

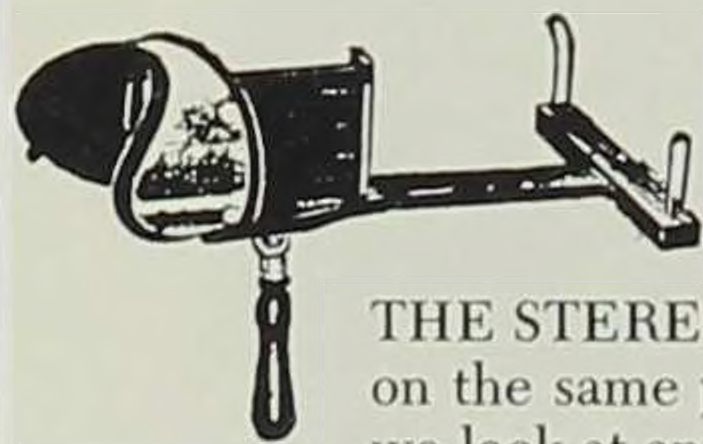
the stereograph had created a steady market for new material, as more and more Americans spent evenings in their parlor viewing local, national, and foreign scenes through hand-held or pedestal stereoscopes. Doremus apparently concluded that stereography was an ideal way to capture and market the natural beauty of the Mississippi River valley. His prosperity as a portrait photographer probably allowed him to take this risk.

Doremus makes no mention in his diary of his grandiose plan to photograph the Mississippi, although entries indicate that he maintained his ties to relatives and friends in Iowa. A diary entry enroute to Riceville in July 1872 suggests that his photographer's eye was alert to the beauty and visual appeal of the river. He writes on July 13th, "Took a good bath at bath house on Mississippi after which went with George in buggy to Rock Island to see the government works [the federal arsenal], then to town of Rock Island, then back by ferry and a ride up the bluff. Have a splendid land and water view." Doremus would later include several of these views around Davenport in his stereograph series.

In the late winter of 1873/74, Doremus again left New Jersey to visit midwestern relatives, and in the *Minneapolis Daily Tribune* of March 13, 1874, we find an announcement of his dream: "A FOUR YEAR TRIP. Mr. John P.

Doremus of Paterson, N.J., a practical photographer, is in the city and is making preparations to take a trip down the river for the purpose of taking stereoscopic views of the scenery. He has been engaged for some time in supplying this class of views to the wholesale trade and now proposes to take a series of views which he thinks will be more popular than any in the market. He will have a flatboat built here at once, 65 by 85 feet in size large enough to carry his apparatus and his house and will start from below the falls early in the spring. Before he goes, he will take a number of views of the scenery in this city and vicinity. His trip will extend to New Orleans and will take four or five summers to complete."

AFTER CONTRACTING for construction of his boat, Doremus returned to New Jersey to ship nearly two tons of freight to the Twin Cities. This included cameras and stands, glass (probably a high-grade, pre-sized glass for glass-plate negatives), and household goods, such as a marble-top table, bedding, and canned fruit. By mid-July 1874, the *Success* was ready to be launched, a mile below the Falls of St. Anthony in Minnesota. Although the *Success* was apparently not the only floating photograph gallery — Doremus mentions a few others in his diary — it may well have been



