

Old Grocery Stores

When an announcement appeared in *The Bedford Times-Press* headed "Miller's Market Closed Here Saturday" I was spurred to complete a story about the old grocery stores in Bedford during my boyhood days.

Clark Miller's Market, under one name or another, had been in existence for more than 60 years when he closed it. It had been located on the same corner for nearly half a century. When our family moved to town in the spring of 1898, it was owned and operated by Lem Deremer. The building on that corner is now occupied by the offices of Attorneys Ralph C. and Richard R. Jones.

My father, Thomas S. Mahan, purchased the store in 1898 and sold it in 1907 to John H. Roe who later moved it across the street to its recent location. Later this store was owned and operated in turn by J. M. Little, Les Galey, and Clark Miller. Throughout the many years of its existence it had the same telephone number — 20.

During my boyhood days, eight grocery stores, all locally owned, and two meat markets served the people of Bedford and vicinity. On Court Street, Sid Dunning and later Charley Beall had a grocery in the building now occupied by the

Econ-o-Wash Coin Operated Laundry. Next door south A. C. Brice and Sons (Elmer, Basil, and Calvin) operated the grocery earlier owned by Swearingin Brothers, R. S. and W. C.

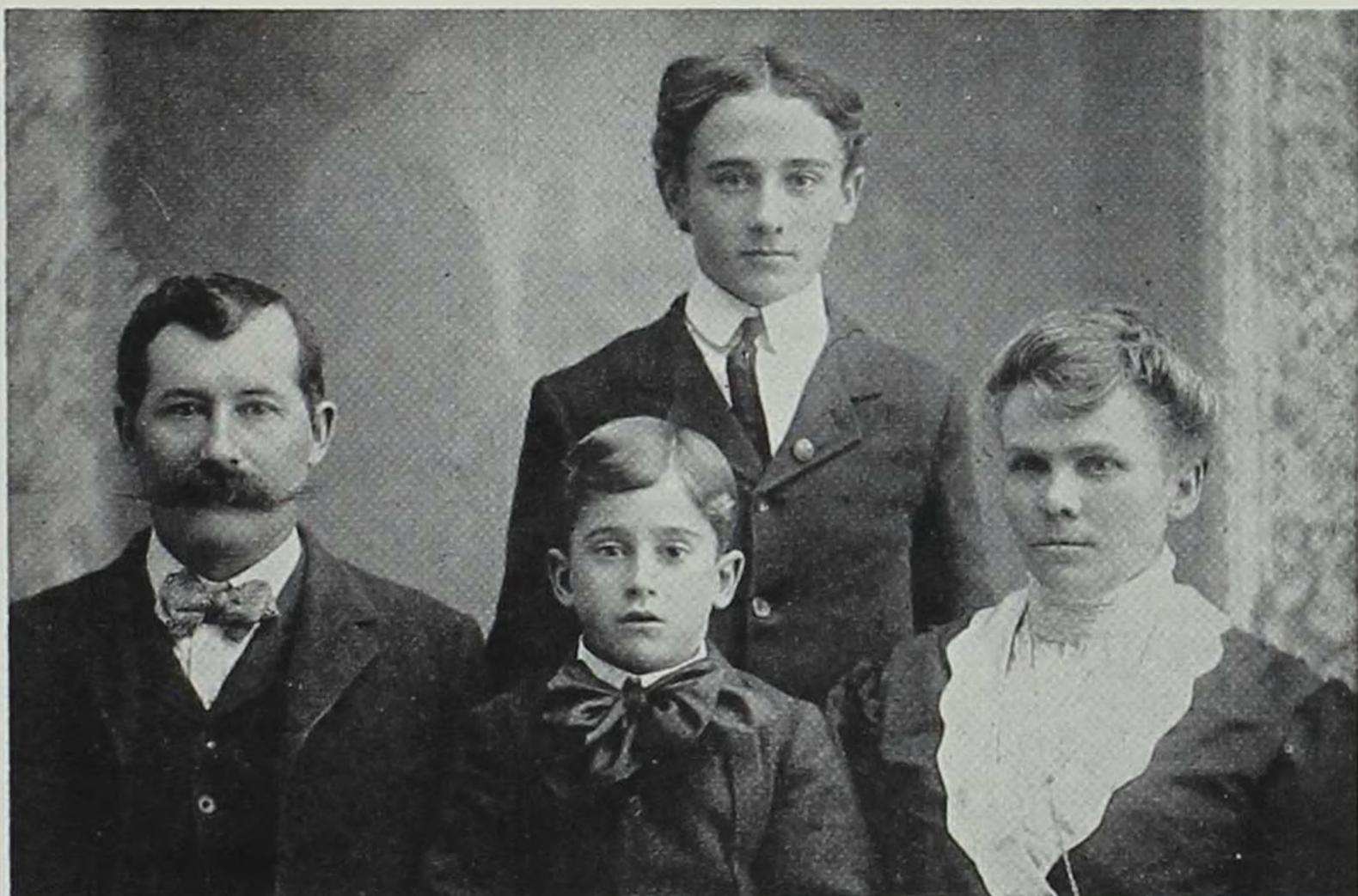
A few doors farther south, at the present site of Don Foreman's TV and Paint Shop, was Nelse J. Levine's Meat Market, later converted into a grocery by his son, Walter. At the present site of Blanche Trumbo's Style Shoppe was the grocery, operated by Frank Beall assisted by his sons, Charley, Love, and Orville. Earlier this store had been known as "Fowler and Beall's Grocery."

East on the north side of Main Street was Sam D. Maxwell's Grocery, and a few doors farther east was J. Perry Opdylke's Meat Market.

On the next corner was Ed Vansickle's General Store with dry goods in the front half and groceries in the rear. East in the same block was the large grocery operated by E. R. Fowler assisted by his two sons — Walt and Gus.

On the south side of Main Street, the Evans Brothers, W. F. and Jesse J., had a grocery in the lower half of the G.A.R. Building, now rebuilt for the Bedford Post Office. My father's grocery in the present Jones Building at the corner of Court and Main streets completed the list.

All of the grocery stores in Bedford during my boyhood were much alike with a limited range of stock compared with the supermarkets of today. However, stocks then were more than adequate,



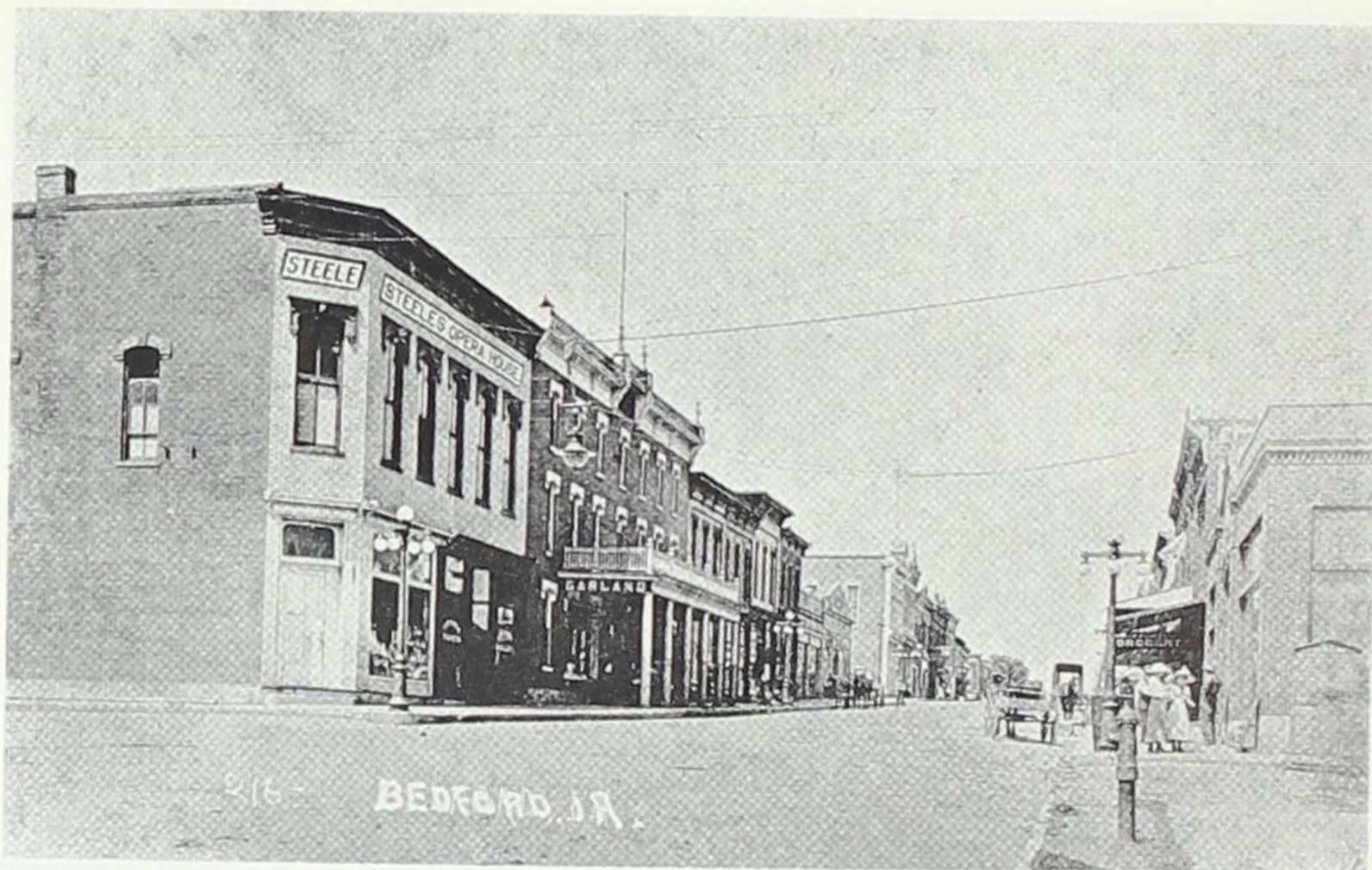
Mahan family at Bedford in 1905. Father—Thomas S.; Bruce E., age 14;
Mother—Luvira Titus; Brother—Frank T., age 6.



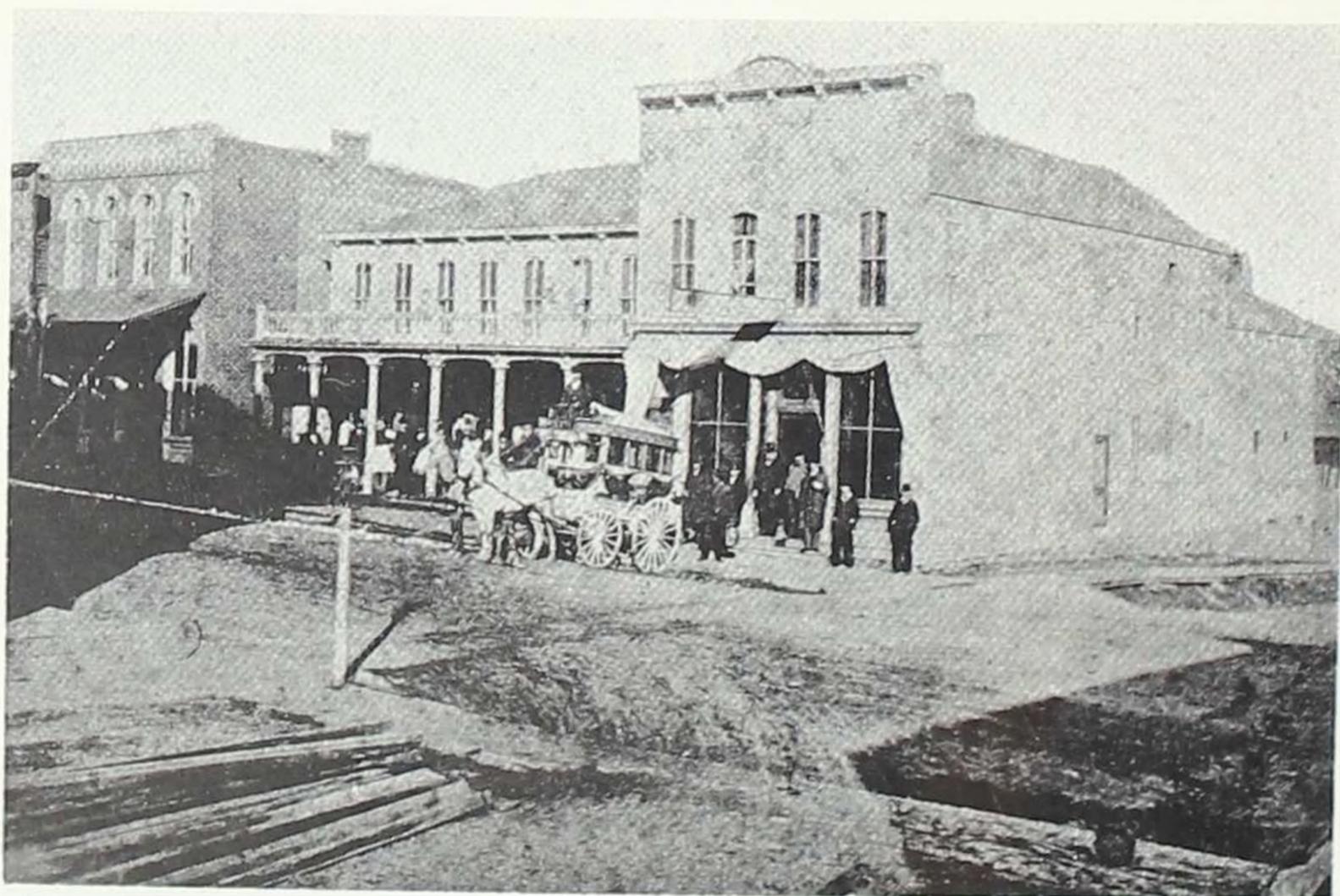
Bruce E. Mahan,
Associate Editor, State Historical Society
July 1, 1923. Age 32.



Golden Wedding Anniversary picture.
Bruce E. and Edna Rohret Mahan,
April 22, 1964.



