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# THE CHARACTER OF THE COUNTRY

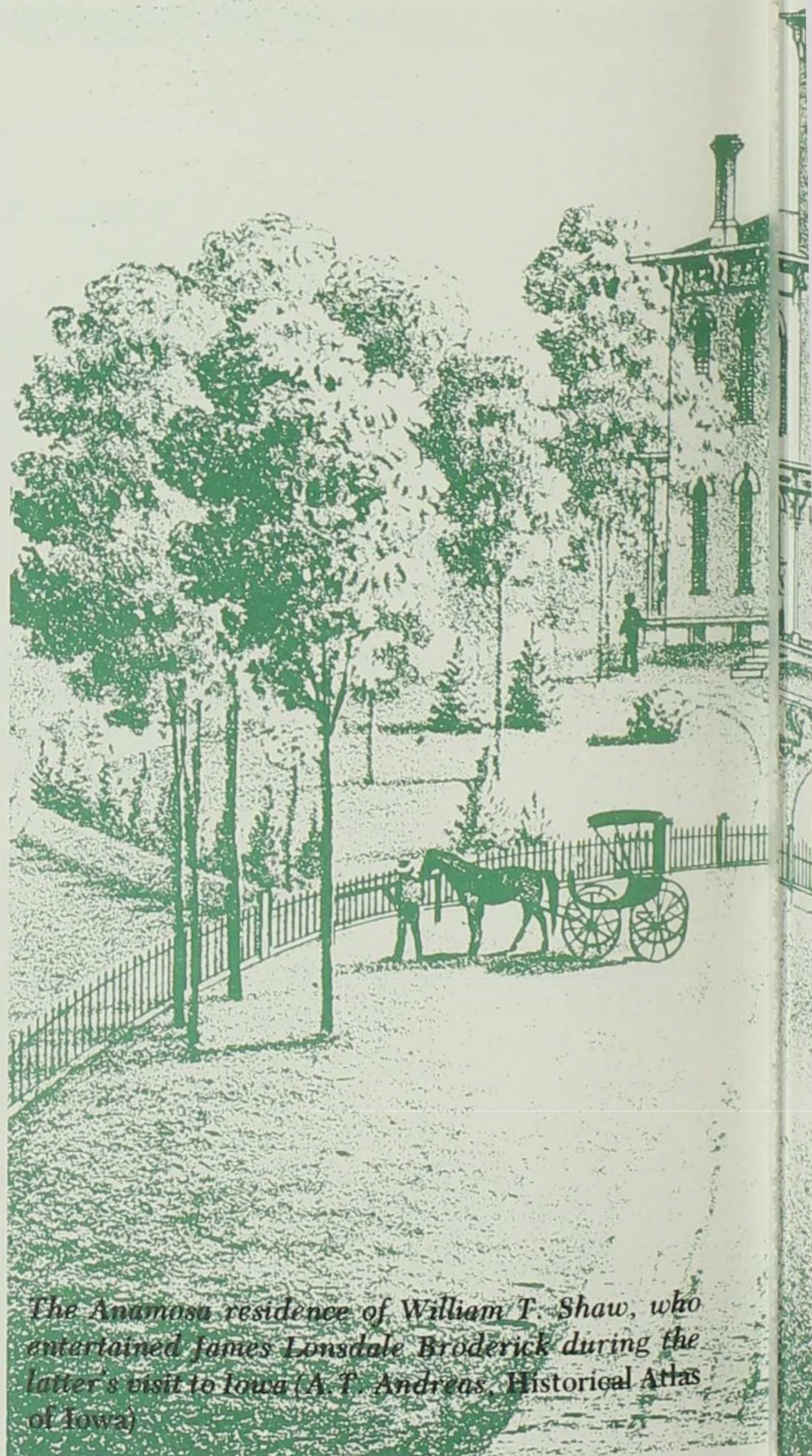
Edited By  
Loren N. Horton

*In the fall of 1876, British land agent James Lonsdale Broderick travelled to Dubuque to visit friends and relatives who had emigrated from England to northeastern Iowa in previous years. The 35-year-old Broderick made his home in Swaledale, in northern England, where his family had been prominent for many generations. The transplanted Englishmen who entertained him in Dubuque felt a strong sense of ethnic cohesiveness in their new country, particularly in their distinctive dialect and maintenance of extended family ties. Broderick's travel journal, published by the Society in 1976 under the title **The Character of the Country**, describes in detail the progress of these English emigrants and much more besides. The journal includes observations of American manners, frontier enterprise, and local personalities which provide a refreshingly candid view of nineteenth-century life in Iowa. The excerpts from **The Character of the Country** reprinted here cover some of Broderick's activities in Iowa during the winter and early spring of 1876-1877. Original spelling and punctuation have been retained throughout.*