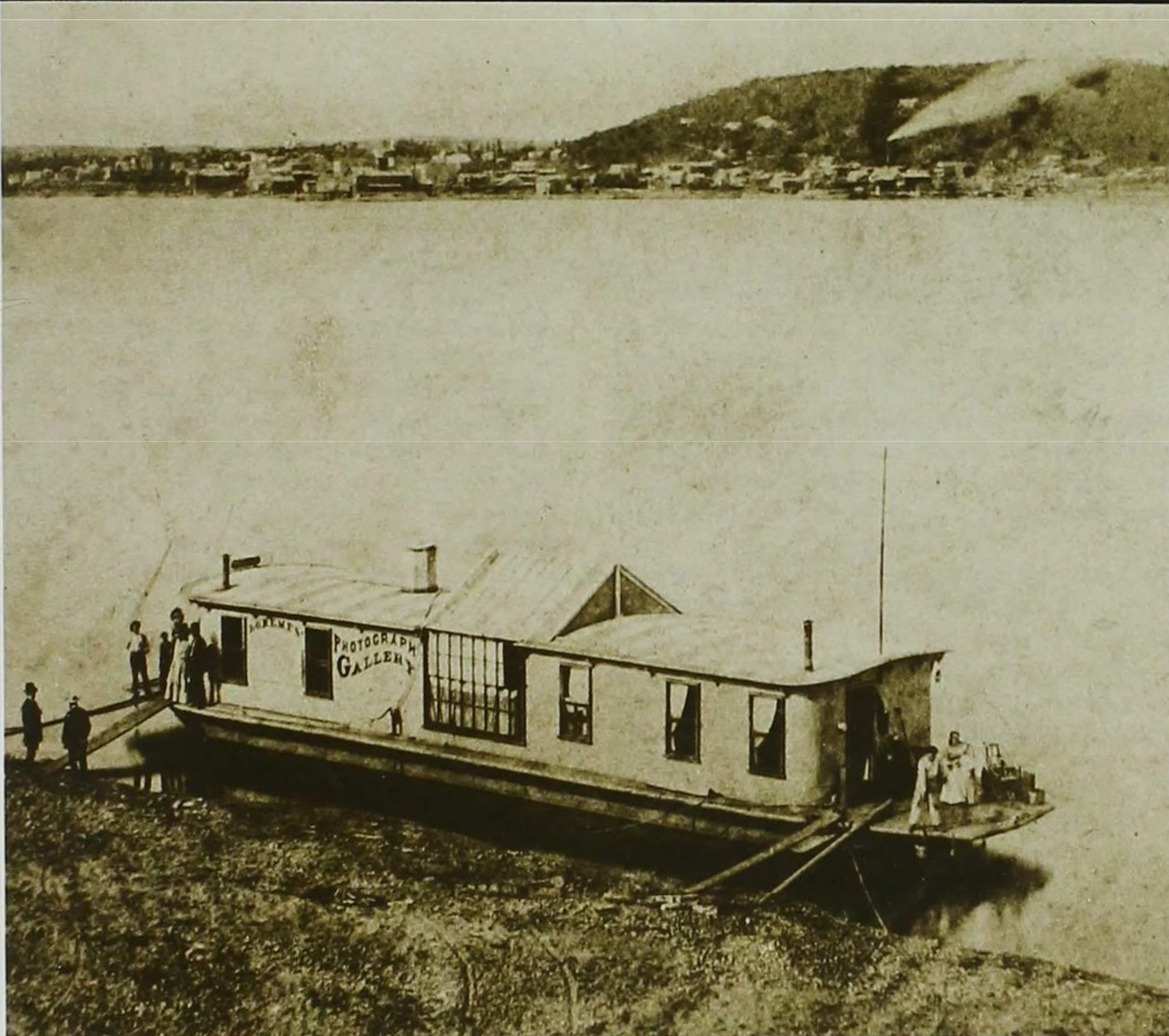
The Stereoscope: 3-D View of the Past

THE STEREOSCOPE was designed to work on the same principle as the human eye. As we look at an object, each eye sees a slightly different view. Our brain combines the two views into one view that is three-dimensional. The inventors of the stereoscope determined a similar effect could be created by placing twin photographs set side by side on a mount. By viewing this stereograph through a special lens or a hand-held stereoscope, a single image with depth or dimension could be seen.

The most successful views had a distinct vanishing point that helped create a sense of depth perception. Sometimes people or animals were

included in the composition to give a sense of scale. The photographer used a special camera with twin lenses about 2½ inches apart, approximately the same distance that separates human eyes.

Stereography was introduced in America in 1850, soon after its invention in England. Photographers, excited by the possibilities of a three-dimensional image, took to the field. A steady market for this new form of photography encouraged many, like Doremus, to create images that document the nation's emerging industrial and urban landscape along with remote frontier scenery. Between the 1860s and 1910, millions of stereographs were produced, including over a thousand views of Iowa.



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The *Success* (summer 1875) across from Hudson, Wisconsin.

There were really two distinct periods of popularity for stereographs (or stereo views). The early innovators, working from the mid-1860s to 1880, created unique regional documents of a particular locale or famous landmarks. The style and quality varied and often reflected the idiosyncratic tastes of the individual photographer. Later, around the turn of the century, a huge commercial market developed as stereographs were mass produced and distributed. These images, intended to appeal to a broad audience, placed less emphasis on local scenery. The subject matter varied widely from standardized views to ridiculous (and sometimes racist and sexist) humor. Still, stereographs were designed to be both entertaining and enlightening.

Stereographs were immensely popular as a form of home entertainment and an important educational resource in the days before radio and television. Leisure time was limited and vacation trips

were not as common so families would gather together to take fantasy trips by looking at boxed sets of views of Niagara Falls, Yellowstone, or the Chicago World's Fair. Geography lessons in school and at home were enhanced with photos of exotic places such as Egypt or the Far East. Many public and school libraries across the nation acquired large sets of stereograph cards for educational purposes.

Stereo photography is significant because the public eagerly adopted this new source of visual information. In an era when many people were self-educated, these views served as an important supplement to their daily reading of books and illustrated magazines. The views captured a record of daily life or a glimpse of faraway places, as well as reflecting the dominant values in this period.

—Mary Bennett, audiovisual archivist,
State Historical Society of Iowa

the most elaborate. "The whole affair [is] finished off in the best style," he writes, "with projecting roof handsomely [bracketed] and the corners of the cabin rounded in first class steamboat style." The eight rooms sported "a profusion of moulding on ceilings and sides."

With local help hired, Doremus launched the *Success*. In 1874 and 1875 he photographed Minnesota and Wisconsin, and in 1876 he turned his camera toward Iowa. By now he had added another vessel to his "flotilla," a 15 × 45 foot boat to be used as a printing gallery and workroom. His season on the river lasted as long as the river was navigable; in the winter he returned to New Jersey. In the summer his family would sometimes join him on his adventure.

Although it's not clear whether the boat was self-propelled in some way, Doremus maneuvered the *Success* downriver by the current or was towed by ferries or steamboats. Other times he anchored the *Success* and set off in a rowboat, ambitiously crisscrossing the river to post advertisements, find customers, or photograph new sights. "Left Trempealeau [Wisconsin] at 7 a.m. The wind was up stream and it rained some," he writes on May 7, 1877. "Made La Crosse, Wisconsin at 11. Sold no views. After dinner I started and reached DeSoto, Wisconsin, 45 miles further at 7 p.m. Got lost in Coon [Slough] and missed Victory, Wisconsin by taking the wrong channel. Made 66 miles today." Another time he reports a "splendid run getting to Burlington, Iowa 27 miles about sundown, the longest run I ever made in one day without being towed."

