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PALIMPSEST

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JULY/AUGUST 1980



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The
PALIMPSEST

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Peter T. Harstad, Director

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William Silag, Editor

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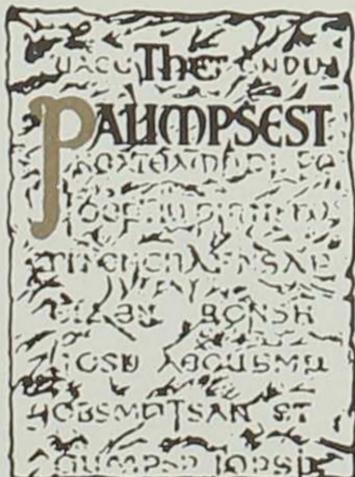
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Cover: *Nineteenth-century baseball fans cheer their team on to victory in a drawing found in the scrapbooks of John S. Entler (1852-1915), hardware merchant of Bonaparte, Iowa. The Hawkeye State has sent many of its best players on to the major leagues—including Hall of Famer Adrian (Cap) Anson, the subject of David L. Porter's article beginning on page 98. (Copy photo by Robert A. Ryan from the collection of the Division of the State Historical Society)*



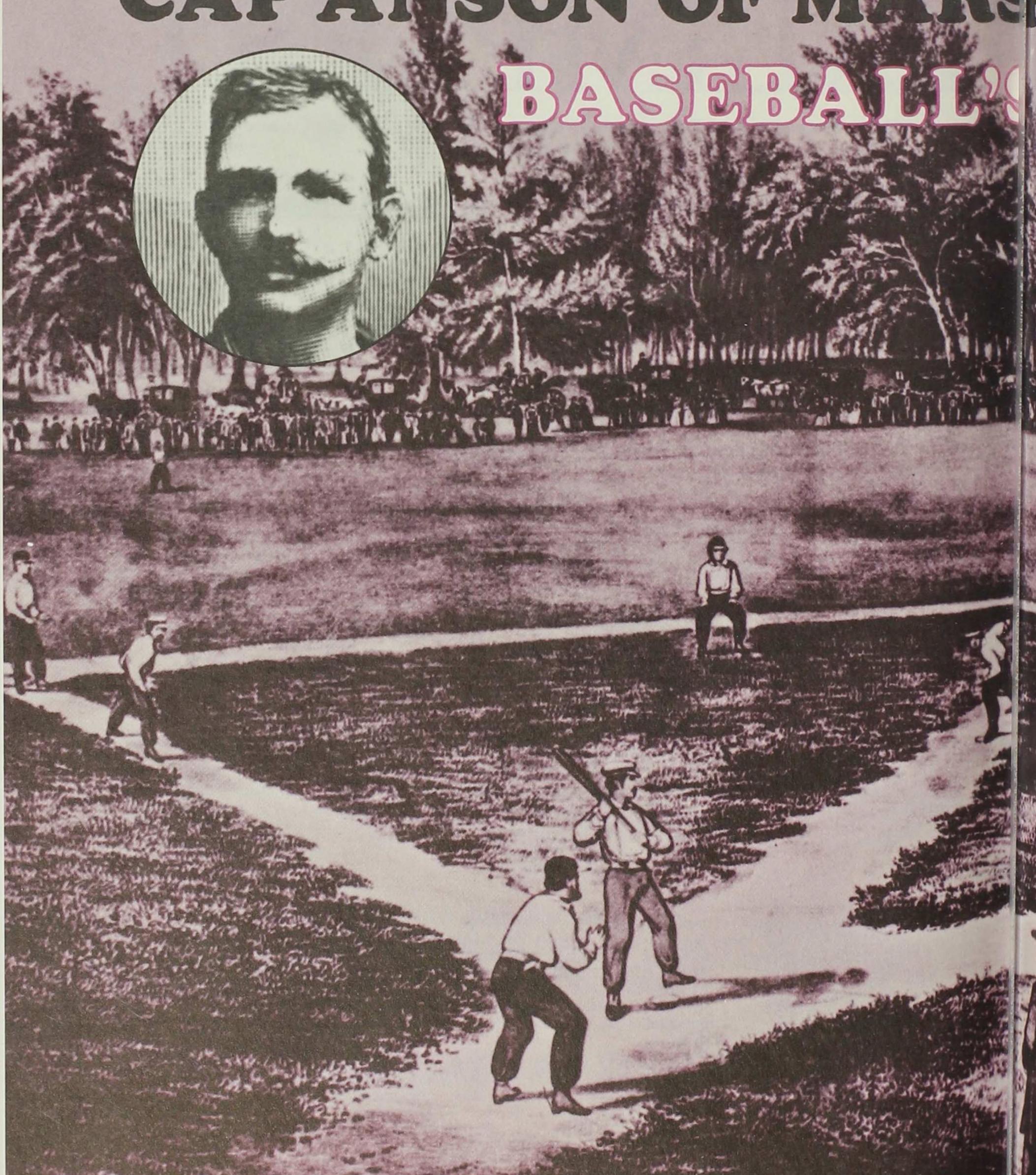
The Meaning of the Palimpsest

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.

CAP ANSON OF MARSH

BASEBALL'S

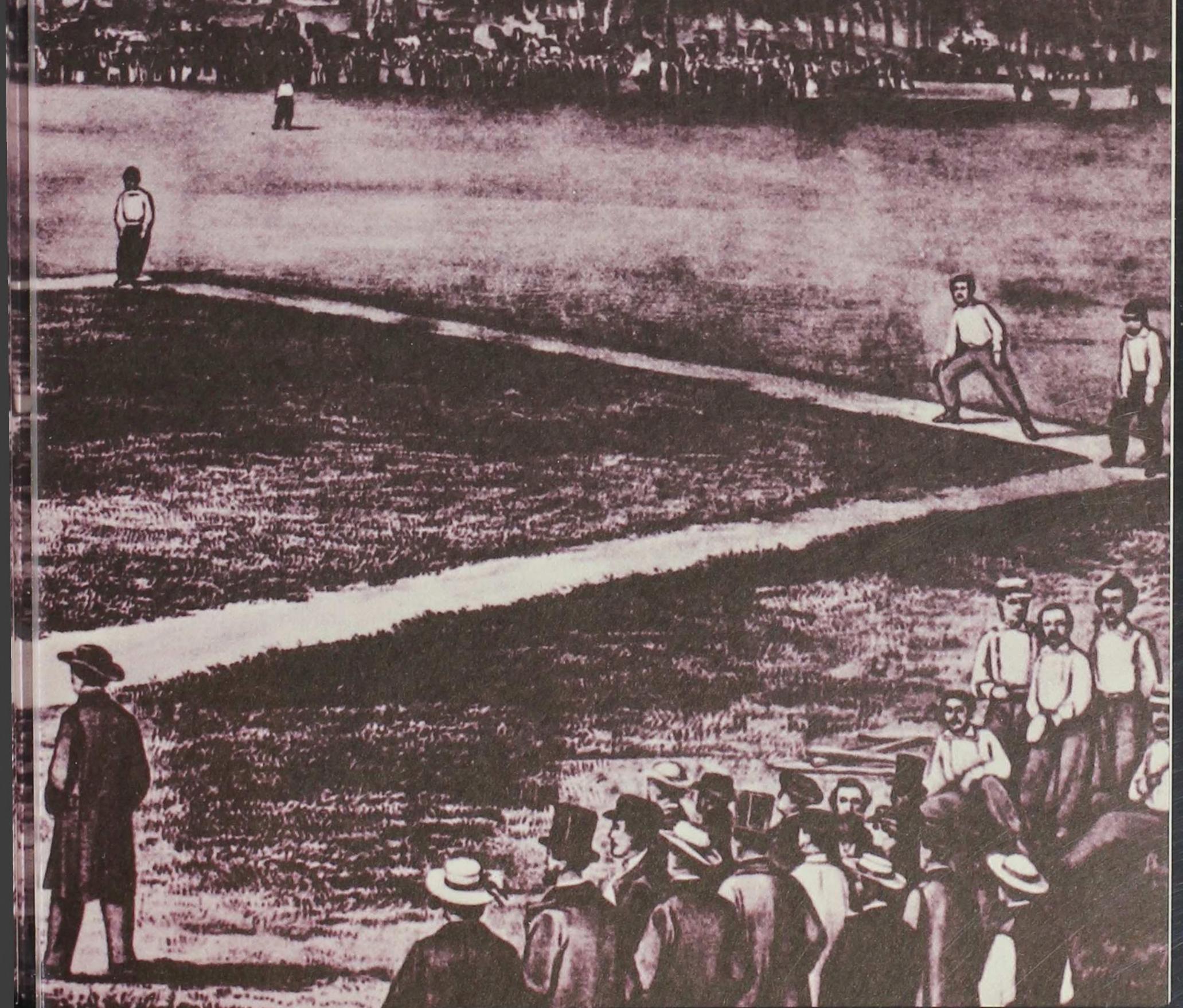


Lithograph by Currier and Ives (Culver Pictures)

SHALLTOWN

FIRST SUPERSTAR

by David L. Porter



*Lo! from the tribunes on the bleachers
comes a shout,
Beseeching bold Ansonius to line 'em out;
And as Apollo's flying chariot cleaves the sky,
So stanch Ansonius lifts the brightened
ball on high.*

Nicknamed "Cap," "Unk," "Pop," and even "Pappy," Adrian Anson of Marshalltown was baseball's first superstar performer. The "bold Ansonius" of sportswriter Eugene Field's verse earned fame on baseball diamonds and in clubhouses at a time when the game became America's national pastime. Indeed, for better or worse, Anson and a few of his contemporaries gave professional baseball much of its modern character.

Born in 1852, young Anson learned the fundamentals of the game from his father, an amateur third baseman who organized the first Marshalltown Baseball Club. After a brief stint at the University of Iowa, he transferred to Notre Dame University in 1869; there he excelled as a second baseman. Anson was a poor student, however, and soon quit school. Returning to Marshalltown in 1870, Anson continued to play baseball for his father's club, which also included Adrian's brother Sturgis. Marshalltown in 1870 attracted considerable publicity by playing an excellent team from Rockford, Illinois in an exhibition game. The Rockford club was one of the nation's premier teams, having an outstanding pitcher in Albert Spalding, and often scored over 100 runs a game. Marshalltown astonished the visitors from Illinois by losing only 18-3, as Adrian played well both at bat and in the field. "They put up a rattling game, especially the two (Anson) sons," Spalding commented, "and they were the hardest fighters I ever saw in my life."

Launching his professional baseball career while still a teenager, in 1871 Anson signed a contract for \$66.66 per month with a newly-

founded Rockford, Illinois team. "It was a fairly good salary for a ball player," Anson recalled in his memoirs, "and especially for one who was only eighteen years old and a green lad at that." Anson played third base and led Rockford in batting, but the club finished in last place in the National Association and disbanded at the end of the 1871 season.

From Rockford, Anson travelled east in 1872 to play for the Philadelphia Athletics of the same National Association. Here he received a more lucrative contract of \$1,250 annually, which was boosted to \$1,800 after he performed well for the club. Although primarily a third baseman, Anson played all infield and outfield positions and frequently even caught.

In Philadelphia Anson became embroiled in baseball's first contract dispute. When the National League was formed in 1876, Chicago entered a club named the White Stockings. The previous year, club president William A. Hulbert had secretly signed six players from the rival National Association, including Anson of Philadelphia. He had agreed to play for the White Stockings for \$2,000—\$200 more than he was receiving from the Athletics. Hulbert hoped to keep the signings secret because the players legally were still under contract to their National Association clubs, but the *Chicago Tribune* published the story in late summer 1876.

Before the 1876 season began, however, Anson sought a release from his new contract with the White Stockings, for the Athletics had offered to increase his salary from \$1,800 to \$2,500. It was a raise that he simply could not refuse. Explaining that his fiancée Virginia did not want to leave Philadelphia, Anson requested but was denied a release from the Chicago contract. Anson journeyed to Chicago twice to persuade Hulbert and team friend Albert Spalding—another of the six ballplayers jumping to the Chicago club—to release him from the agreement. On his second trip Anson even offered to pay the Chicago club \$1,000 in



The baseball diamond at the University of Iowa, where Cap Anson played as a college student in the late 1860s (SHSI)

return for his release. The offer astonished both Hulbert and Spalding, but they still declined to release Anson. "A man who will give a thousand dollars rather than break his word," Hulbert commented, "must be a good man to have."