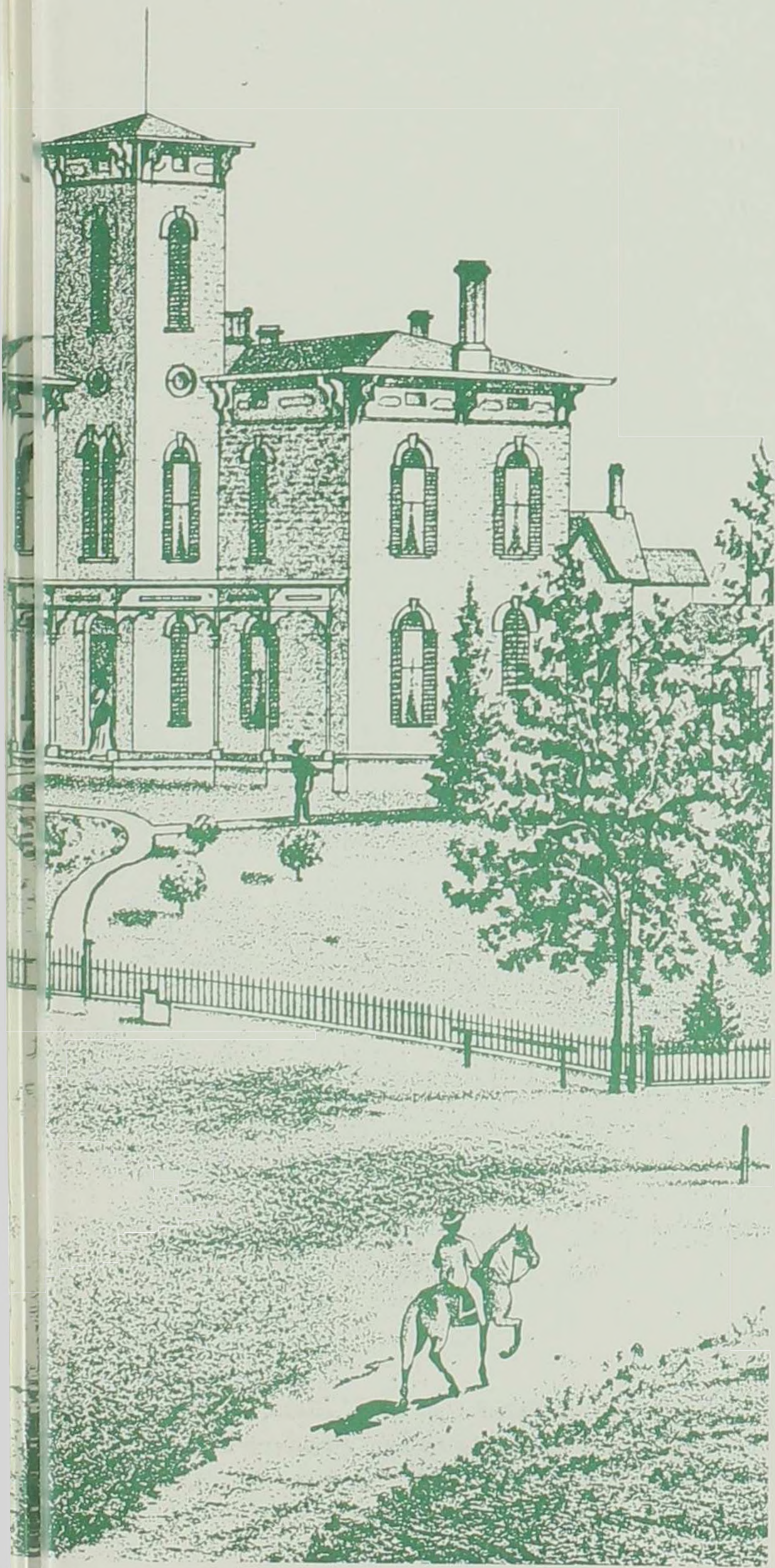
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*The Anamosa residence of William T. Shaw, who entertained James Lonsdale Broderick during the latter's visit to Iowa (A. T. Andreas, Historical Atlas of Iowa)*



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9. The thermometer at 11 o'clock this morning was  $10^{\circ}$  below Zero and in the morning the paper states as low as 21 below Zero. We took a walk in the afternoon across the ice on the Mississippi to Dunleith, a small town opposite to Dubuque, where there were about 350 hogs standing shivering, waiting till a road of ashes was made across the ice, across which they were to be driven to be slaughtered. I am told that a pig on slippery ice once down lies perfectly helpless, and there is an ironical saying here, viz "as independent as a hog on ice." Wagons and horses were crossing, and the Ferry boat was frozen in for the Winter. The river is about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile wide, the ice in some places very smooth, in others very rough, especially on the margins of each night's freezing where heaps of floating ice have been frozen together. We went to the top of the Dunleith bluffs in order to get a good view of Dubuque, &c. Dubuque looks very fine from this point. It occupies a sort of semicircle by the side of the river worn out by the water at some former period, and the cliffs behind are more than half covered with buildings, &c. At the south end of the town lies the Irish quarter, and there are some poor little shanties in it and nothing fine in its best parts. The business part of the town lies in the middle. The stores are mostly 3 stories high with a cellar underneath; the usual frontage of each store  $22\frac{1}{2}$  feet and 113 through to the alley behind. A block of buildings is about 270 ft. front by 113. The western portion of the town is nearly all German. Their houses are better by far than those of the Irish, but not so good as those of the Americans and English which are principally situated on the cliffs and slopes behind.