Doremus's diary portrays the Mississippi as a busy commercial thoroughfare churning with steamboats, lumber rafts, ferries, and occasionally other commercial enterprises. (He photographed an umbrella maker's boat and comments about "Proctor's floating gallery built in imitation of mine.") The diary also conveys a sense of adventure and danger: rough waters and summer storms, sandbars and snags. "We went through the Devils Elbow, a crooked place in the river very much dreaded by raftsmen at midnight," he records for October 7. "We got along very well going on shore only once when a tree caught us and took one of the brackets off." Other times the

river traffic itself posed danger: "Harbored down near shore as we were in the channel and in danger from rafts and steamboats. We are getting negatives ready and silvering paper for printing tomorrow."

Besides photographing landscapes and towns for stereographs, Doremus apparently also photographed individuals in the popular carte-de-visite and cabinet card formats. A room on the *Success* was fitted out as a studio, and his promotional pamphlets assured the public that "the inhabitants of the smaller towns where an artist cannot find constant employment, will be enabled to have their likenesses taken in the multitude of styles known to the art." Yet for the bulk of his work he used the special stereoscopic camera with twin lenses. The diary suggests that during winters in New Jersey, he produced the stereographs by pasting a pair of nearly identical photographic prints onto rectangular cardstock preprinted with his name and logo. On February 27, 1877, he notes, "Have been home near two months. Have had a thousand small pamphlets printed describing my Mississippi trip for gratuitous circulation. Bought stock, printed a lot of stereos." His optimism seems warranted; by the previous September he had sent home seven hundred dollars earned on the *Success*.

Ready for his 1877 season on the river, Doremus left New Jersey for the Midwest and was soon "fixing up my boat [with] carpenters making alterations." On March 6 he notes, "The river is almost all covered with floating ice. My boats are firmly frozen in and the floating ice rattles against that which is stationary making a noise at night like the rattling of a lot of light wagons over the frozen ground."

PROUD OF THEIR majestic river scenery and local landmarks, midwesterners undoubtedly bought his stereographs. A stereoscope and a pile of stereographs were commonplace in American parlors, and retailers and families alike were probably eager to buy new views from Doremus. "Just sold a gross of stereos to Seymour & Co., price \$12.00," he notes in April, and two days later, "This morning after selling a



Detail from Doremus stereograph

gross of views, I started and rowed across the lake [Pepin?] in the face of a hard wind and waves like steamboat rollers to Hudson, Wisconsin. Got there in time to sell a few views." Customers also included steamboat captains; in May 1877 Doremus writes, "Left Sabula and after going a short distance was overtaken by the steamer J. W. MILLS with a raft. They wanted some pictures taken."

Stereographs were often marketed in sets or series, and avid collectors could check the typeset "back list" (pasted on each card) to see what other views were available in that series. According to an advertising brochure, Doremus intended to photograph an assortment of "wild western scenery, embracing views of towns and cities, lumbermen sorting logs and building their rafts; scenes on the 'Diamond Jo' line of steamboats, and a number of beautiful and picturesque bits of scenery." On all counts, he succeeded; Doremus's first seven series featured 197 scenes between Minneapolis and Keokuk. He photographed from a variety of vantage points — grain elevators, the Dubuque shot tower, the Clinton water works tower, rooftops, aboard steamers, and from sandbars. The fifth, sixth, and seventh series include Iowa scenes; beginning with view #130 one can follow the course of his trip during the summers of 1876 and 1877. The diary entries often mention the places photographed.

After 1877, Doremus headed downriver, continuing his dream to photograph the Mississippi to New Orleans. Less is known about these later years. Some stereographs exist of Missouri sights, and in August 1879, a Mitchell County (Iowa) newspaper refers to his floating gallery in Randolph, Tennessee.

John Doremus did return to Iowa in 1883 at age fifty-five to look after land interests and establish a photography studio in Riceville. The *Mitchell County Press* of August 16, 1883,

reported that he was "commencing the erection of the largest set of farm building[s] in the county" and that an architect was preparing house plans. Three months later, the newspaper reported that Doremus was refitting a store as a photograph gallery and assured readers that he "is a first class artist and will get the business in the locality."

But within two years, the Doremus family decided again to move back to New Jersey. Although John Doremus retained some financial interests in the Mitchell County area, it appears that he never returned to Iowa. He did, however, continue to winter in the South and it was there in January of 1890 that he died of acute gastritis.

No doubt, some Doremus images are still to be located in family collections of stereographs tucked away for nearly a century after their popularity waned. Many of Doremus's stereographs, printed on orange cardstock, are easily identified by his logo, an anchor draped with a banner labeled "SUCCESS." And by many measures of the good life, Doremus and his floating photograph gallery were a success: he had combined business sense, ingenuity, adventure, and artistic sensibility. Certainly he was a witness to the variety of livelihoods once supported by the Mississippi River and the towns that thrived or lazed along its shores. Today, all that remains of the Doremus floating gallery are the yellowed pages of his diary and the well-worn stereographs held by public archives and private collectors. Yet his words and images create a fascinating portrait of river life in Iowa and the upper Midwest in the 1870s, and document the life and contributions of one of America's innovative pioneer photographers. □

Turn the page to begin a visual trip down the Mississippi, as photographed by J. P. Doremus.