Still determined to secure his release, Anson watched the White Stockings in their first practice dressed in a Prince Albert coat, striped trousers, and fashionable hat. Anson grew impatient after watching for a few minutes and asked hurler Spalding to throw him a few pitches. Spalding refused to honor the request until Anson took off his coat and hat.

Cap Anson not only participated in the remainder of practice that day, but stayed with the White Stockings for the next twenty-two years. In his rookie season with Chicago, Anson continued as a third baseman and helped the White Stockings win the National League pennant. The 1876 club still ranks as one of the best in baseball history, winning 52 of 66 games or

nearly 79 percent of its contests. Pitcher Spalding won 47 of those games while Anson compiled an impressive .343 batting average with 59 runs batted in.

Over his entire career, Anson had a remarkable .333 batting average. In 27 seasons he had 3,041 hits, a figure surpassed by only eleven players. He holds a major league record for hitting at least .300 in 25 of 27 seasons, including his final season at age 46. The first player to make 3,000 hits, he won the National League batting title twice and finished second four times. Anson was also a power hitter, pounding 96 home runs and driving in over 1,700 runs in a dead ball era. Larger physically than most of his contemporaries, the six-foot, 227-pound Anson menaced opponents with a 44-ounce bat to the end of his long career.

With his good eye and his strength, Anson became one of the great hitters in the game's history. He proved himself competent in other playing categories as well. Although a slow



Nineteenth-century baseball attire, from the scrapbooks of John S. Entler (SHSI)

runner and only an average first baseman, he nevertheless enjoyed great moments in the field. He led National League first basemen in fielding six times and was the first player to make two unassisted double plays in the same game.

For all of his contributions to the game, unfortunately Anson also established an unwritten rule banning black players from organized baseball. His rigid belief in the segregation of black and white players and his enormous popularity discouraged other owners from recruiting blacks. While managing the White Stockings in 1884, Anson threatened to remove his team from the field during a game against a Toledo team that included a black player, Moses Fleetwood Walker. The Toledo management insisted that Walker play even if it meant a forfeit by the White Stockings for refusing to play. Anson retreated quickly and dropped his protest. Several years later, however, Anson again threatened to take his squad off the field, this time against a Newark minor league club unless its black pitcher, George Stovey, left the field. Later Anson persuaded the New York Giants to cancel plans to promote

Stovey to the major leagues, and—according to baseball historian David Quentin Voigt—used “all the venom . . . of a Tillman or a Vardaman” to achieve his end. (Benjamin F. Tillman of South Carolina and James K. Vardaman of Mississippi were rabid segregationists in the United States Senate in the late nineteenth century).

As manager, Anson was a strict, gruff, outspoken taskmaster; he disciplined players for drinking violations, required top physical conditioning, and even made legendary night bed-checks. He insisted that his players wear suits, abstain from liquor and tobacco, and stay at reputable hotels. Although well-respected, he was regarded as a domineering manager by many players. A serious-minded team leader, Anson also stressed honesty and dignity among his players. After his team lost one very erratically played game, a suspicious spectator telegraphed Anson inquiring whether the contest was “on the level.” “I would not disgrace my players by showing them your telegram,” Anson tartly replied, “nor degrade myself by answering your question.”

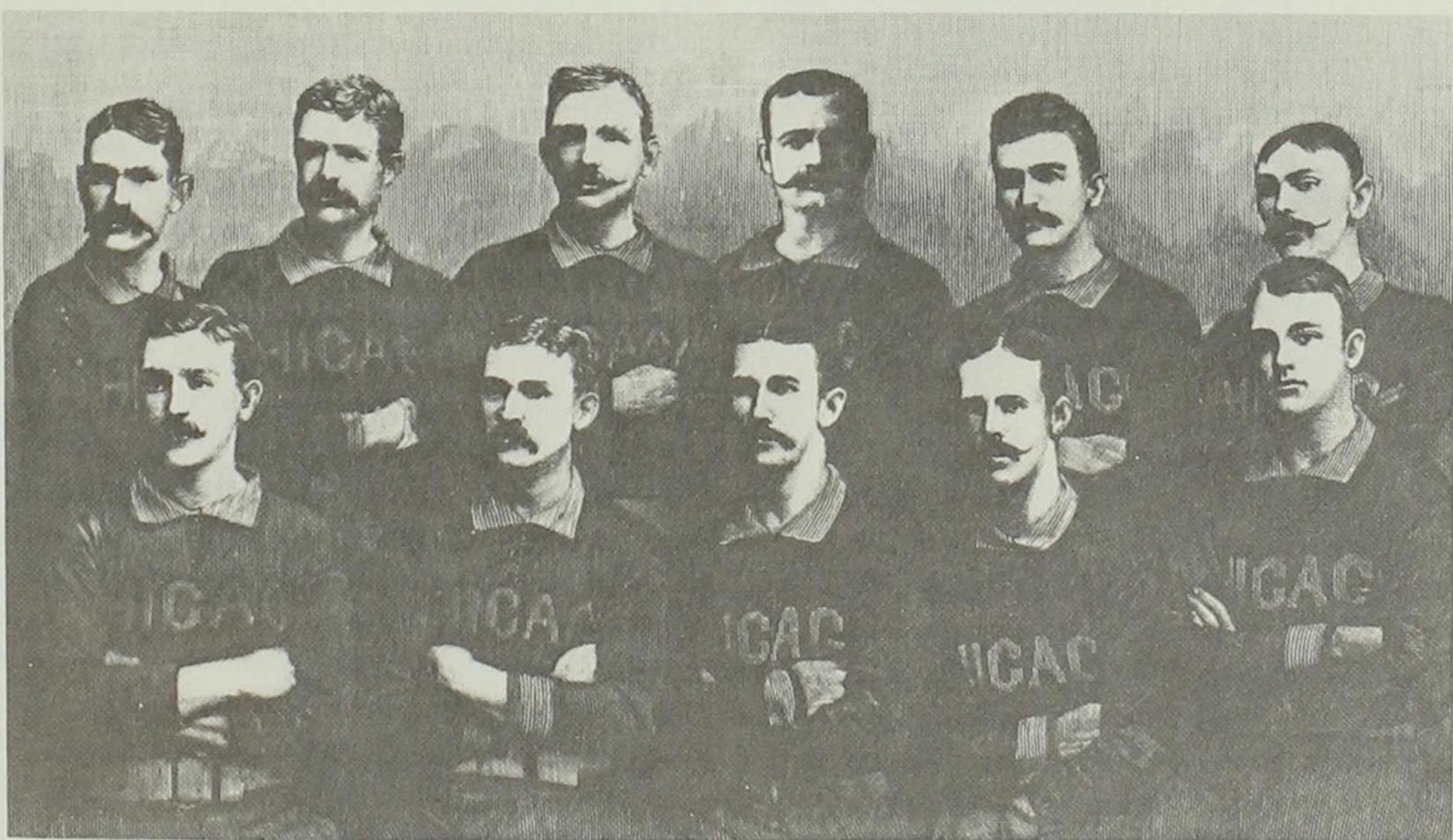
Anson managed and captained the Chicago White Stockings from 1879 to 1897, and is considered the premier manager of the late nine-

teenth century. His apprenticeship for the post took place between 1876 and 1878, when he served as the team's captain and player-coach. Ranking in tenth place among baseball managers, Anson won nearly 1,300 games and compiled a .575 lifetime won-lost percentage. In the years 1879-1886 Anson directed the White Stockings to five National League pennants; the club won consecutive championships from 1880 to 1882 and won again in 1885 and 1886. During the next five seasons, the White Stockings finished in second place three times and in third place twice.

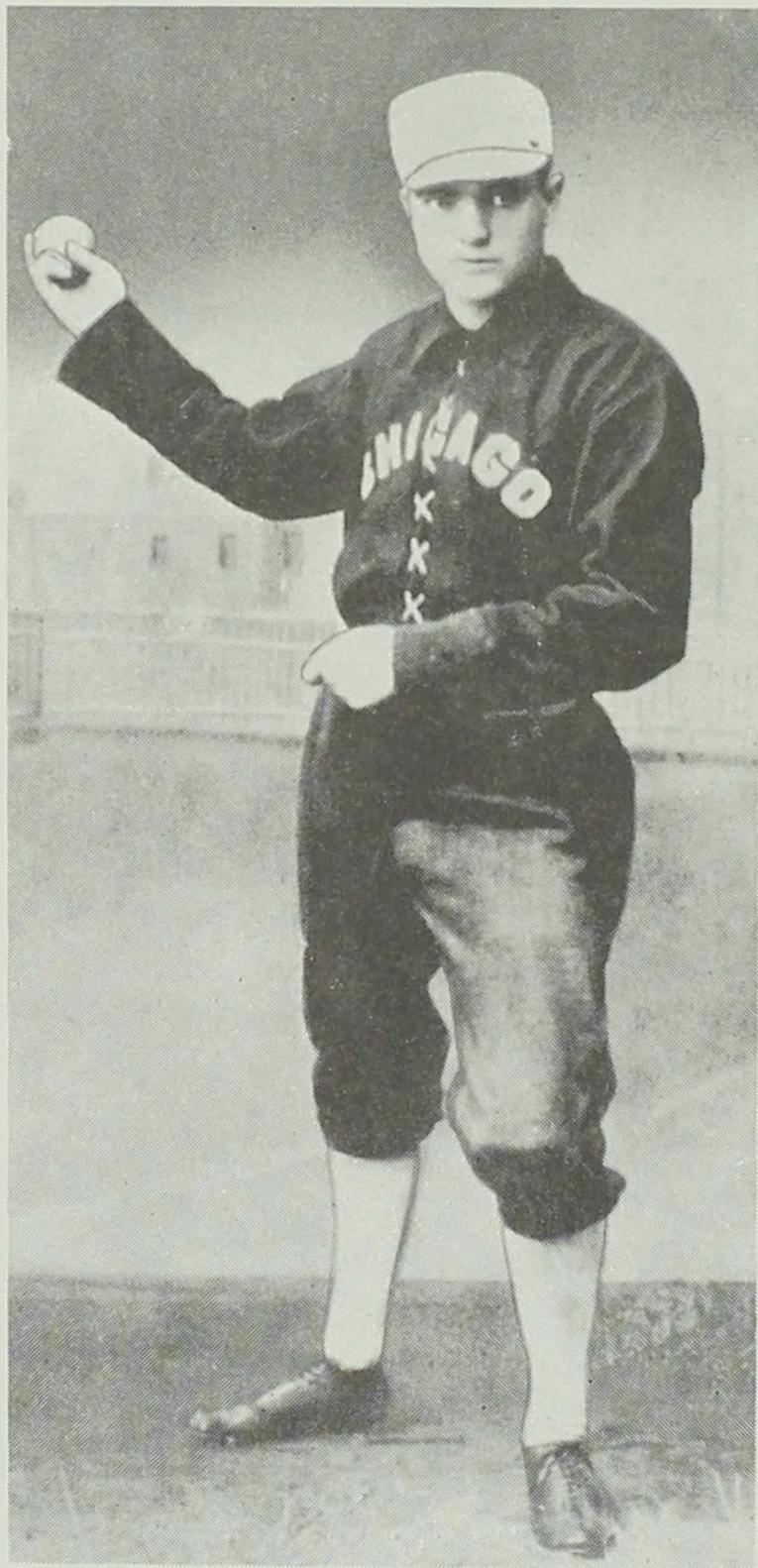
Stressing aggressive team play under Anson's leadership, the White Stockings compiled other impressive records as well. In 1880 they set a yet-unsurpassed record of winning 67 games, or nearly 80 percent of their contests. In September 1883, the team sent 23 players to the plate in one inning against Detroit, scoring 18 runs on 18 hits. The next year Anson's club hit 140 home runs, the highest team total until Babe Ruth's legendary 1927 New York Yan-

kees. Considered an exceptional judge of baseball talent, Anson developed many important players, including pitchers Larry Corcoran, John Clarkson, Jim McCormick, and Clark Griffith, as well as outfielders Mike "King" Kelly, Ed Williamson, William Lange, and fellow Iowan Billy Sunday.

