fuller portrayed his fiancée (Culver Pictures).

tion. Walter Howey, prototype of the swaggering, news-mad Walter Burns, barked his way into American folklore.

Howey is one of the great legends of American journalism. His bombastic carryings-on while managing editor of the Chicago *Herald-Examiner* inspired Hecht and MacArthur, two former Chicago journalists, to dramatize him in their play. In-

deed, he was the ruthless, unpredictable Walter Burns who outsmarted his star reporters and rival newspapers and who could finagle with the best of politicians.

Walter Howey grew up in a strong newspaper town which was home for two vibrant, competitive dailies—the Fort Dodge *Messenger* and the Fort Dodge *Chronicle*. The newspapers were constantly at one

another's throats in an effort to capture the local readership. It was an atmosphere that was a microcosm of the Chicago newspaper world that he would later enter.

Howey was born in Fort Dodge January 16, 1882, the son of Frank Harris and Rosa (Crawford) Howey. His father helped operate a store that handled drugs, paints, and wallpaper directly across the street from the *Messenger*.

After completing his early education in the Fort Dodge public school system, Howey briefly pursued further education in art before entering journalism. He was a student at the Chicago Art Institute from 1899 to 1900 before returning to his home city.

Charles F. Duncombe, publisher and editor of the *Chronicle*, saw enough potential in young Howey to make him editor of the daily, even though Howey had barely reached 18 years of age. Duncombe's calculated risk was rewarded in just a short time.

Howey's sixth sense for smelling out a news story was first displayed not on merely a local basis, but on a story of international importance. He scooped the state and the nation on the death of President William McKinley in 1901.

The President had been shot by an assassin in Buffalo, New York, and lived eight days before succumbing to the wound. During this period, Howey wrote the story of McKinley's death in advance, plus the life story of his successor, Vice President Theodore Roosevelt, and had them set in type.

"I got hold of a servant at the house in Buffalo," said Howey, "and told him I'd give \$10 to the first person there who would telephone me the minute the Presi-



Walter Crawford Howey

dent died. The call came through as I knew it would. In a few minutes the pages were on the press, and we were out on the street hours ahead of our opposition."

Howey enjoyed being the first with the news. In 1902, he joined the staff of the *Messenger* and claimed credit for originating in Fort Dodge the newspaper stunt of running off two editions for a famous murder trial, one with a "Guilty" line and one with a "Not Guilty" line. He held both editions in the pressroom until he received a flash from the courtroom (usually by a reporter signaling at a window) and then let boys rush out hawking the verdict even before the judge had dismissed the court.

A young man with Howey's ambition and drive could not be contained in the world of Fort Dodge journalism. In 1903,

he moved briefly to Des Moines as a "cub" reporter for the *Des Moines Daily Capitol* under Lafayette Young, a well-known editor. As Howey later recalled, Lafe Young was impressed with the energetic youngster and offered Howey the editorship of a small-town Iowa paper that Young had just acquired. Howey at the time wanted to be a reporter for a big-city newspaper and had no thoughts of being an editor, so he declined the offer.

Despite his refusal, Howey long remembered Young's advice. Young told Howey, "A man must study for an editorship almost as long as one would study for the priesthood. You are thinking only of the fascinating adventures in the newspaper business. Did you ever think about the responsibility of an editor to his readers?" Even though Howey was eventually to discard Young's advice that "the best editors are seldom seen and never heard,"

the young man did heed the counsel which placed emphasis on pleasing the reader.

Within a few months, Howey moved on, bursting onto the Chicago scene with a flourish. As the *New York Times* said, "One summer day in 1903, Walter Crawford Howey came out of Fort Dodge, Iowa, determined to make a tumultuous impact on journalism. He did. Young, flamboyant, with an iron drive, he descended on Chicago, his arrival signaling the beginning of one of the most raucous eras in Midwest newspaperdom."