Top left: Pontoon bridge at North McGregor (now Marquette), Iowa (August 1876).

Bottom left: Point Estes near confluence of the Turkey and Mississippi rivers. (Date unknown. Doremus wrote in his diary about rowing up the Turkey River in October 1876.)

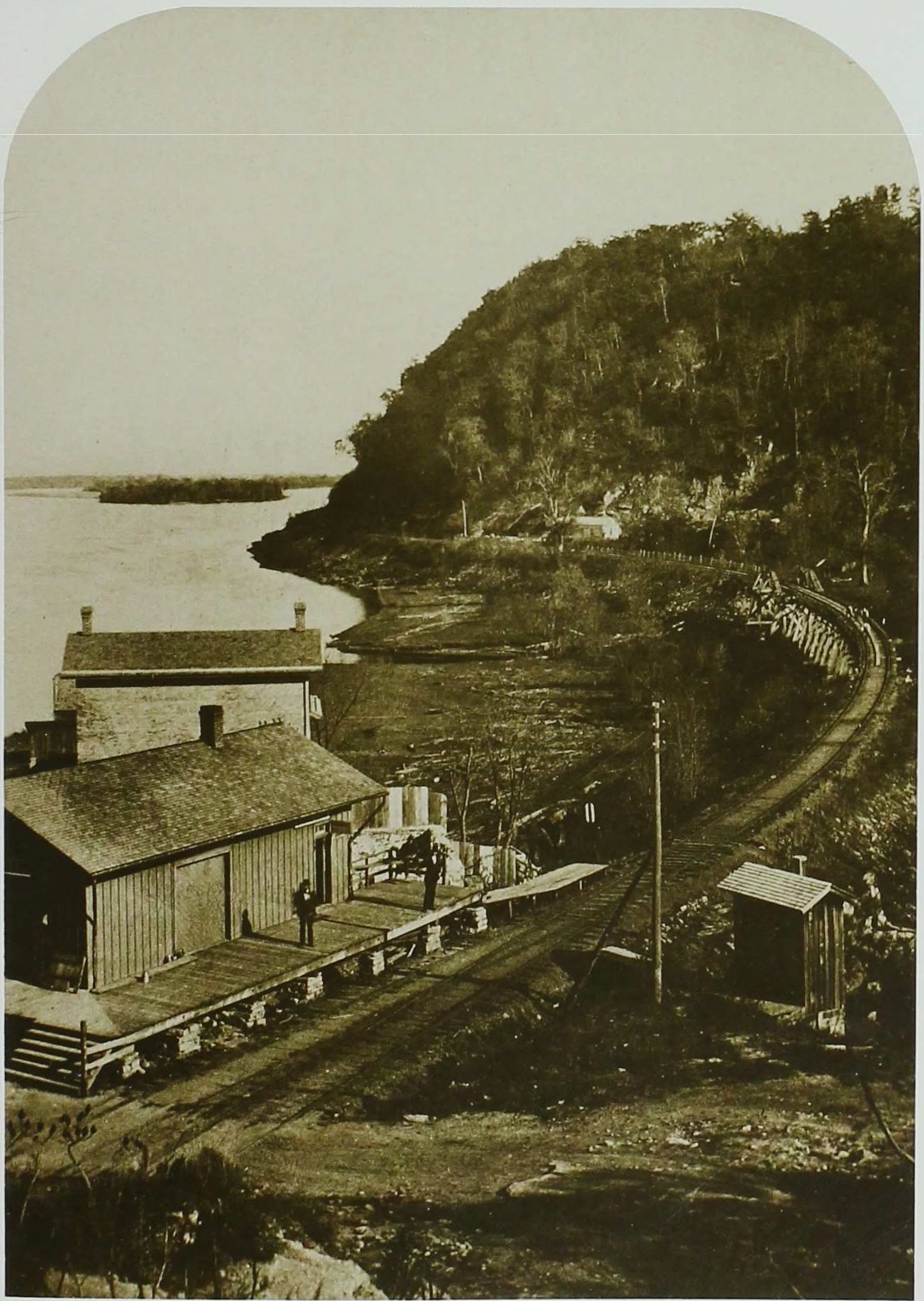
Above: The stereograph is labeled "Glen of the Pictured Rocks." On August 24, 1876, below McGregor, Doremus wrote, "The wind was up stream this morning, but we managed to get half a mile further to the pictured rocks where I took several negatives."

Opposite: Depot at Buena Vista, Iowa (summer 1876). Doremus often traveled by train to inland towns, to advertise his business or to visit acquaintances in Riceville, Iowa.

Stereograph manuals often advised photographers to include a person in the image to provide scale, or to set up a shot with a distinct vanishing point to enhance the sense of depth.

Note: A stereograph, or stereo view, has twin images mounted side-by-side (see back cover). The following images represent only half of each stereograph.