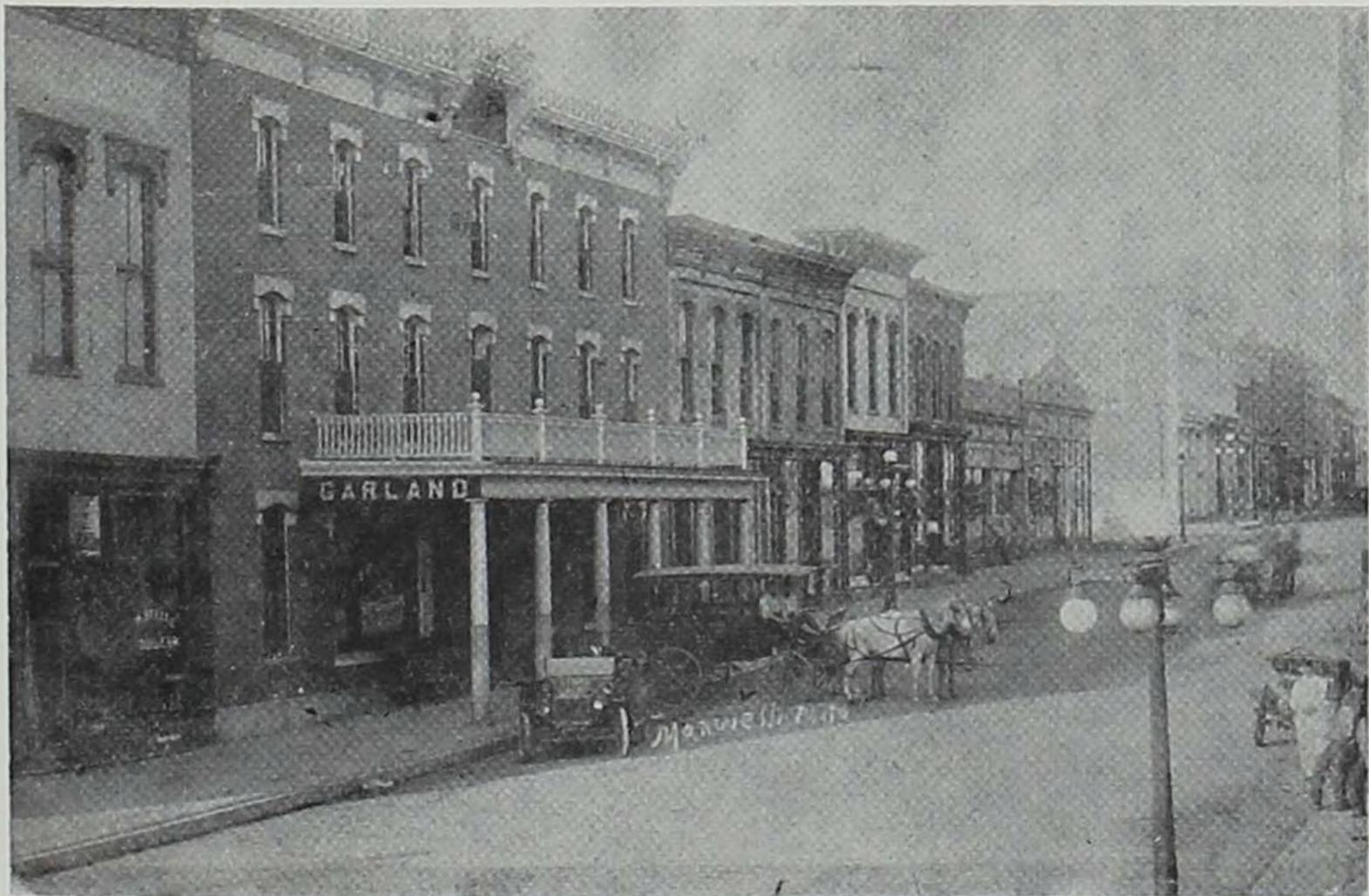
Steele's Opera House about 1905. Upstairs hall used for plays, dances, and meetings.



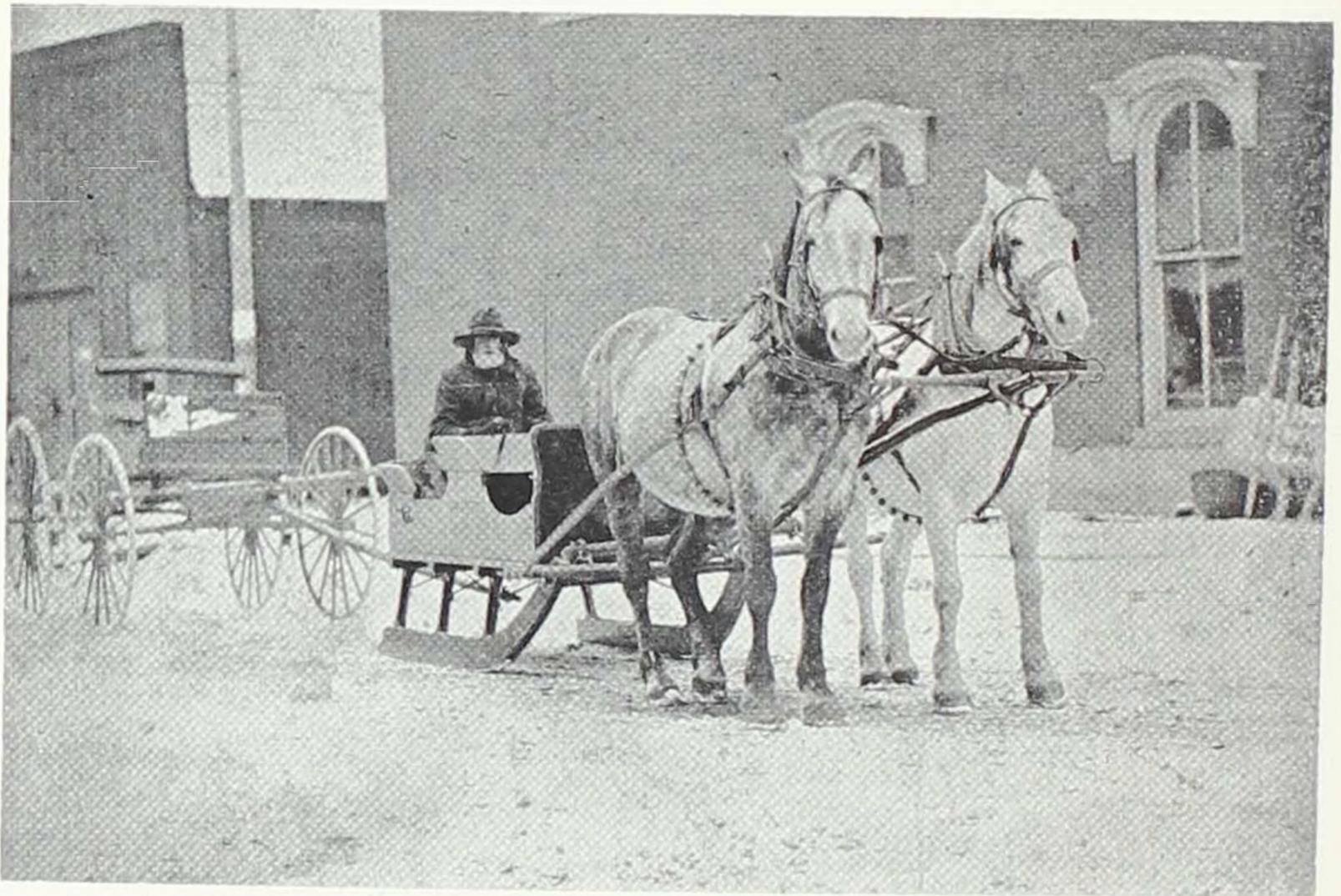
Clifton House, formerly the Pacific House. Across the street from Steele's Opera House. Old-style depot bus in front. Later, site of the Clark Theatre, destroyed by fire, and the present Hardin Theatre.



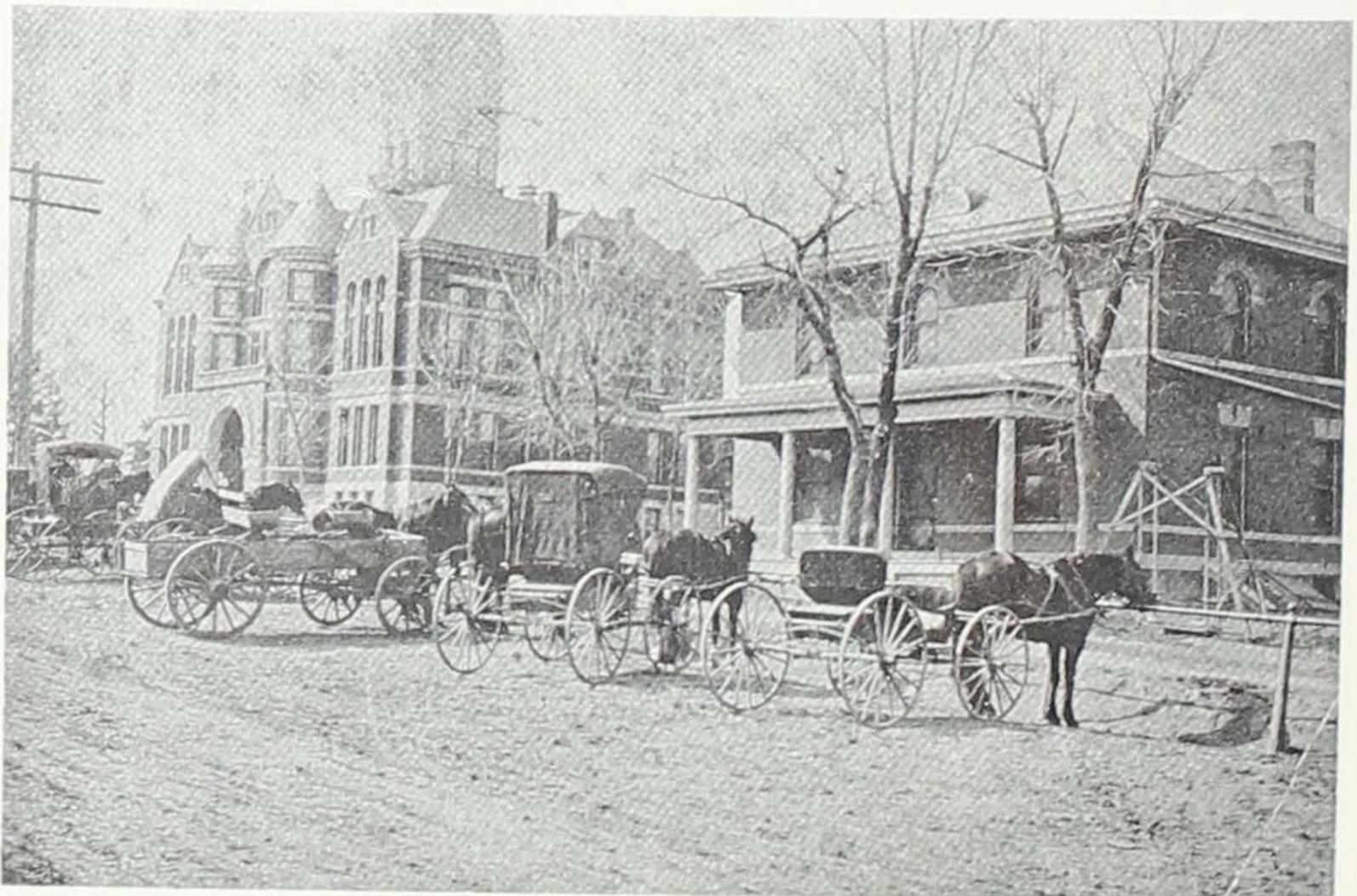
Merchants sweeping upper Main Street before street was paved. Streets were a sea of mud in springtime.



Hotel Garland, formerly Bedford House, on lower Main Street. (Hotel was renamed for daughter of J. J. Clark, newspaper editor and businessman.) Hack-type depot bus is awaiting passengers in front of the hotel.



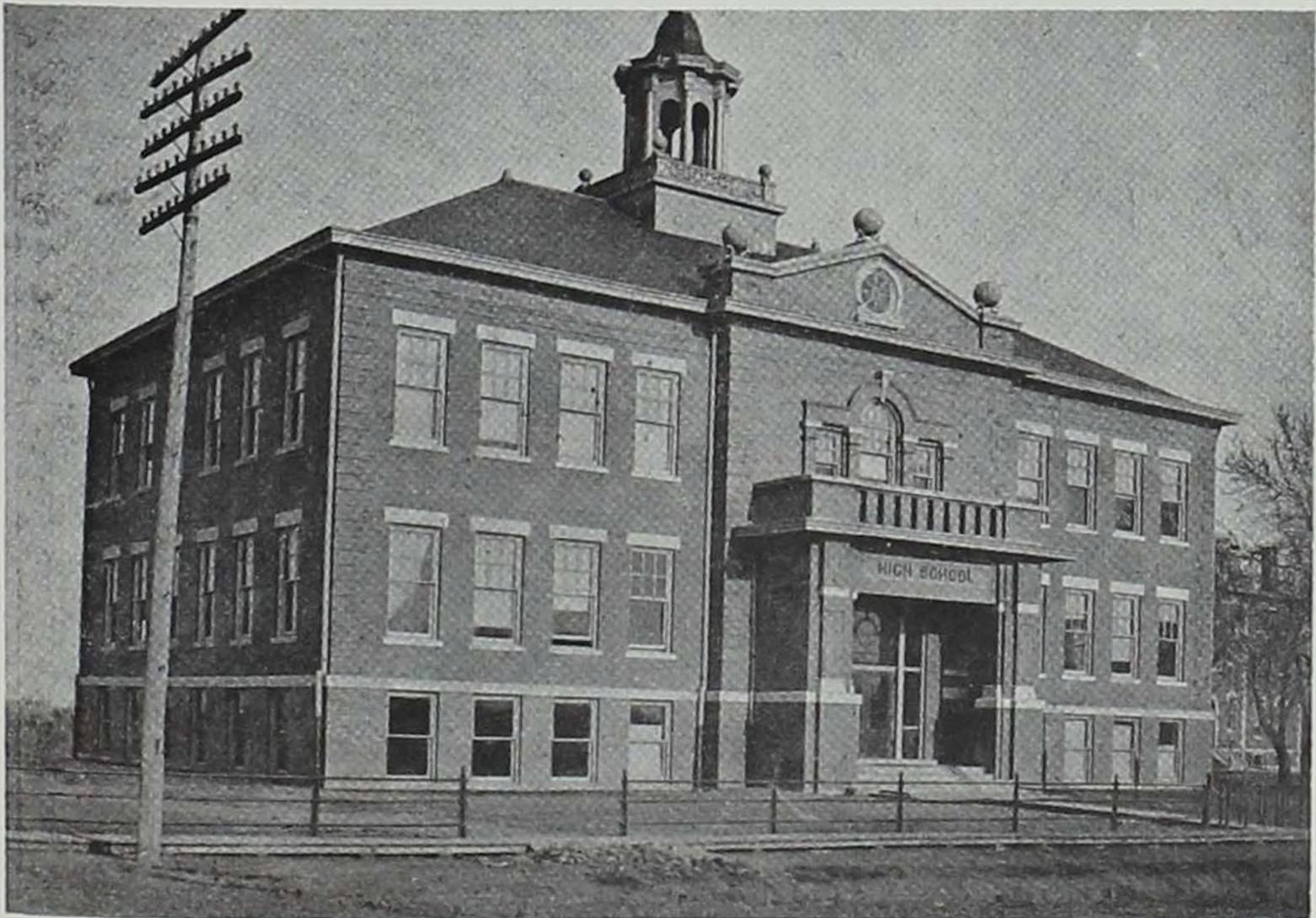
Sleigh made for farmer Sol Neumeyer by blacksmith Cy Wolverton, an expert workman in wood and metal. Blacksmith shop at left rear.