Anson made several innovations in the game during his career. In 1886 the White Stockings manager required his players to train for three weeks in the South before beginning the regular season. Soon other major league clubs were employing spring training sessions. Anson also introduced the daring "hit and run" strategy—having the batter try to advance the runner an extra base without concern for his own average. Besides encouraging base stealing, he developed the baseline coaching box and invented both offensive and defensive signals. Anson's idea of rotating pitchers encouraged opposing teams to try the strategy, especially when Anson's club won five pennants in seven years.



The champion Chicago White Stockings of the 1870s (SHSI)



Renowned evangelist Billy Sunday—born in Ames, Iowa in 1862—enjoyed a successful career in the big leagues before he turned to preaching in 1891. Signed by Cap Anson in 1883 to play with Chicago's White Stockings, outfielder Sunday also played on National League teams in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia. Many fans considered Sunday the fastest man in baseball, though others complained that Sunday's weak hitting would have kept him out of the majors had it not been for the influence of fellow Iowan Cap Anson. (SHSI)

Throughout his years as a player, Anson served as a goodwill ambassador for baseball abroad. In 1874 Anson's Philadelphia Athletics made a thirty-day tour of England, playing fourteen exhibition games against the championship Boston club. Although not familiar with cricket, the American players had such batting skills that they defeated the premier Marylebone All-English Eleven and other British teams. Fourteen years later, the Chicago White Stockings and ten National League All-Stars made a six-month tour playing numerous baseball exhibitions around the world. Accompanied by their wives, the players visited Hawaii, Australia, Ceylon, Egypt, Italy, France, and England, and received a cordial welcome everywhere. "[They] created interest in the game," tour organizer Spalding said, "in countries where it had never been seen before."

In the 1890s Anson began to experience an increasing number of problems as a player-manager. During the late 1880s, the White Stockings sold stars Mike Kelly and John Clarkson to Boston. The formation of the rival Player's League in 1890 further depleted Anson's once-stellar team, which was renamed the Chicago Colts. The hapless Colts did not finish above fourth place for the rest of the decade. Chicago sportswriters chided "Old Man Anson" for their failings on the field and boldly hinted that he should retire as a player. In a game on September 4, 1891, the 39-year-old Anson retaliated by wearing broad, long whiskers covering the letters on the front of his uniform and made three hits. He insisted on being awarded first base in the second inning after one pitch hit his whiskers, but the umpire adamantly refused to oblige. "And even if it had hit them," umpire Tom Lynch replied, "they aren't really yours and you couldn't take first base just because somebody else's whiskers got hit." The *Chicago Tribune* remarked that "the grand old man of baseball was hurling defiance

into the teeth of age by aping its appearance." Although Chicago sportswriters and spectators became increasingly disenchanted with the team's declining performance over the years, manager Anson continued playing first base until 1897, when he quit at age 46 after 28 years as a player.

(The whiskers incident was not the only humorous escapade involving the usually very serious Anson. In a home game against Louisville during the 1890s, a Louisville player hit a sharp ground ball to Chicago shortstop Bill Dahlen. Dahlen threw the ball wildly over first baseman Anson's head. After hitting the base of the stands, the ball bounced toward right field. Anson chased the ball into right field until a sway-backed horse owned by a Chicago groundskeeper escaped from a fenced area behind the clubhouse and galloped toward the first baseman. Anson promptly gave up on retrieving the ball and ran for safety, while the runner circled the bases and scored the winning run. No ground rule existed limiting the number of bases that a runner could take when a fielder was being chased by a horse.)

Quarreling with umpires was another Anson trait and he often used "brawling, bullying tactics" against game officials, according to the *New York Times*. Anson had "a voice in his impassioned moments like a hundred Bulls of Bashan," and—as sportswriter Ira L. Smith noted—the spectators "love to see him face up to the umpires" and "go wild when he clashes with the officiators. Whenever there is the slightest cause for a difference of opinion, he leaves his place at bat, on the coach's line, or at first base and roars into a presentation of his argument." National League President Nicholas E. Young, who fined Anson \$110 for misconduct in 1886, said "he has walked a hundred miles up and down the first base path in mild deprecation of the umpire's decisions."

Anson also frequently engaged in spirited conflicts with team officials. He strongly disliked James A. Hart, a businessman named by

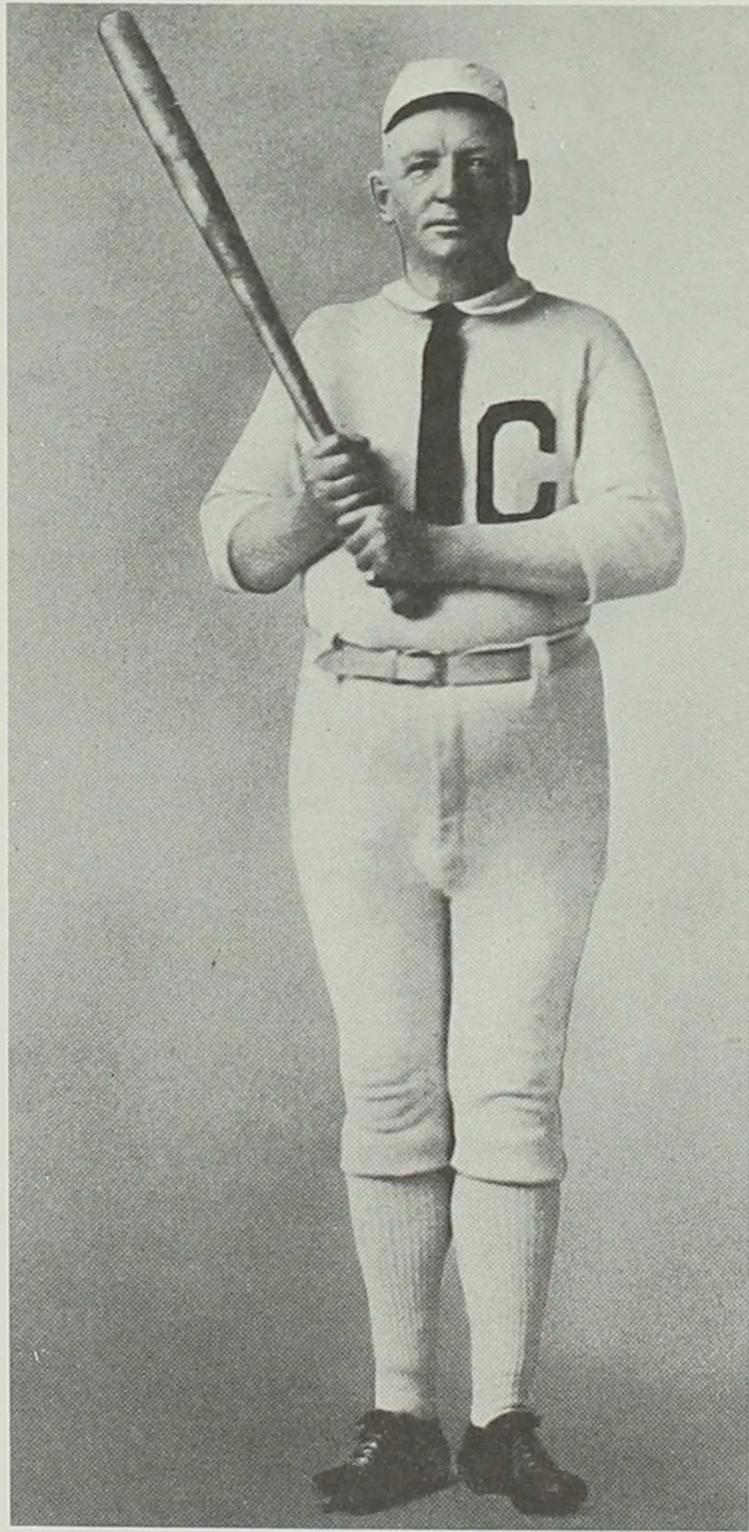
owner Albert Spalding as White Stockings club president in 1891. Previously Spalding had given Anson a free hand in field operations. After all, the manager was in the fourth year of a ten-year contract and owned 130 shares of stock in the club. Anson aspired to become club president and now insisted that the younger Hart not infringe upon his managerial authority. In an attempt to placate Anson, Spalding assured Anson that Hart would be only a figurehead and that Anson would be retained as manager. In truth, Spalding intended to let Hart operate the club, and increasingly during the 1890s Hart compromised Anson's control over daily operations. To Anson's dismay, Hart repeatedly blocked player deals and did not back his manager in disciplining players. And to make matters worse, Anson's once powerful club continued to founder in the standings. Writers and fans were growing more and more impatient.

In February 1898, Hart fired Anson. Anson's ten-year contract had expired a month earlier, and Hart had concluded that Anson was no longer useful to the club. He needed only Spalding's consent to remove the veteran manager. Spalding hoped to retain Anson, but Hart already had committed the club to name Tommy Burns as replacement and threatened to quit unless Anson was released. Spalding considered Hart a very able businessman, and thus reluctantly consented to the dismissal of Anson and named Burns as manager. In a fitting gesture, the Chicago Colts were renamed "the Orphans" to symbolize the departure of their nineteen-year manager.

Spalding meanwhile offered Anson an opportunity to establish and preside over a baseball college for training young players, but the veteran manager rejected the offer. Spalding also arranged with the Chicago Athletic Club a testimonial dinner designed to raise a pension worth thousands of dollars for Anson. On the day prior to the event, however, Anson learned of the dinner and ordered Spalding to cancel

the testimonial. "This I refused to accept," Anson stated, "for the reason that I was not a pauper, the public owed me nothing, and I believed that I was still capable of making my own living."

That same year, Anson made a fruitless at-



Cap Anson late in his career, when he managed and played first base for the Chicago Colts. Local sportswriters teased "Old Man Anson," but even in his forties the slugger from Marshalltown batted better than .300 almost every season. (Bettmann Archive)

tempt to become the controlling stockholder of the Chicago team. On February 15, Spalding agreed to sell Anson 1,000 shares of stock at \$150 per share and set a sixty-day deadline for the transaction. Anson worked diligently to raise the amount by the April 15 deadline, but failed to acquire the needed funds for the purchase. In his memoirs Anson charged "there was never any intention on the part of A.G. Spalding and his *confrères* to let me get possession of the club." Anson claimed that he had trusted Spalding too much and thereafter did not continue cordial relations with his once-close friend.

Ousted from his Chicago club, with little chance of assuming front-office responsibilities, Anson did not remain in baseball much longer. The New York Giants selected Anson as field manager with the guarantee that he would have full control of the team, but Anson resigned after three weeks charging that owner Andrew Freedman had interfered too much in daily operations. Later he attempted to revive the American Association, an older baseball league, but was unable to convince his former colleagues in the Orphans front office that the city of Chicago could support two rival franchises.

Anson remained active in sports nonetheless, operating both a billiard hall and a bowling alley in Chicago. Himself an outstanding bowler and billiards player, the former major leaguer captained a team in the 1904 American Bowling Congress Championships. When his businesses faltered—because of strikes by workers and because business associates often took advantage of him—Anson turned to politics and enjoyed brief success in public life. Elected City Clerk of Chicago in 1905, Anson gleefully told reporters, "I'm just as pleased as if I'd won another pennant." After serving two years, however, Anson met defeat in a bid for re-election.

His hard times continued. In January 1909

Anson was summoned to appear in municipal court for owing \$111 to a Chicago wrecking company. Admitting that he was "busted," Anson told the judge he was "getting on as best he could, and wasn't going to worry because that never got anybody anything." The judge, who had watched Anson play baseball years earlier, dismissed the citation. Leaving the courtroom, Anson remarked, "There is still another inning," and received a round of applause from spectators. Despite this temporary reprieve, Anson eventually saw his Chicago home foreclosed.