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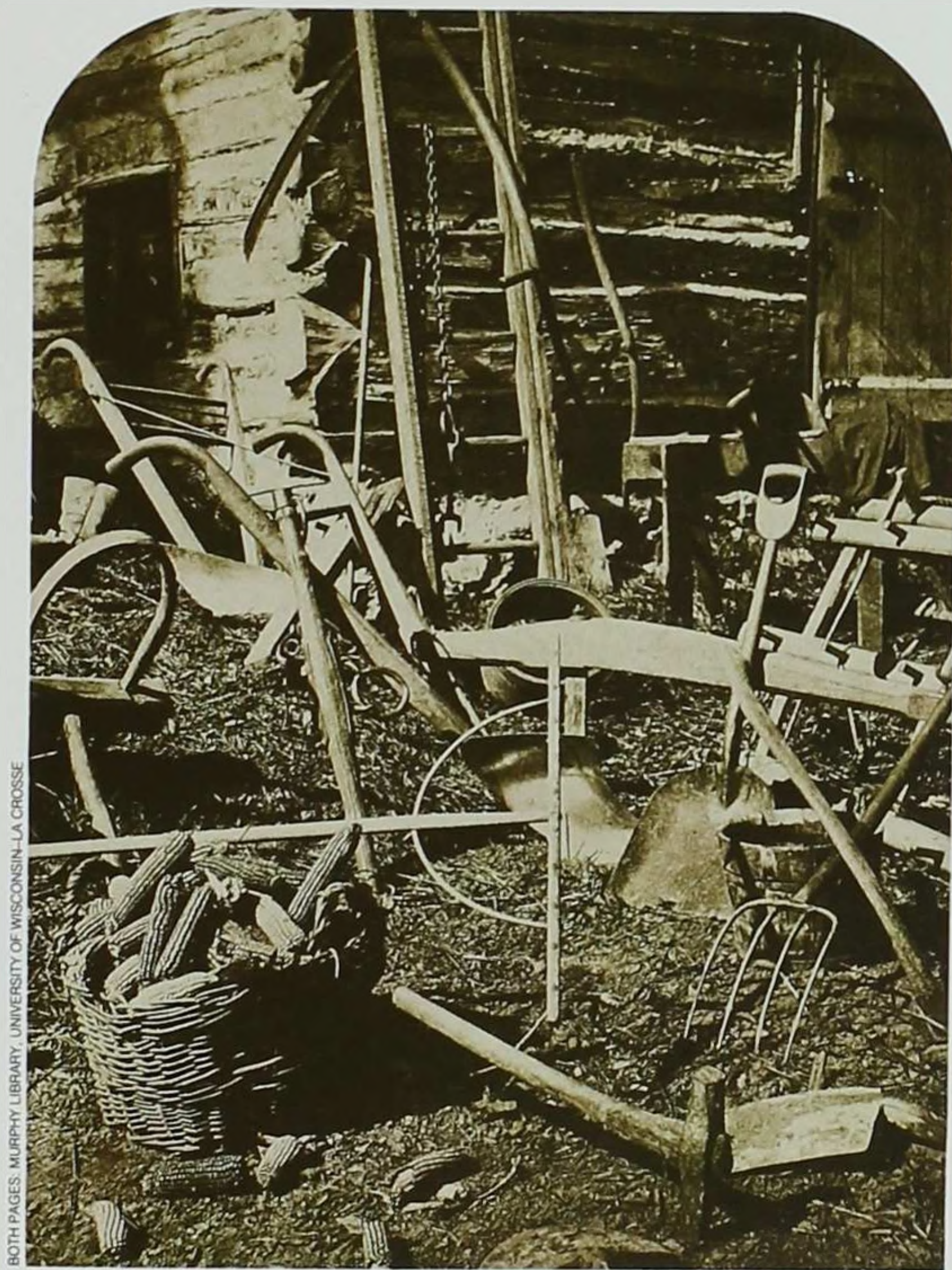




BOTH PAGES: MURPHY LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-LA CROSSE

Above: In the foreground, a man relaxes on a hillside overlooking Buena Vista, Iowa (summer 1876).
Left: Lansing, Iowa (August 1876).





BOTH PAGES: MURPHY LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-LA CROSSE

Both pages: Barnyard scene and farm implements, near Buena Vista, Iowa (summer 1876). Above: note the man in the window. Many of Doremus's images document occupations, as well as urban and natural landscapes.