The Iowan, just 21 years old, bluffed his way into his first job in Chicago. He later described how he accomplished it:

The Daily News was my first stop. I went in and said to the editor, "I hear George Ade is sick." That was the first big writer I could think of. "There's nothing the matter with George Ade," said the editor. "Never mind," I said, "is anybody else sick? I'm a versatile writer." "No," he said, "but I could use a reporter who knows the town. Do you?" "Every alley in it," I assured him. "Then you know the corner of Madison and Monroe?" "Who doesn't?" "Fine!" he said. "Get going." I ran out and asked the first cop, "Where's the corner of Madison and Monroe?" "Not in this world," he answered. "They both run east and west!"

Undaunted by this technicality, Howey later returned to the newsroom with a hair-raising description of events he had seen—at Madison and Monroe—complete with full names and addresses. The editor was impressed.

"You're hired," he said. "I don't want you to be too honest, anyway."

Reporter Howey stumbled onto a story later in 1903 that turned out to be one of the biggest in Chicago's history—the Iroquois Theatre fire on December 30, in which nearly 600 people were burned or

#### Note on Sources

The author's interest in Walter Howey began during research for a master's thesis on the history of the Fort Dodge *Messenger*. Howey is one of the few major figures of American journalism without a biography, reflecting his desire that no book be written about his life. The only comprehensive magazine article on Howey is J. P. McEvoy's "Here's Howey" in *Cosmopolitan* (June 1948). A more accessible but condensed version, from which the author quotes briefly, appeared in *Reader's Digest*, Aug. 1948, 35-40.

Three books were helpful for relevant information of a general nature: W. A. Swanberg, *Citizen Hearst* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961); John J. McPhaul, *Deadlines and Monkeyshines* (Englewood, N.J.: Princeton-Hall, 1962); and Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism* (New York: MacMillan, 1962). Specific facts were gleaned from Howey obituaries in the *New York Times* (Mar. 22, 1954), 27; the *Boston Record-American* (Mar. 22, 1954), 2; *Editor & Publisher* (Mar. 27, 1954), 50; and *Newsweek* (Mar. 29, 1954), 57. The introduction to a book edited by Howey called *Fighting Editors* (Philadelphia: D. McKay, 1948) gives some interesting details on Howey's Iowa newspaper days.

The dialogue from the play is quoted from pp. 31, 187-89 of the edition published in 1928 by Covici-Friede in New York.



*The scene following the Iroquois Theatre fire in December 1903 (courtesy Chicago Historical Society).*

trampled to death. How he discovered the fire was a matter of luck, but how he handled its coverage was a brilliant display of skill.

Returning to the office on that winter day, he was startled when a manhole in the street opened and out popped a knight in armor and three elves with wings. They turned out to be a group of actors who had escaped the burning theater by way

of an underground passage. Howey, showing remarkable poise for a young reporter, established a post in a nearby store, from which he telephoned his paper the first news on the disaster and directed the efforts of other *Daily News* reporters. It was a preview of the talents that were to make him one of the most sensational news editors in America.

Howey later worked briefly for the Chi-

cago *Evening American*, and then moved to the *Inter-Ocean*, where, as city editor, he made newspaper history with a daring first—a full page of photographs. His reward, when the bills came in, was being fired.

When Howey joined the *Chicago Tribune* as its city editor in 1907, the mood of journalism in Chicago was beginning to change. A man who worked as a cub reporter during this time described the atmosphere.

In those days there was a fresh, frontier approach to public morals which reached a high point in the fang-and-claw ethics of the daily press. It was commonplace for newspapers to plant spies in rival editorial offices and saboteurs in pressrooms; to kidnap and jail rival reporters on trumped-up charges; to hijack murder suspects and key witnesses from one another—and from the police.