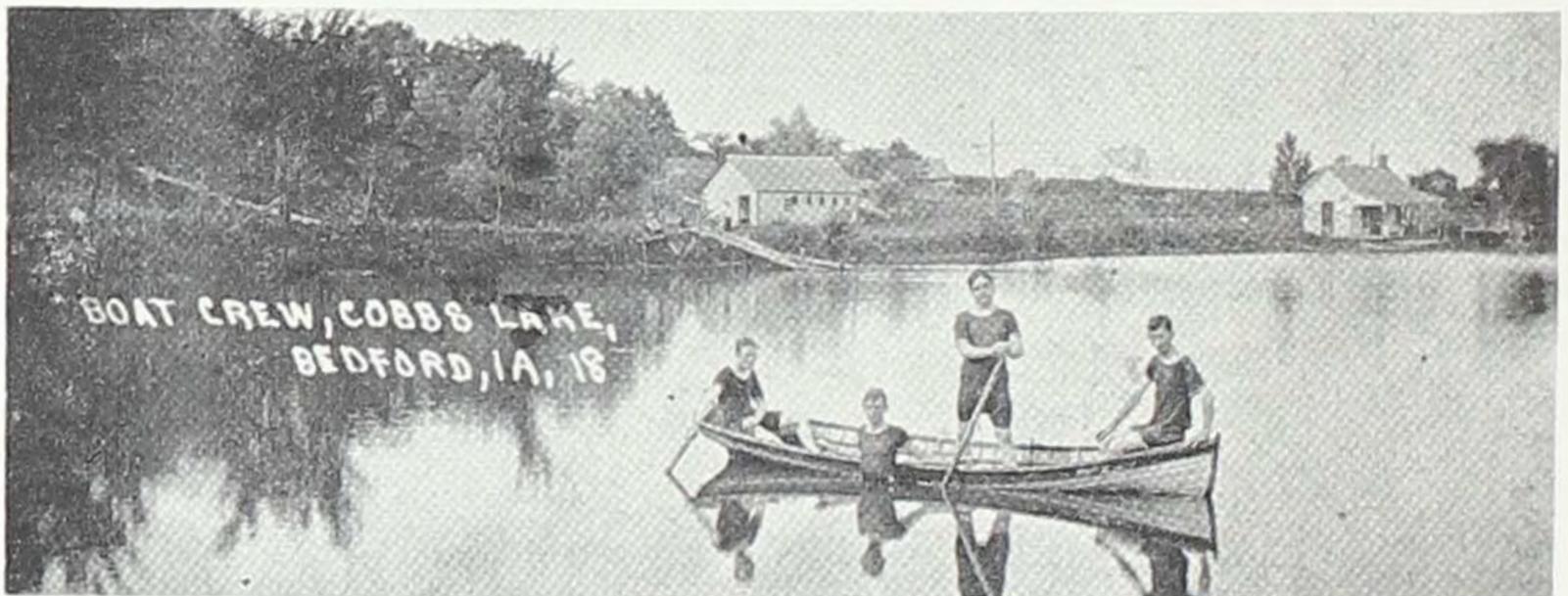
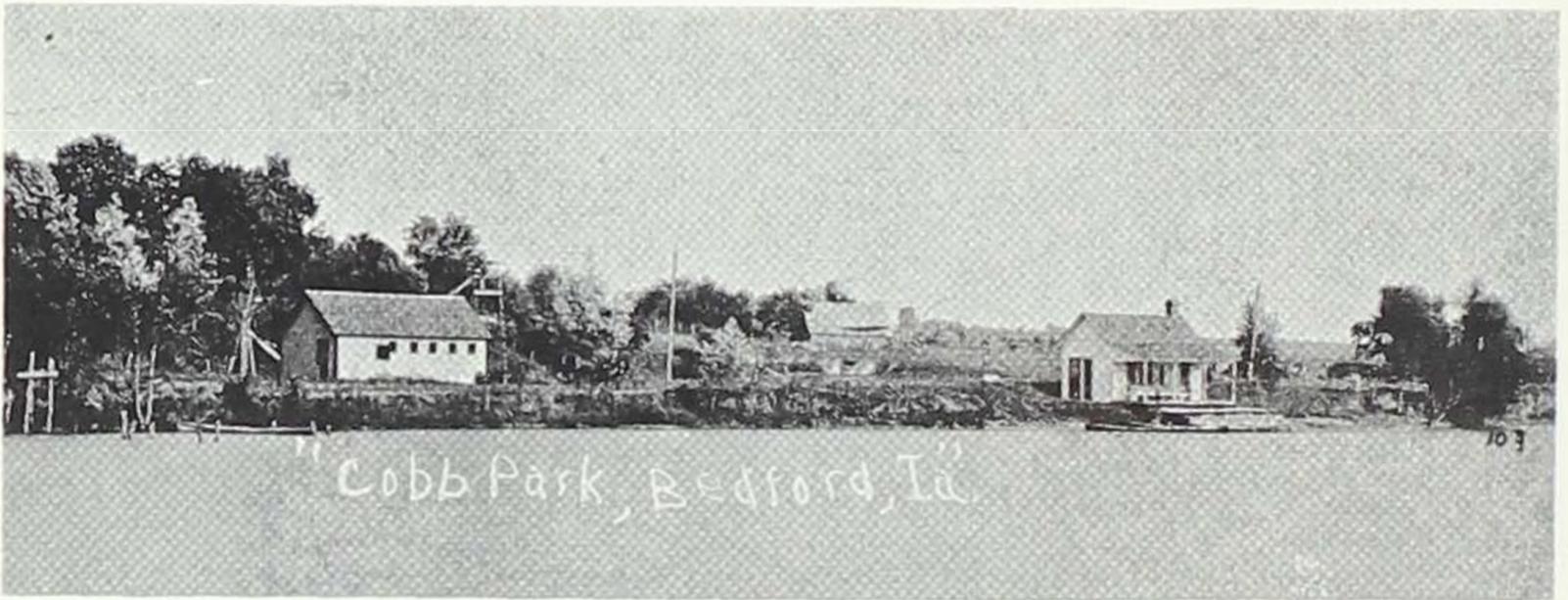
Sheriff's home, jail at rear not visible. Hitching racks in front and court house at upper left. On Saturdays, horses and buggies filled four sides of the court house square.



Brick grade school attended by the author. It served Bedford from 1877 to 1927.



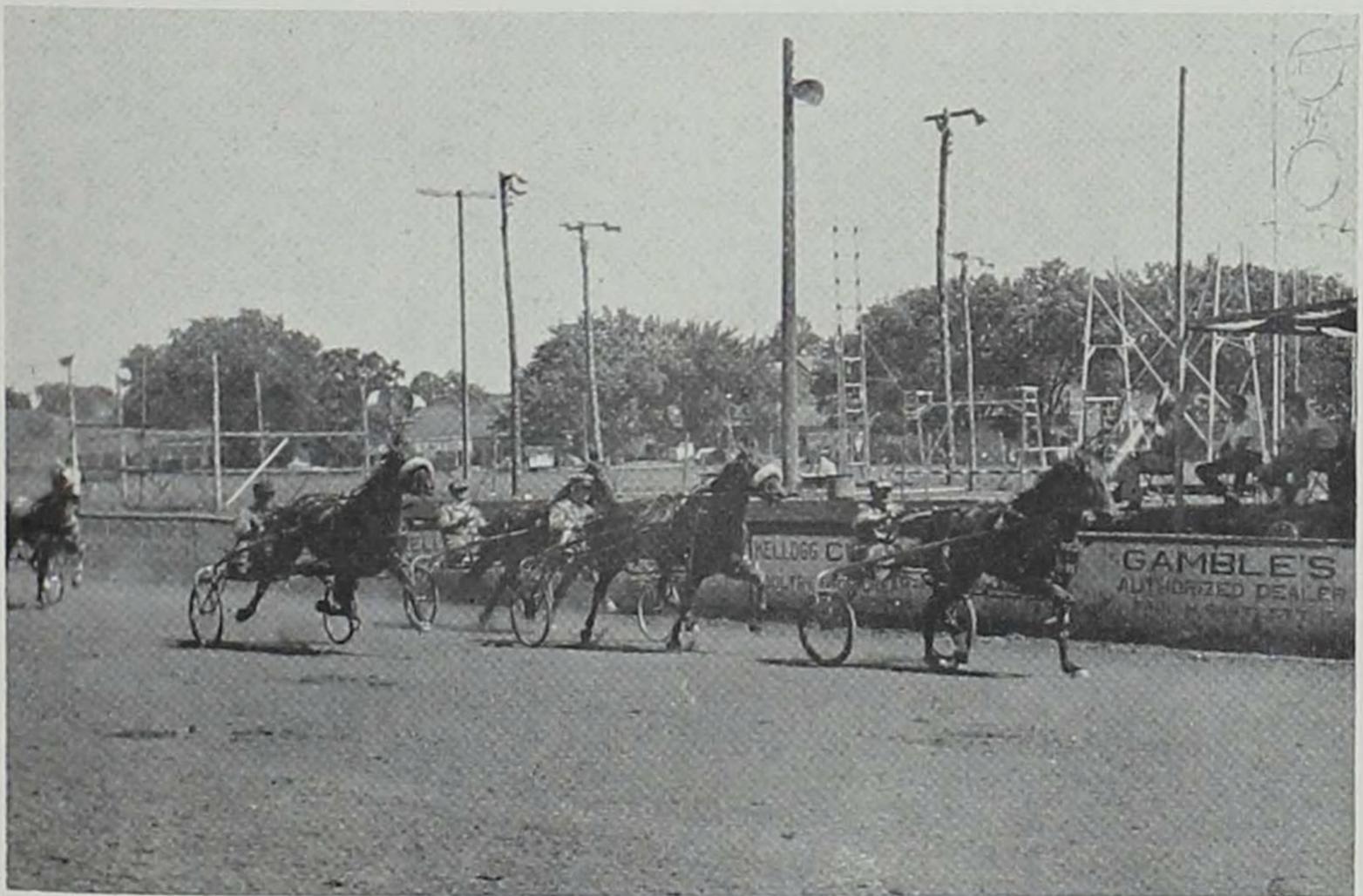
High school attended by the author. Built in 1904. Now used as a grade school.



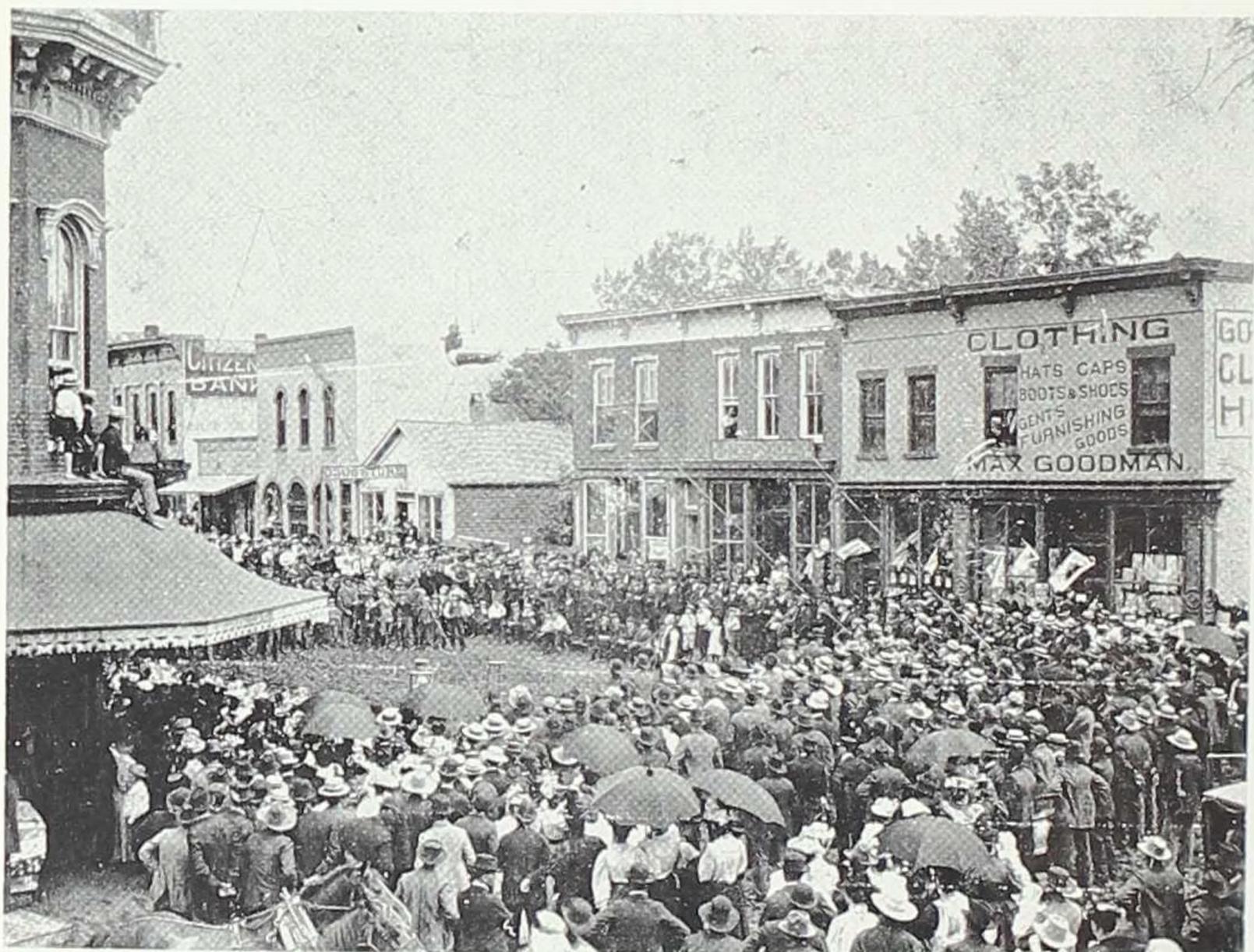
Scenes of Cobb Lake and Park. Used in summer for swimming, boating, fishing, and picnics; for skating and ice cutting in winter. Cobb Lake was a popular recreation center during the author's boyhood. It has been replaced by Lake of Three Fires State Park north of Bedford.