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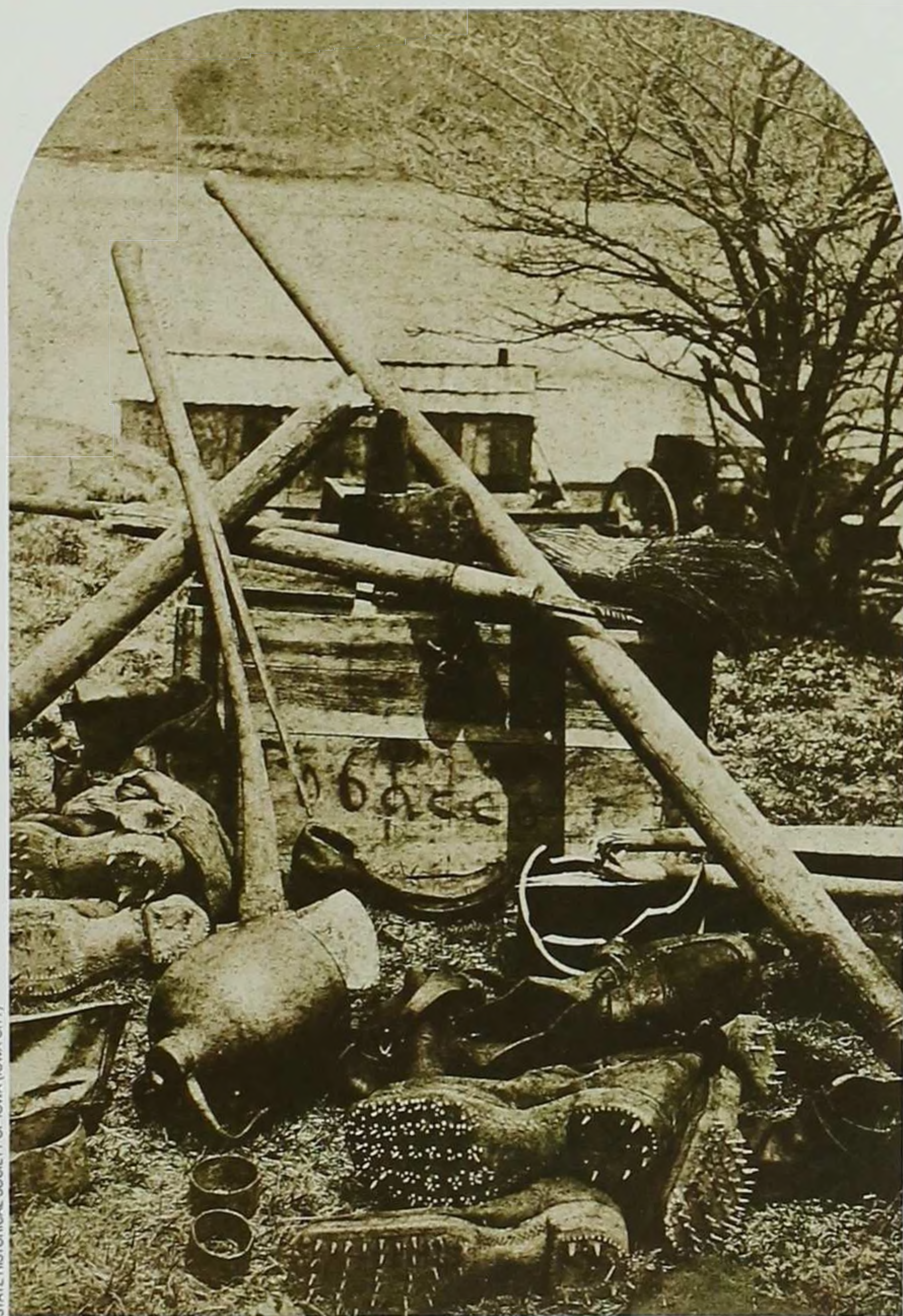
Vessels on the Mississippi ranged from elaborate to primitive. Above: The *Success* — frozen in the Mississippi. The replica of a camera on the roof was probably an advertising gimmick. The small boat behind the *Success* had a printing “gallery” and workroom. (See Doremus’s description of the *Success* below.) Opposite: A wanigan (a floating work area), used by cooks for a steamboat crew (on the St. Croix River, about 1876).

“The boat is a little palace in itself, complete in all its appurtenances. The deck is 18 × 76 feet, on which there is built a miniature house. Upon entering the inside of the boat, one is ushered into the reception room 8 × 16 feet, fitted up handsomely with marble top table, water cooler, and oil paintings, chromos, carved brackets, etc., showing taste and lavish expenditure. — Two doors in the left lead, one into a toilet room six feet square and the other into a room 6 × 9 feet, for the use of Mr. Doremus. Folding doors open into the operating room 14 × 30, at the end of which is a door leading to a private dining room and private parlor 8 × 14 feet, one door from which leads to a state room 6 × 7 feet with two [berths] in it. Another door leads to a kitchen 7 × 11 feet, connected with which is a large sized pantry and a storeroom. — Under all is a hold three feet deep, well ventilated by air shafts, to be used for storage. The whole is finished in the best style, with projecting roof handsomely bracketed. Inside there is a profusion of moulding on the ceiling and sides of the room, each room to be moulded and painted in a different style with regard to the best artistic effect.”

(From Doremus’s 1877 pamphlet, *Floating Down the Mississippi: A Work Descriptive of the Past and Proposed Journeyings of an Artist engaged in Photographing the Magnificent Scenery Along the Father of Waters.*, quoted in *S&D Reflector* (March 1988).)



The *Le Claire Belle* towboat with log raft (about 1877).



STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA (IOWA CITY)

"Played Out? The remains of the River Driver's equipment at the end of the cruise." Doremus photographed objects used by the workers who rafted logs down river: spiked shoes, poles for coralling logs, keg, and tobacco chest.



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Drilling a well (location and date unknown).

