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PALIMPSEST

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MAY/JUNE 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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Cover: A street scene in Waterloo, Iowa, ca. 1911-1914, facing north from the west side of the Cedar River. This was a time of great change in Waterloo, a transition period between the horse-and-buggy days of the nineteenth century and the modern automotive era. It was also a time of dramatic growth in industry and trade, in construction, and in population. Among the thousands of newcomers to Waterloo in these years were several hundred black families from the southern United States, drawn to Blackhawk County by the promise of better jobs and a better life. In this issue of The Palimpsest, Robert Neymeyer chronicles the progress of Waterloo's black pioneers as they worked to make good on that promise. His story begins on page 80. (SHSI photo)

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.



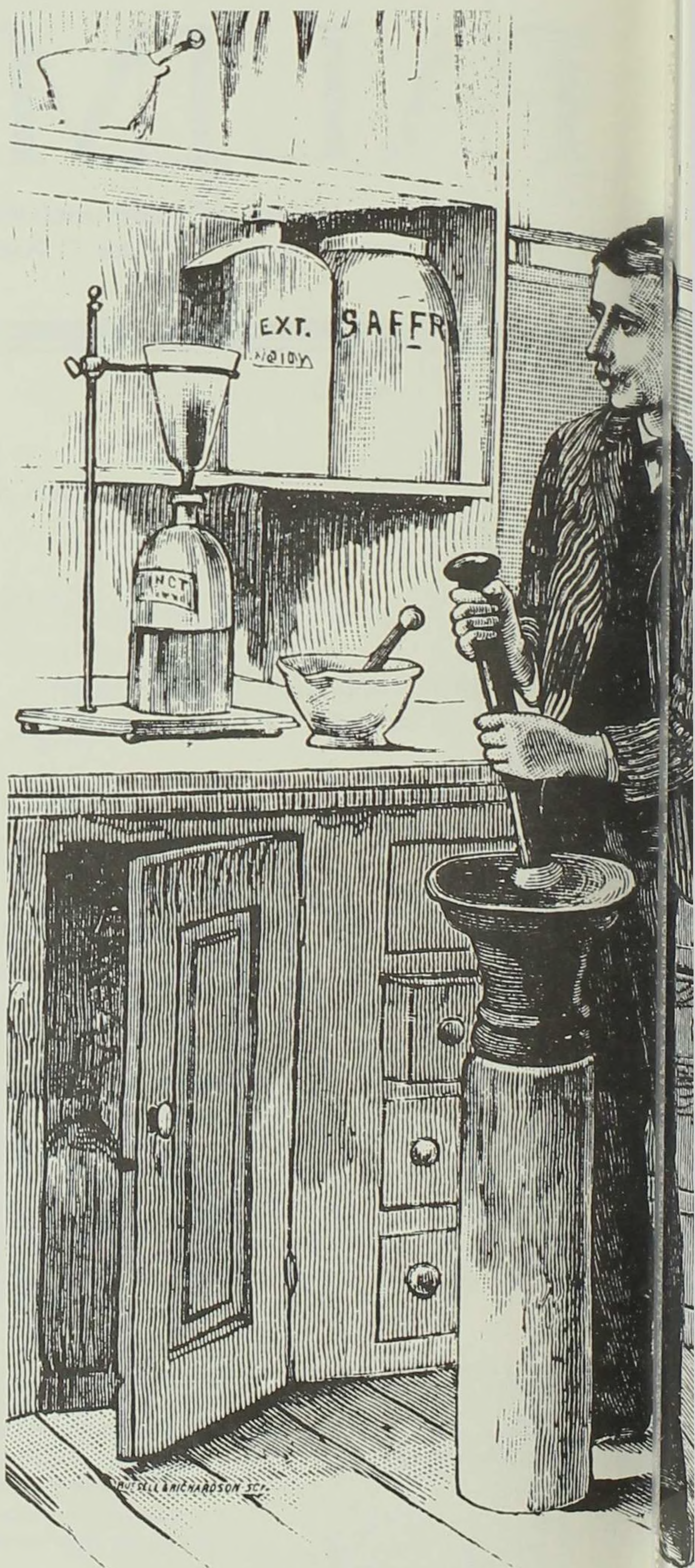
MEMOIRS OF A COUNCIL BLUFFS DRUGGIST

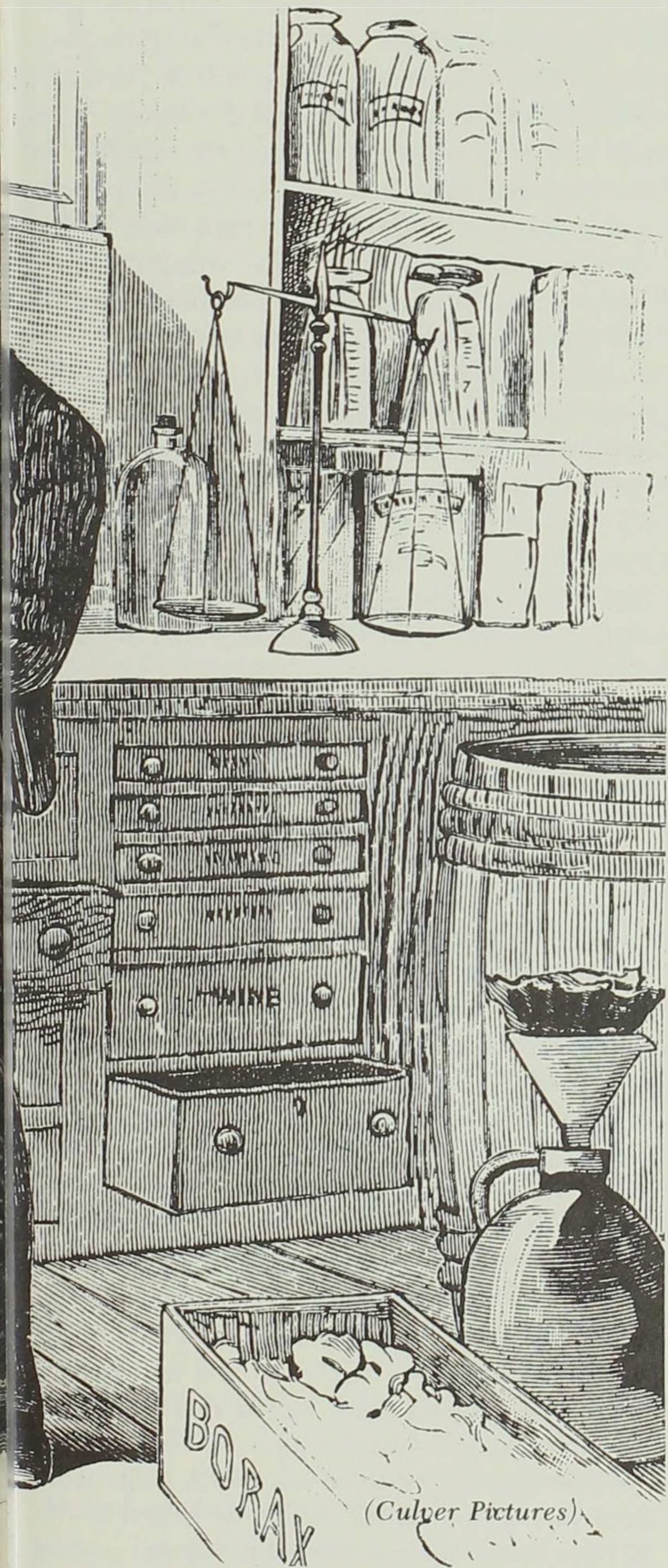
edited by
Robert B. Stuart

The following article is from the autobiographical record of James Daniel Stuart. Born in Council Bluffs in 1860, he was the son of James Stuart and Margaret Hardie Shaw Stuart. In 1864 his mother died in childbirth, leaving James Daniel, older brother William, and older sister Margaret with their father, who was a tailor. Young James began working as a druggist in 1876 and remained thus employed in Council Bluffs until 1880, when he moved to Mondamin, Iowa to open his own drug store. In 1888 he and his wife, Annie Leonora Caffall Stuart, returned to Council Bluffs but moved again ten years later, this time to Magnolia. Here Mr. Stuart owned and operated a drug store for the rest of his working life. He died in 1938.

James Stuart's memoirs appeared originally in Saints and Sundries, a book written by his great-grandson Robert B. Stuart and published privately in 1976.

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As soon as school closed, when I was sixteen, I began working for Robert McKenzie, who had a seventy-two-acre market garden and fruit farm. He was a very nice man but slaved himself from morning until night. His wife was Swiss. I worked on the market garden for \$3 a week and board, while men who did less got \$1.25 and their dinner each day. I have always felt that the boy or girl or woman should be paid equally with the man for the same amount or kind of work, but it has been my experience and observation that it is not done.

Across from Dad's tailor shop was a drug store first run by John D. Honn, whose clerk was Amzi M. Beardsley. We did all our drugstore business with them, and they patronized the tailor shop. Mr. Beardsley at one time had worked in a furniture factory in Horicon, Wisconsin which was his home. During a spring flood there, he had waded in the cold water all day, and a resulting chill turned to rheumatism and later a white swelling that cramped one leg until his heel touched his hip. Clamps were placed on the leg to try to straighten it out but left it crooked, so that one foot was about a foot higher than the other. Mr. Beardsley and a partner, J.D. Black, bought out Mr. Honn. Then Mr. Beardsley saved enough to buy out his partner.

Unknown to me, Dad had asked Mr. Beardsley to give me a place in his store when he next had a vacancy, and Mr. Beardsley had said he would.

Mr. Beardsley decided to visit the 1876 Centennial celebration at Philadelphia, going by way of his home in Wisconsin where a brother worked as a conductor on the Milwaukee Railroad. Mr. Beardsley left his clerk, Edward N. Monroe, in charge of the store. Ed had come from Unionville, Missouri where he had clerked in a drug store. He had had trouble with his employers there and had sued them for his wages. They wrote him at Council Bluffs to come back to Unionville, and if he would withdraw his suit they would turn the store over to

him. Ed decided to leave and wired Beardsley at Horicon to return home, which he did. Beardsley then went to my father and told him he was ready to give me a try and wanted me to begin at once. That message was delivered to me the evening of September 14, 1876 at McKenzie Gardens, and early the next morning I was installed as the only helper in the Beardsley Drugstore, at the princely salary of \$3 a week.