Thus, Charles MacArthur exaggerated only mildly when he said that *The Front Page* was an understatement of the times. The play, which opened on Broadway in 1928, was a melodrama set in the pressroom of the Chicago Criminal Courts building. Hildy Johnson, who comes to bid his reporter cronies good-bye, is delayed when Earl Williams, an escaped murderer whose stay of execution has been ignored by corrupt officials, falls in through the window. With the help of Walter Burns, Hildy hides Williams in an old rolltop desk until the paper can expose the civic corruption. They are caught by the sheriff, but Burns blusters their way out of the predicament. Such a set of cir-

cumstances was not only totally believable, but actually mild when compared to events that occurred in Chicago.

Money spoke big in those days, and press lord William Randolph Hearst, publisher of many large newspapers, had plenty to spend. After Howey quit the *Tribune* in 1917 following an argument with the paper's owner, Hearst offered him a job as editor-in-chief of his Chicago *Herald-Examiner*. Howey's new salary of \$35,000 a year was four times what he made as city editor of the *Tribune*.

The arrival of Howey marked the beginning of a competitive news conflict between the morning rivals, the *Herald-Examiner* and the *Tribune*.

Howey's first move was to declare war on the *Tribune*, which he called "The World's Greatest Snoozepaper." He then shanghaied Frank Carson, the *Tribune's* day city editor, by inviting him out to dinner, getting him drunk, and then guiding his hand while he signed two papers—his resignation from the *Tribune* and a contract with Hearst.

The *Herald-Examiner* reached its peak of power in 1919 when it was the only Chicago paper to support the winning mayoralty candidate, William "Big Bill" Thompson. MacArthur describes the aftermath:

Mr. Howey's reward was a newspaperman's dream. Two city patrolmen and a sergeant were stationed in our city room and were subject to the orders of the paper's reporters. We went out and arrested people whenever we had to. Our private interrogation headquarters was at a nearby hotel.



The Herald Building, circa 1905 (courtesy Chicago Historical Society).

Our policemen would keep rival photographers from taking pictures at the scene of a crime, and we got one exclusive story after another.

The other papers howled with rage but what could they do? Walter had the resignations of half a dozen city officials in his desk to be used at his convenience.

Many legends exist about Howey and his bold actions as editor of the *Herald-Examiner*. "Howey would sit at his desk and make monkeys of all of us," said Ben Hecht, who worked for the *Tribune*. "If he couldn't scoop us, he'd invent a switch or an angle for the story that outfoxed us."

In one incident, a little girl was reported to be locked in a bank vault in Galena,

Illinois, the time lock on. Howey knew that time locks could be picked, so he called the warden of the state penitentiary at Joliet and said, "Have you any good safecrackers?" The warden replied with pride, "Certainly. The best!"

Howey persuaded the warden to lend him the safecrackers. He rushed four of his best reporters and photographers to Joliet, where they joined the safecrackers on a privately hired train that roared into Galena. The safe was opened in no time, but there was no girl to be found inside. Others may have shriveled away in embarrassment, but not Howey. He played up the *Herald-Examiner's* role, centering his lead story on how the hardened criminals fell down on their knees and gave thanks when the little girl was not there. The newspaper's bold headline proclaimed: "Humanity is a Wonderful Thing."

On another occasion, the *Tribune* took the bait when Howey planted a well documented story that an Indian heiress was in Chicago and had to marry an American by midnight in order to inherit a fortune in Bombay. Howey even arranged to have her married to a dying bum (a madeup stooge). After the *Tribune* and others splashed the story, the *Herald-Examiner* explained the stunt and gave thanks for the plug on its upcoming Sunday serial about a Bombay heiress.

He often employed subterfuge to embarrass his paper's rivals. Howey once wrote an editorial lavishly praising the *Herald-Examiner's* enterprise and human-

itarianism in sending relief to an Illinois town struck by a cyclone. He had a deadpan copy boy take it directly to the *Tribune* composing room with the instructions: "Must. Colonel McCormick." (McCormick was publisher of the *Tribune*.) The tribute led the *Tribune's* editorial page for half the press run before being discovered.