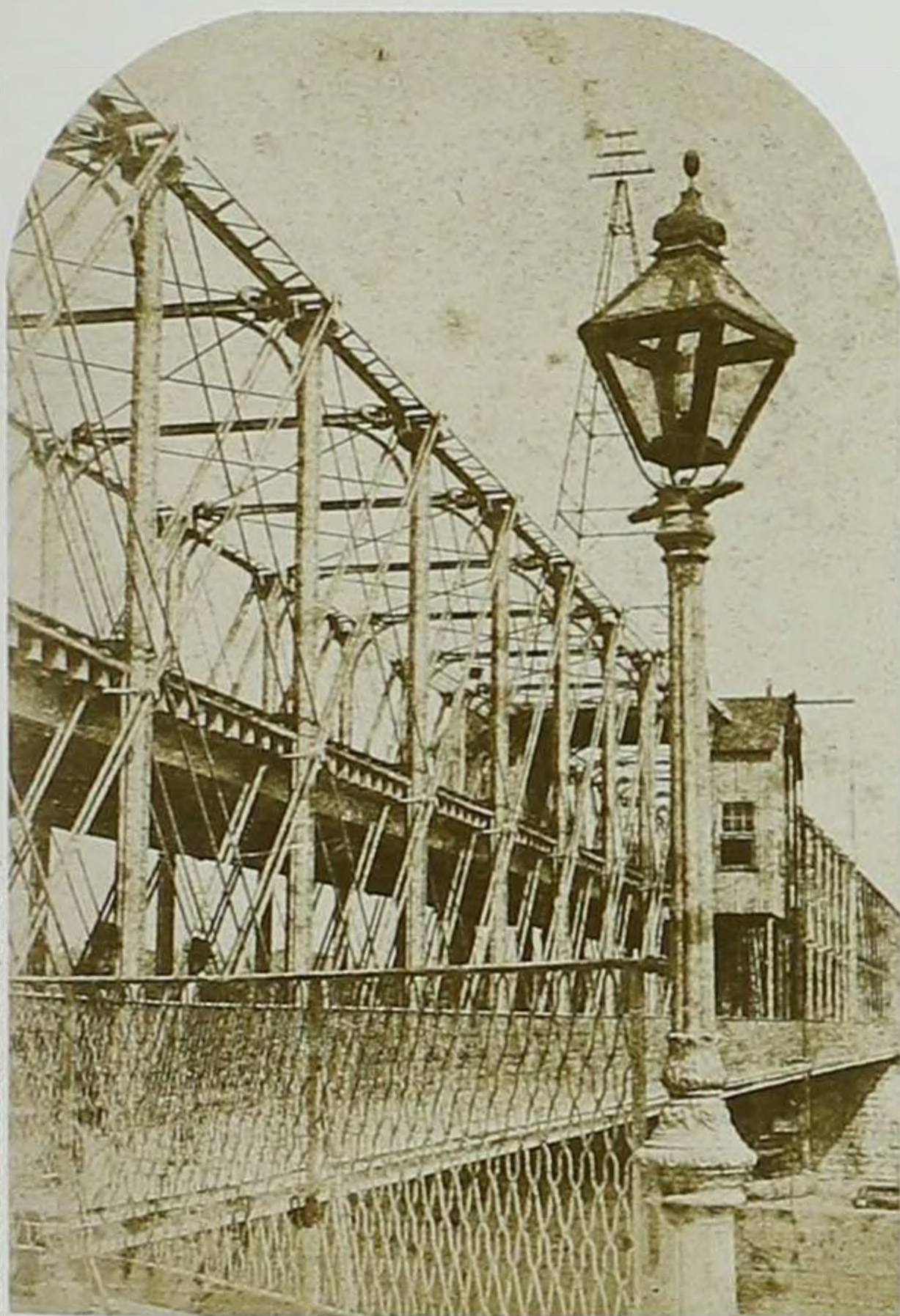


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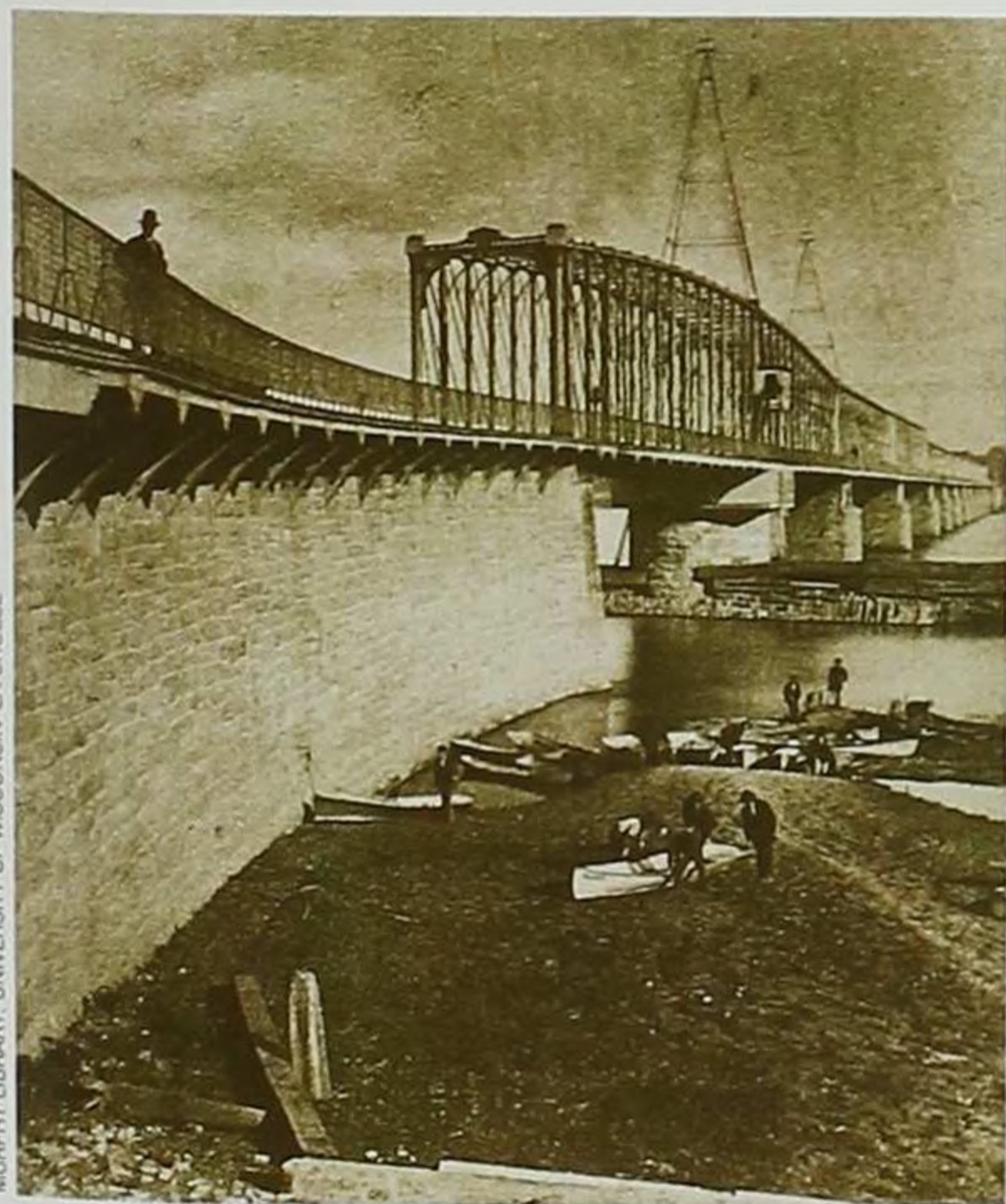
The steamer *Iowa City* towing a raft of logs, bound to a sawmill (about 1877).