The choice of a profession had never troubled my mind. I certainly had never thought of the drug business, but parents have pride in their children and high aspirations for their future. I had no previous experience either in a drug store or in any store. I viewed the array of dispensing bottles and jars on the shelf with awe and the Latin or botanical labels as mysteries never to be mastered. I was turned loose. I would hold up a bottle and ask "What is this?" The reply, "Find out." In answer to the question, "How?" Mr. Beardsley referred me to the dispensary. He remarked, "If I tell you, you will forget; if you look it up yourself and read all that is said about it, you will remember."

When this position as drug clerk came to me I boarded with my brother William and his wife. He had been married the year before, September 9, 1875, to Christie A. Gamet of Mondamin. Their home was on the east side of Washington Avenue between First and Second.

I roomed in the rear of the drug store, a coop about six by eight feet. The wardrobe and bed took up practically all the floor space. There was a window in the rear, frosted glass on the south side adjoining the store, a door and the wardrobe on the west side. The east side was a brick wall. Robert and Margaret Boyd lived overhead. She was an old time Scottish midwife. . . . A rear stairway went from her room to the back lot where she had a horse in the barn.

The adjoining building to the west, along Broadway on the north side of the street, was

twelve feet longer than the drugstore building, and their east window opened on our lot. This building was a gambling house, and at the time of my employment the principal game was Keno. The man who got the ball in the right place called "keno" and got all the money. This was an every night occurrence for months. In the summer time the windows were opened, and it was just as though the men were in the next room. Every time the winner yelled "keno" everyone else swore, and for a long time the noise interfered with my sleep. One gets used to accustomed noises, however, and finally I slept through it all. Even Mrs. Boyd did not arouse me one night when she pounded at the back door and rapped on the window near my bed. That was the kind of noise I had learned to sleep through. Only expected calls disturbed me, like a call at the front door of the drug store. When the thumb touched the latch I awakened.

Two doors west of the drug store was a large saloon with tables and games, and overhead there was a public hall for theater, lectures, and political meetings. Almost every night something was going on, frequently with bands of music outside to attract the crowds. The building was built by Henry Burhop. After his death it was rented, and known for a long time as Bradley's Academy.


The question of salary became a serious one right away, since I paid my brother \$3.00 a week for board, and that took all my wages with nothing for laundry, clothing, or extras of any kind. After three weeks of work I suggested to the boss that I hoped I would soon be worth a little more to him. He took the matter sternly, it seemed to me, and replied that he would pay me more when I was worth it. Mr. Beardsley was about forty-five years old and had been a widower for a long time, but he married about the time I entered his employ. The week after he was married he gave me \$4. A short time later he wanted me to change to board at the Bryant house because the landlord was a good

customer. Mr. Beardsley then paid my board and gave me \$16 a month.

At first the nights were very lonely at the drug store, surrounded with what I considered poisons and not knowing when I should be called out of bed. Even the ribaldry next door was company in that I knew I was not alone if anything happened.

One night I was called up and handed a prescription to fill. The orders were not to fill any. I looked at this prescription thoughtfully. I thought of the humiliation if I confessed my ignorance, and I thought of the urgent need, for the party told me he had been the whole length of the street and had been unable to arouse a single drug clerk. It was a simple prescription, plainly written, but it took me a long time to fill it and hand it over. I went to bed but not to sleep. Several times I got up and looked at the piece of paper and the medicines I had used in making it up. I told the boss when he came down in the morning and explained why I had disobeyed him. He looked at the prescription and looked at the things I had put in it and the quantities as I had interpreted the signs. He said it was all right this time, but he sighed as he said it.