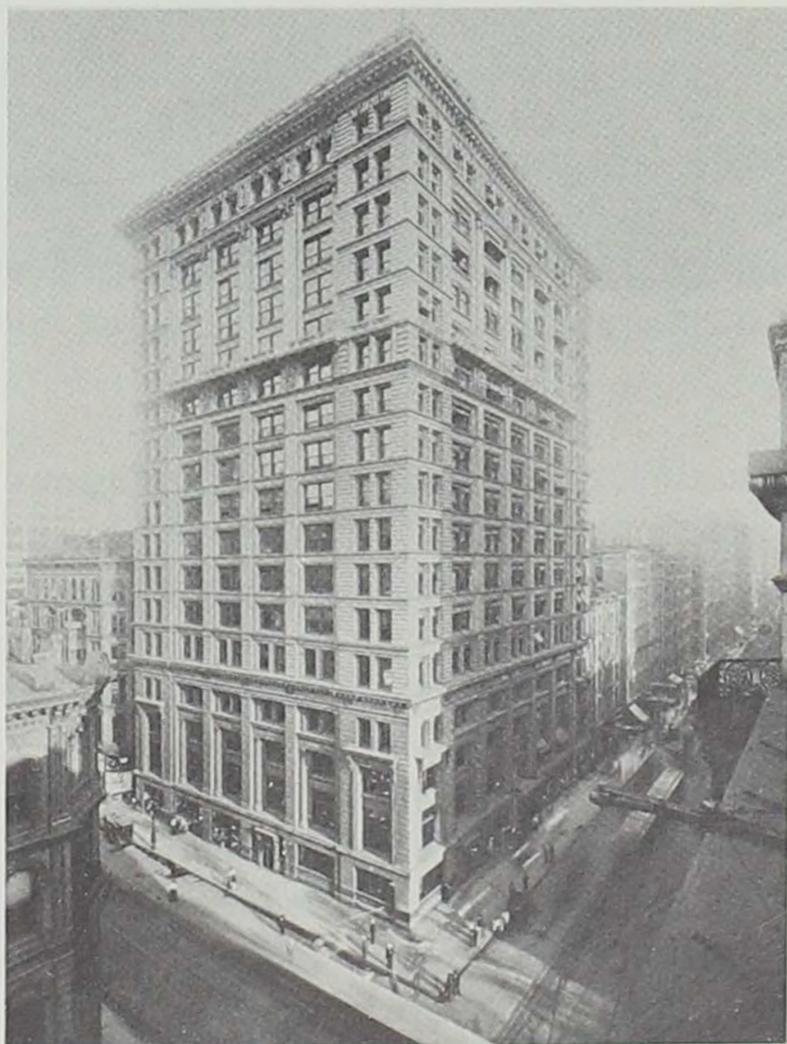
At the *Herald-Examiner*, Howey often followed the practice of grabbing the first edition and boarding an elevated train. Once aboard he would open the paper and comment to a train passenger about a particularly "hot" front page local story. He would get reader reaction from one or two men and the same number of women and then would take another train back to the Loop. At the newspaper office, he would often have his staff rewrite the story, stressing or clearing up points that his elevated friends had mentioned in discussing the story.

"Humanity is a Wonderful Thing" was a formula for news that Howey practiced throughout his career. Another formula was the repentance of "wayward souls." "It is the simplest thing on earth to create circulation but it took me years to discover the secret," Howey said. "People are more interested in the repentance of a wayward soul than they are in themselves."

The repentance theme was employed by Howey when Hearst sent him to Boston to become editor of the faltering *Boston American* in 1922. Hearst told Howey to add 50,000 circulation to the *American* and he gave him six months and a gen-

erous budget to do it. Howey found a familiar wayward soul—a woman who, in a hold-up, had killed a policeman and was awaiting execution. Howey convinced her that she should repent her sins—exclusively for the *American*—in return for a handsome sum of money for her daughter. The story of her life of crime and her repentance unfolded daily in Howey's paper, and its circulation shot up by 54,000 in six days.