Champion baseball team of early Bedford. During the author's boyhood, Bedford had many fine baseball teams, and the games were attended by large crowds.



Harness racing at Taylor County Fair. To a boy, the Taylor County Fair was a wonderland of horse racing, midway attractions, livestock exhibits, and floral hall displays. Country visitors would bring their lunches and stay all day.



Fourth of July high wire performance at corner of Court and Main streets. These shows furnished thrills and chills for young and old. Boys, including myself, filled the front row of spectators.

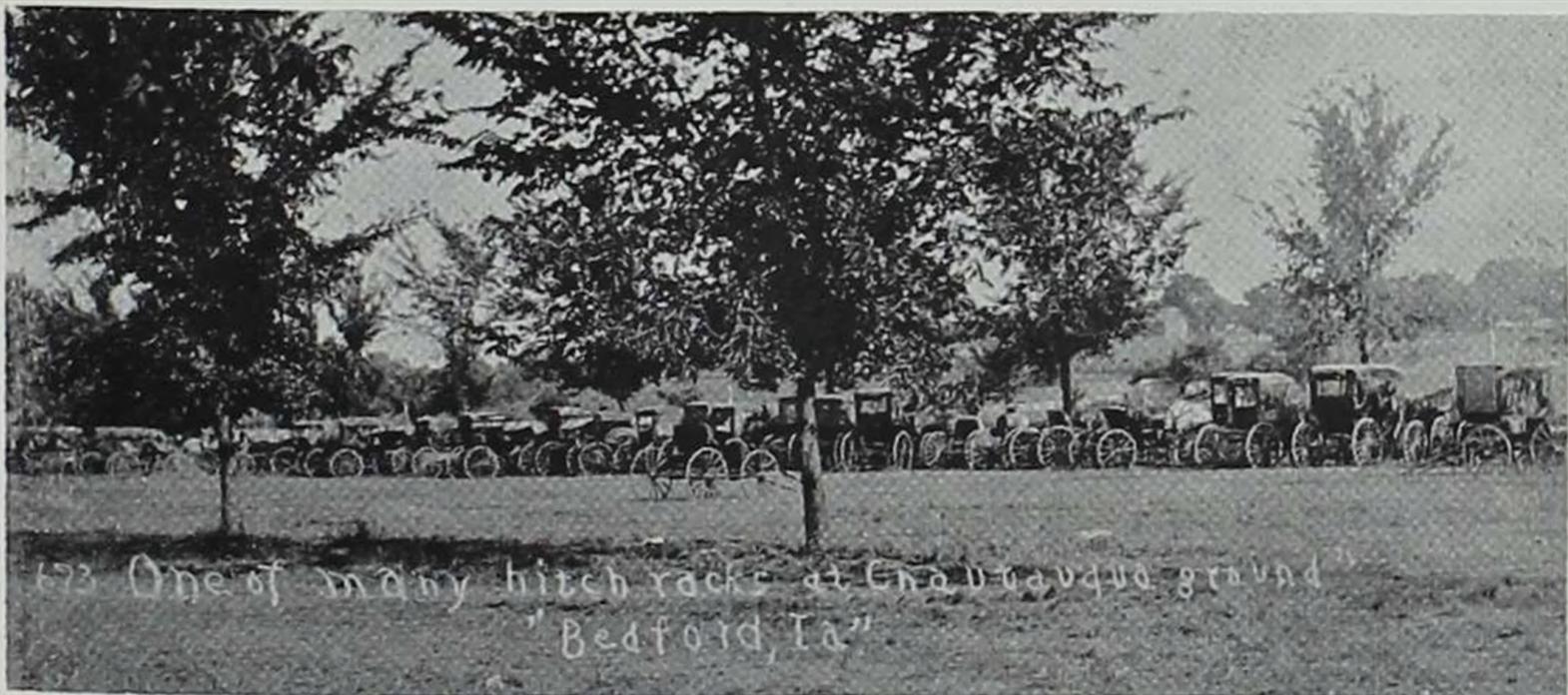


Fourth of July platform entertainment at same site. Chautauqua sign above on corner building advertised Bedford's next summer attraction.



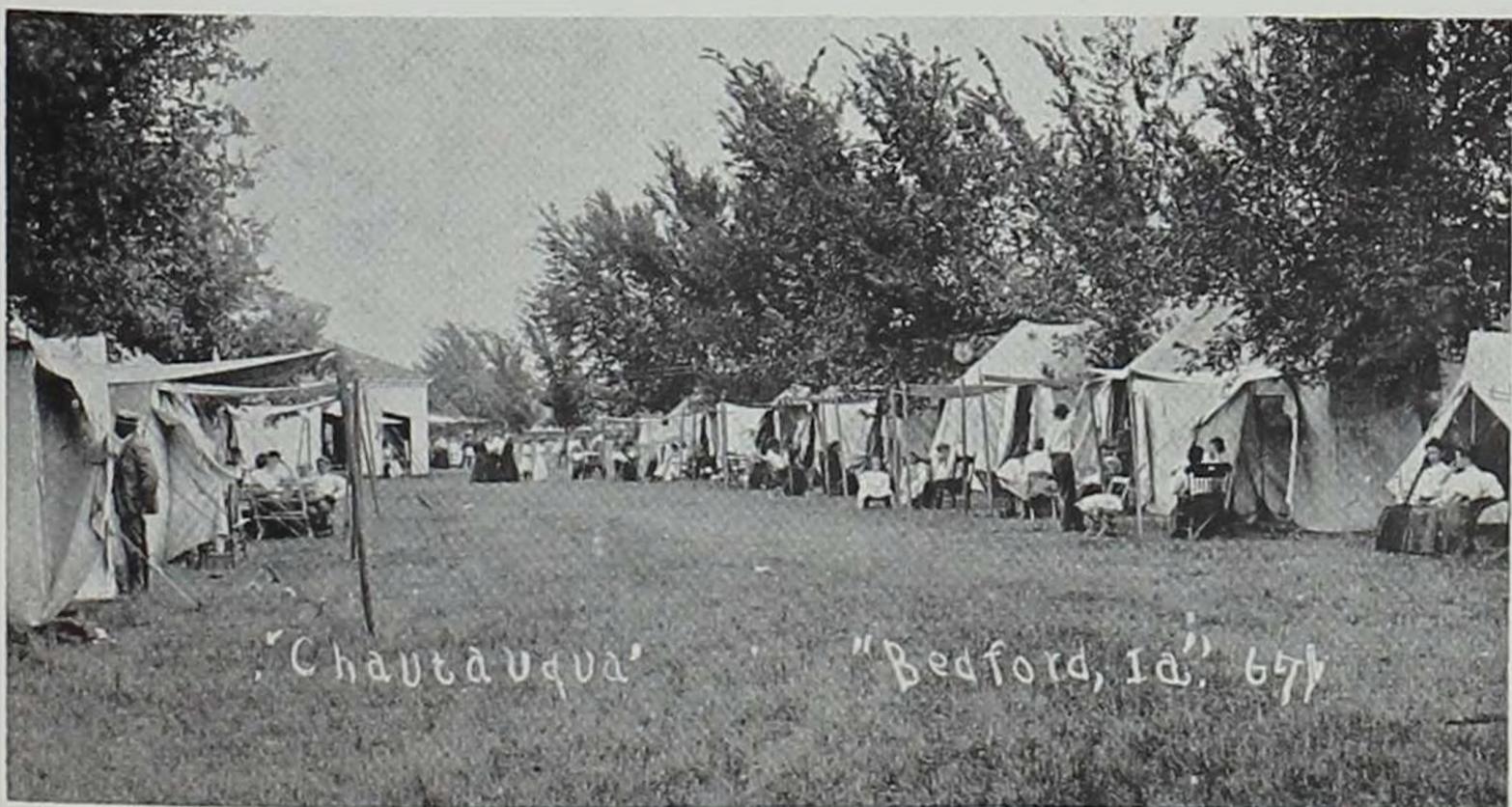
642 Foot Bridge at Chautauqua Grounds, Bedford, Ia.

Crossing footbridge enroute to town after Chautauqua session. Large crowds attended Bedford Chautauquas.



673 One of many hitch racks at Chautauqua ground
"Bedford, Ia."

Well filled horse and buggy hitchrack at Bedford Chautauqua along the fairgrounds racetrack.

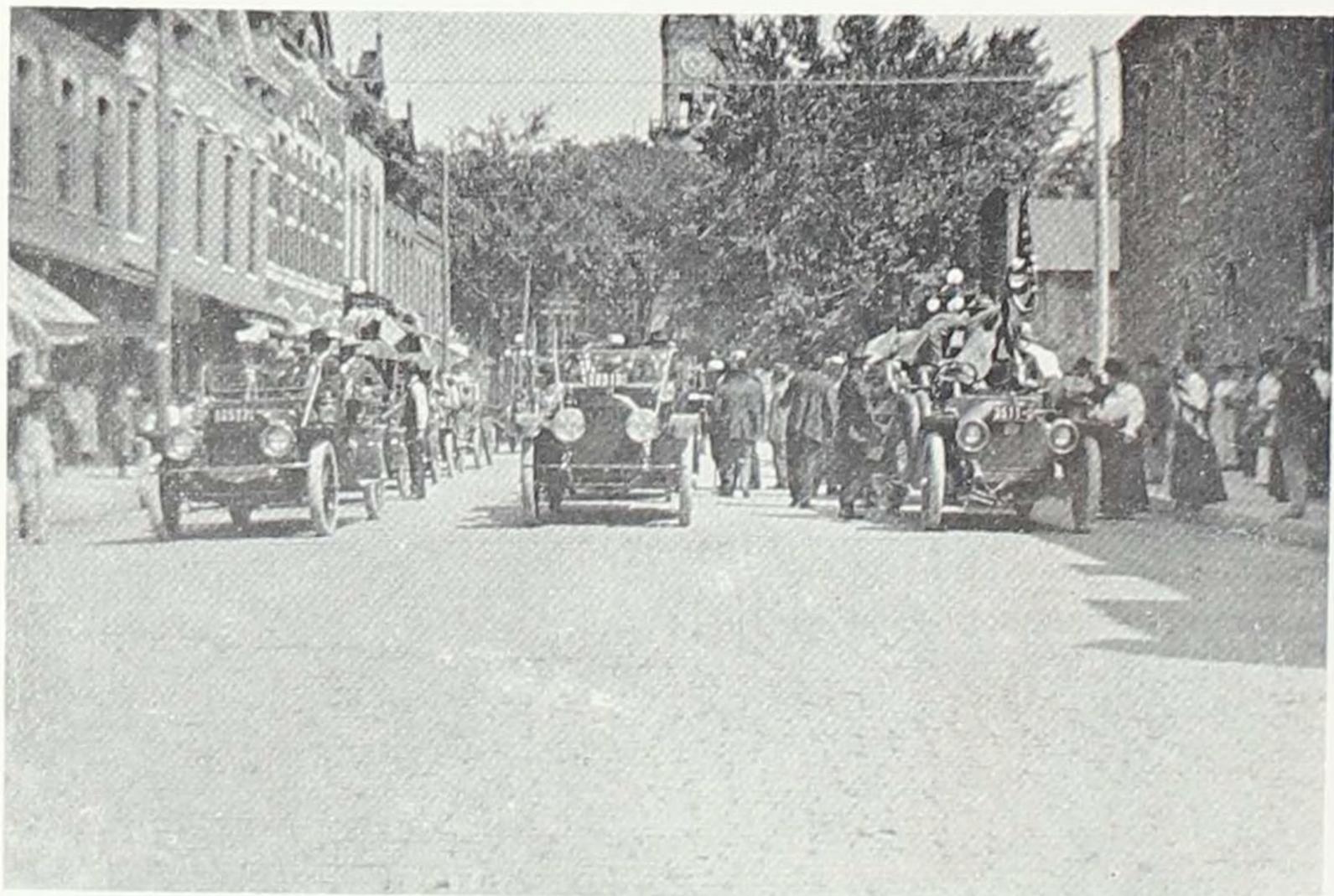


"Chautauqua" "Bedford, Ia." 677

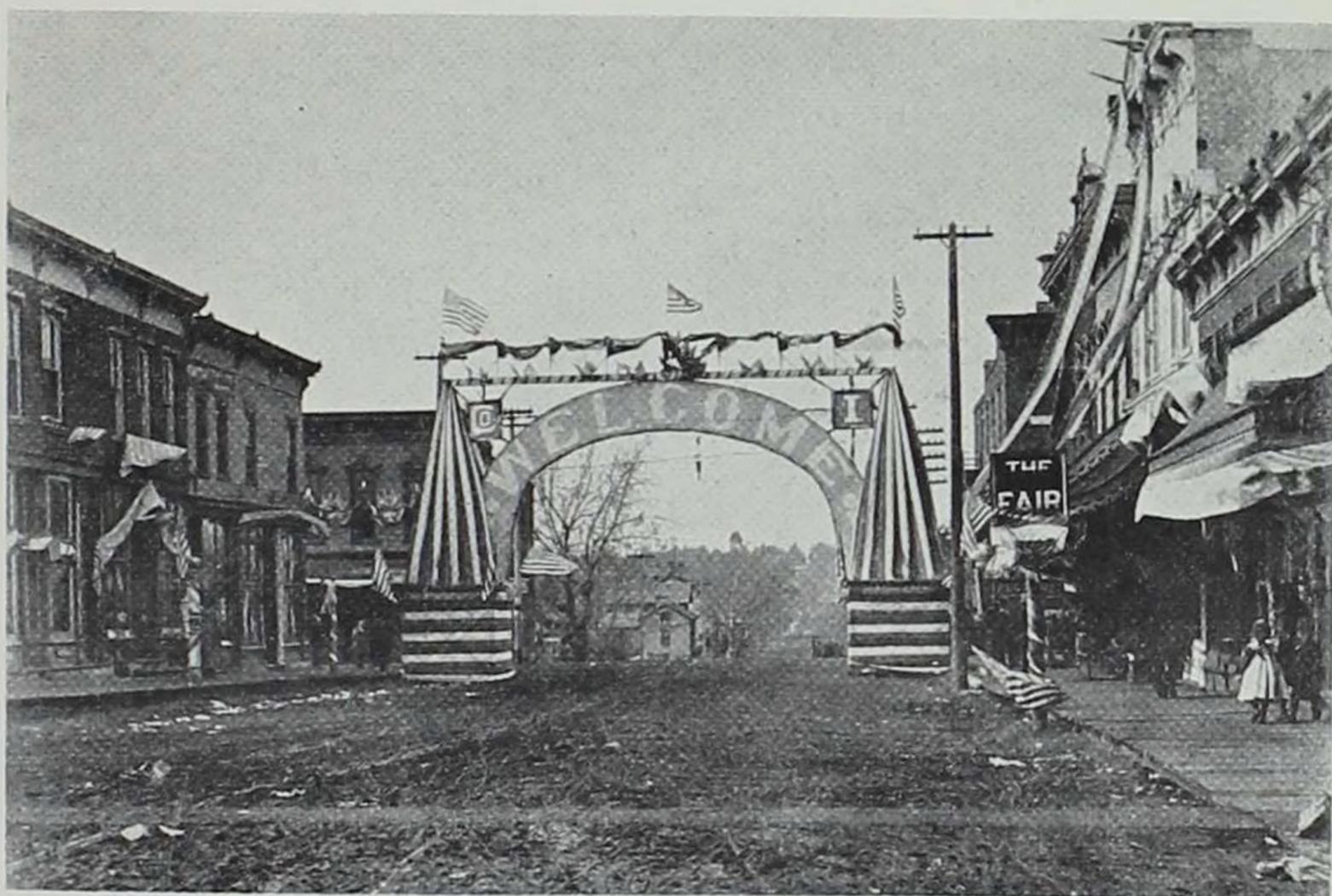
Tent city for campers at popular Bedford Chautauqua. Pavilion was located east of the tent city.