Anson managed a semi-professional baseball team that toured the Midwest in 1909 and 1910, but this endeavor likewise was unprofitable. In an attempt to restore his assets, Anson starred in a much-criticized play entitled "The Runaway Colt." He also appeared in a slapstick vaudeville act, during which he wore green whiskers and sang a chorus, "We're Ten Chubelin Tipperary Turks." National League President John K. Tener attempted to establish a pension fund for Anson, but the former Chicago manager rejected the plan as another charity move. More insulting perhaps, in 1920 baseball club owners chose Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis over Anson for the newly created position of Commissioner of Baseball.

Two years later, while managing Chicago's Dixmoor Golf Club, Anson was stricken with a glandular ailment and had to be rushed to the hospital. Surgical efforts to relieve his painful condition proved unsuccessful and on April 18, 1922 the legendary slugger was dead.

News of Anson's death spread quickly throughout Chicago and then across the nation. Players and fans looked back on his career with both awe and affection, all of them aware of his immense impact on the sport. Albert Spalding lauded him as "one of the greatest ballplayers that ever lived. . . . a man who was as good as his bond," while pitcher Cy Young claimed "they never made any greater

or better players." Sportswriter Grantland Rice praised Anson as "The Grand Old Man of Baseball" and lamented that "there is none in sight who will ever quite take his place." A year after his death, Anson's friends erected a monument in his honor at Chicago's Oakwood Cemetery, where he is buried.

The ultimate tribute came in 1939 when Anson was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. According to his plaque in Cooperstown, the young man from Marshalltown had become "the greatest hitter and greatest National League player-manager of the nineteenth century." Anson's innovative leadership and aggressive style put him in the select company of the game's great pioneers—including Connie Mack and John McGraw—men who helped transform a sandlot sport into the national pastime. □

Note on Sources

The author is indebted to Archie Motley, Curator of Manuscripts at the Chicago Historical Society, and Terri Wendt of the Marshalltown Public Library for providing pertinent materials on Anson. The principal sources for this article are: Adrian C. Anson, *A Ball Player's Career* (Chicago: Era Publishing Company, 1900); the *Chicago Tribune*; the *New York Times*; Albert G. Spalding, *America's National Game* (New York: American Sports Publishing Company, 1911); Arthur Bartlett, *Baseball and Mr. Spalding, the History and Romance of Baseball* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Company, 1951); and "Baseball's Grand Old Man," *Literary Digest*, LXXIII (May 6, 1922), 62-65.

The Chicago Historical Society houses the helpful Chicago National League Baseball Club Records, 1873-1890. For Anson's statistical impact, the *Baseball Encyclopedia*, Rev. Ed. (New York: The Macmillan Publishing Company, 1974) and *Spalding's Official Baseball Guide*, 1876-1898 are indispensable. Useful articles include: Roger H. Van Bolt, "Cap Anson's First Contract," *Annals of Iowa*, XXXI (April, 1953), 617-625; George S. May, "Major League Baseball Players from Iowa," *The Palimpsest*, XXXVI (April, 1955), 133-165; and Edwin Platt Turner, "Adrian Constantine Anson," in Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, eds., *Dictionary of American Biography*, 22 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1928-1944), pp. 311-312. Harold Seymour, *Baseball: The Early Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960) and David Quentin Voigt, *American Baseball: From Gentleman's Sport to the Commissioner System* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966) describe the development of baseball in the late nineteenth century.

PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE SCHWINN COLLECTION



Leonard Schwinn came to Red Oak, Iowa from Illinois in the 1880s. Although a businessman by profession, Schwinn spent much time behind the camera, recording the activities of his family and friends in this pleasant Montgomery County community. More than a hundred of the photographer's glass negatives survive, and they provide an unusually candid view of life in southwestern Iowa in the years around 1900. The photographs shown on these pages were printed directly from the original negatives, a gift to the State Historical Society from the photographer's son, Mr. Walter K. Schwinn of West Hartford, Connecticut.

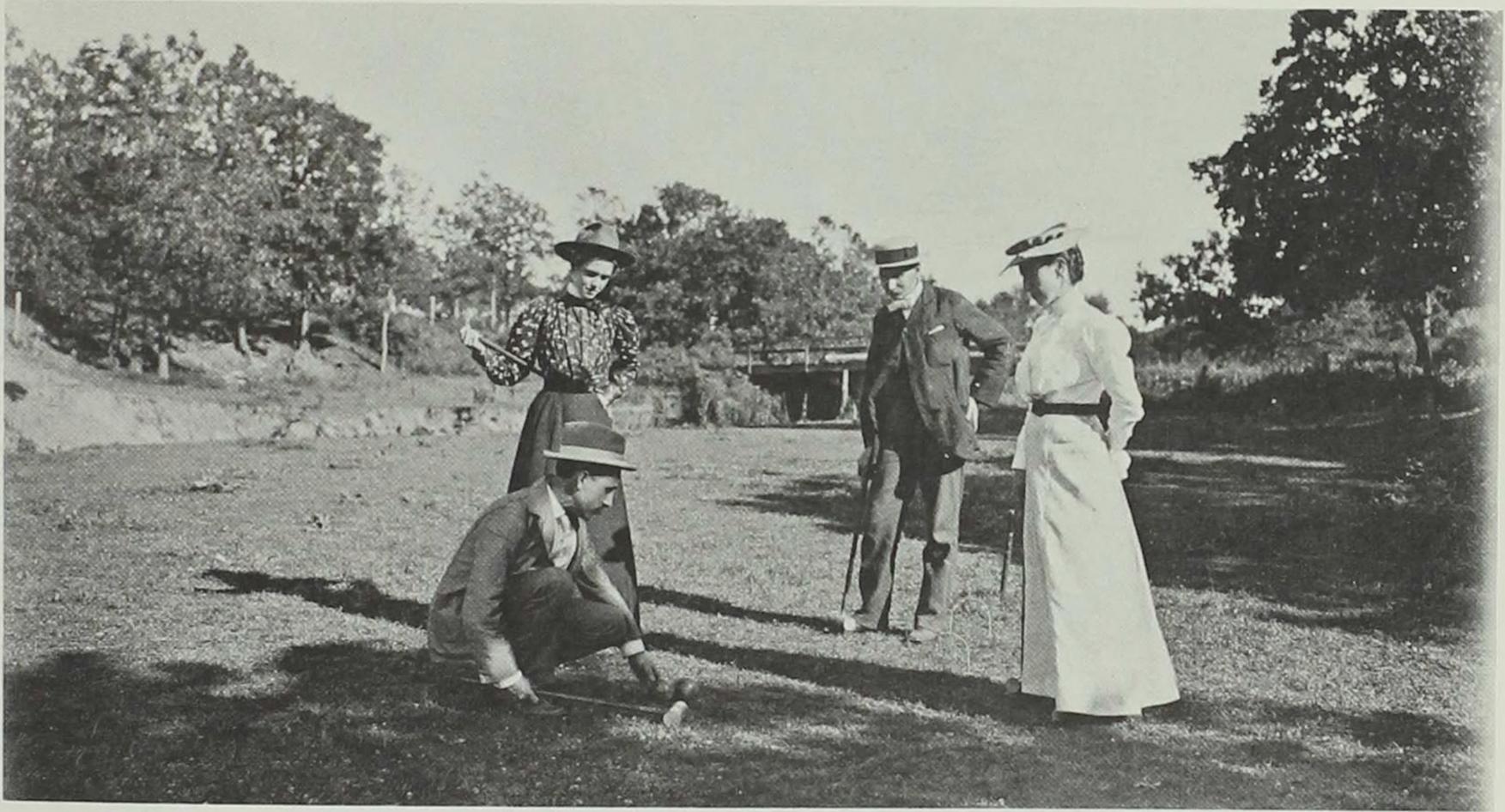


Country scenes appear frequently among the Schwinn photographs: pictured on the opposite page are Schwinn's wife Kate and son Byron in a carriage drawn by Skibo, the family horse; above, the Seeley Flour Mill on the Nishnabotna River. (All photos SHSI)



Summer fun: members of a fishing expedition pause on the banks of the Nishnabotna (left), and a nutting party in a Red Oak park (below). Kate Schwinn's brother Walter Kelly also lived in Red Oak. Kelly's children pose for their uncle (right); (top right) the Kellys play croquet.

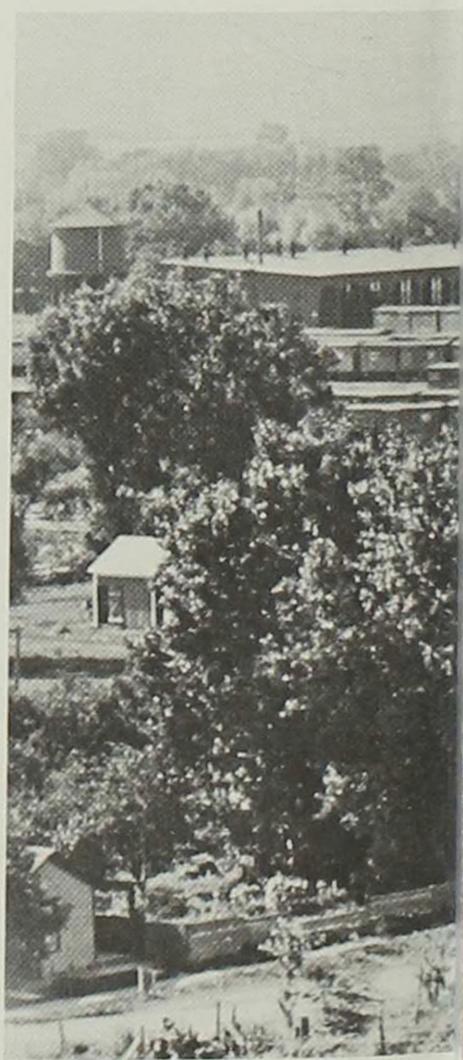
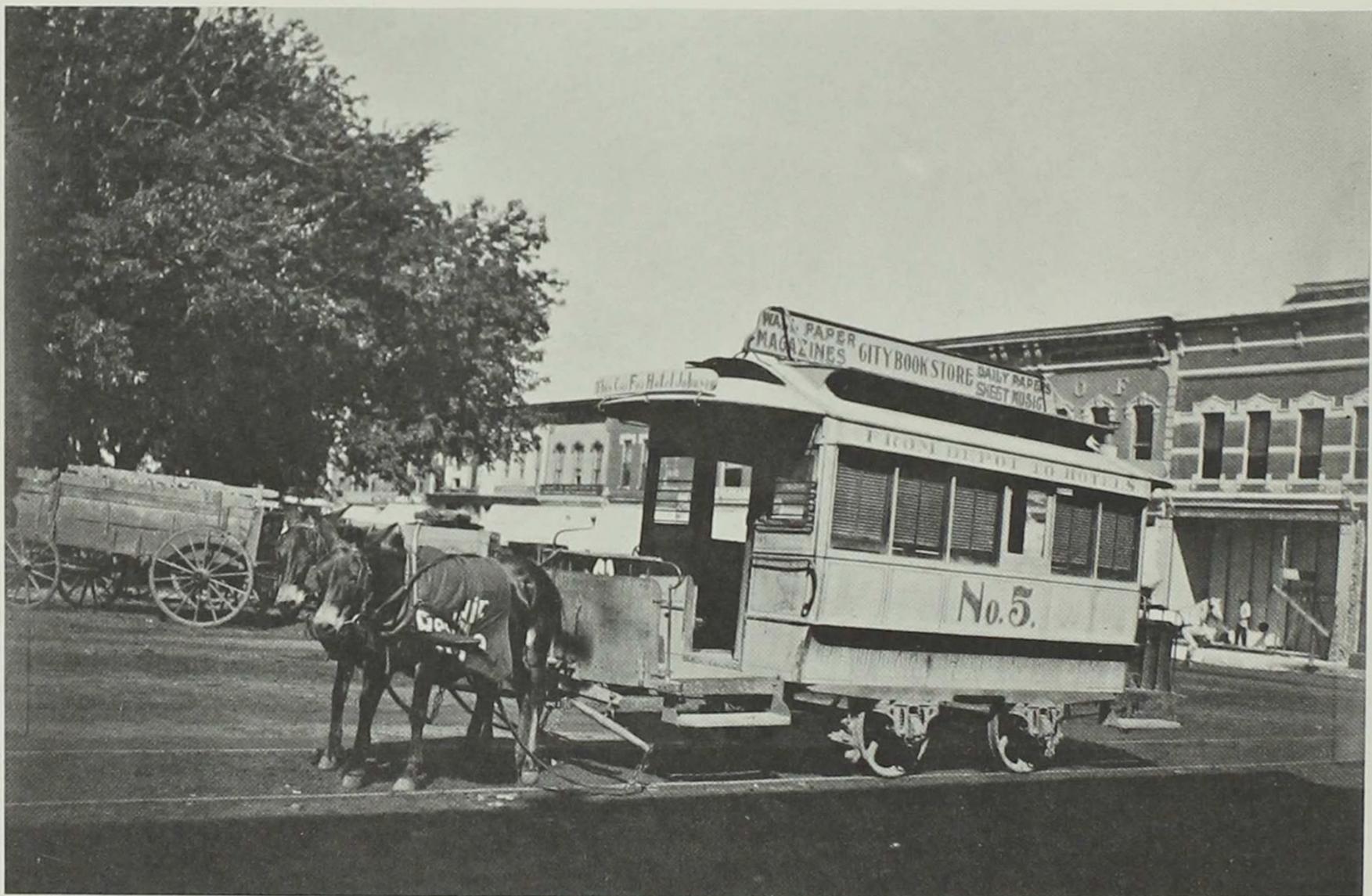








A party in a melon patch; photographer Leonard Schwinn stands second from right.