Howey was managing editor of the *American* for two years, and in 1924, he went to England for Hearst to study newspapers published by Lord Northcliffe.



The Chicago Tribune Building, about 1905 (courtesy Chicago Historical Society).



Press lord William Randolph Hearst (Culver Pictures).

Upon his return later that year, Howey's ideas for a picture newspaper led to the establishment of Hearst's New York *Mirror*.

Unlike the fictional newsman Walter Burns, Howey was a solid production man. He carried a printer's union card and owned 17 patents, including inventions for making engravings and covering methods of transmitting pictures and messages by wire. In 1931, his invention of an automatic photoelectric engraving machine was unveiled in Washington in the pres-

ence of Hearst editor Arthur Brisbane and officials of the Federal Bureau of Engraving. Howey developed the sound photo for Hearst in 1935; this machine transmitted halftones by ordinary telephone. His inventions, an outgrowth of his belief in the importance of pictures, hastened the nationwide use of wirephotos.

The remainder of Howey's years were spent supervising Hearst publications and working as Hearst's editorial assistant. Howey was editor-in-chief of Hearst's three Boston papers—the *Evening-Ameri-*

can, *Daily Record*, and *Sunday Advertiser* (1939); supervising editor of *American Weekly* magazine in New York (1940); and editor of the Chicago *Herald-American* (1942). He divided his time among these three jobs. In 1944, Howey was appointed special editorial assistant to Hearst.

Hearst revived the Howey touch in 1948 in an effort to build circulation of the Chicago *Herald-American*. Arriving at the battleground, Howey looked for a repentant soul. They were hard to find, so turning to another formula, "Humanity is a Wonderful Thing," he directed his efforts toward a housing shortage in Chicago.

A little girl wrote a letter to the editor of the Chicago *Herald-American* that said: "Please help me find a home—I have never slept in a bed." Howey's critics contended that when she wrote the letter, Howey was at her side guiding her arm. He published the letter and a photo of the girl looking into a store window at a child's bed. Chicagoans had to buy the paper every day to learn the plight of the little

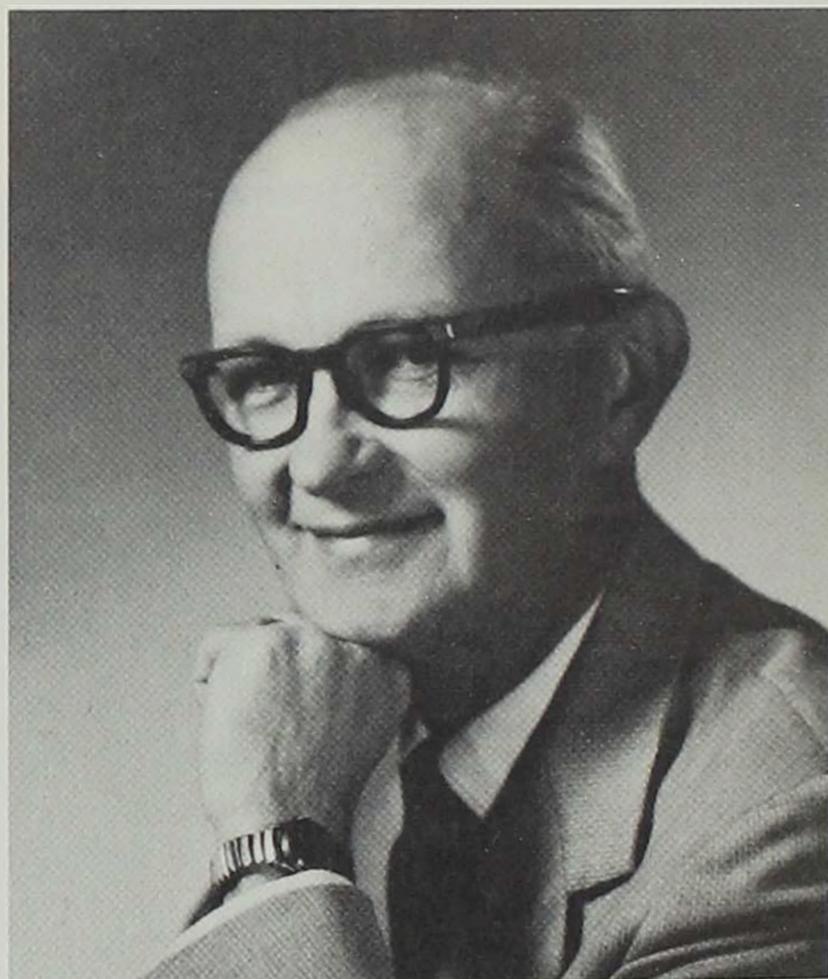
girl. Among those reading the heart-breaking stories was Hearst himself, who wired Howey \$10,000 and said, "Please buy the little girl a home. You're breaking my heart."