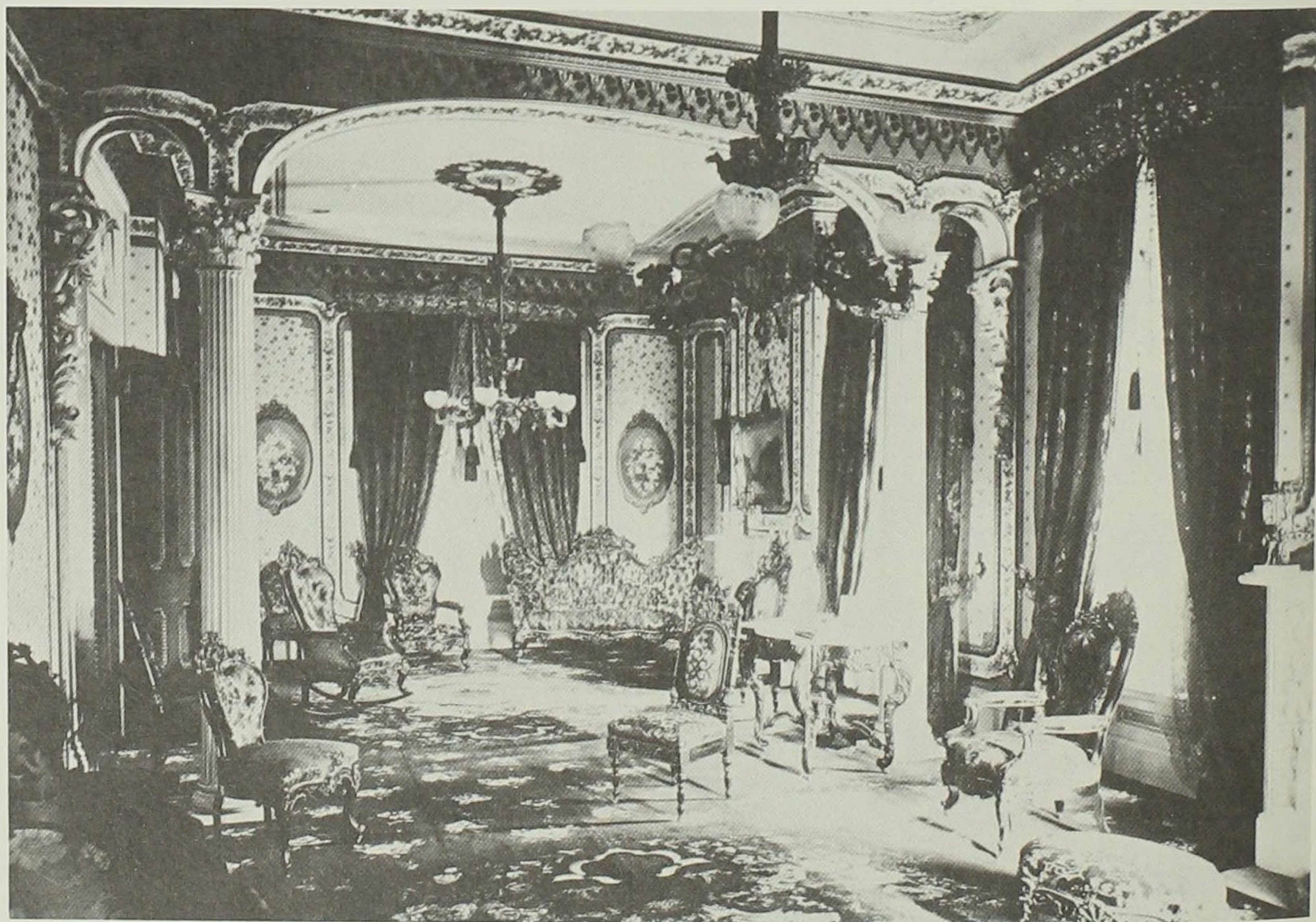
The Mississippi bends like an S seen from behind, thus including to the left looking North and also to the left looking south. Mr. W. [James Woodward, Broderick's travelling companion] forgot his overshoes, and consequently his feet became cold, mine remaining quite warm. My breath falling on my beard made it

quite white and icy, through freezing on, and there was no means of getting it off except by the heat from a stove; some young ladies smiled as I passed them, and I remarked afterward that I was in danger of being frozen in.