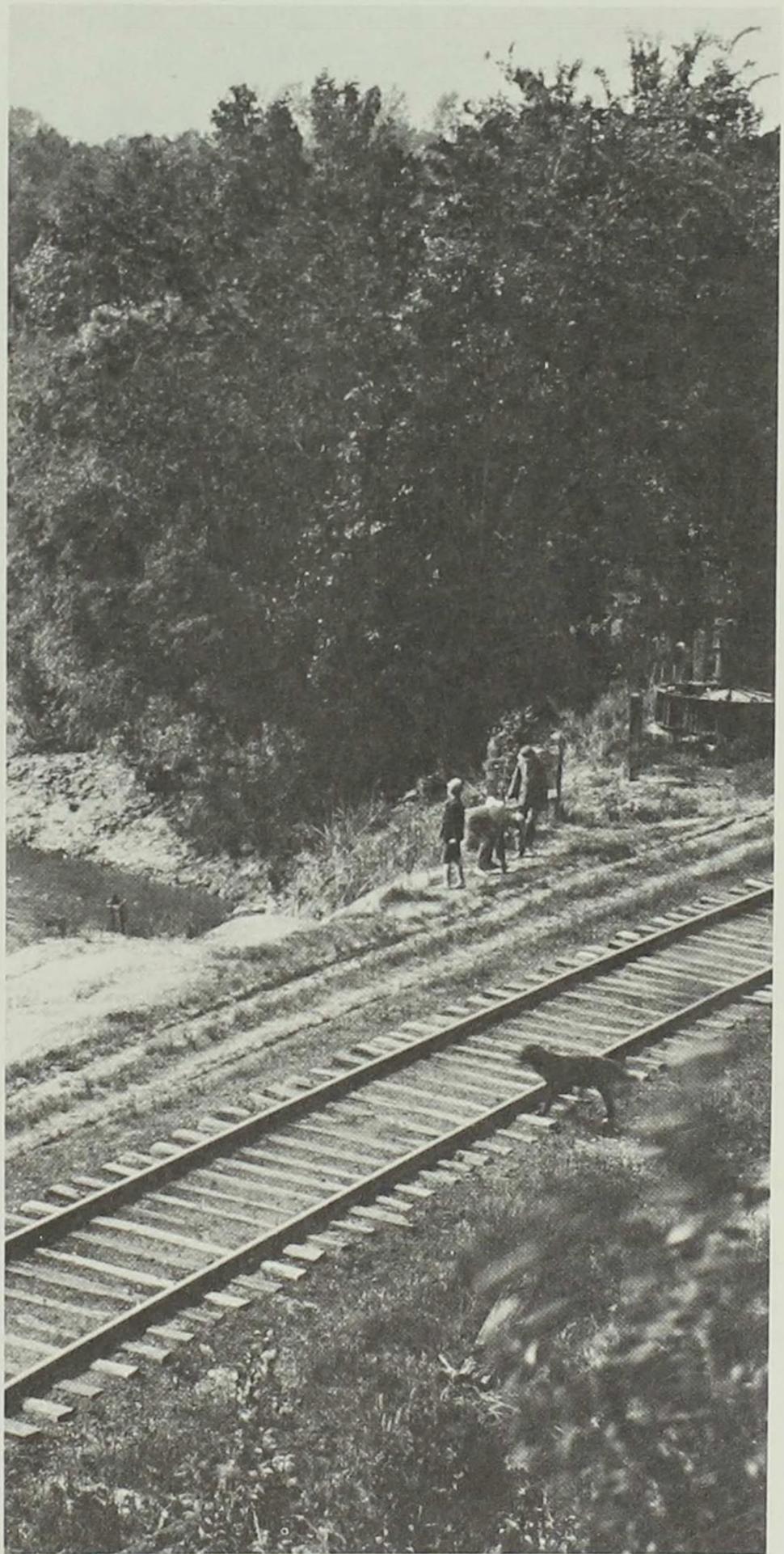
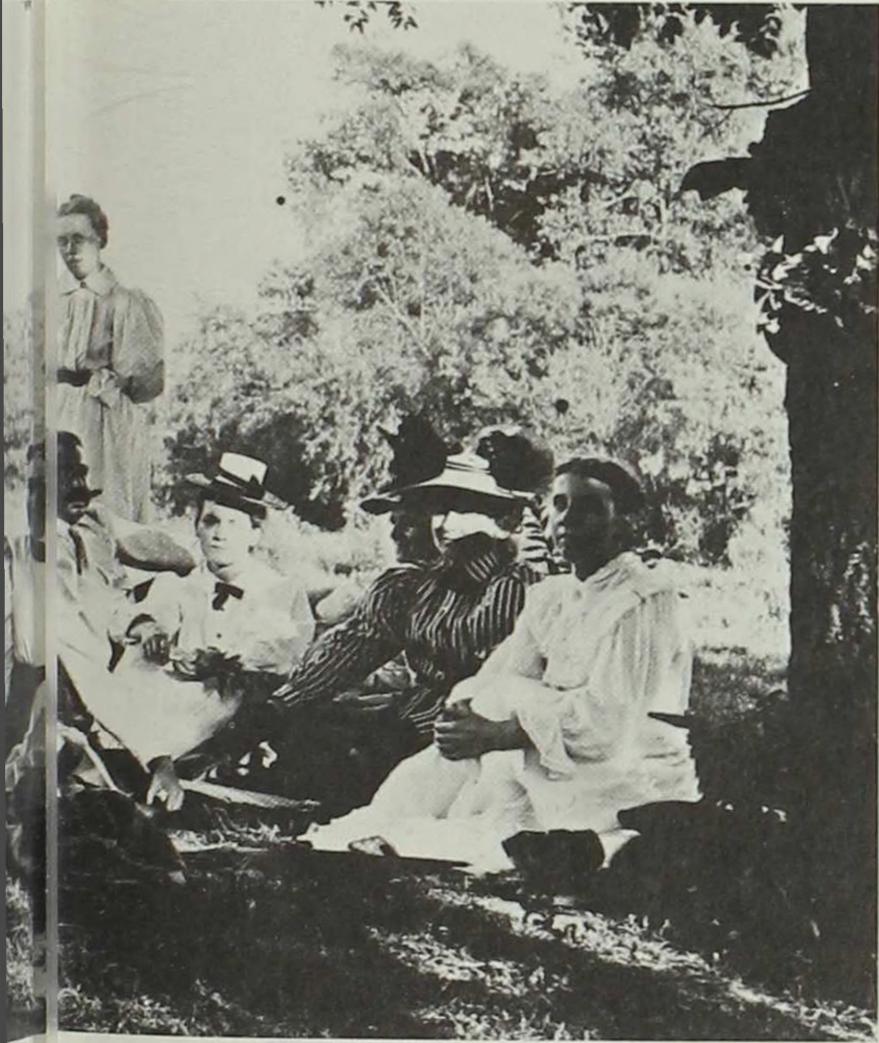




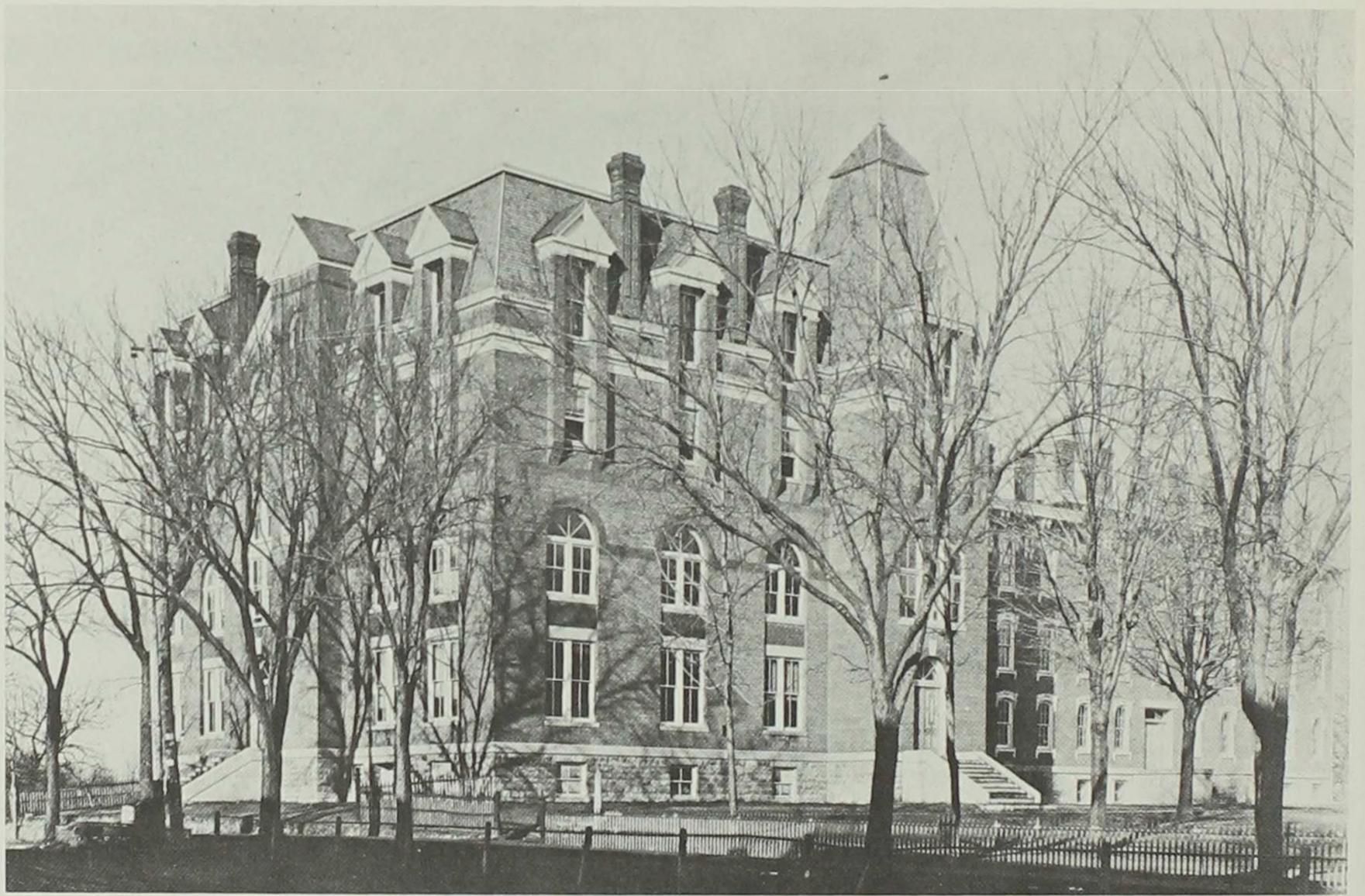
In and about Red Oak: a panorama of the village (below right); a horse-drawn trolley (left); picnickers in the park (right); and the home of Schwinn's father-in-law, Charles Kelly (below left). Sitting on the porch are (from left) Kelly's daughters Virginia, Kate (Schwinn), and Jessie. Young Byron Schwinn watches his father from the top step.