Howey's life ended on a tragic note. In January 1954, he was badly injured in Boston when a skidding taxi pushed a mailbox onto him. Ten days later, his wife died of pneumonia. Howey was slowly resuming his duties as editor of Hearst's Boston newspapers when he died of the auto injuries on March 21, 1954.

The Walter Burns-Walter Howey mold of journalist is almost an extinct species today. It was dying even at the time of Howey's prominence. Hecht and MacArthur perhaps were speaking truth, not fiction, when they wrote in *The Front Page*: "Schools of journalism and the advertising business have nearly extirpated the species. Now and then one of these boys still pops up in the profession and is hailed by his editor as a survival of a golden age." □

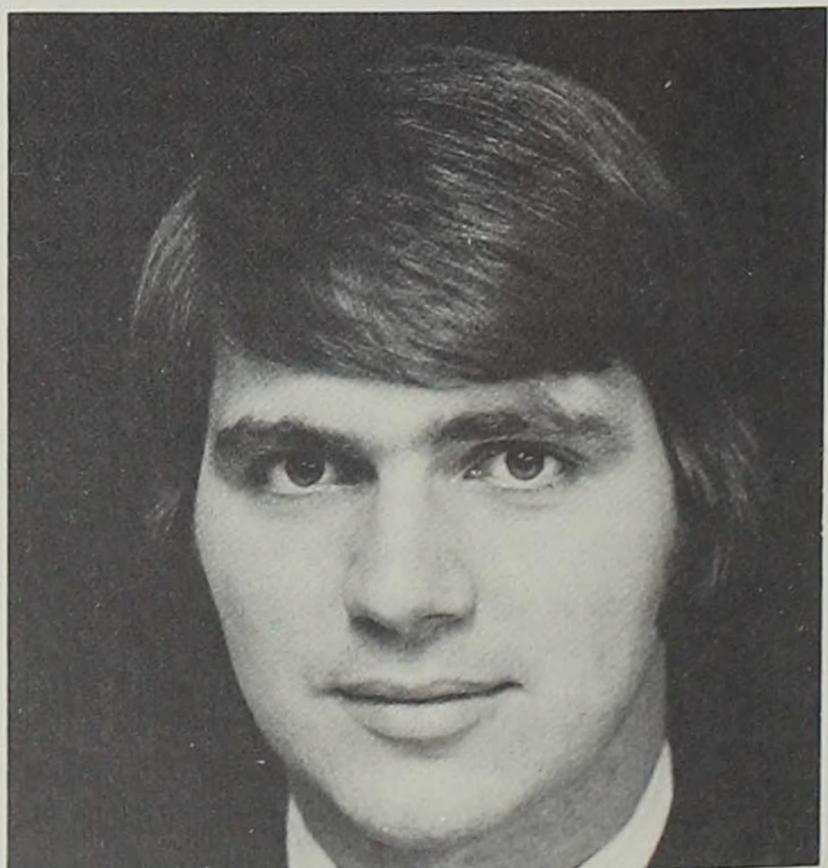
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A happy Valentine's Day from the collection of the State Historical Society of Iowa.



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