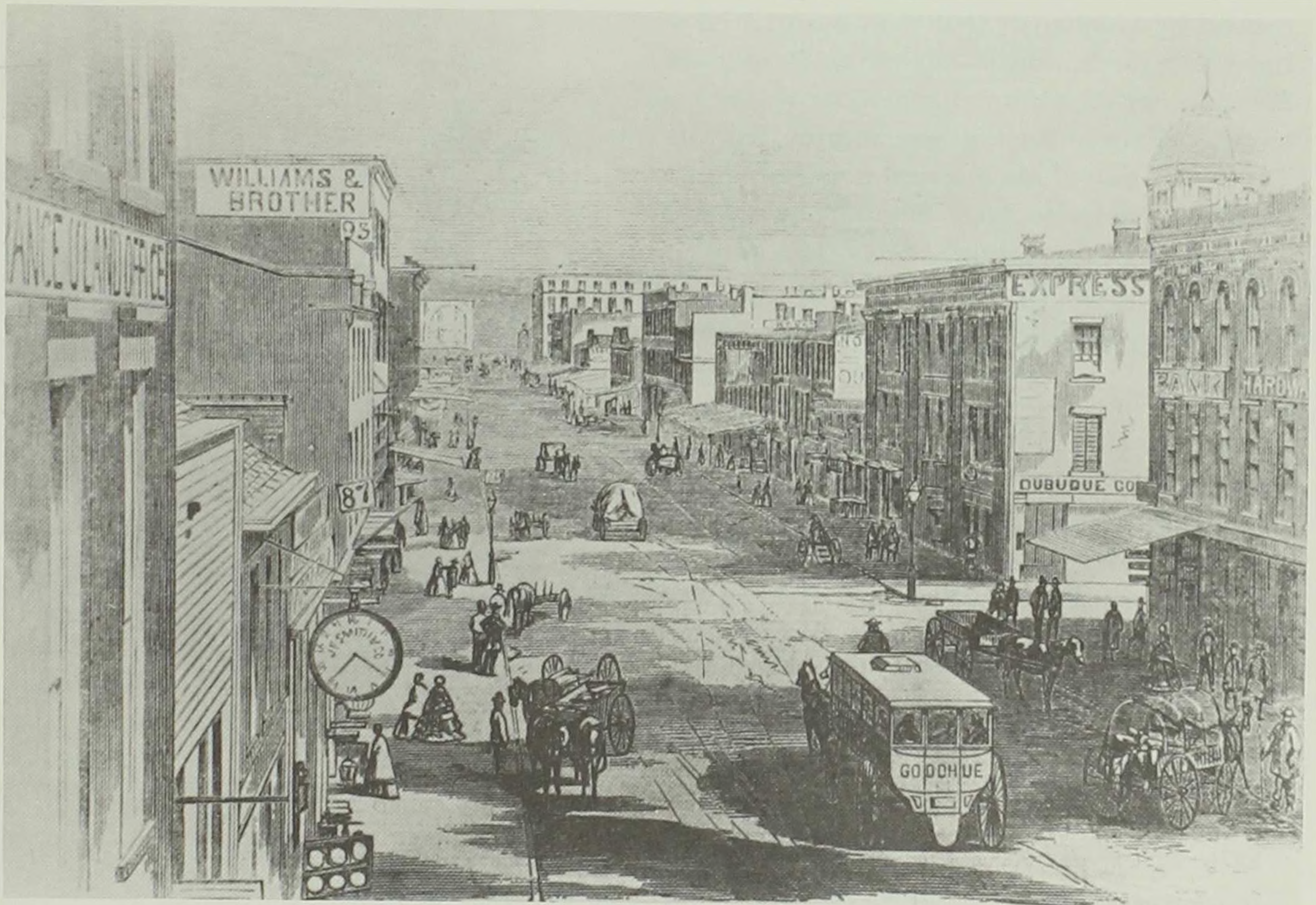
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 22. At nine in the morning I met Mr. Herod at the nearest School, opposite Mrs. Marsh's house, and he introduced me to the teachers. He had brought his sleigh, so we drove from School to School till we had finished them all, ten in number, and I was introduced to all the teachers mostly young ladies, about 60 altogether. Mr. Herod did not forget to tell them that I was a bachelor from Yorkshire, on a visit to this country. Several of the young ladies were very handsome, and on an average taller than those in England. They

were all very polite, asking me to take a seat, how I liked the country, glad to make my acquaintance, hoping to see me again, &c. The schools are large, having a master as principal, the remainder being Ladies. The poor little negroes have a school for themselves. There was only nine of them taught by a lady; they sang for us, keeping good time and well in tune.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15. We went down town as usual and got tickets for the Evening lecture by the escaped nun, whom we went to hear relate her experience in Convent life. Her name is Miss Edith O'Gorman, who was 6 years in a Convent in Jersey City, and was very unkindly treated there and most miserably deceived in her expectations. Having given up all her wealth and becoming a Sister of Charity,