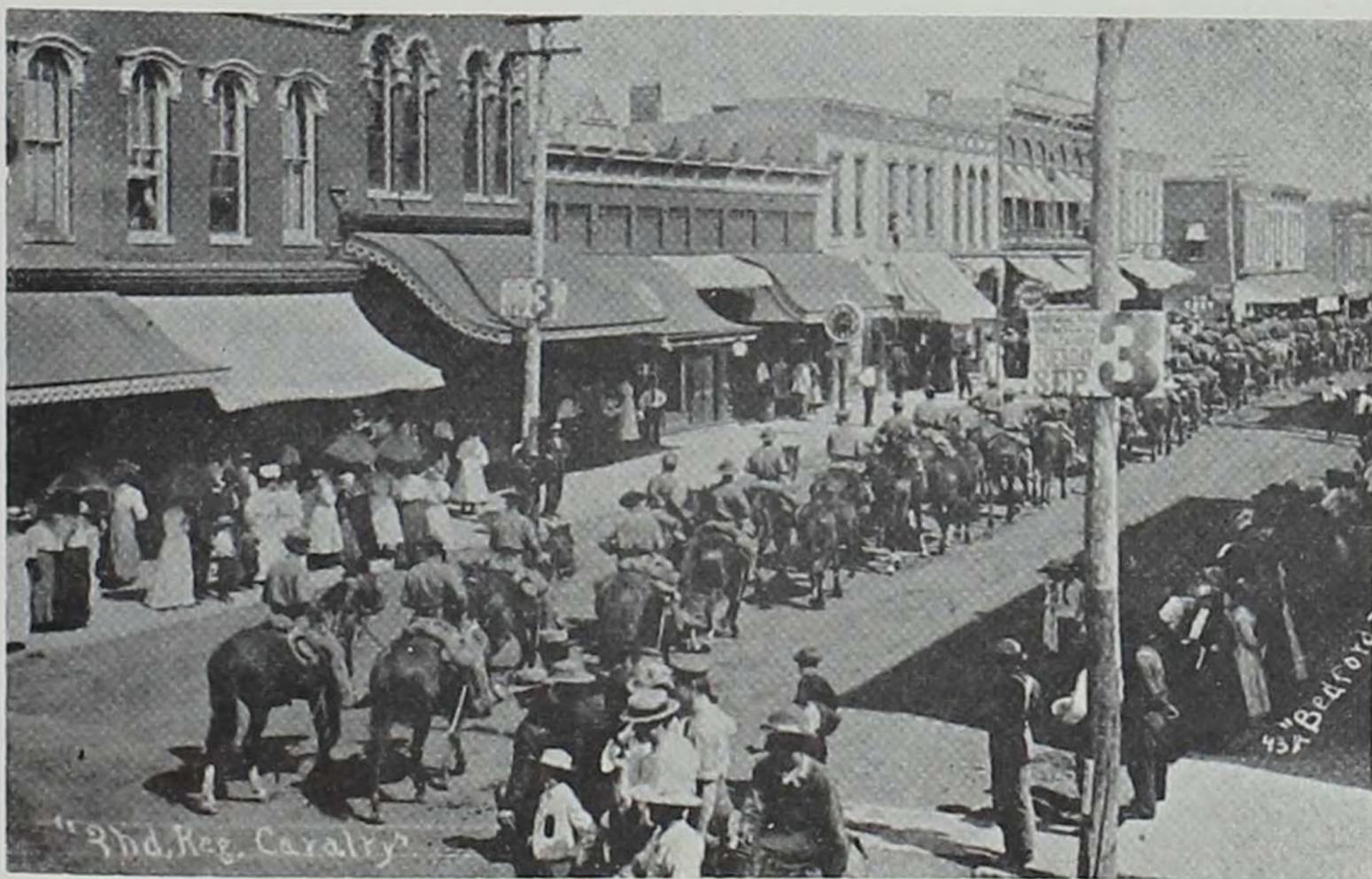
Bedford Civil War veterans. Members of Sedgwick Post No. 10 G.A.R.
founded June 7, 1883.



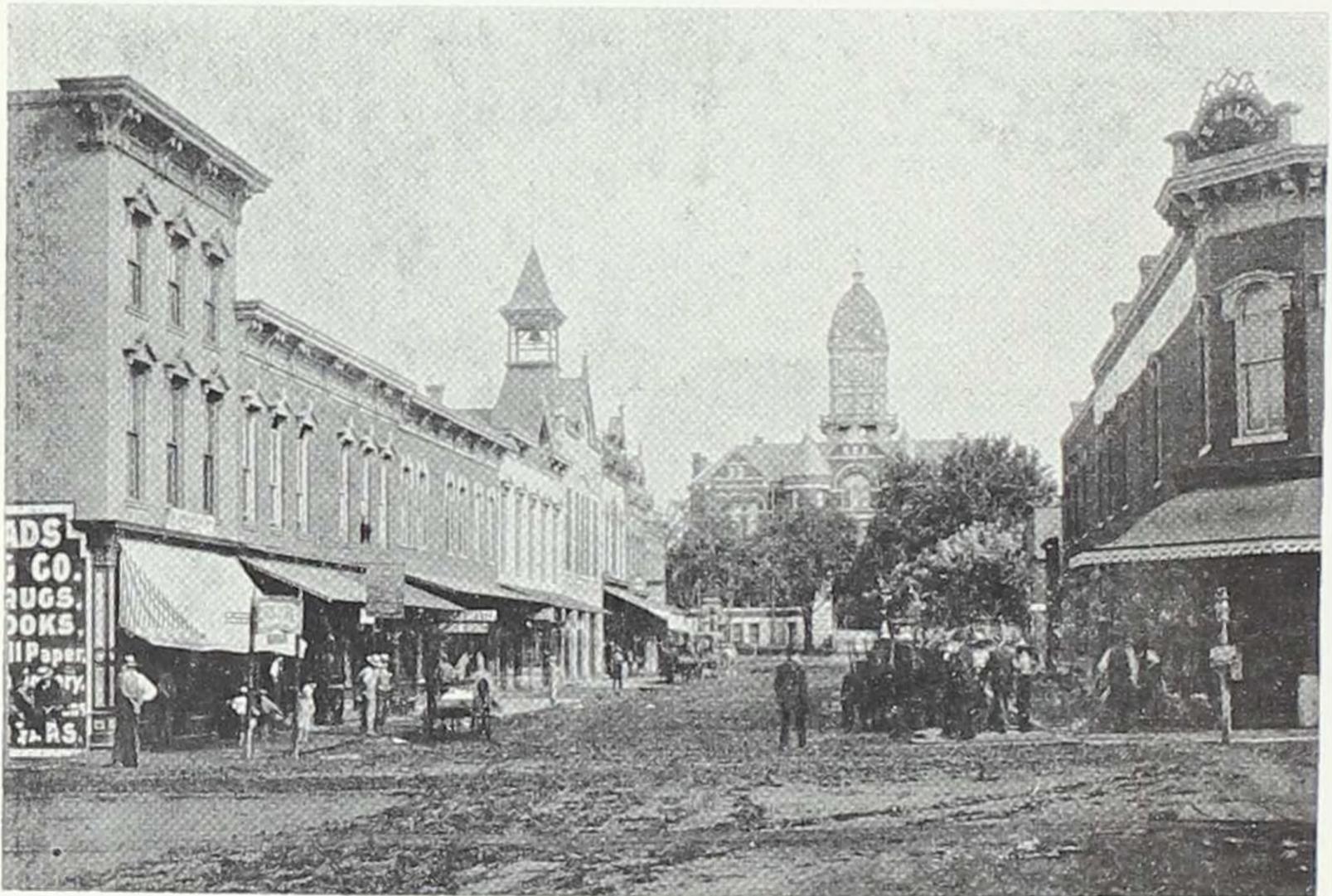
Memorial Day Parade forms on Court Street. Autos replaced carriages used earlier
for veterans who for many years marched the long mile to the cemeteries.



Welcome Home Arch for Bedford's Co. I, 51st Iowa Infantry, on return from service in Philippine Insurrection, Spanish-American War, November 6, 1899. Old and young in Bedford lined the streets from the court house to the depot to welcome their heroes.



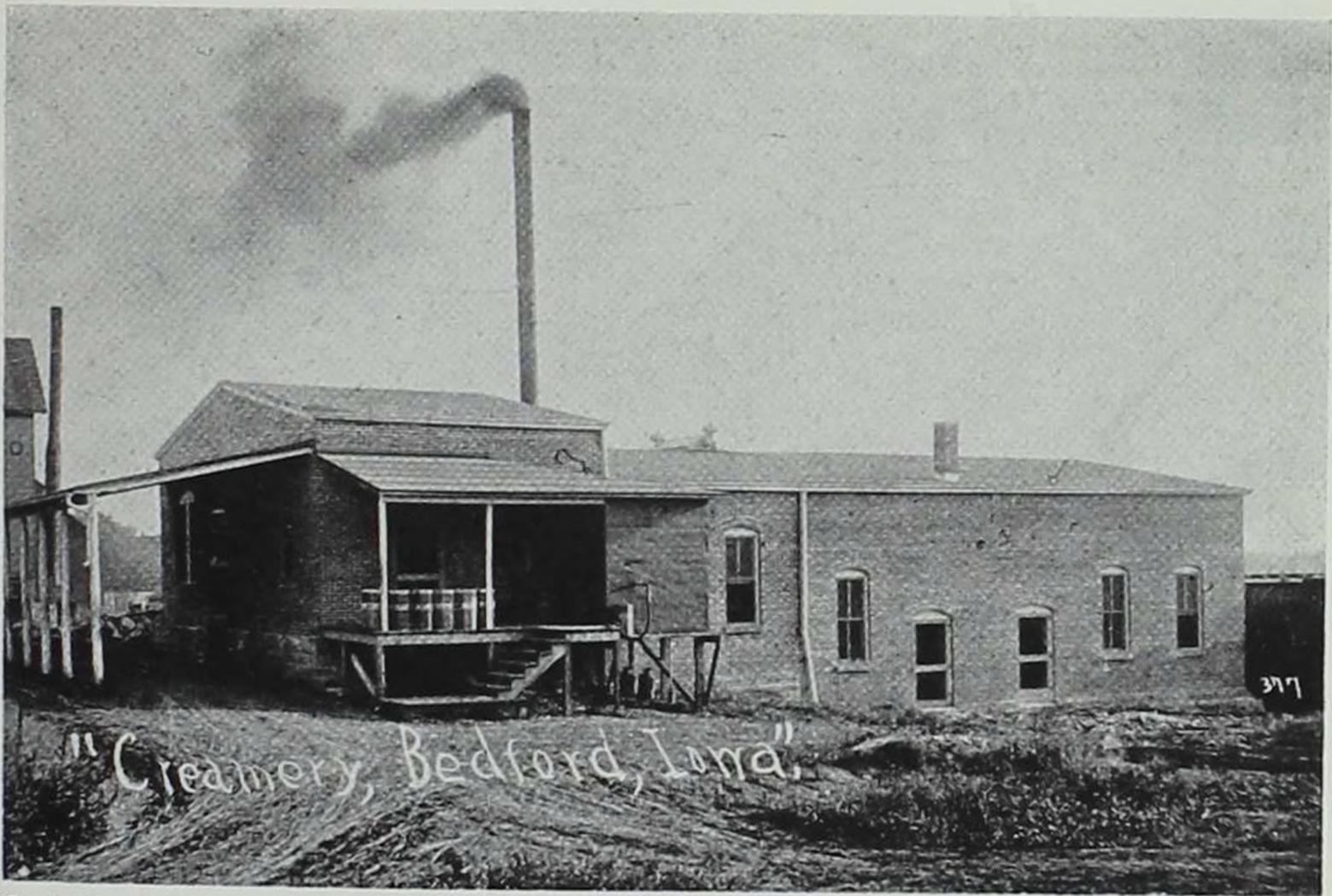
2nd U.S. Cavalry enroute from Fort Riley, Kansas, to Fort Snelling, Minnesota, parade down Bedford's Main Street. The outfit encamped at the fairgrounds.