The second day working I was in the store alone, and an old lady came in from the country. She looked at me and inquired for Mr. Beardsley. I told her he was home for dinner. She wanted to know when he would return. I was unable to say but suggested I might be able to supply what she wanted. She said, "You look pretty young." She was restless and got up from her chair often. I asked her to tell me what she wanted and I would tell her whether or not I could supply it. Finally she said she wanted "camfire," but I was pretty young and she would wait. I swelled with importance and took a bottle from the shelf labeled Aqua Camphorae. I showed it to her. She smelled it, looked at it, smelled it again, hesitated and said, "It looks like camfire, smells like camfire,



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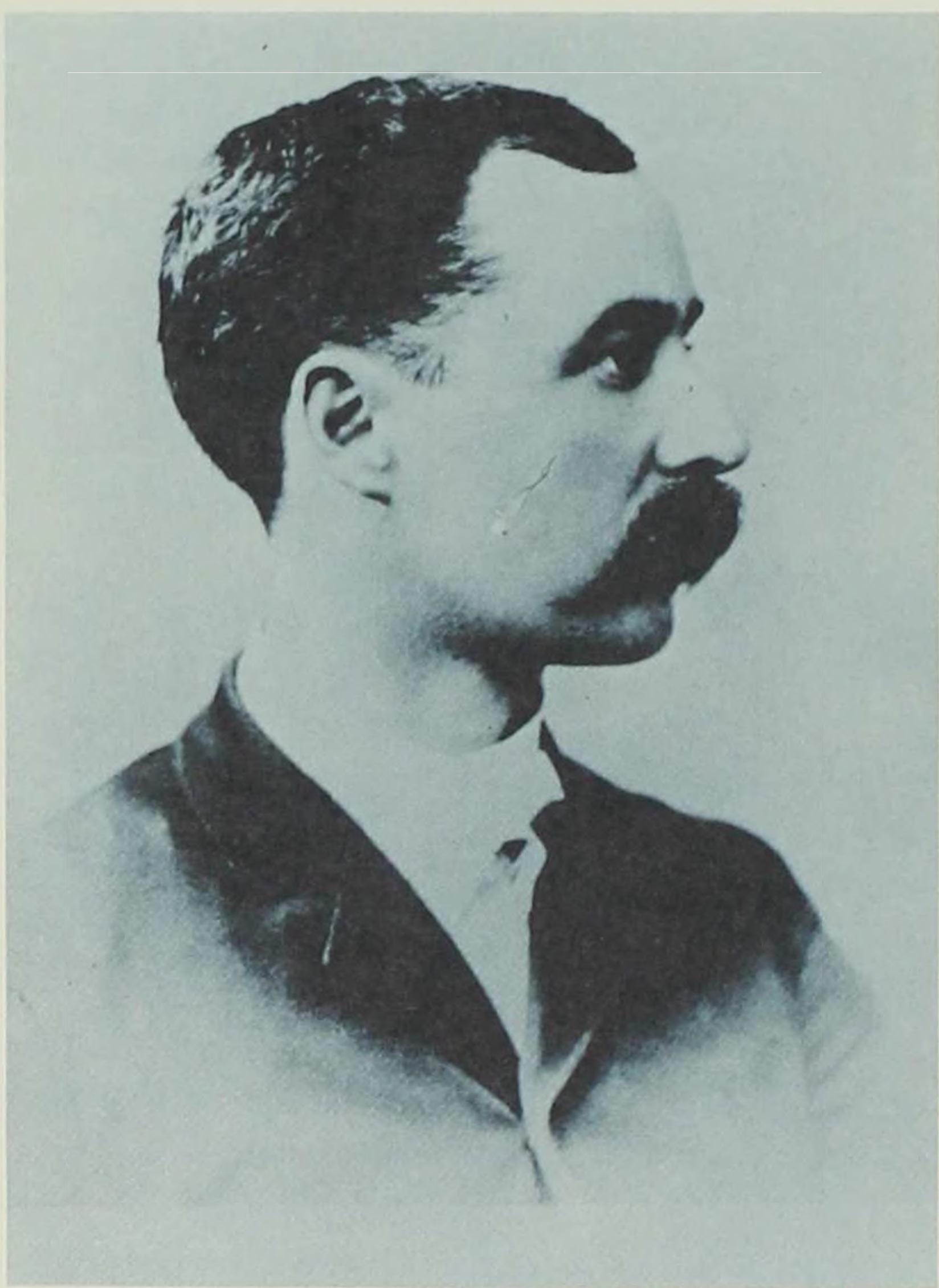
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SURE CURE

Some of the cures and medications advertised in the Council Bluffs Weekly Nonpareil around the time of Mr. Stuart's apprenticeship (SHSI)



James Daniel Stuart, 1881 (courtesy Robert B. Stuart)

are you sure it is camfire?" I assured her and she finally heaved a sigh and departed with her purchase.

Mr. Beardsley returned, and I laughingly told him the experience. He said, "What did you give her?" I showed him, and he replied, "You go and find her and get it back." It was humiliating, for I had given her camphor water, when I should have given her spirits of camphor which contained two ounces of gum to a pint of alcohol. How could I face her and explain? I'm afraid I strained the truth. I walked up the street looking in each store I passed and found her in a toy store owned by an old English couple, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Soar. I had a bottle of what she wanted to exchange for her first purchase. I approached her and explained, "Madam, Mr. Beardsley returned and when I said who you were he told

me you were in the habit of buying the stronger kind of camphor, and he has sent me with it to exchange." She said, "I thought you were pretty young."

A short time after this a young lady came in and inquired for Lilly White Powder. Now the billboards were covered with huge posters announcing a new baking powder named "Lilly White" for sale by all grocers. I explained to her that the grocery stores handled baking powder. We both flushed when she said she wanted a powder for the face.

Sometime later I filled a prescription at the noon hour. It was for a retired hod carrier whose stomach was spoiled from so much whiskey. One of the ingredients was Ipecac, and the intention of the Rx was to ask for one dram. The last stroke of that sign looked like a lower case "j" with the hook at the bottom turned in the opposite direction. In this case I interpreted this sign to mean five drams and so dispensed it. When Mr. Beardsley returned and I told him the quantity he told me to go to the patient's house and have the bottle returned. I reasoned with him that it would do no more harm after he had taken it than to come up again, it might be too late when I got to the house, and the advertisement of error and possible damages would discredit the store. He was quite uneasy about it but let it go. No harm came from it, and the patient lived for many years afterward.