*The sitting room of Mrs. Anna Marsh's house in Dubuque, where Broderick stayed during his visit (courtesy Dubuque County Historical Society)*



*Dubuque's Main Street in the Civil War era (SHSI)*

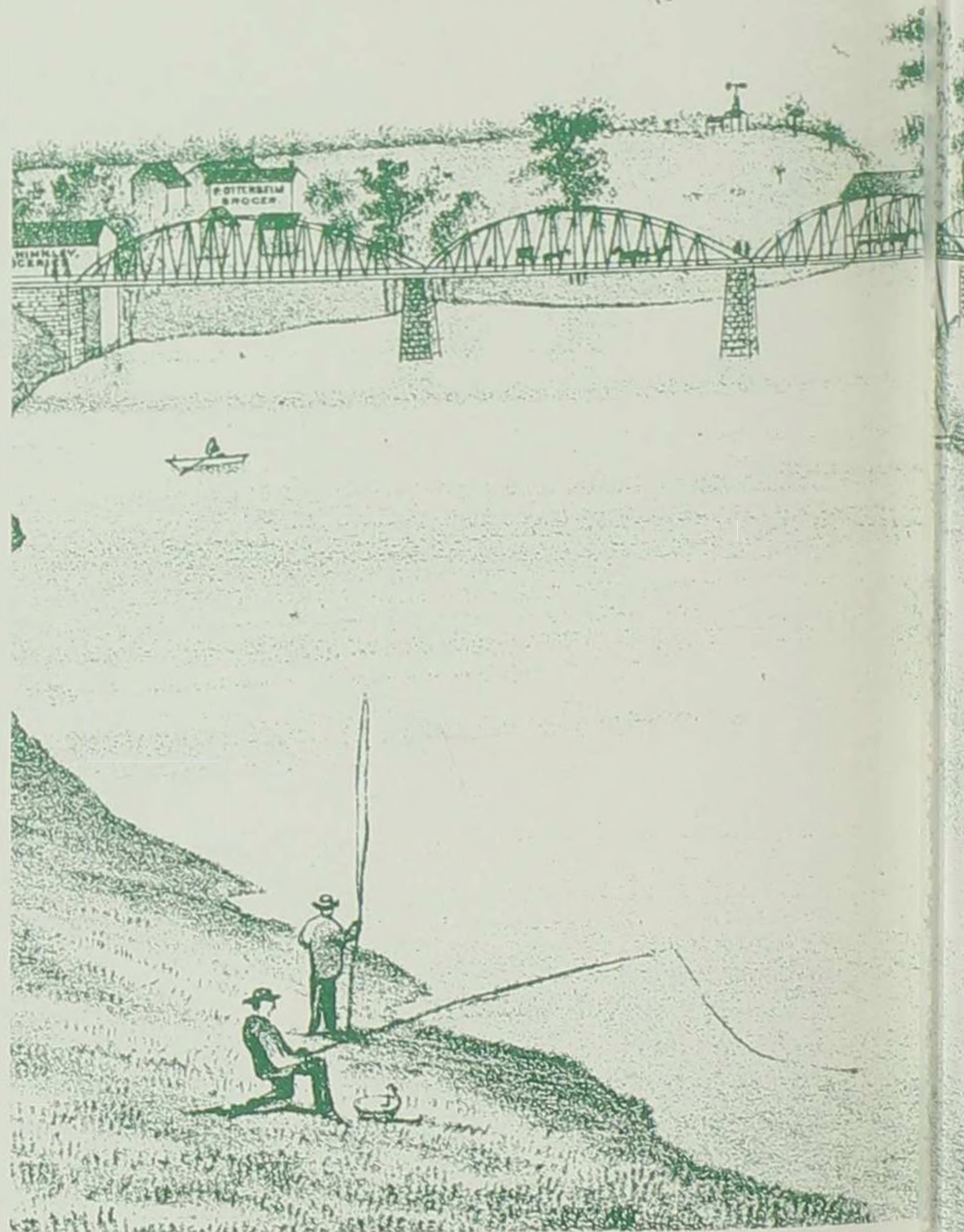
found that she was merely a slave to the caprice of her Superioress and the priests. She had known as many as six nuns in love with the priest at one time, and he the ugliest man imaginable. It was to save her honour that she fled the convent. At night it appears that the vow of obedience must be obeyed no matter how absurd or humiliating the consequences may be. The sin, they are told, if there is any, rests with those in authority. She told us what the commands of the Church are, and principle of which seems to be obedience, to break which is eternal damnation. She spoke remarkably well. During the Lecture a cry of "fire" was raised by some one in the Gallery, and many of the audience were very much alarmed. However most of them kept their seats. Miss O'Gorman bade them sit down, saying that it was not the first time that this cry had been raised to prevent

her speaking. One man called out "it's only a Catholic fire" which had the best effect possible in allaying the alarm. She says she runs the risk of losing her life every time she stands before the public and that she has been fired at, a bullet having passed through her hair. She is a good looking young woman of about 30 and is now a Protestant. She will give another lecture tomorrow, to Ladies only, in which she will still further reveal the immorality of the priests and nuns.

**SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18.** We went to the Wesleyan Church in the morning and heard Mr. Rhea preach. He attributes the mortality of man to the fall of Adam who he supposes was the first man and thinks that mankind might have all gone to Heaven like Elijah. He does not appear to know that it can be distinctly

proved by Geologists that man has existed on the Earth for hundreds of thousands of years. After dinner we went to Centre Grove and had tea with George Reynoldson and his 3rd wife. There was one of his married daughters there and Thos. Metcalfe. Geo. Reynoldson says that both his grandfathers used to say for "shut the door" "spear that dewr"; this is a word I never heard used. The roads were dry in some places and in others very muddy. Thos. Metcalfe was talking about the grass hoppers-"Locusts"-which he saw when he was working for John Clarkson at Marcus. They eat up every thing, even clothing and come in clouds; they deposited their eggs about an inch deep in the ground. They were so numerous on the rails that the wheels of the engine turned round upon the rails, and the train was stopped by them. They will bite sometimes and are very strong and muscular and about the size of a "tengalether" [dragon fly].

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 4. Mr. Spensley hitched up a light wagon with two horses, early in the morning, and drove us out to see Matthew Willis and his farm. The roads were excessively muddy all the way. In some of the "meanest" places we were almost up to the hub in it and apparently in danger of throwing over. Mr. Willis has a very fine farm of 470 acres, besides some 40 or 80 acres of timber at a distance. His land looks well-tilled and clean, but his house and outbuildings are nothing more than an old rookery. In fact when Mr. Spensley stopped the team at the house, it is a fact, I had not the slightest idea that it was a dwelling. I thought it was an out-building of some kind. It was raining fast, so we got inside as soon as possible. The old gentleman and his sons and daughters made us very welcome. They took us into the parlour and cooked us a good dinner. The Young Willis that was in Wensleydale two or three years ago did not remember having seen me before, though I met him three times before. We passed several other good farms of



first rate quality. The land was rolling Prairie, like that we saw near Winthrop, Iowa. We called at a very good lead and zinc mine and went down the shaft on ladders of 12 feet each, each terminating and resting upon a little platform. The work is drawn up by two horses up the other part of the shaft. The mineral lies in two beds, like coal, one at the top of about 7 feet of limestone the other at the bottom. The upper seam is all lead ore, the other lead and zinc. They blast all this 7 feet of rock clean out and cast it away behind, the width taken out being about 40 or 50 yards. It is astonishing how the roof keeps up. They bore for blasting