Muscatine, Iowa (September 1877).



Right: Lists on back of Doremus stereographs. Above: Bridge from Davenport, Iowa, to Rock Island Arsenal (1877 or 1878). Below: Bridge over the Mississippi at Keokuk, Iowa (September 1877). Bridges worked well as subject matter for stereographs because the vanishing point enhanced the depth of the view.



The following Comprise the Sixth Series.

- 185 View of Victory, Wis.
- 186 Ferry boat at DeSoto, Wis.
- 187 Clayton Cascade, Clayton, Iowa.
- 188 Lossing Waterfall, Clayton, Iowa.
- 189 Guttenberg, Iowa.
- 140 Big Spring, Guttenberg, Iowa.
- 141 Fairy Dell, Guttenberg, Iowa.
- 142 Glen Haven, Iowa.
- 143 C. D. & M. Railroad Bridge, Turkey River, Iowa.
- 144 Point Estes, Turkey River, Iowa.
- 145 Cassville, Wis.
- 146 Buena Vista, Iowa.
- 147 Point Lookout, Buena Vista, Iowa.
- 148 View down the Mississippi from Buena Vista, Iowa.
- 149 Barn Yard scene, Buena Vista.
- 150 Farming tools of the olden time.
- 151 Lansing, Iowa.
- 152 Scenes on a raft towed by steamer Iowa City.
- 153 Savanna, Ill., from the bluff.
- 154 Savanna, Ill., from the elevator.
- 155 Savanna, Ill., from the river.
- 156 Building the winter bridge of the Western Union Railroad at Sabula, Iowa.
- 157 Transfer boat of the W. U. R. R. in winter quarters at Sabula, Iowa.
- 158 Pork Packing Establishment at Sabula, Iowa.

The following comprise the Seventh Series.

- 159. View of Dubuque, I., from the Shot Tower.
- 160. Railroad Bridge across the Miss. at Dubuque.
- 161. View of Clinton, Iowa.
- 162. R. R. Bridge across the Miss. at Clinton, Ia.
- 163. View of Port Byron, Ills., from Le Claire.
- 164. View of Le Claire, Ia., from Port Byron.
- 165. View of Rapids City, Ills.
- 166. Coal Mine at Rapids City, Ills.
- 167. Steamer Robt. Ross, coaling up at Hampton, Ills.
- 168. Steamer Iowa pushing a raft.
- 169. View of Davenport, Ia., from the Tower of Rock Island Arsenal.
- 170. Davenport, Ia., from the tower of School House.
- 171. Dav. Bridge, Upper or Railroad Section.
- 172. Dav. Bridge, Lower or Carriage Road Section.
- 173. Interior views of Dav. Water Works.
- 174. Cathedral of the Diocese of Iowa, Davenport.
- 175. Episcopal Cathedral and Bishops House, Davenport, Iowa.
- 176. Griswold College, Davenport, Ia.

ROCK ISLAND ARSENAL.

- 177. Government Bridge from Davenport, Iowa, to Rock Island Arsenal.
- 178. View from the Tower of Storehouse A. Main Avenue, entrance gates, &c.
- 179. Near view of Entrance Gates.
- 180. Commanding Officers Quarters.
- 181. Shops A, C & E. (Main Avenue)
- 182. Pump House.
- 183. Col. Rodman's Monument.
- 184. Entrance to Cemetery.
- 185. West Front of Armory, Shop B.
- 186. Interior of Shop A.
- 187. Bridge from R. I. Arsenal to Moline, Ills.

- 188. View of Andalusia, Illinois.
- 189. View of Muscatine, Iowa.
- 190. View of Burlington, Iowa.
- 191. R. R. Bridge across Miss. at Burlington.
- 192. View of Montrose, Iowa.
- 193. Sternwheel Steamer Ashland.
- 194. View of Keokuk, Ia.
- 195. Bridge across Miss. at Keokuk, Ia.
- 196. Repairing the Lower Lock of Des Moines Rapids Canal.
- 197. Cabin of Passenger Steamboat Golden Eagle.