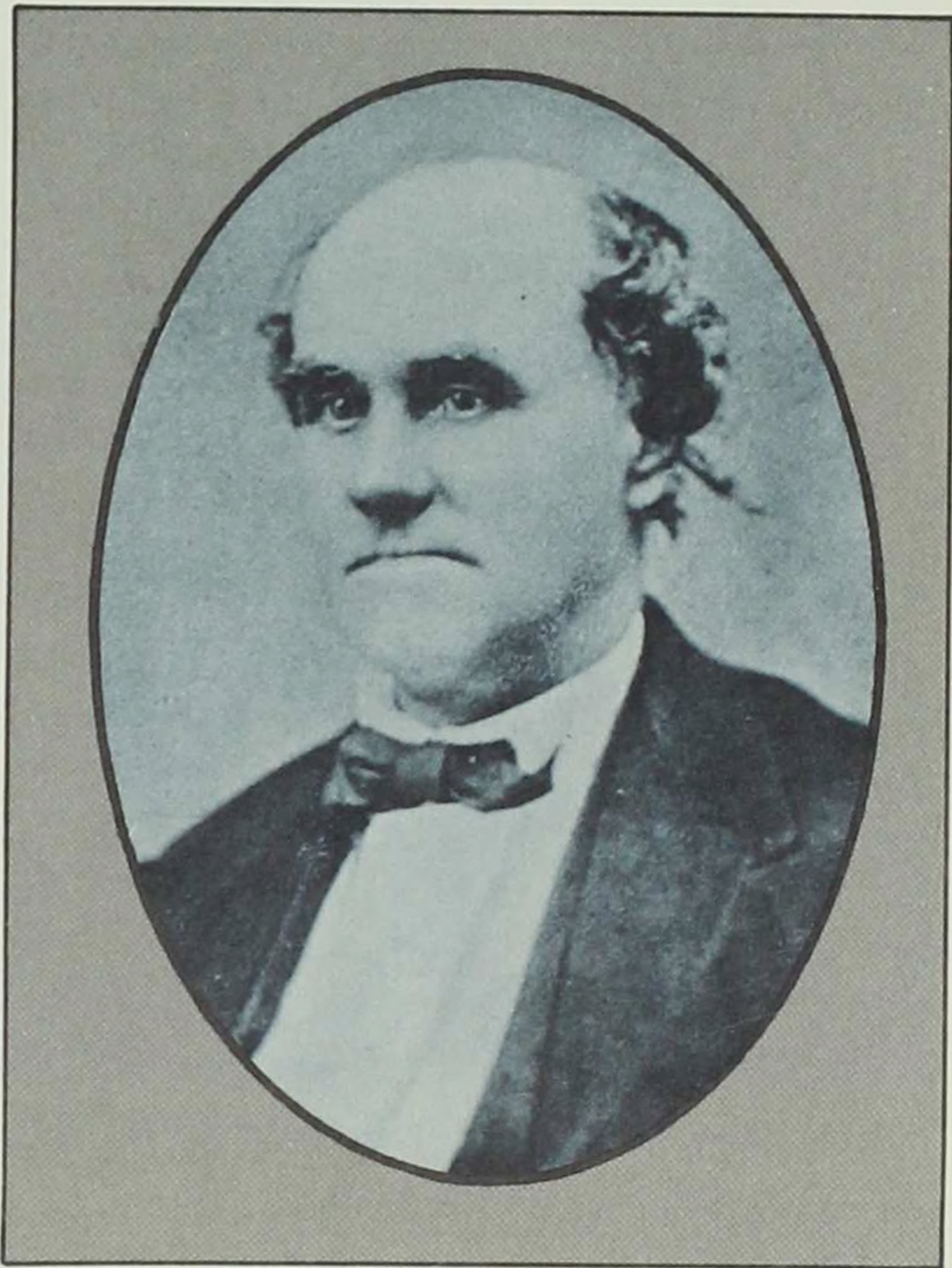
I rejoice in the thought that these are the only mistakes I ever knew I made, and also I am very glad I have caught many serious errors by physicians that would have done harm had they not been aborted. I was at a disadvantage in my apprenticeship since my employer was neither educated as a druggist nor as a scholar. He engaged in the business as I did without book learning or schooling in the profession. I remember one humiliating mistake he made that illustrates this handicap. We received a prescription that included an ingredient written "Aquae Bullientes." I asked what it meant, he

puzzled over it and looked for it in the dispensary and finally concluded that it was a private formula intrusted to the preferred druggist, so that he would get the business. Mr. Beardsley sent me with a four-ounce bottle to the druggist indicated. That man smiled and asked if I had been sent, or did my employer know that I was after it. I told him I had been sent. "Well," he said, "when you get back to the store, light your burner, set a pan of water on it, and when it boils you have what is called for in the prescription." I felt pretty cheap, and so did my employer.

There has been an evolution in the drug business since that time. Then we made our tinctures from barks and roots and our syrups, pills and ointments from the raw materials. We powdered our drugs and dispensed everything sold in wrapping paper.

I am glad Mr. Beardsley depended on me and gave me responsibilities. He would not let me lean on him and insisted that I should go to the books to study it out. In a general way, also, he insisted on his own methods being followed. I was not allowed to sit down during the day. If no customer were in the store I was to stand at the door and greet the incoming customer at the door or at the curb if in a vehicle. I was to be in bed every night at nine o'clock. I was allowed Sunday afternoon from two to six o'clock and Thursday night from seven to nine. I had an hour for each meal. I was to arise in time to have the store cleaned and the sidewalk swept, the fires attended to, and the empty dispensing bottles filled before sunup.

It is not my purpose to enter into the details of the experiences that every drug clerk has, although very many were unusual. At one time I undertook to keep a copy of every funny order or peculiar experience. It became too bulky since the ordinary layman knew so little about drugs. It became commonplace, for example, to fill phonetically spelled orders, "gum mare back" for gum arabic, or "Auntie Guentim" for unquentum, or the request, "enough Ipecac to



James Stuart, father of the Council Bluffs druggist (courtesy Robert B. Stuart)

throw up a small child." The semi-professional character of the drug business attracted confidence from patrons. The skeletons were paraded and advice sought. In reviewing some of these experiences I am thankful I have intervened to prevent crime and death, or useless expense. In that respect I have performed some service to my fellow man. Perhaps there is more ignorance and superstition with regard to drugs than any other line. Miraculous virtue is given to inert drugs and testimonials of lives saved that exist in hallucinations of the mind only. And yet if a word of doubt is expressed to the customer, you have offended him.

An acquaintance, Edward Knabe, quarreled with his wife and aroused me in the middle of the night, coming into the store in shirt and pants only. Excitedly he said he was being tortured with toothache and wanted morphine.

To refuse him would only send him away to another store. I asked the quantity, and he threw down a quarter. As he left he shook the contents of the paper down his throat and said "goodby." It was quinine that I gave him; if it had been morphine the quantity was great enough to kill a score. His passion cooled by morning, but he passed the store on the opposite side of the street.

Grocer Clark aroused me at midnight, yelling through the door, "Never mind dressing." He held out a quart bottle saying it was given him for taking snuff for catarrh and he had taken a large dose. I gave him a stiff dose of Ipecac and opened the door to let him out. He got rid of it at the curb. I gently teased him the next morning, and he pledged me to secrecy.

Rebellious expectant mothers were quite frequent solicitors for advice and abortive medicines. I am glad I yielded to none of them. One mother afterward thanked me for a son she said was saved by my advice.

When positions are scarce and money lacking, clerks cling to their jobs. When a new opening is ready at every turn because helpers are scarce, they are often careless of their conduct and indifferent to their employer's interests. If one is not interested in his work and thinks only of money, he watches the clock and never makes a success.

Seldom do the sons of the rich make a name for themselves. Poverty is often a blessing in disguise. My father built strong hopes on me. I knew he did.

My employer was an honorable man. He bought the best quality drugs and never substituted or omitted any ingredient because it was expensive. He always paid a liberal wage for the times and was entitled to service. He enjoyed a good trade, and I was just as much interested in the receipts as if they were my own. I formulated a number of good things that sold well and made him extra profit, all of which he took to himself without any appreciation.