A final quartet from the Schwinn Collection: a summer outing (upper left); the armory at the Montgomery County fairgrounds (left); riders stop on a country lane (far left); and three boys play on the railroad tracks near the South Mill (above).



The Library Fire of 1897

by Mary Monson

Despite record temperatures in the upper nineties, more than two thousand firemen from across the state gathered in Iowa City on June 16, 1897 to participate in the Iowa State Firemen's Nineteenth Annual Tournament. Events such as this one helped compensate the volunteer firemen of Iowa City and other towns for their labors throughout the year, though at least a few local citizens objected to the gambling and the illegal sale of liquor that usually accompanied the summer celebrations. Their protests had been ignored previously, for most citizens welcomed the annual revelry and apparently condoned the casual enforcement of the law in these circumstances. But a tragedy during tournament weekend in 1897 intensified criticism of the firemen and threatened to

leave Iowa City with no fire department at all.

On the afternoon of June 16, all was festive. Townspeople along the route of the tournament parade decorated their houses and businesses, and ten thousand spectators turned out to greet marchers representing communities from various parts of the state. Delegations from several large cities marched in full regalia, including members of Muscatine's "Old Hooks" who wore silk badges reminiscent of badges they won in the tournament of 1881. They also carried red, white, and blue umbrellas, which—according to the *Muscatine Journal*—helped them "make up in appearance what they lack in style." Included in the marchers' ranks was their chief's little daughter, confidently driving a hose reel. Neither she nor the firemen impressed the judges suffi-

ciently, however, and another fire company won the \$75 prize for best appearance.

The parade ended at City Hall, where Mayor Frank Stebbins welcomed the visitors with a short speech. From there the festivities moved to the fairgrounds where, according to the *Iowa State Press*, "the boot-black, the ring-man, the soap vendor, and the Italian with bear and monkey" had already arrived.

In three days of competition for \$2,750 in prizes, the fire department teams participated in a variety of hose races and coupling contests. There was even a novelty race in which teams ran with a hose cart three hundred feet to a hydrant, laid two hundred feet of hose, uncoupled the fourth section of hose, dropped back and took out the second section and replaced it with the fourth section. The most exciting event was the horse hose race Friday afternoon. Although Clinton was the favorite of many, it could not match the pace set by an excellent Cedar Rapids team, which won the first prize of \$125. Clinton finished second, winning \$75. The Harlan Fire Department won the most money overall and carried away the championship belt. LaPorte and Corning companies also made strong showings, winning many badges and large sums of money.

Members of the host Iowa City Fire Department returned to the station Friday night, exhausted but pleased. The tournament had been a great success, and a storm building in the west brought hope of relief from the intense heat.

By three AM the storm was moving into the area. The lightning flashed more and more brilliantly and, at 4:10 AM, the University Library was struck by a bolt that hit the second chimney at the southwest corner of the building. Flames traveled along the roof and then down into the building itself. Ed Lodge, night porter at the Kirkwood Hotel, turned in the alarm.

The firemen rushed to the campus to fight the blaze and attempted to save what books

they could. But the water pressure was low that morning and the firemen could do little. At five AM, Second Assistant Librarian Mary Barrett and three firemen entered the building through a second-story window and broke into the librarian's office in an attempt to save books. Miss Barrett located the accessions register while fireman Lycurgus Leek ran into the main library room and filled his arms with books. Just as he was turning to leave, a portion of heavy timber and slate roof collapsed on him. His three companions were driven back by the flames. Soon the fire blazed totally out of control and the rest of the roof crashed to the floor. It was an hour before the flames diminished enough for the firemen to recover Leek's body. The community responded with great sympathy to the news of the heroic fireman's death, and Mrs. Mary O. Coldren circulated a subscription list to pay for the funeral, but University President Schaeffer asked that the university be permitted to bear all the expense.

In the aftermath of the fire, the largest academic library west of the Mississippi lay in ruins. In its forty-year history the collection had grown from 200 volumes to 33,600. Of those 33,600 volumes, over 6,000 had been in other buildings. However, of the 27,500 books in the main library, 25,000 were destroyed along with 15,000 pamphlets. The shelf list and 40,000 catalog cards were also lost. Fortunately, the librarian's office was protected by a gallery, which saved the records kept there.

The fire department's failure to save the library became the focus of a political and moral controversy that actually pre-dated the fire. It was suggested—although not stated—by the Republican *Iowa City Citizen* that more than one of the firemen had not fully recovered from the effects of the celebration by the time of the fire, and that had the firemen been working at full capacity, more books could have been saved. The *Iowa City Press*, a paper of



The Alert Fire Company of Iowa City, participants in the tournament of 1897 (SHSI)

Democratic leanings, disagreed and supported the firemen. In any event, as a third newspaper reported on June 23, certain facts were clear:

There were rumors afloat several days ago that the churches of the city would unite in an effort to stop the sale of liquors on the fair-ground during the tournament, and Jacob Mohr, who purchased the privileges, was warned and cautioned not to sell beer.

The warning was disregarded, however, and his arrest followed. Constable Jack Butler made the arrest last evening at 7 o'clock and brought Mr. Mohr before Squire Leasure, who placed him under a bond of \$500 to appear Monday afternoon at 1 o'clock. He is charged with selling liquors contrary to law.

Traditionally, of course, municipal authorities had ignored violations of the liquor laws during the firemen's tournament. But led by temperance advocates such as the members of the Ministerial Union, a number of vocal Iowa Citizens wanted to be sure that the blame for the tragic loss of life and property in the library fire was put squarely on "demon rum." The Ministerial Union had deplored the sale of liquor at the tournament from the beginning;

here was its chance to make the charges against alcohol stick.

The indignant firemen protested this criticism immediately, and soon moved to disband and to turn over all firefighting equipment to the city. A special meeting was called to discuss the idea, but a final decision was postponed for a second meeting to be held on July 6.

In the meantime, facing the possible loss of its fire department, on June 25 the *Republican Citizen* ran a conciliatory editorial:

That the annual tournament of the Iowa Firemen's Association is a worthy institution, organized for a good cause, is indisputable. It stimulates agility, quick action and proficiency as well as precision and cool determination. It quickens discipline, and strengthens every feature of proficiency, so much relied upon in emergencies—and the life of a fireman is one of emergencies. In small cities and towns firemen render their hazardous aid without remuneration, which everyone will

The Malvern Volunteer Fire Department's running team, typical of the entrants in firemen's tournaments held in Iowa cities around the turn of the century (Allan Wortman Collection, SHSI)

agree is generosity in its most acceptable form. That the public is constantly indebted to the firemen is indisputable. They stand between the people and grave calamities, risking their lives, at times, to save others. These things cannot be lightly looked upon. . . . The association affirms that without the annual tournament, the interest in the local firemen's organizations will soon wane, and the excellent service attained by many of our cities and towns be seriously crippled.

On the other hand, the ministers hold to the belief that such a lapse of morality cannot be allowed to pass unrebuked and the church maintain its dignity and consistency. Furthermore, they assert that this affair has been allowed to drift beyond reasonable restrictions, in which belief they are not without sympathizers.

The question that is to be discussed is just how many of the bars that divide law and order forces from the other fellows, should be laid down to maintain a necessary and useful institution.

Five days later, Fire Chief August Luez wrote a penitent letter to the Ministerial Union. He explained that the planners of the tournament had decided to sell privileges to

operate a wheel of fortune and to sell liquor in order to avoid a probable deficit, which would have been assumed by the different fire fighting companies of Iowa City. Apologetically, he explained that

this action of the committee was done hastily and under the fear that the tournament would be a financial failure, but ought not to have been done at all. The firemen of Iowa City regret that such privileges were sold and say that henceforth they will have nothing to do with such matters, nor promote any enterprise by such means. We feel that this statement is due to you and make it cheerfully, trusting that it may be the means of regaining your confidence and esteem.

The Ministerial Union was satisfied. That same day Edward N. Barrett and Motier A. Bullock, representing the clergy, wrote back that ". . . having secured, in the above acknowledgement, confession and promise, the substantial ends of justice; we hereby accept the same and consent to the dismissal of the cases against Jacob Mohr and F.H. Gifford." For their part, on July 6 the firemen met as planned and voted unanimously to retain their organization.





University Librarian Joseph Rich (seated) surveys the devastation, June 1897 (SHSI)

Although controversy and recrimination eventually subsided, the task of salvaging, sorting, and rebuilding the library was an overwhelming one. A volunteer corps of faculty, alumni, and students searched for books amid the wreckage of the burned building. Salvaged books were taken to the basement of the Unitarian Church (then located at the present site of Phillips Hall), where Assistant Librarian Bertha G. Ridgeway directed fifteen volunteers who dried, sorted, and recatalogued the books. Packaged according to their condition, books were inspected by bookbinder Zaccheus Seeman to determine the best method of restoration. His assistants spread wet books on racks and regularly turned and aired them to prevent molding. Meanwhile, Librarian Joseph Rich compiled a list of books that had survived the fire, most of them in departmental libraries. Included on the list of salvaged volumes was

the oldest book in the library, *History of the Great Councils of the Church*, a Latin work published in 1502. Quite by accident, Mr. Rich had discovered it in an ash heap.

The departmental working libraries of biology, zoology, geology, mathematics, and approximately three-fourths of the chemistry volumes had been housed in professors' rooms in other buildings and thus escaped the flames. Totally destroyed, however, were collections in political science, political economy, history, French, English, Greek, and Latin, along with hundreds of theses and 1,500 volumes in the German library—the latter collection a gift from Iowa's German-American residents. Perhaps the most shocking loss was the destruction of approximately one-third of the 4,200-volume Talbot Collection. Donated to the library in 1890 by D.H. Talbot of Sioux City, these books constituted one-sixth of the

library's total collection and nearly equalled in value everything else held by the library. Talbot's donation included works in natural history, explorations, voyages, travel, and biography, and also contained a number of books from the early sixteenth century. Of the volumes saved, many were damaged by fire or water and others were too charred to rebind. Things could have been worse, however. Closely shelved in one corner of the library room, the Talbot books had been surrounded by an eight-foot pine partition. Behind it were the only book cases left standing; a falling roof had overturned all the others in the library.

The library building (North Hall) had been erected just north of Old Capitol in 1865 at a cost of \$33,000. It was built to be used as a chapel, with provision on the first floor for the Chemistry and Physics departments. However, in 1882 the library moved into it, replacing the chapel on the second floor. The first floor was occupied exclusively by the physics laboratory. The laboratory did not catch on fire, but damage from heat and water was estimated at \$5,000, which seems paltry compared to the \$100,000 loss to the library.

For more than ten years librarians and university officials had feared just such a catastrophe. They repeatedly begged the legislature to provide them with a fireproof building. In 1886, Mrs. North, the librarian at that time, made such a request. It was repeated in 1891 by the Library Committee of the Board of Regents and by President Schaeffer. In 1893 Librarian Rich again asked for a new building and the request was repeated in the 1895 report of the State University of Iowa to the General Assembly.

In the aftermath of this great tragedy, everyone was confident that the legislators would at last allocate the funds needed for a suitable building. The state carried no insurance on any of its buildings, so a request for

\$150,000 was made for a fireproof structure. Members of the Board of Regents Executive Committee, headed by Chairman Albert W. Swalm, wrote to the governor, to every legislator, to major newspapers, and to hundreds of prominent men and women all over Iowa. President Schaeffer himself addressed a letter to alumni, asking them to contact their legislators requesting support for the necessary funding.