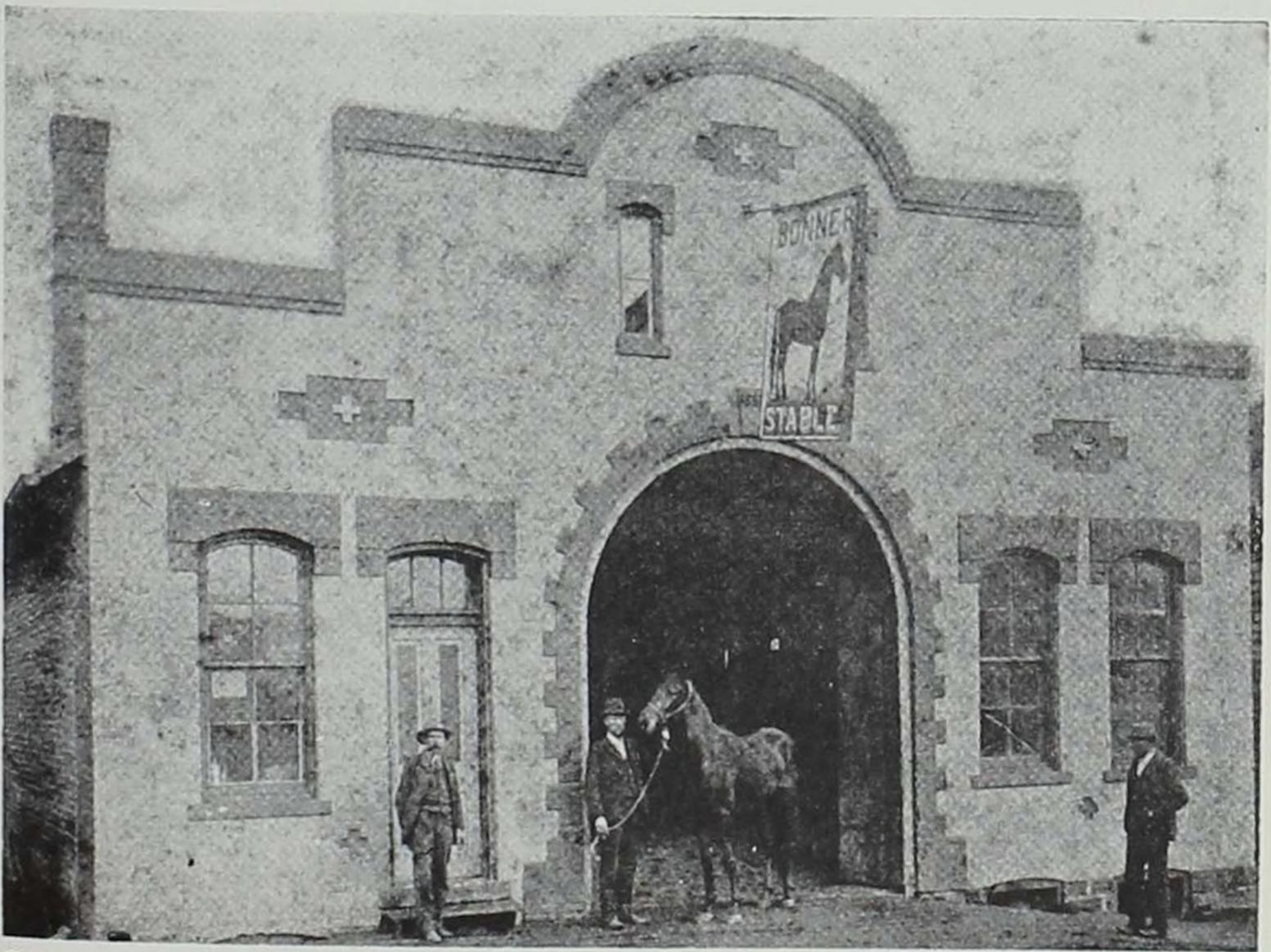
Court Street before paving. Three-story building on corner and City Hall cupola were landmarks. Old oil street lamp on corner.



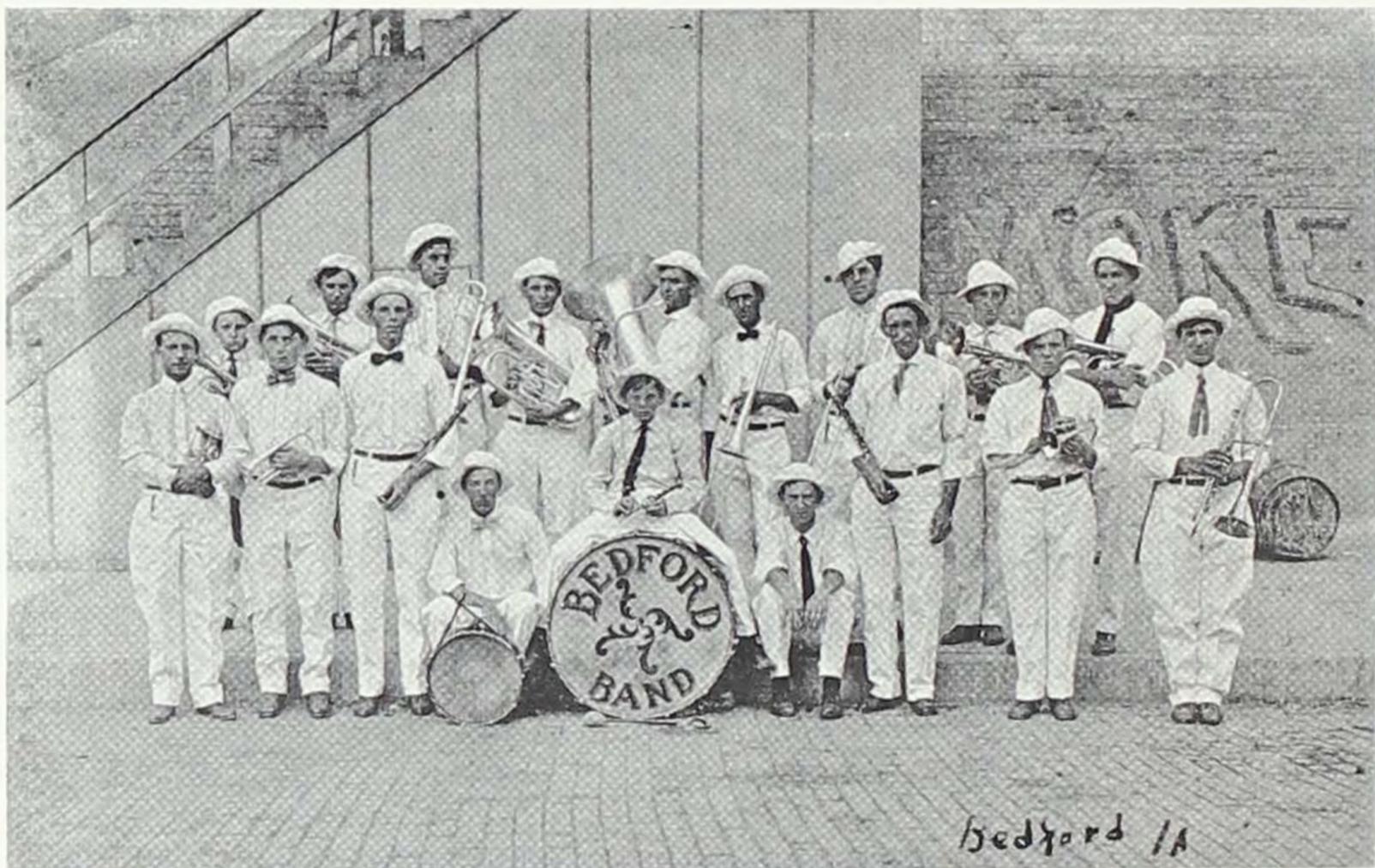
Court Street after paving. Five-cluster electric street lamp on corner. Third story of building on corner and City Hall cupola were later removed.



Old Bedford Creamery. Carloads of butter were shipped east each week during the author's boyhood. It was an important industry in Bedford.



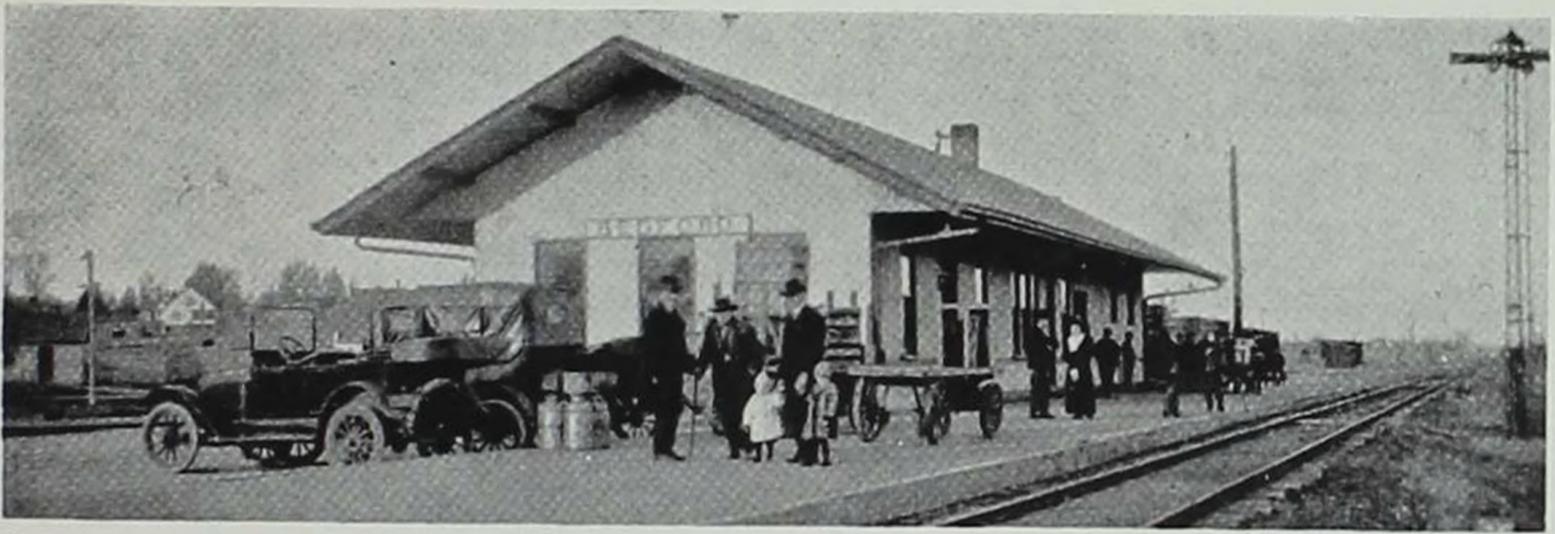
Old Bonner Livery Stable, built in 1880, provided complete, high-grade livery service for Bedford and vicinity. Later it was used as a garage, a warehouse and hatchery, and now houses bowling alleys.



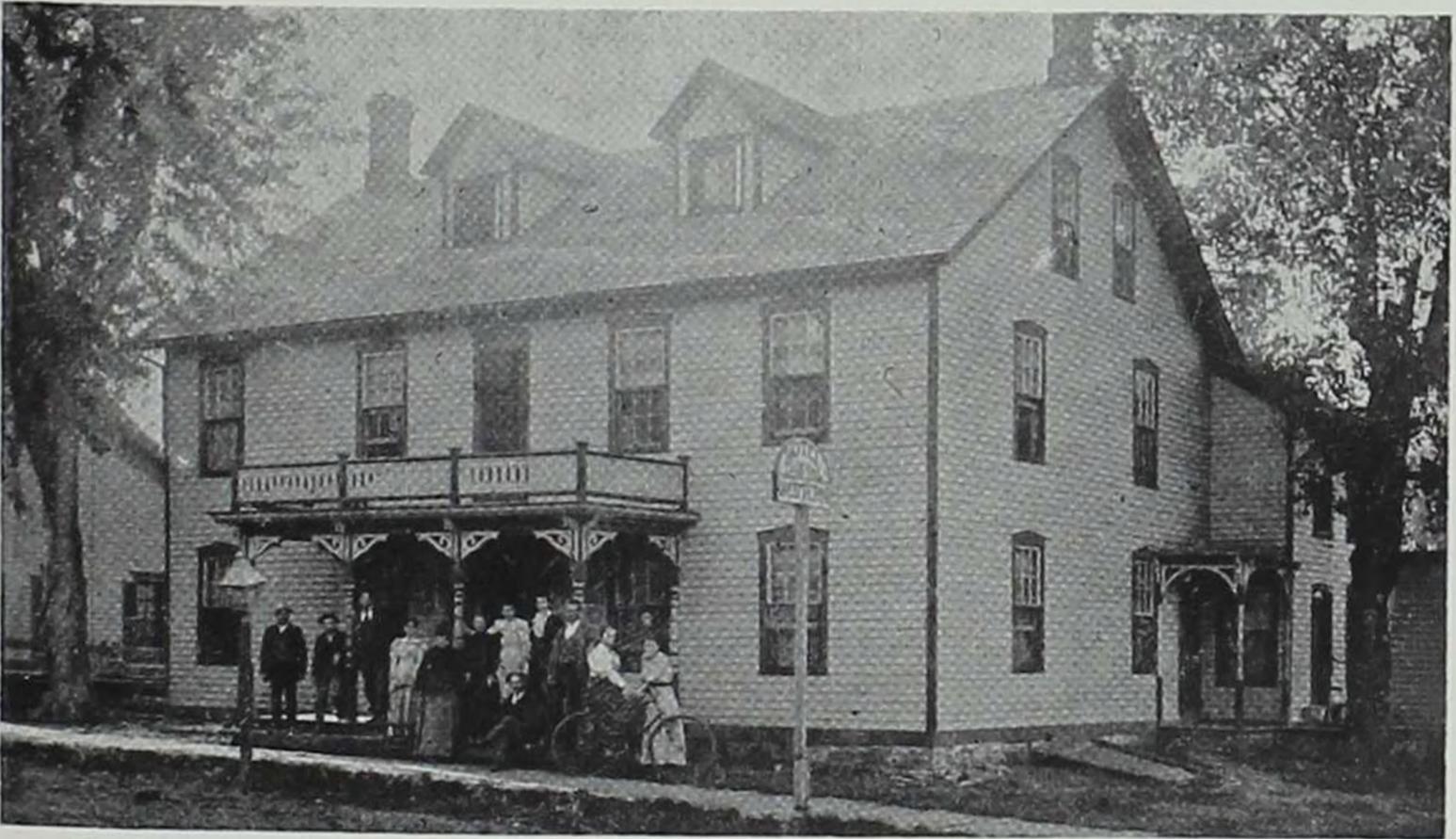
Bedford Band in summer dress about 1908 or 1909. The Band played Saturday night concerts, marched in parades, and furnished music at the county fair.