Many times I felt that my work was burdensome because of lack of appreciation, or monotony of sameness and long hours, or sometimes business policies I did not approve of. Being the best paid drug clerk in town, however, I seemed to be indispensable to him. I bought the goods, did the banking and correspondence, and kept the books. Not to disappoint my father, and also because of the good things about my employer that offset the things I disliked, I stayed on.

Incidents that annoyed me: if I was engaged in filling a bottle for my customer and spilled some in the operation, Mr. Beardsley would call me down before the customer. If a customer came in and I stepped up to wait on them, if he knew them pretty well or thought he could do better in making a sale, he would step up and quote a lower price than I was instructed to sell for, discrediting me before the customer. I bore with this, at times with inward rebellion and sometimes verbally, and then he flew all to pieces.

We kept a want book. Every time we made a sale or had a call for something we were out of or thought we needed, we made the notation in this book. That was my job also. Traveling men got all the orders. One traveling man in particular never failed to get a liberal order every time he called through many years.

One evening this man was being given the order while we all sat before the stove in early evening. Mr. Beardsley thought one item on the want book was in stock, and he asked me about it. I told him I had used the last of it. He was not convinced. I repeated that I had made a diligent search for it when I entered it on the book, but he ordered me in a rough way to look again and so I did gingerly. Then he looked himself without success and placed the order. I went to supper and while I was gone, I learned afterward, they discussed me. The traveler persuaded Mr. Beardsley that a clerk in his town was the very man he wanted. The young man wanted to come west because of weak



An enlargement of a traveler's "carte-de-visite," ca. 1866-1870 (SHSI)

lungs, he said. Three weeks later at the noon hour on the first of October I had returned from making a successful first of the month collection among our customers, when a young fellow came in with grip in hand and mackintosh over his arm. He stepped up and inquired for Mr. Beardsley and introduced himself as Mr. Barker. He was invited to take a seat by the stove, and turning to me Mr. Beardsley said, "Stuart, that's my new man. You have been so impudent that I couldn't stand it any longer," referring to the earlier incident with the traveling man and the order.

There had been no intimation or notice of any kind, simply the roughshod summary dismissal. Mr. Barker stepped forward and asked permission to go and clean up before he began work. I felt it was brutal and undeserved. I sat by the stove fingering the wage he paid me and realized that after my obligation for a suit of clothes was met I was out of a job and had only \$1.50. It was past Mr. Beardsley's dinner hour, and he was nervously waiting for the new clerk

to return. I told him to go to dinner and I would stay until he returned. He thanked me and went. I got my belongings together, and when relieved by the new clerk I got courage enough to tell my father. He said little. I imagined that although disappointed, he thought I was not altogether at fault. I stayed then with Dad at the tailor shop.

Mr. Beardsley regretted the haste in engaging my successor and persuaded his brother-in-law to solicit my services in a general merchandising store. I told him, however, that I had started out in drugs and wanted to continue.

The night watch was asked to keep a lookout on the new man. He reported the first morning that Barker had spent the previous night at a resort across the way. The next night it was a billiard hall until one AM, and the night after that several young fellows were in the store drinking with him until very late. Then a friend of mine told me he had been asked if he thought I would come back. I avoided Mr. Beardsley. I

heard all kinds of compliments about myself, and I wanted to go back, but I wanted to be asked and with a chance to have my say. After nearly two weeks Mr. Beardsley saw me on the opposite side of the street and called me over. He had swallowed his pride by force of reason and necessity and asked if I didn't think we could come to some agreement. I told him some of the things where I thought I had been mistreated. He referred to the traveling man as evidence that I had been impudent. He finally admitted he had been hasty and suggested the experience might be good for both of us. If I would come back he would advance my salary to \$5. We agreed. This was Saturday and he wanted me to begin Sunday morning.

I went to the store Sunday at nine AM as Barker was leaving for the post office to get the mail. Mr. Beardsley turned on him and said, "Give the keys to Stuart; he will get the mail. I have no further use for you." Brutal again, but he had reason as the man had not been true to him. Nevertheless, tears came to Barker's eyes as he surrendered the keys and departed. He got instant employment in a downtown store, was discharged, engaged his service to a plumbing establishment in Omaha, got drunk one night and broke into a Council Bluffs grocery, stealing a shot sack filled with minor coins. He was arrested and would have died in jail had he not been pardoned out to die a few weeks later.

Not usually resentful for a long period, I still felt the traveling man had mistreated me. If he had overtaken me in some dishonest act or disloyalty it was his duty to inform my employer, but when he meddled to curry favor or further his own ends he had gone beyond his rights. He got no more orders. When he called there was simply nothing on the order book, then after he had gone I put a page of wants on the book from a memorandum in my pocket. He couldn't understand it and felt something was wrong. Years later when I was a proprietor he called on me to solicit business, but I never

bought from him. Finally, after I learned his son had committed suicide and his wife had died, and knowing he was crippled with rheumatism I relented and sat him down on a chair by the stove and told him the whole story. He wiped his eyes, said he was wrong, did not understand why he had done it, realized that clerks had much to do with the orders and always cultivated their favor. He remembered the whole circumstance including the mistake he had made in recommending an unfit man. I gave him an order and ever after when he called I "remembered him." It was the only similar experience in my career.

As I look back to that experience I am of the opinion that it was profitable both to me and Mr. Beardsley. He treated me with more consideration, and I tried to look at matters from his viewpoint. He not only had raised my wages, but I profited by my experience of being out of work and money. I had never squandered any money, but I did not realize that it was necessary for me to make a start in life for myself by saving for that start. I resolved that I owed the bank all my wages except \$10 a month, and that was an obligation I had to meet. When I had saved \$250 I loaned it to my brother's father-in-law, David Gamet, at ten percent. He used it for a year. I found that the habit of thrift was beneficial, and it made me feel independent. When an opportunity occurred later to buy a store I had saved \$630, and without this money I should not have had any chance.

Being short in stature and heavy set I had strong limbs and back, and some of the work I was called on to do developed my strength. I could unload a barrel of oil from a truck without skids. We bought coal oil in barrels and pumped it by hand into a measure, through a funnel into a vessel. I have sold as many as ten barrels in one day.

One time I took a barrel of alcohol down the cellar stairs with no assistance or skid. There

was a landing halfway down, but I often think of the criticism I got for doing it nonetheless. Normally the draymen unloaded heavy goods in the rear of the store, where we took them to the cellar through an outside door using skids to slide barrels directly to the cellar. On this occasion, however, he unloaded the alcohol on the front walk when I was occupied with a customer. The only way to dispose of it then was to take it down from the inside, or have it loaded again to take around the block to the rear of the store. The boss was at dinner, and I rolled the barrel into the store, turned it behind the counter, opened the cellar door, stepped down two steps and tipped the barrel toward me, and step by step I eased it down. It weighed perhaps four hundred fifty pounds, and if it had started to slide it would have killed or crushed me severely. I was young and foolish and took the chance, and I got the barrel down safely. When Mr. Beardsley returned and I told him what I had done he said, "That barrel of alcohol cost me over a hundred dollars, and if it had got away from you and fallen into the cellar it would have been a total loss. Never do such a trick again." Not a thought of what would have happened to me!