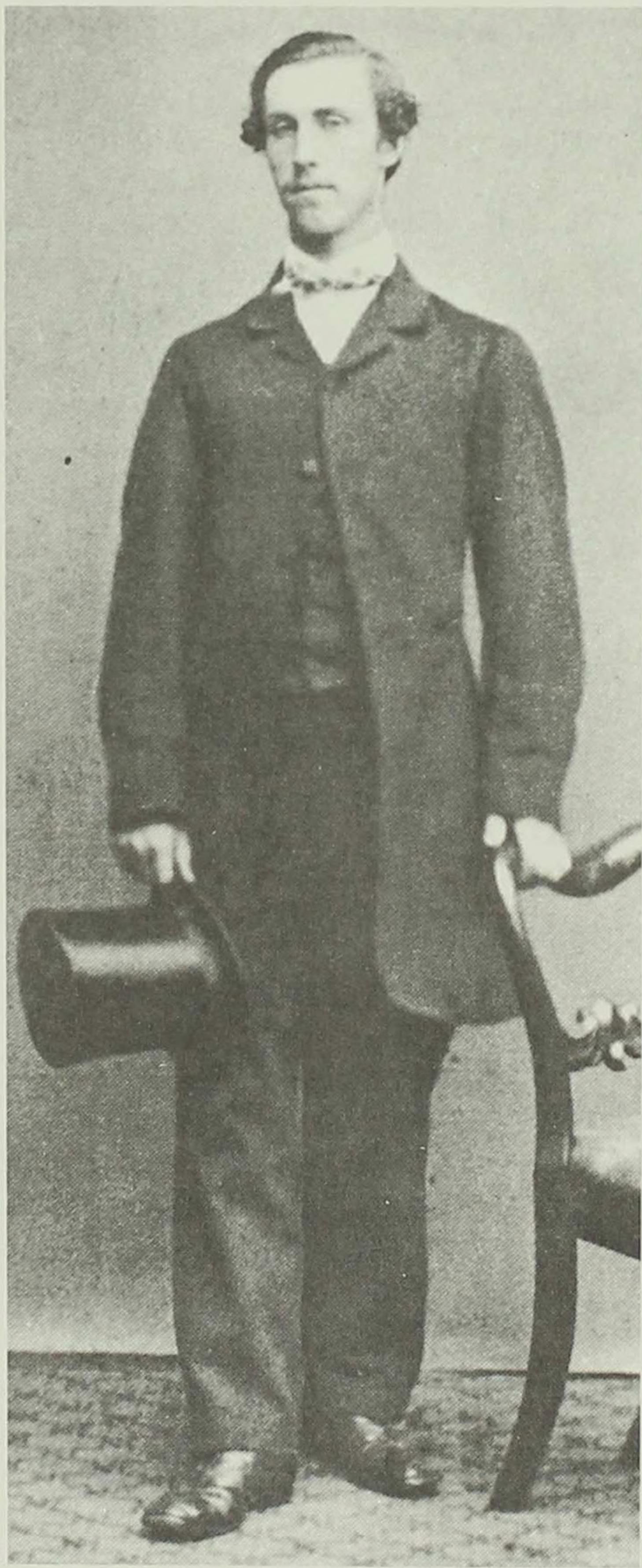


Hay Island and the Iron Bridge over the Cedar River in Cedar Rapids (A.T. Andreas, Historical Atlas of Iowa)

("blowing") with a machine driven by compressed air, forced from a distance outside in iron pipes by a steam engine. They fire all the holes at once by electricity. We saw them boring and should have heard the blast, but there was something wrong with the battery or something and it did not fire the holes. In returning we met two ladies driving a team through the mud like ourselves; although the ladies in the country are poor walkers, yet they deserve great credit for the dashing manner in which they can handle a team.

THURSDAY, APRIL 12. The whole of this wild

land is so even and has such a gentle slope that we could safely drive at a trot over any part of it except where there is an occasional boulder or swampy hollow. I noticed one large granite block, covering as much ground as the bottom of a hay stack, which was split in the middle, the upper half being slid considerably off towards the south but still resting partly on the under half, though the fracture had not nearly sufficient slope to warrant the supposition that it could have slid off without great force being used, probably the pressure of a glacier. Taken all together this is a very fine tract of land and well situated; from the highest parts there is a