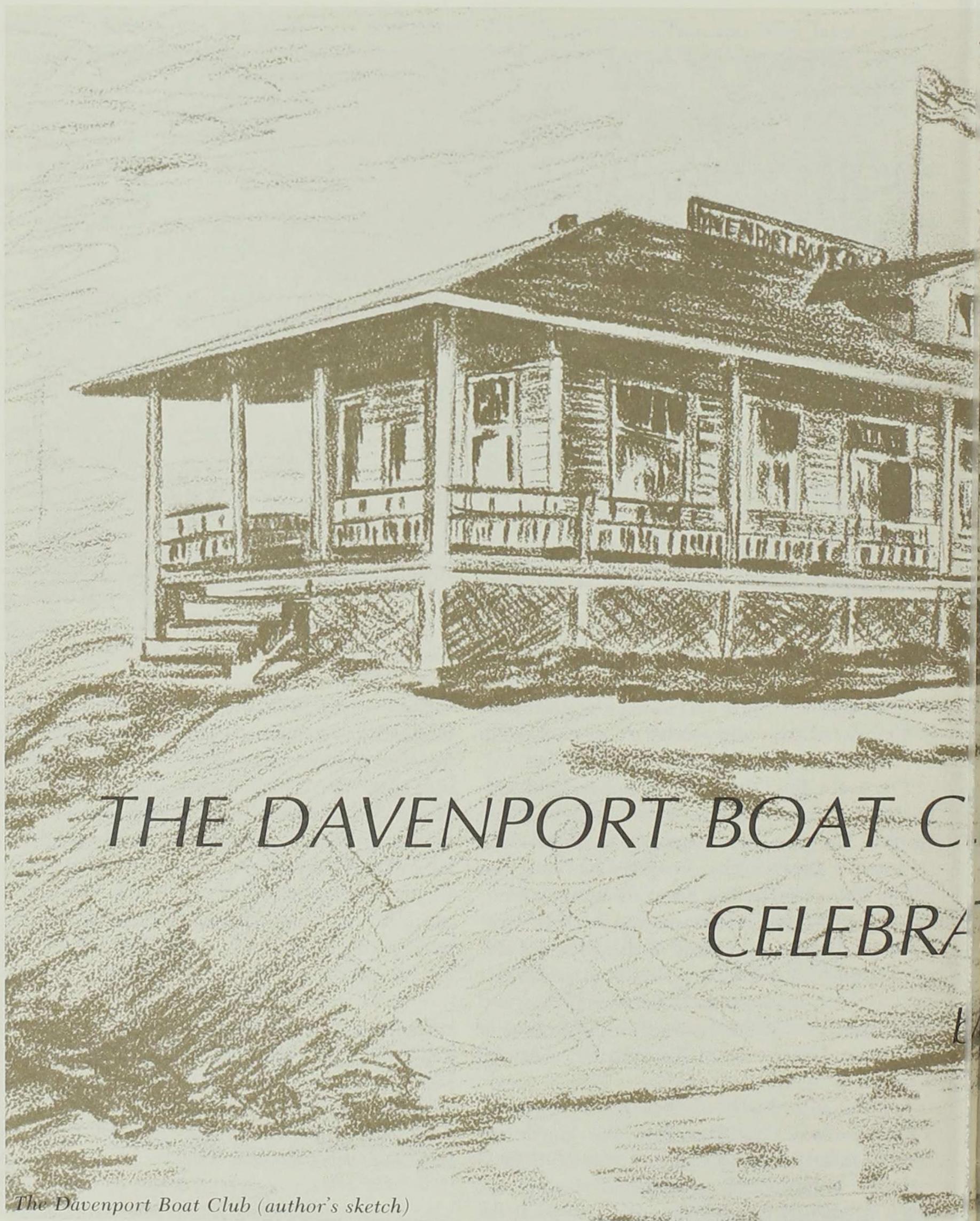
But the dream of a new building remained only that. The legislature accepted Frank Novack's bid of \$3,800 for the repair of North Hall and voted \$75,000 for the restoration of books, this amount to be expended at the rate of \$15,000 a year for five years.

When school opened in the fall of 1897, the Unitarian Church basement served as a temporary library and the State Historical Society offered the use of its library to university students on condition that the University provide a librarian to work those four days of the week that the State Historical Society Library was normally closed. By October 23, the repairs on North Hall had been completed and the books were moved back in.

By May 31, 1898, over 9,000 new books had been acquired through purchases and gifts, and the General Assembly of 1898 voted \$41,900 to buy more. By 1901 the library's collection had regained its pre-fire size. But it wasn't until 1941 that the state legislature finally funded a new library building. □

Note on Sources

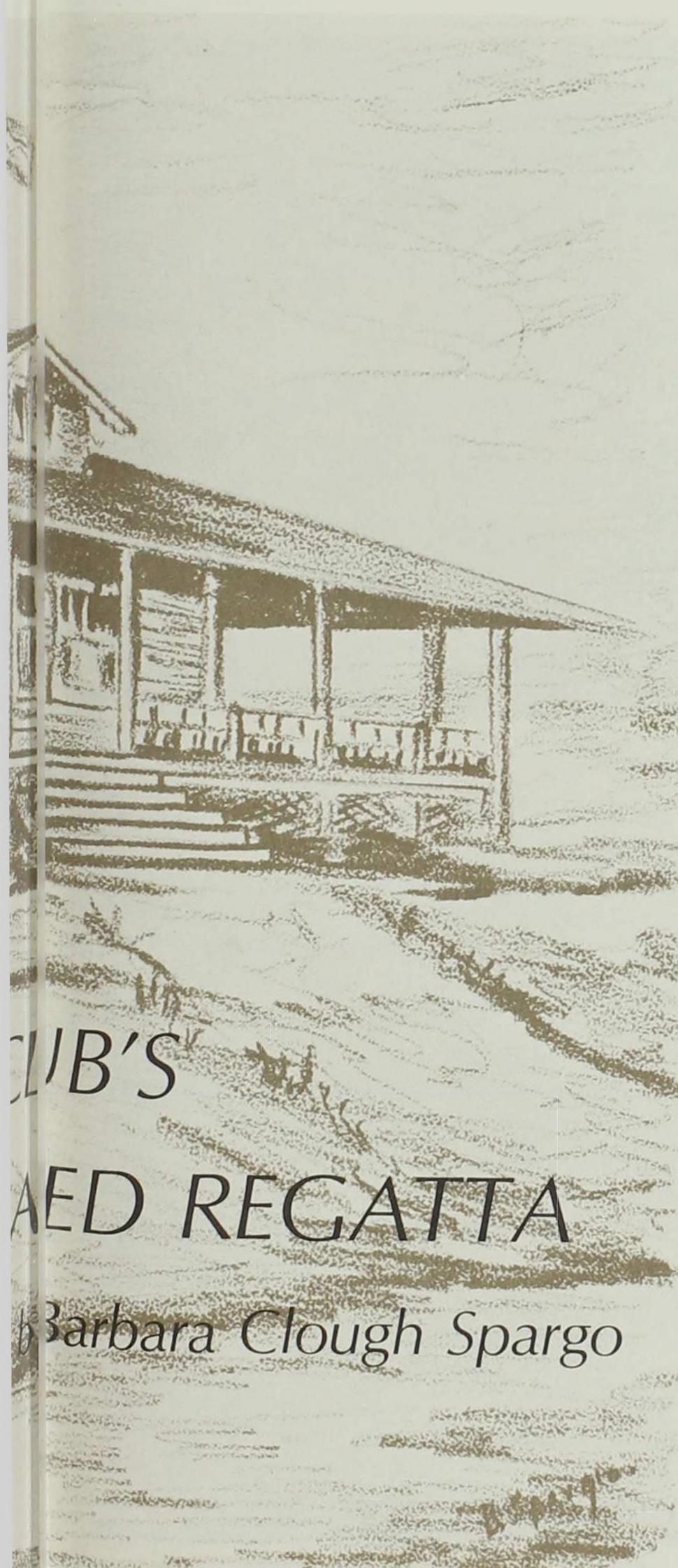
Sources for this article included issues of the *Iowa State Press* and the *Iowa City Weekly Republican* published in 1897 (on microfilm at the State Historical Society) and records of the Rescue Hook and Ladder Company #1 of Iowa City (also at the Society). Also useful were Mildred Throne, "History of the State University of Iowa: The University Libraries," (M.A. thesis, University of Iowa, 1943), and *Staff*, 16 (Winter 1966), a magazine formerly published by the University of Iowa.



THE DAVENPORT BOAT CLUB

CELEBRATE

The Davenport Boat Club (author's sketch)



CLUB'S

AGED REGATTA

Barbara Clough Spargo

The Greatest Aquatic Event in the History of Davenport—500 boats and 50,000 spectators expected! 400 visitors coming from Wilton and 2,000 from Muscatine!”

With that rousing headline, the Davenport *Times* of July 3, 1912 helped set the stage for a speedboat regatta to determine the National Champion of the Mississippi Power Boat Association. The fastest boat racers in the United States were coming to Davenport, Iowa to compete on July 4th for more than \$3,000 in cash prizes plus other prestigious plaques and awards, including the famous Webb Cup to be awarded along with \$1,400 in cash. Thousands of bleachers lined the waterfront in preparation for the huge crowds expected.

At the urging of Gar Wood—the “king” of powerboat racing at that time—the four-year-old Davenport Boat Club was the enthusiastic sponsor of the event. Always famous for thinking big, the boat club in its ensuing twenty-one years of life never quite recovered financially or otherwise from trying to run the glamour race of the era.

Speedboat racing in 1912 was a new sport, almost as new as the 20th century itself. The development of an efficient marine gasoline engine a few years earlier had started a revolution that rapidly changed the face of boating. The special “chug, chug” noises of familiar steam launches with prairie-schooner tops and side curtains gradually gave way to luxurious gasoline-powered yachts. Outboard “pop-pops,” originally shaped like coffee grinders (and like coffee, priced by the pound) were becoming racing machines.

Boat people everywhere dedicated themselves to increased speed on the water, always experimenting with both motors and hull shapes. The object was to cram in as much power as a given hull could hold, and for several decades speed replaced comfort as the goal of most boaters.



The Davenport harbor on the morning of July 4, 1912 (SHSI)

The boating boom had already reached Davenport when an avid group of Quad-City motorboaters met one evening in February 1908 to form a club having something for everyone—not only boaters, but all river-watchers, hunters, and fishermen as well. The original constitution even provided for a committee to protect the fish by placing snags in the river to stop the drawing of seines. Wild rice was to be planted to attract birds. That first night, 100 people paid an initiation fee of \$3 and annual dues of \$2, with a membership goal set at 500 persons for the start of the boating season. The group immediately joined regional powerboat associations and began to plan major regattas.