In those early days the city had no sewers. We had a dirt floor in the basement, and in wet seasons the water came up through the soil. I have seen it stand eighteen inches deep. On each side of the basement there were rows of barrels set two feet above the floor on boxes to protect them from water, and to permit the contents to be drawn from the faucet. Scarcely a day passed but at least one full barrel had to be lifted to these boxes. I had a pair of rubber boots to wear when the water came up, and on more than one occasion when I put my chest against the top of the barrel as it lay on the floor, with both hands under the bottom of it bracing my feet to end it up from the water, I have had my toes slip backward falling on my face in the water.

One night a friend came to visit with me. He

suffered with a cold in his head, and the room was warm. I got him a clay pipe which he filled with cubebs, crushed and lit it, inhaling the smoke and discharging it through his nostrils. It sickened him before it was half burned out, and he emptied it into a box filled with sawdust which was used for a cuspidor behind the stove. He left as it was my retiring time. I later awakened to apparent broad daylight and dressed hurriedly, thinking I had overslept. Stepping from my room I was startled by flames leaping as high as the stove. The cubebs had set fire to the sawdust in the cuspidor. Fire had burned the dust and container and had eaten a hole through the floor, and there were flames on the bridging of the floor joist and on top of ten barrels of coal oil directly beneath. I seized the remains of the sawdust box and threw it out the back door, then I grabbed a bucket of rinsing water under the prescription case and poured it down through the floor, rushed downstairs and with a spade dug dirt from the basement floor covering the burning barrels with it. The smoke was thick and choking. Extinguishing the fire took only a few minutes, however, then I opened the doors to let the smoke out. The night watch came along and, viewing the situation, congratulated me that the fire department had not arrived and done water damage.

Within a half hour I was in bed again; it was about one AM. I remained awake, though, and wondered how much I would be held to blame for the fire. Mr. Beardsley came at the usual hour, and he turned pale at the site of the narrow escape. He never said a word to me, either of praise or censure, but to others he remarked that if Barker or his like had been working for him he would have had us burned out. So I knew he was appreciative. The smoke from the fire accomplished more than Mr. Beardsley had been able to, and that was to get the landlord to repaper the store.

One night I opened the drug store for a customer who, before he left, drew a gun and

leveled it on me because I had ordered him out when he had pestered me. He was maudlin drunk and didn't know what he wanted. Afterward he was sent to the penitentiary for life for killing a man.

One day a party came in the store and asked if we would oblige him with dimes for a dollar. I waited on him then turned away. He remarked, "Excuse me, but three of these dimes are 3¢ pieces." The 3¢ coin was minted then and was about the size of a dime and looked much like a dime. With an apology I exchanged them for dimes, Mr. Beardsley commenting, "Have you been taking in 3¢ dimes?" I was not aware of it if I had. Shortly after, he was visiting Huntington who operated a grocery, and he was told he had been taking in 3¢ pieces for dimes. This information led to an investigation, and it was learned that every business house visited had been touched. The culprit was apprehended.

The Beardsley Drug Store soon got the reputation of being the only store in town where night calls were answered promptly. One night I was called up eleven times. I was not averse to being called for necessities, but the larger part of the calls were for unnecessary things. A stable across the street called for every dose a horse needed instead of buying a few doses ahead. I complained to Mr. Beardsley about the unnecessary calls, and he said when calls came that could wait until morning as well as not to charge the customer double price and keep the difference. It seemed to me poor advice, at least I never thought enough of it to follow it.

One day I stood by while Mr. Beardsley made up a mixture of neatsfoot oil, turpentine and sulphuric acid for a hoof liniment. There was two gallons of it. The jug was on the wrapping counter whose boards had large cracks between them, and underneath there were two open barrels of birdseed and a lot of folded sheets of wrapping paper. After the acid was added the mixture was corked tight. Gradually the mixture heated, and the cork did not go, so

the jug split in two. I had a mess to clean up. After that we made up mixtures in the back yard.

A lady brought a recipe for a dye mixture. Mr. Beardsley took it in hand. It contained indigo and sulphuric acid among other ingredients. They were put into a bottle separately, and with his thumb over the opening he shook the bottle vigorously. When he removed his thumb, the neck of the bottle pointing upward and southward along the row of shelf bottles, the discharge was like a syphon of charged gas. It went over nearly every bottle on the shelf as well as the wall behind and splattered Mr. Beardsley's face and clothes. The situation was certainly laughable, although it meant a serious loss. All the dispensing bottle labels—made of imitation glass and covered with varnish—were ruined, and the back wall needed recoating. Besides, Mr. Beardsley's clothes were ruined and his hands burned.

Another time he was filling a prescription for a powder to be used in a glass tube, the contents to be blown on the patient's throat. The principal ingredients were chlorate of potash and sulphur, a pretty good gunpowder mixture. The potash was in crystals, and instead of powdering each separately he put them both together in a mortar. When the pestle hit the mixture a little too hard the mortar broke in four pieces and the pestle hit the ceiling.

I do not recall any mishaps of this character that befell me, but I remember once, later, while living on Park Avenue, trying to clean a ten-gallon can that had contained gasoline. I washed it with water several times, and it still smelled of gas. I filled it to the cork with water and let it stand an hour, rinsed it again and still it smelled. But thinking it safe and putting it to the test I held a lighted match over the opening. The can struck the ceiling of the porch.

Early on the morning of April 25, 1879, I went over to the tailor shop, where I was still getting my meals from the time I had been dismissed by Mr. Beardsley. Father was partly



A stereoscopic image of an Iowa drug store in 1875, in this case the J.H. Harrison Store in Davenport (SHSI)

on the bed and partly off. His talk was incoherent, but I managed to understand he had fallen as though he had been hit while arising from bed, and he had no use of one side of his body. It was a stroke, which kept encroaching little by little. Some days later, surrounded by his children (myself, William, and our sister Margaret) and a few dear friends, he passed peacefully from this earth. Just before he died, he held out a hand and each of us took it in our own. Then he smiled and left.

He was a worthy father. Amid the surroundings that were unusually bad his example kept me from drifting toward the maelstrom that engulfed so many. His memory is an inspiration.

My father had borrowed \$300 from William Strang to build a new shop when the old one burned. He gave his note, payable at an indeterminate time, with interest at ten percent payable quarterly. Rain or shine, cold or hot, father had never failed to call on the day his interest was due, although Strang lived near Crescent City about eight or nine miles away. After my father's death I settled up his affairs, but this note was still unpaid. Attached to it was a full sheet of legal paper endorsed with the \$7.50 interest payments made, written closely all over it on both sides. It was an object lesson to me, since he had paid the principal several times over in interest.

Mr. Beardsley allowed no loafing in the

store. Nevertheless, a group of his cronies made it their headquarters. One of them was a Mr. A.S. Bonham who owned a fifteen-acre grape orchard on the outskirts of town and a two-story brick business house at the other end of the block where I worked. One day while Mr. Beardsley was at dinner he made it a point to stay to have a talk with me. "Stuart," he said, "I have been taking notice of you, and I want to make you an unusual proposition. You are looking forward to the time when you and Miss Caffall can make a home of your own, and to support that home you will want a business yourself. Now I have that Broadway store building with the upstairs and outside stairway so they can be used for living rooms. I will remodel it to suit you, both upstairs and down, and stock it with an up-to-date stock of drugs, with complete furniture and fixtures of your own selection. I will give you outright a one-half interest in this business, the other half to be owned by my Bill. There will be no rent to pay for the upstairs; I will concede that much to you because of your experience in the drug business, while my son has none. I will charge you no rent for the downstairs until such time as the business is on a paying basis, and then it will be moderate."