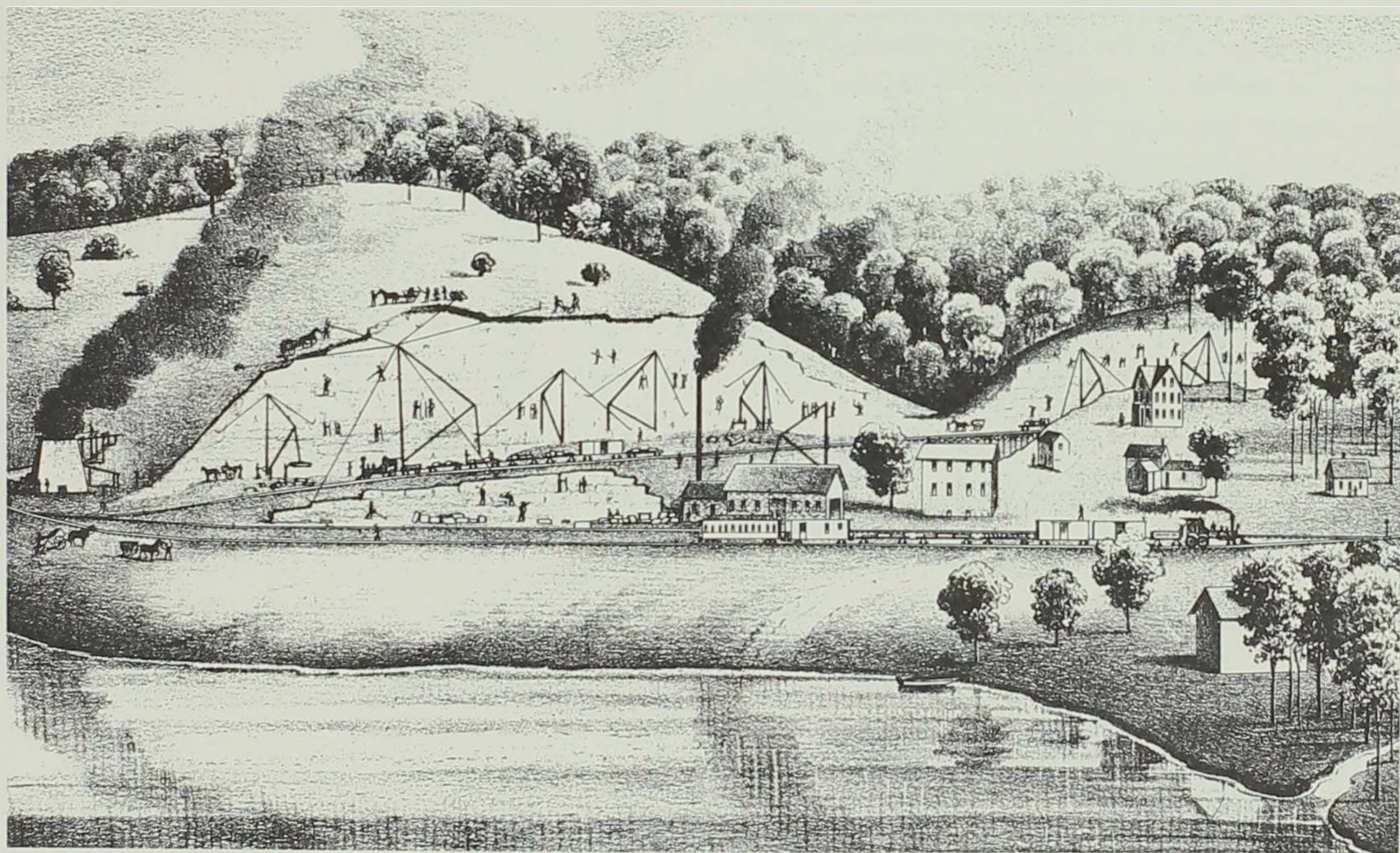


*James Lonsdale Broderick (SHSI)*

very wide view in every direction as far as the eye can reach, and the landscape is far from being unpleasant. At from \$8 to \$10 per acre this land would be a very good bargain I think.

We returned in time to catch the freight cars and went forward to Waterloo, a thriving town further west. We had prairie all the way nearly. The frogs which have just come out were making an awful noise near Independence in the sloughs. Beside the river the soil is mostly of a sooty-looking black. We saw numbers of prairie fires all of limited extent on account of most of the land being under cultivation. We rode in the upper seats of the conductor's car and could see over the top of the train. Some "Bummers" were busily engaged playing cards and chewing tobacco. They seemed to enjoy themselves immensely. A "Bummer" is what is called in England a "Traveller." We had a fine sunset. It was darkening fast when we got to Waterloo, where we had supper and stayed all night. We saw the town by gas-light. It seems to be a thriving place with good waterpower in the Cedar River. Two Corn Mills and a factory were at work.

FRIDAY, APRIL 13. We got up in the morning at about 1 o'clock and took the cars for Cedar Rapids. As we approached this place, the scenery was pretty along the banks of the river which are rather low. Cedar Rapids is a very fine country town, on the Cedar River, with good water power. I noticed no less than 5 bridges across the river, one or two of them being Railway bridges. One bridge crosses over an island in the river; there were two houses and quite a number of trees on the island. The river is between 3 & 400 yards wide. The houses are many of them very good, and streets being very wide. One of the main streets was 100 feet across. None of them were macadamised, the soil being composed of sand. Several railroads terminate or cross here. The flood plain of the river is very fine land, level and broad; behind are low hills and woodland and further back lies the prairie lands, all settled and worth from 28 to 35 dollars per acre, we were told. Quite a large number of fine trees were left growing in the streets; there was



*A Jones County stone quarry (A.T. Andreas, Historical Atlas of Iowa)*

a large public square and several fine churches, and several new buildings were being erected. Some of the side walks were of stone. We saw some boys fishing and went to see what they had caught. They had some "suckers" which weighed from 1 to 3 pounds each. We inquired how many kinds of fish there were in the river. One of them said we have salmon, bass, pike, suckers, catfish, eels, &c. Mr. Woodward asked if there were any codfish; they said "No!" but one of them rather less than the other, said, "There are plenty of whales." I asked, "Don't they sometimes knock the boat over?" "Sometimes they do," he said. The weather is very fine, quite hot in the middle of the day but cold in the morning, with no feeling of damp but dry and sharp. Awhile after dinner we again took tickets for Dubuque. We passed the quarries of Anamosa where they have a jail and work the convicts, who are all dressed, conspicuously and alike. Quite a number were at work; three

sentinels stood off at a distance with rifles ready to shoot, in case of mutiny or attempt to escape. The stone they get is a light buff-colored limestone, with fine cleavage and is taken up in large sizes and of varying thicknesses. There are other quarries which are not wrought by convicts. Two of Nanny Watters' sons live at Anamosa, which is a growing town. After passing here we left the valleys and got on the prairie. We had supper at the junction at Farley, travelling from Farley to Dubuque on the line we came out upon.

*Later in April 1877, Broderick travelled to Ohio to visit relatives living there. The following month he returned to England and resumed his responsibilities as an estate manager in Swaledale. In December 1886—at the age of 45—he died at his home in Hawes and was buried on Birk Hill, overlooking the family seat at Spring End.* □