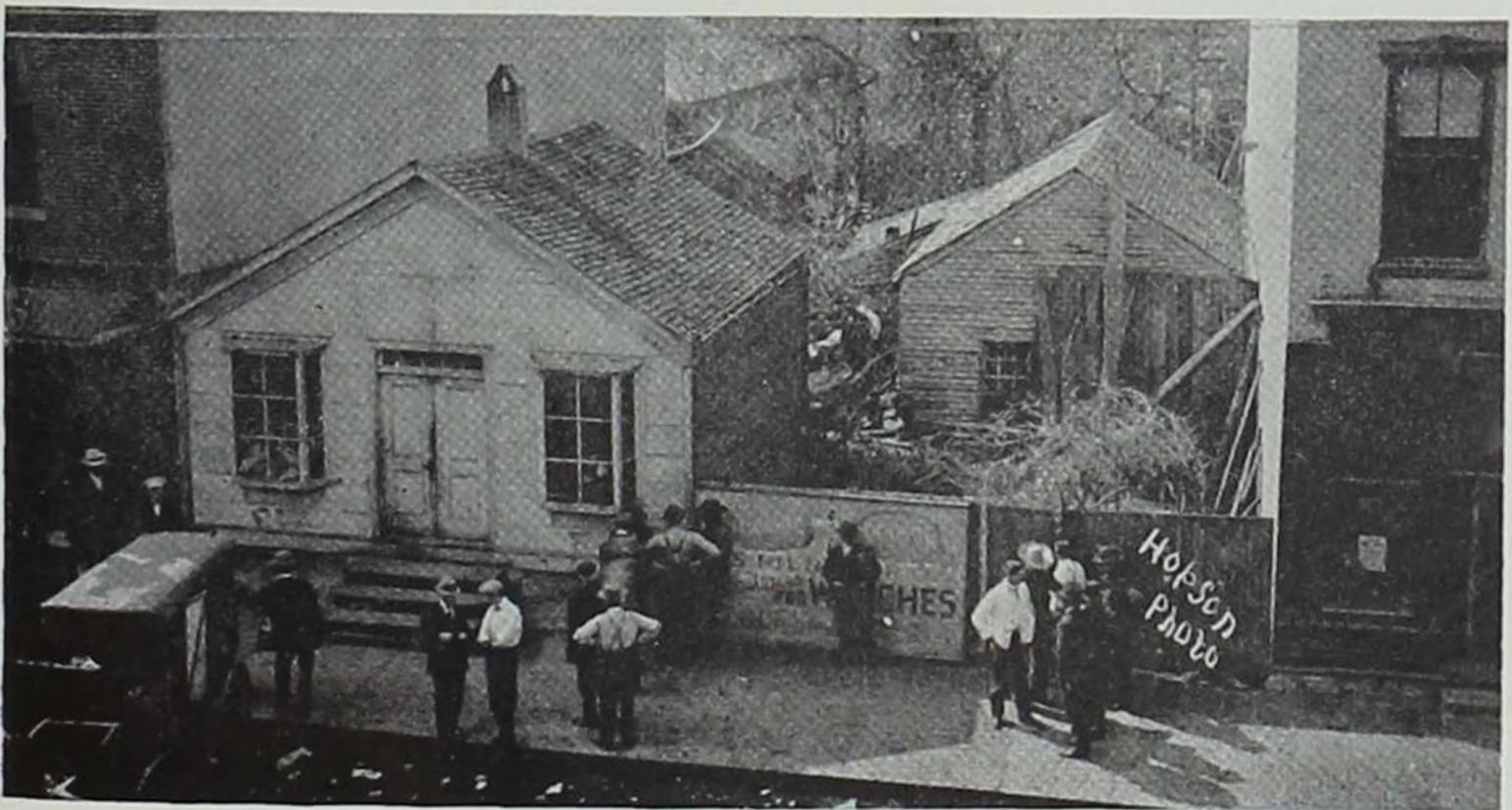
Bandstand in courtyard park. Formerly used for concerts, Memorial Day and Fourth of July addresses, and union church services in summer. Now dismantled.



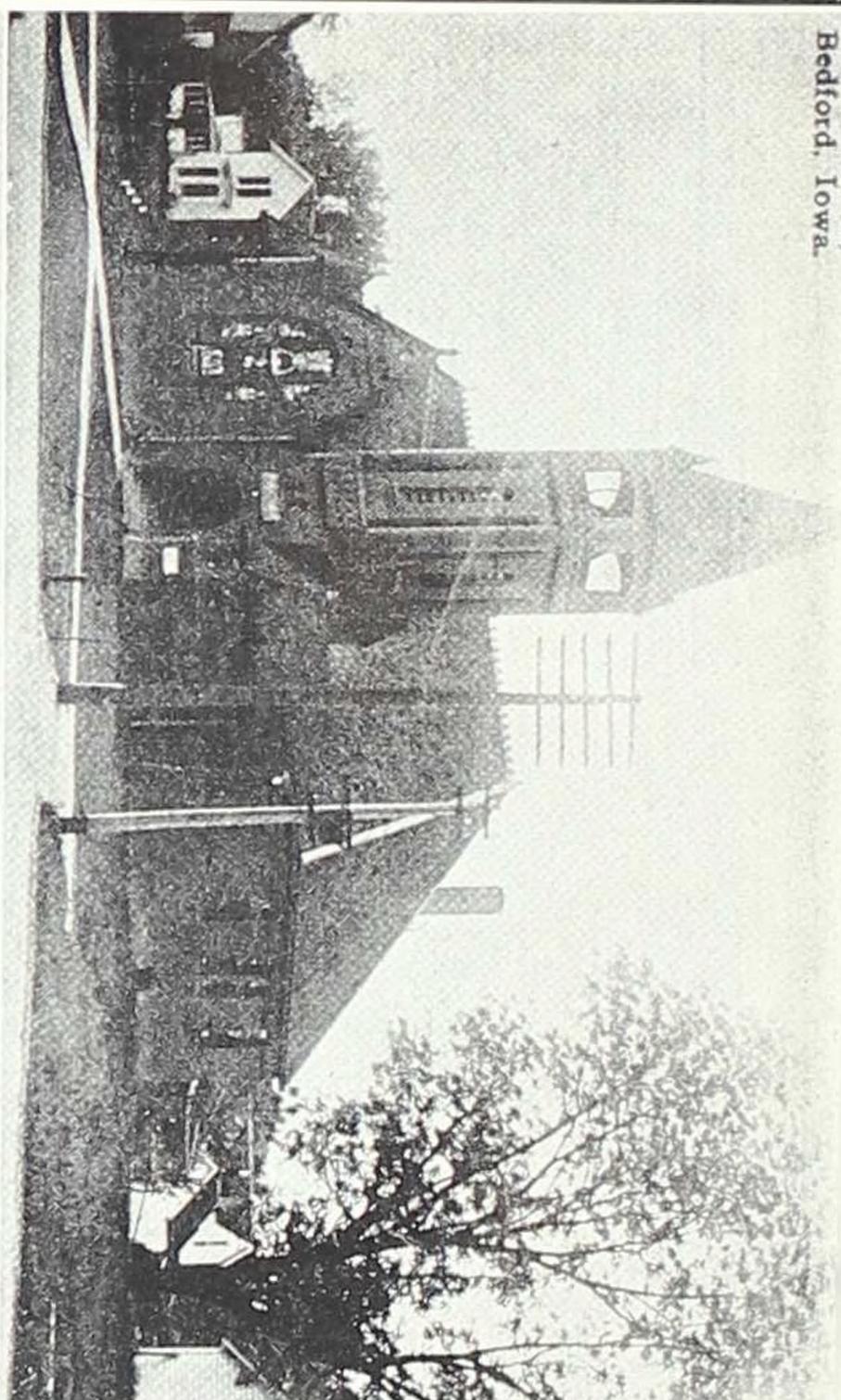
C. B. & Q. Railway Station. Bedford was served by four passenger trains and two freight trains daily during the author's boyhood. All passenger trains are now discontinued and freight service drastically curtailed.



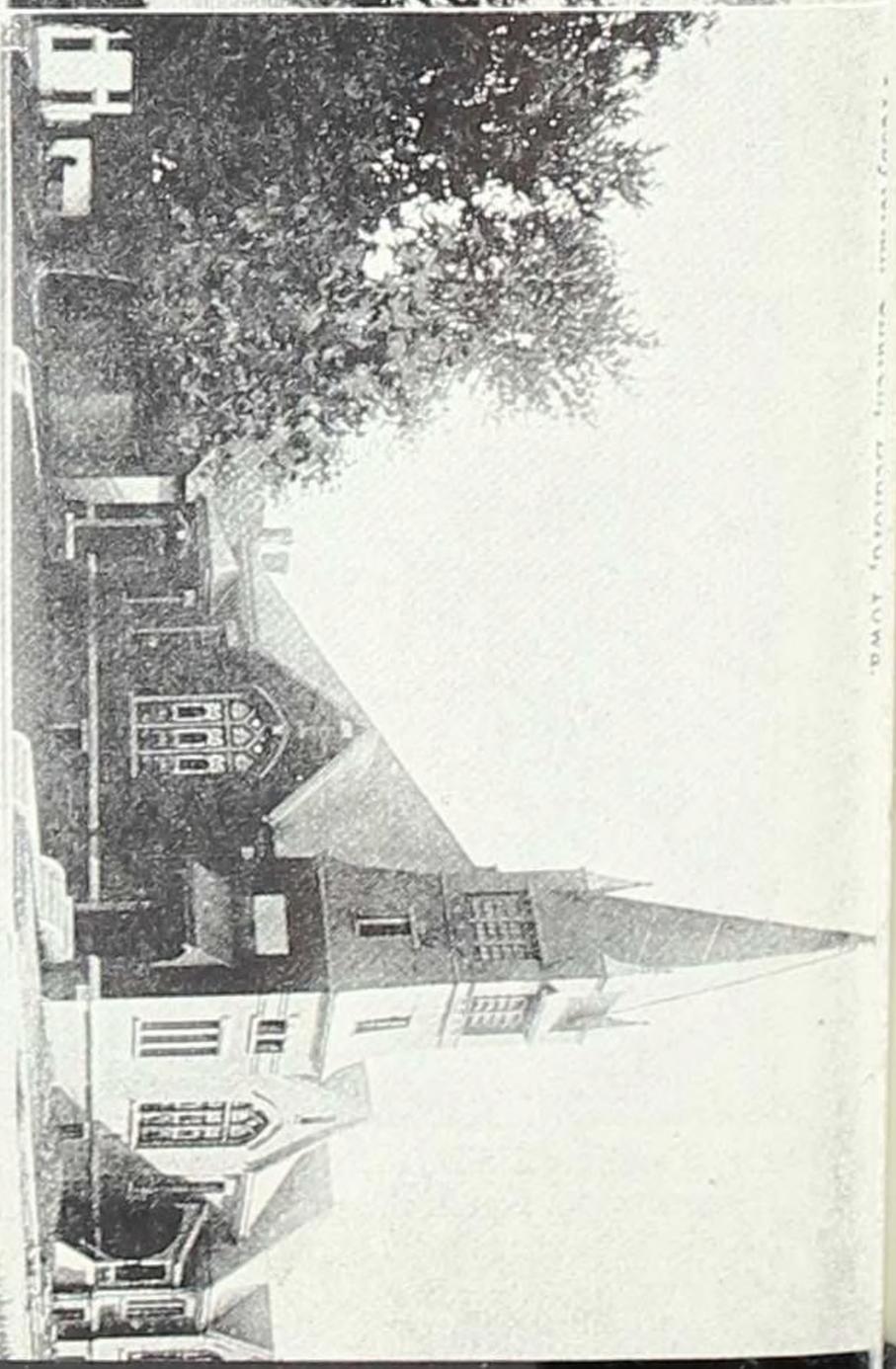
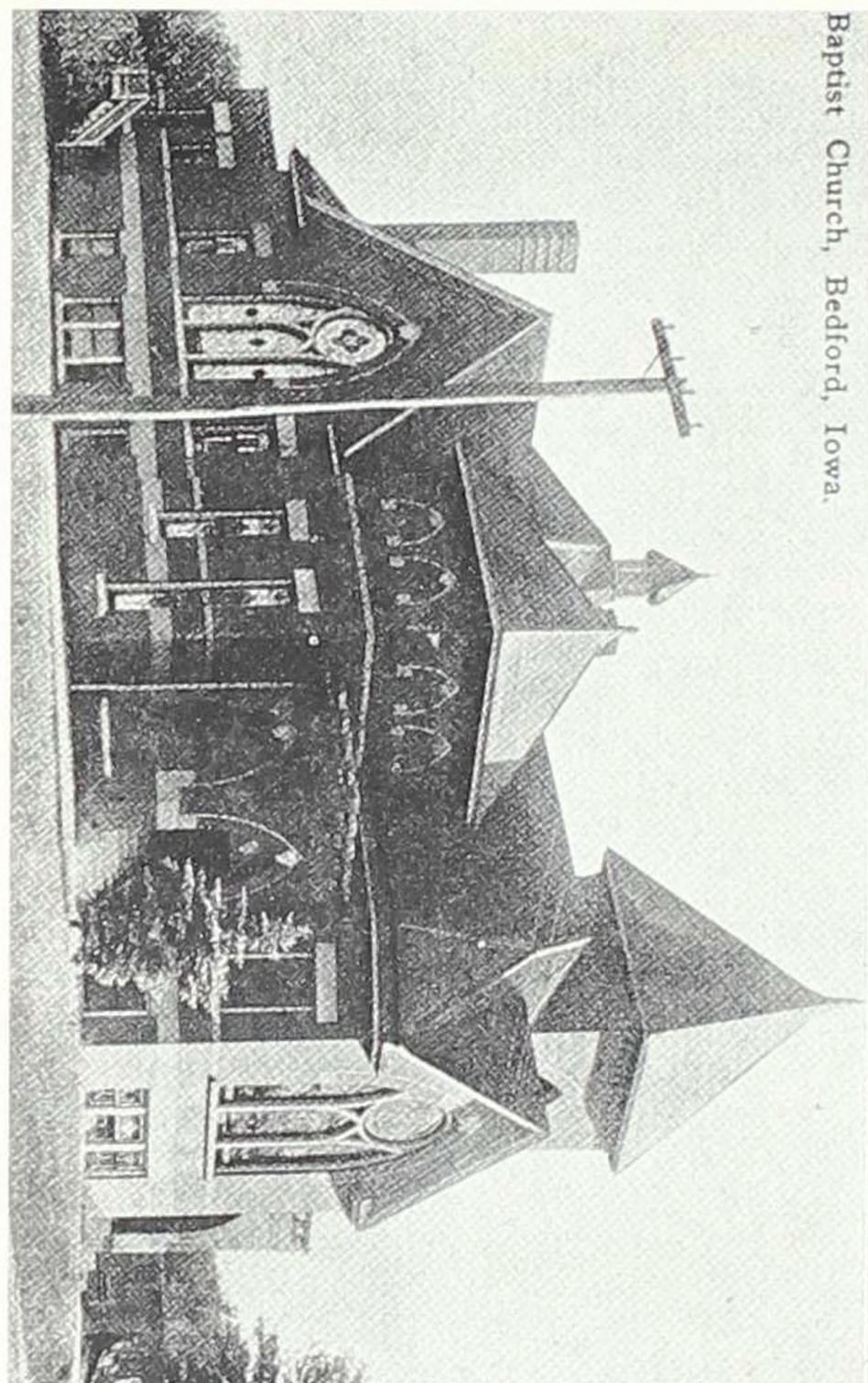
Old Western Hotel. Located on west Main Street, it is now a family residence.