I rejected the offer. Bill was a sport and tin-horn gambler who his father wanted me to tame down. He also overindulged in spirits at times. Also, I was close to my employer and would have become an active competitor of his. I was under no special obligation to him, yet I felt it would be unpleasant. Mr. Bonham urged me to consider the proposition well, but I turned him down.

Three doors west of Beardsley's was an old tumbled-down frame drug store operated by E.D. Baker. He was an inoffensive, good-hearted man with whom we exchanged favors in the business. Without exception, however, his was the most untidy and filthy store I ever saw. In his clothing and person it was the same. His son, Eddie, was a rounder, and his wife

conducted an assignation house. Mr. Baker was an educated man, a classmate at Princeton College of Chester A. Arthur, and had fallen to his present low estate by the use of dope. He sat in a chair or leaned against his counter and slept most of the time. His trade was made up largely of the demimonde, and of painters who bought their paint and carried it away while he slept. When he got a box of goods he opened it on the floor, and when he had a call for something in the box he rummaged around in the straw packing until he found it. He did not remove anything else until he had another call.

One day while I was in his store on an errand, he said to me, "Stuart, come down at the supper hour; I want to have a talk with you." I went to see him. He opened up much the same as Bonham. Said he had been taking notice of me for a long time, and he wanted Eddie to settle down to succeed him as he was liable to drop out any time. He would tear down the old building and rebuild a modern brick store, stock and furnish it completely, "for Eddie and you." I should have a one-half interest. This offer came right on the heels of the other, and I also declined for the same reasons.

Some suggest that our lives are shaped by little things or incidents. Leaving out the higher thought that Providence overrules, I am inclined to think it largely true. Young people meet by chance and partnerships are formed. Chance employment leads to greater activities. Chance discoveries or chance investments lead to greater opportunities.

It was our custom to take account of stock each year between Christmas and New Year. The year 1878 had been prosperous, and sales had been greater in the drug store than in any previous year. A large amount in sales had been realized from a contract to supply all the plate and window glass in the Merriam Block. The sale was about \$1500, although the profit was not overly large as competition was keen. When the footings for the project were in, Mr.

Beardsley said to me, "I feel pretty well satisfied with the year's business, and I will raise your wages from \$40 to \$50 per month provided business in 1879 keeps up to the 1878 record. I will pay you the \$40 as before, each month this year, and when the year closes and the invoice shows the business as good I will hand you a bonus enough to make it \$50 a month for the year." I had not asked nor expected a raise as I was young and already was getting more than any drug clerk I knew. Moreover, I was not a druggist by virtue of classical or laboratory knowledge, although I was granted a Certificate of Registration in Iowa, Number 1682, by examination.

During 1879 Mr. Beardsley built two houses as an investment, and it depleted his cash reserve. At invoice time that year we showed sales \$1500 less than the year before but profit was \$500 greater. "You see the sales were not as great as last year," he said, "and instead of the \$50 I will give you \$47.50 per month for the year. This irritated me and was the straw that turned my thoughts toward a business of my own. I reasoned that as long as I worked for another I would be subject to whatever happened to him or to his whims, which some day might leave me stranded.

In the spring of 1880 I arranged to leave Mr. Beardsley to go in business for myself. He almost begged and pleaded with me to remain. He was financially well off, he said, but getting too old to break in a new man. He did not want to be tied down by staying at the store as much as it would be necessary to do if I left. He also

said I would succeed him in the business. I had given him a month's notice and after two weeks, when he had made no move for my successor, I reminded him the time was getting shorter. He still clung to the hope that he could win me over and offered me \$75 per month. I replied that I was alone in the world. I had no parents, no dependents. I had saved \$630 and had been offered a store including the building for \$1600, in Mondamin [Iowa], \$600 down and the balance in six, twelve and eighteen months' time. I had looked forward to being my own manager, and if I lost my savings I was young and could start over. Finally he said, "Well, I don't blame you; I would do the same myself."

Several years later I learned of the sudden death of my old employer. The widow sent for me and offered to sell me the store at a favorable price, on my terms with nothing down. The store enjoyed a large clientele. Moreover, I was acquainted with the trade and could fit in better than others, but the stock was the accumulation of half a century and the furniture was ancient also. I also was tied up where I was at the time and could not see my way clear to take it.

Bonham, Baker, Mr. Beardsley, and Mrs. Beardsley had each offered me an opportunity. I was being paid \$47.50 per month when I left, and in his eagerness Mr. Beardsley had offered \$75. I knew of no drug clerk in the city getting more than \$40. Perhaps it would have been better had I stayed, but my boyish reasoning was that if I was worth the advance he offered, why hadn't he paid it to me before? □

MAY HARMONY P THE EARLY HISTORY





REVAIL

OF BLACK WATERLOO

by Robert Neymeyer

Workers pause for a photographer in front of the Illinois Central Railroad's Waterloo repair shop in about 1915. The railroad provided employment for generations of newcomers to Blackhawk County, including European immigrants and recent arrivals from the American South. (courtesy Grout Museum of History and Science, Waterloo)

Reverend I. W. Bess glared at the *Waterloo Courier* spread across his desk. The advertisement in front of him touted the celebrated Hollywood film, *The Birth of a Nation*, due to arrive within the week at the Waterloo Theatre. The fanfare preceding the film's cross-country tour had been met in some American cities by angry protests from black leaders who objected to producer D. W. Griffith's derogatory treatment of Afro-Americans in the movie and by his distortions of their history. For a moment, Reverend Bess faced a dilemma: his political instincts told him to avoid arousing the animosity of Waterloo's white moviegoers, who would probably regard the film as a harmless diversion, but his heart instructed him to join the chorus of protestors. The preacher's pulse quickened at the thought of creating further controversy for the men and women of his small congregation on the city's East Side.

Bess was no stranger to controversy. In the two years since taking charge of the African Methodist Episcopal (A. M. E.) Church on Halstead Street in 1913, the thirty-five-year-old Bess had assumed the leadership of a loosely organized movement among Waterloo's black citizens to win the respect of local white residents. The work had not been easy, but progress was apparent. Afro-Americans had organized a variety of social institutions to advance their interests, and black churches, benevolent associations, and service clubs had done much to improve the quality of life in the East Side neighborhoods where black citizens had settled in recent years. In turn the growth of community pride helped temper the East Side's reputation as a den of sinners and outlaws. Reverend Bess had not produced this change single-handedly, of course, but his energetic leadership did much to heighten public understanding of the city's newest immigrant group.

The Bess house was often crowded with visitors coming to see the young minister about one of the many local issues that received his attention. In addition to church-related activities, Reverend Bess led neighborhood clean-up campaigns, founded a Big Brother Mission, and became involved in a variety of public issues. White civic leaders began to view him as one who could communicate with both white and black groups in the city. Requests for his assistance grew frequent. When, for example, a public campaign emerged to rid Waterloo of "undesireable Negro elements," the local police judge called on Bess for cooperation and support. Repeatedly the minister demonstrated his executive and diplomatic skills, as he joined ministerial and community-wide efforts to bridge the gap between the races in Waterloo.