Within a few weeks the club had obtained from the City Council a lease on a 600-foot strip of land at the end of Scott Street between the river and the railroad tracks. It cost just a dollar per year but it was no simple project to transform this area from a veritable dump into park-like grounds. Volunteer labor, however, ac-

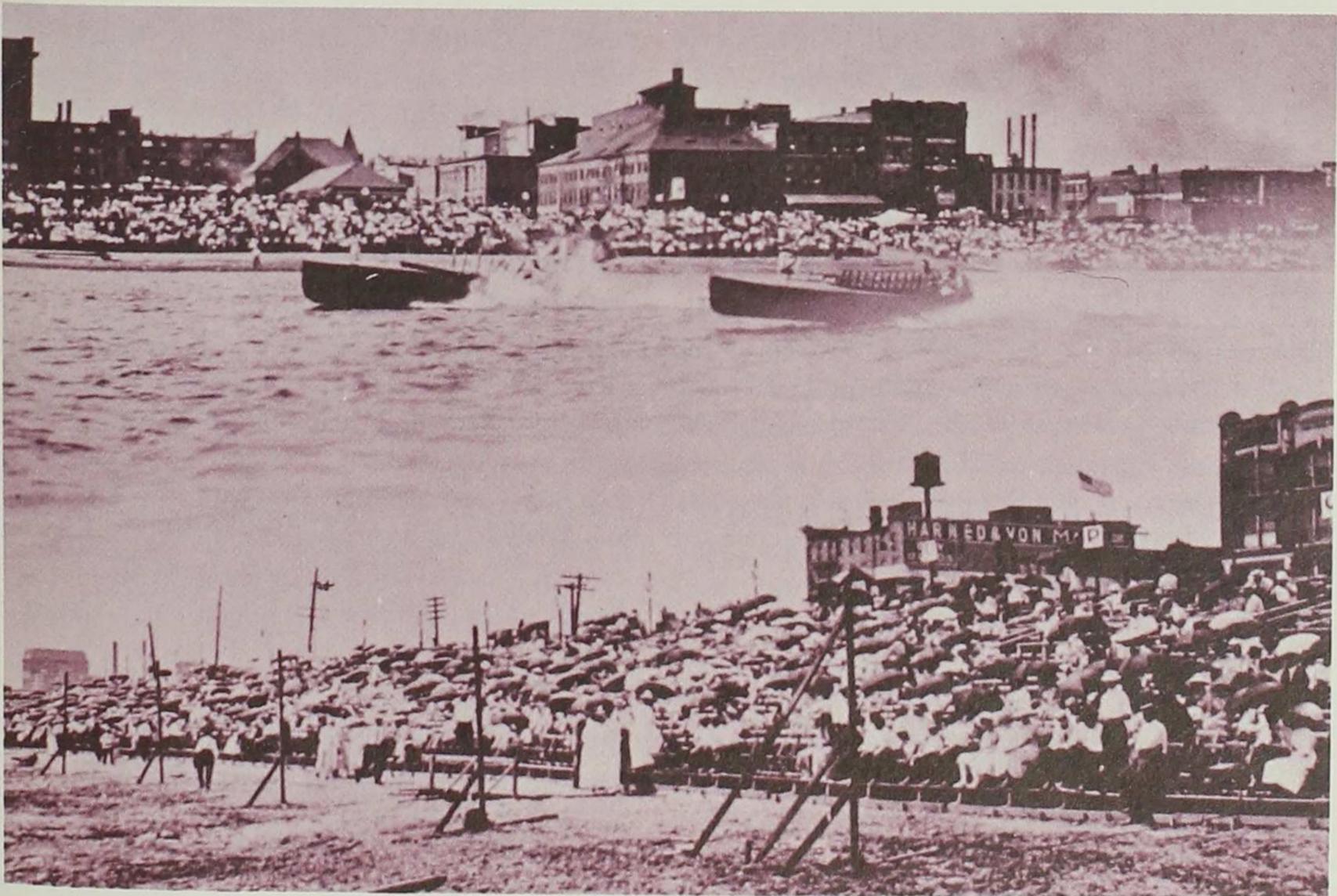
complished quite a lot. The club also obtained permission from the Corps of Engineers to construct in the river a breakwater to form a harbor for mooring boats in the swampy area directly downstream. From their own dredging operations upstream near the Water Works, the Engineers provided the new organization with as much as two barge loads of rock per day for fill purposes, and also assisted in dredging the entire area for several weeks. In years to come, the old swamp continuously silted in, but it was a usable harbor most of the time. With the construction of a lean-to shanty of corrugated metal about the size of a one-car garage, the Davenport Boat Club was ready for a new world of speed.

S ometime early in 1912, with regatta ideas in their dreams, the members felt strong enough to make plans for a long-desired club house with wide porches on three sides. In later years, several people recalled being *the* one to dig the first spadeful of dirt when con-

struction began that spring. With great effort put forth by everyone, the house was apparently completed within hours of the big regatta. Indeed, while boaters were registering by the hundreds on that July 4th morning, the club members were literally racing to complete construction of their club house, still hammering and sawing in the midst of the chaos. Nearly two hundred boats had docked at the club harbor by 11:30 AM, and many more thundered over the horizon both singly and in caravans.

Those coming from upstream experienced longer and longer delays waiting for a pilot at \$5 per trip to lead one boat at a time through the treacherous Rock Island Rapids to regatta headquarters downstream. Finally, so many boaters were clogging the Mississippi that a scheduled parade of boats was cancelled and the races necessarily postponed for many hours.

There were many categories of competition according to the size and type of boat—inboard or outboard engines—but interest focused on the Webb trophy and the powerful hydroplanes fighting with fury for it. (In simple terms, a hydroplane is a type of boat that skims on top of the water instead of plowing through it—a “planing” versus a “displacement” hull.) The typical racing hydroplane of this early regatta was perhaps forty feet long with powerful engines that could zoom the boat over the water at speeds near fifty miles per hour. The highest speed of the great sailing ships of the past was about twenty miles per hour; early launches sometimes reached eighteen miles per hour. No one really knows what speed the favorite contestant of the 1912 regatta might have attained. James Pugh of Dubuque, Iowa, the previous year’s winner of the Webb Cup did arrive in Davenport with his new \$35,000



Racers and spectators at the speedboat regatta, July 1912 (SHSI)

hydroplane, *Disturber III*, said to be able to develop 550 horsepower. Before the races, Pugh tested it on the river and shipped the boat back to Chicago without entering a single race. The tests had shown him that if the engine were opened full speed, the hull would disintegrate.

One local boatbuilder and mechanic, Harry Godley, well understood Pugh's predicament. Godley was constantly experimenting and had previously designed one of the first hydroplanes which used the step principle instead of a flat hull. With that boat, known as *Ugly Duckling*, he won many medals in local races, but was not so lucky with a later design, *Ugly Duckling III*. In a local championship race, it developed a commanding lead, then suddenly "conked out," throwing engine parts and pieces and hull all over the river.

In the 1912 regatta, another local powerboater, Bill Stegen, raced a borrowed boat, a single-step hydroplane that reached 29 miles per hour to take fifth place in its class. No Davenport entry took any of the big money prizes, as, of course, the competitors were of national championship caliber.

One of the key challengers was a monstrous hydroplane known as *Wigwam II*, shipped to Iowa from Astoria, Oregon. Sizable crowds watched it being unloaded from the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy railroad station at the foot of Perry Street on the morning before the races were to begin. With Pugh out of the races, bets ran high on the Oregon entry.

The Corps of Engineers had set the race course, starting west of the Government

Bridge, running under the Crescent Bridge to a point opposite Suburban (Credit) Island and back.

When the races finally did get under way, they were almost over before the judges could sort out who, when, where, or what was taking part in a given contest. Somehow they succeeded. The scene was a carnival of slamming, pounding noise, motion, and roaring color, mingled with death-defying spins and turns that required instant timing and flawless judgment to survive.

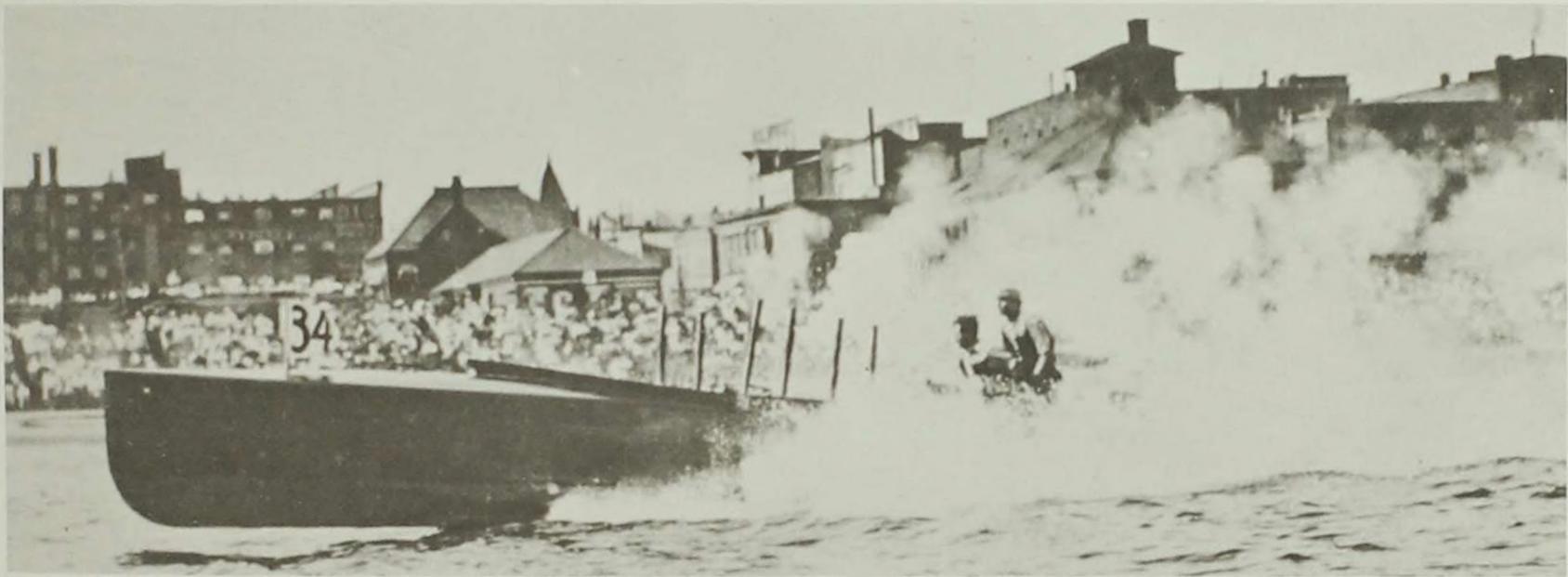
Only a few seconds separated the winners from the losers, but the top boats did deserve their victories. These powerful machines were well-tested and well-financed; their drivers were furiously competitive, ebullient about power boat racing. The ultimate winner of every race and the Webb Cup was *Baby Reliance*, a second-step hydroplane, thirty-two feet long, which surged along at just under fifty miles per hour, and was driven by John J. Ryan of the Smith-Ryan Boat Company. This was a Chris-Craft firm, a leader for many years in national speed racing, and its owner Chris Smith along with Gar Wood succeeded in packing more and more brute force into each successive effort.

Even if one did not care for the ear-splitting thunder and raucous speed of the hydroplanes, there was a spectacular river display to watch that final evening. It was a star-studded night for fireworks, and it featured a parade of elaborate floats on river barges, including such varying themes as "Washington Crossing the Delaware," and "Niagara Falls," gloriously climaxed by one float confidently proclaiming, "Every Year a Better Year in Davenport."

Every year was not really better for the Davenport Boat Club, although it remained a part of the riverfront scene for 21 more years. After the extravagant and clamorous regatta of 1912, the club turned its attention to simpler and quieter things such as cruis-

Note on Sources

Persons and descendants of persons who participated in the Davenport Regatta provided helpful information for this article. They include Burdick N. Richardson, Emeline Godley (Mrs. B.F. Driscoll), Bill Stegen, William Hetzel, Grover Waldman, and Naoma Kistenmacher Buooa. Other accounts of the event and related material appeared in the Davenport *Times* of 1908, 1909, and 1912. Also helpful were D.H.C. Phillips-Birt, *Famous Speedboats of the World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1959) and William Wallace, *Boating* (New York: MacMillan Co., 1964).



Charging along the Mississippi, July 1912 (SHSI)

ing comforts and bill-paying. The tempo of life became slower, almost as if the club had retired. People sat on the wide lawn enjoying sandwiches, drinking beer, sometimes canoeing or swimming, running their boats more casually, and always ready to welcome "beautiful people" on boats travelling up and down the Mississippi. It was always a great day, for example, when the Mayo brothers from Rochester, Minnesota, modeling immaculate yachting attire, landed their vessel at the Davenport Boat Club dock. Their yacht carried on board not only a small launch but, wonder of wonders, a two-seater Cadillac automobile swaying in a sling on the deck.

Local boats couldn't quite equal that one,

but old-timers recall with pride and envy many large cruisers there with polished, syrup-colored decks, one "monster" Gar Wood runabout, and several luxurious cabin boats. Outboards bumped the water in increasing numbers, but organized racing was only sporadic and usually informal. The membership of the Davenport Boat Club gradually declined, especially during the Depression. After Municipal (now John O'Donnell) Stadium was built nearby in 1931, disputes arose over rights to the shoreline between the boat club and the Davenport Park Board. In 1933 the city finally condemned the property, terming it an "eyesore." Nothing like the big regatta would ever be seen there again. □

CONTRIBUTORS

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The State Historical Society of Iowa is a Division of the Iowa State Historical Department, a state agency created by the Sixty-fifth General Assembly. Along with the Society the Department includes a Division of Historical Museum and Archives (formerly Iowa Department of History and Archives) and a Division of Historic Preservation.