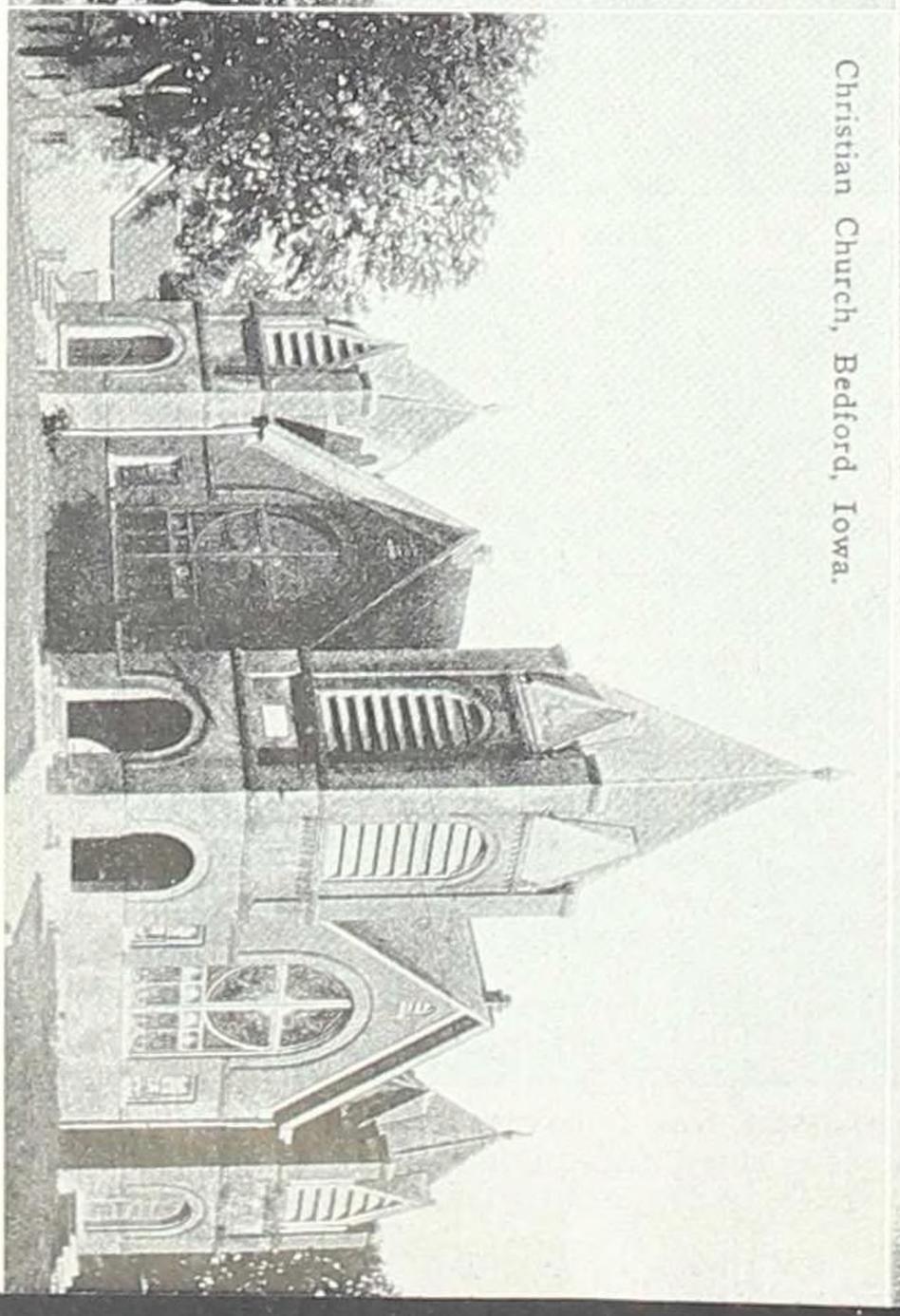
Dr. Golliday's Drug Store on day his body was found in rear building. Curious spectators watch the proceedings. The Golliday story made nationwide headlines.



Baptist Church, Bedford, Iowa.



Christian Church, Bedford, Iowa.



as almost every home in town had a garden for summer vegetables, nearly every housewife canned fruit for winter use, and almost every husband stocked his cave or cellar with a supply of apples, squashes, onions, turnips, and potatoes. Many families kept a cow for milk and a flock of chickens for poultry and eggs.

Interior arrangements of Bedford's grocery stores during my boyhood were very similar. Both sides of a store would be lined with shelves filled with canned fruits and vegetables; packages of Cow Brand and Arm & Hammer Baking Soda; cans of KC, Calumet, Royal, and Dr. Price's Baking Powder; bottles of catsup, pickles, and olives; round boxes of oatmeal containing gift bowls or cups and saucers; piles of White Russian, Fels Naptha, and Ivory Soap; cans of salmon and oysters; packages of Arbuckle's Four X and Lion Brand unground coffee with gift picture cards inside; and other packaged goods, such as Gold Dust Twins cleansing powder and Sapolio for polishing.

In front of the shelves were counters, some of which were topped by glass showcases. One long counter was equipped with a scale and a double rack with rolls of wrapping paper in two sizes with a spool of string at its side or a ball of string hanging above it in a round metal container. Another counter held packaged goods, such as sacks of sugar in 25-cent, 50-cent, and \$1 sizes. Another might be used for orders ready for delivery.

In the center, toward the rear of each store, stood a tall round stove with a long stove pipe suspended by wires from the ceiling and extended to a chimney in a side wall. A tobacco box filled with ashes served as a spittoon for loafers whose circle of chairs around the stove provided a setting for discussions of local, state, and national affairs.

Behind and below the counters were built-in bins for dried fruits — prunes, peaches, apricots, and pears — navy and lima beans, corn meal, dried peas, and coffee. Barrels of white and brown sugar and salt swung out from below the counters on metal roller flanges. On one counter, a spice cabinet held an assortment of whole and ground spices — cinnamon, cloves, allspice, nutmeg, and pepper. Nearby, large square boxes, lined with lead foil and covered with oriental scenes on colored paper, held Gunpowder and Uncolored Japan Tea, two favorites of that day.

In front of one counter, a row of kegs, most of them open, contained bulk pickles, salt mackerel, white fish, and pickled herring. Toward the rear of the stores were barrels of vinegar and molasses with wooden spigots for filling the cans and jugs of customers. In a corner at the rear, a square tank with a dispensing pump held kerosene for lamps and lanterns. The opposite corner, an area with a mouseproof, tin-lined base and low sides, held sacks of flour piled high toward the ceiling.

Stores were lighted by a few single drop cord

electric lights attached to exposed wiring down the middle of the ceiling, with one light in each front window. Although store illumination then was dim in comparison with today's standards, it was a vast improvement and convenience over the use of hanging kerosene lamps. Bedford's first electric light plant had been installed shortly before my father purchased his grocery, and he was delighted with the new lights which today would seem crude and inadequate.

Only a few mechanical devices aided clerks in waiting on customers in those days. One of these was a rotating platform for large circular cheeses, with a hinged cleaver to slice out wedges. A screened, box-like cover with a swinging door protected the cheese from flies. Another useful device was a tall red and black coffee grinder at the end of a counter. It had a large balance wheel on each side (one with a handle), a polished, dome-like container on top, and a large scoop below for the ground coffee. This was a real accommodation to those customers who were beginning to have their coffee ground at the store instead of using the small hand grinders — now antiques — at home before each meal. Special circular metal racks for brooms and feather dusters usually occupied one corner of the grocery.

Other equipment included counter scales, a floor scale, a two-wheeled truck, a large wooden icebox supplied daily by the Bedford Ice Company, a roll-

top desk for bookkeeping with a captain's chair for the store owner, and an iron safe nearby. A gasoline tank which supplied fuel for stoves was usually located outside at the rear as a safety measure.

Little attention was given to window displays in those days. Usually oranges and lemons, in wooden boxes or in pyramid piles, and a stalk of bananas filled one window. The other window was generally used for packaged goods or boxes of strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, and fresh vegetables in season. Bananas came in round jute-lined crates with a small rope loop at the top end of the stalk. A close inspection had to be made for tarantulas when the stalk of bananas was removed from a crate and hung in a window.

Although the eight grocery stores of my boyhood days were much alike, certain ones were well known for special features. A. C. Brice and Sons, Evans Brothers, and Swearingin Brothers handled a large assortment of queensware, glassware, and lamps. Sam Maxwell always had the largest and best assortment of fresh vegetables in season supplied by two expert gardeners, Sam J. Dallison and William E. Swap, the former a retired mason, the latter a retired jeweler. Beall's Grocery, later John Tate's, featured a bakery with Jack Ford and John Ulrich as expert bakers. (Bread sold at 5 cents a loaf, six for 25 cents, pies at 10 cents each, and cookies at 10 cents a dozen.) My father had a large country trade and furnished many cus-

tomers with fresh country butter — especially prized were the round, one-pound molds provided each week by a farm lady, Mrs. William Shum.

None of the Bedford grocery stores during my boyhood sold fresh meat, but they did handle well-known brands of hams and bacon. Fresh meat was sold exclusively at the two meat markets or butcher shops with Dan Burke as the long-time meat cutter for Levine and Dave Terbell for Opylke, and later for Kelly and Scane.

Although the staple breakfast food of those days was oatmeal, newer breakfast foods were beginning to appear — Cream of Wheat, Grape Nuts, Shredded Wheat Biscuits, Malta Vita, Vim, Force, and Elijah's Manna, an early name for corn flakes. Housewives found Swansdown Cake Flour to be a much appreciated aid in making cakes; and store cookies such as ginger snaps, lemon and vanilla wafers, Mary Anns, coconut-topped marshmallow delights, and Nabisco Wafers were beginning to compete with home-baked products. Graham crackers, sweet crackers, large and small soda crackers, and oyster crackers were available both in bulk and in packages. Coffee in open barrels and in packages ranged in price from 15 cents to 30 cents per pound.

Grocerymen opened their stores as early as six o'clock in the morning and closed them at nine o'clock at night after most of the townspeople had gone to bed. One or two clerks could handle the

trade during the week; but on Saturdays extra help was needed, for on that day farmers and their wives flocked to town to exchange butter and eggs for cash or groceries for the week ahead. Mother and I worked in father's grocery on Saturdays.

Well do I remember packing dozens of eggs into crates after fishing them out of buckets or baskets filled with oats — a cheap and convenient method of preventing breakage on trips to town.

It was my job, also, to fill orders for chewing tobacco, cutting pound slabs into plugs at conveniently marked lengths with a hinged blade mounted on a heavy base. Favorite brands included Horseshoe, Star, J. T., Battle Axe, Climax, and Piper Heidsick, "the champagne flavored" choice of bankers and lawyers. Some farmers preferred to buy one-pound round tins of Sweet Burley or Sweet Mist fine cut tobacco, rolls of Granger Twist, or sacks of Mail Pouch, Yankee Girl, and Beechnut scrap.

Smokers would buy large one-pound sacks of Country Gentlemen pipe tobacco, or several smaller sacks of Bull Durham, and Duke's Mixture. Cigar smokers preferred Old Virginia Cheroots (three for a nickel), Pittsburgh Stogies (three for a dime), Tom Keane and Cremo 5-cent cigars or the popular Grand Special (five cents each or six for a quarter), a cigar made in Bedford's Cigar Factory by William Joseph and Ollie E. Sperry.

Another pleasant duty of mine was to sell candy

on Saturdays and to sample it from time to time. My father's well-stocked candy case included many tempting varieties in long metal containers — hard mixed candies, assorted stick candy, jelly beans, chocolate caramels, and chocolate creams, peanut brittle, lemon drops, peppermint and wintergreen lozenges, corn candy, assorted gum drops, and cinnamon red hots. For the youngsters, the assortment included heart-shaped sugar candies with sentimental words such as "I Love You" and "Be My Sweetheart" on them, chocolate cigars, jaw breakers, all-day suckers, plug and string "lickerish" (used by boys to ape the tobacco chewing habits of their elders), banana-shaped marshmallow bars, and small tin frying pans with candy eggs and a spoon. Favorite brands of chewing gum for old and young were: Yucatan, Spearmint, Beaman's Pepsin, Tutti Frutti, Black Jack, Juicy Fruit, and square packages of Kismet in assorted flavors.

Much business was done by credit in those days with monthly, semi-annual, or annual collections. I still have my father's day books, in which daily credit purchases were recorded, and his large ledger in which accounts were posted under names listed alphabetically. He posted these accounts on Sundays and I helped with the monthly collections.

When a customer paid a bill of long standing or purchased a large supply of groceries for cash, it was customary to give him a generous bag of

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Consultation and Examination Free

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page 8 and 9

L. T. TRACY, BLACKSMITH

BEDFORD, IOWA

Brice Company

DEALERS IN

QUEENSWARE, LAMP GOODS, GLASSWARE, GROCERIES. BEDFORD, IOWA

FOR ABSTRACT OF TITLE

SEE

F. E. PAYTON, Bedford, Iowa

J. H. CHILCOTE, Conway, Iowa E. H. CHILCOTE, Gravity, Iowa

THE TWIN AUCTIONEERS

FINE STOCK OR FARM SALES

Eighteen years experience as breeders of fine stock enables us to handle all kinds of pedigreed stock sales successfully. Write or phone before claiming your sale dates.

candy for his wife and children and a handful of cigars for himself.

Most of the grocery deliveries in my day were made by Dan Moore who served several stores with an Adams Express Company delivery wagon drawn by two horses. Only a few Bedford grocers had their own delivery service.

After a long week in the store and a busy Saturday, the groceryman of my boyhood could sleep late on Sunday morning unless someone who had left a package in the store on Saturday night, or someone who had forgotten a badly needed item, asked him to open up for a few minutes. Clerks, too, could rest on Sundays after earning their \$1 per day for six days with the privilege of buying groceries at cost.

Today the modern supermarkets and grocery stores operate with streamlined efficiency and a large assortment of goods easily accessible to customers. They are characteristic of the age in which we live. Gone is the distinctive odor of the old grocery store which greeted a customer when he entered — an odor made up of the mingled smells of freshly ground coffee, cheese, open kegs of salt fish, kerosene, molasses, vinegar, oranges, lemons, and bananas. Gone, too, is the easy sociability that went with the unhurried buying of groceries during my boyhood.

BRUCE E. MAHAN