One problem that concerned Waterloo's blacks in these years had to do with public recreational facilities. In May 1914 the City Council restricted bathing at the municipal beach to white citizens. Infuriated black residents asked Reverend Bess to take their protest to the Council's next meeting. Bess obliged and tried to negotiate a settlement. While accepting restrictions on the use of the municipal bathhouse and on the rental of bathing suits, Bess charged that the Council could not legally prevent blacks from swimming in the Cedar River. As he reminded the politicians, "Waterloo is too far north to maintain such racial discrimination."

Resolution of the beach controversy—in favor of removing restrictions on black bathers—initiated a period of calm in race relations in Waterloo. While stories of East Side vice and criminality continued to make local headlines, identification of blacks with illegal activity lessened considerably in 1914 and 1915. Indeed, it was because race relations had improved so much lately that East Side community leaders feared the damaging effects of *The Birth of a Nation*. Thomas Dixon's novel,

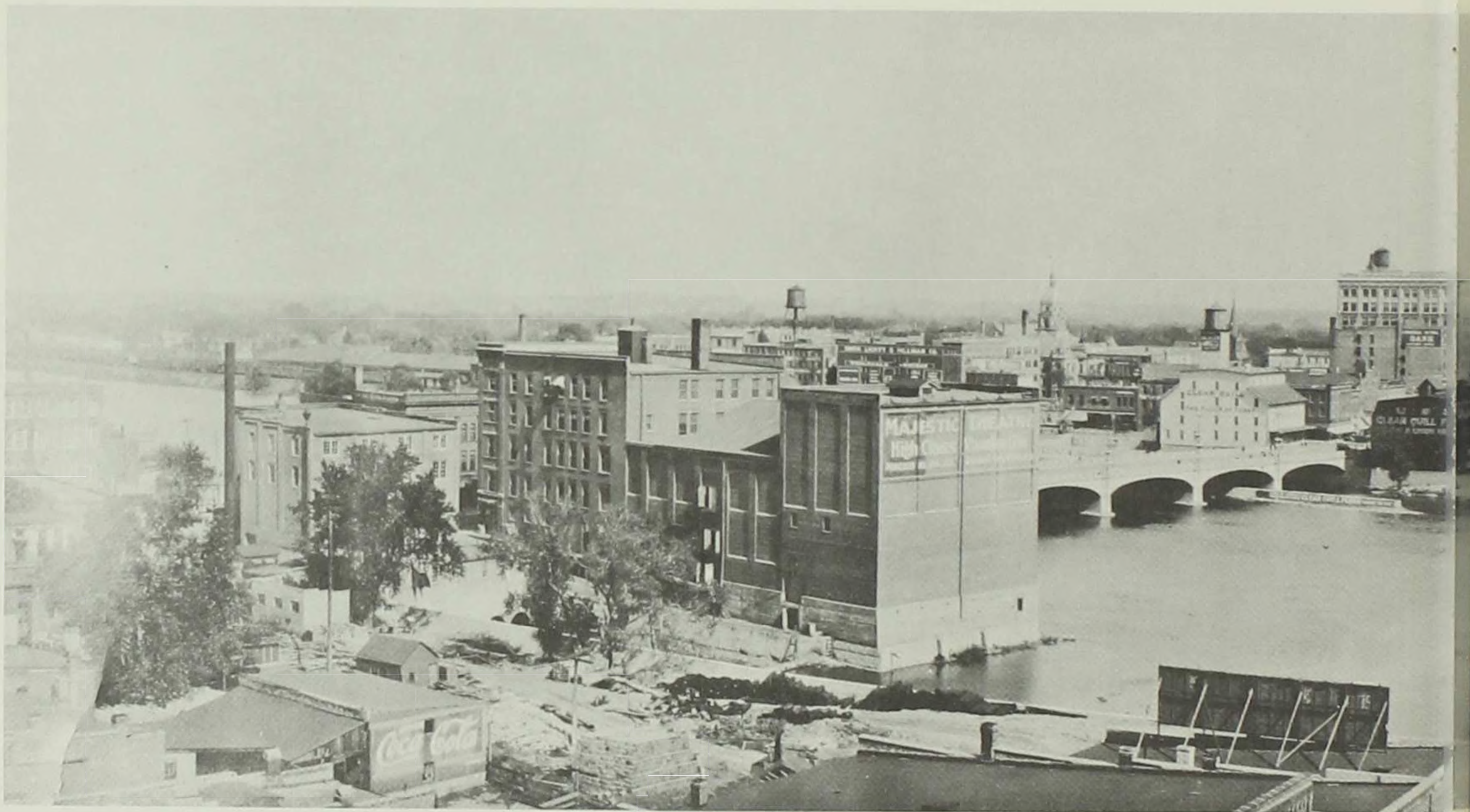


Racial stereotypes presented in D.W. Griffith's movie The Birth of the Nation, as well as scenes such as this one depicting a Ku Klux Klan march, troubled advocates of racial harmony. (Culver Pictures)

on which the film was based, portrayed black Americans as a degraded people, victimized by history and condemned to live in poverty and ignorance. Such a view contradicted all that Waterloo's black organizations had tried to achieve since 1912.

Bess himself steered clear of the limelight during the movie protest. Speaking in the name of the local black community was G.W. Collins, president of the Young Men's Sunday Club of the A.M.E. Church. In December 1915 Collins brought a petition to Waterloo Mayor R.C. Thompson asking that the film be banned in local theatres. Arguing that the

movie would inflame tensions between black and white, as it had elsewhere in the nation, the petition appealed to community pride: "The races in Waterloo today are at peace, and harmony prevails. Our people have jobs and are working every day and supporting their families. . . . We trust that you will take your place in this matter with the other cities of our country that have barred this play in order that their citizens might be protected from the fiery darts of prejudice and slander by this wolf in sheep's clothing." However, the Council chose to ignore the petition.



A panoramic view of Waterloo, ca. 1911-1914, facing northeast from the west side of the Cedar River (SH)

About four hundred black men and women lived in Waterloo in 1915, only one percent of the city's population. Fewer than twenty had been there five years before; the rest had arrived since then to take advantage of new job openings in what the local papers had taken to calling "The Factory City of Iowa." The great prosperity of Black Hawk County farmers who shopped in Waterloo and shipped their produce from its depots caused the town to boom in the years before World War I. Farm profits built factories and shops in the city, and the city attracted workers to run them. Many of the newcomers were black southerners concerned that the trends of the day boded them ill in the land of the boll weevil and Jim Crow segregation laws. The pages of the *Chicago Defender* and other northern black newspapers available in Mississippi and Alabama told black workers of an alternative to the heightened climate of political and economic repression that befell the South beginning in the 1890s. Columns in the *Defender* extolled

the virtues of Northern life, describing in detail the money to be made and chances for personal advancement. They also provided advice for potential migrants. To be sure, readers were told of the prejudice and discrimination that might greet them in the North, but the papers' columnists showed very clearly the way to economic freedom.

In the fall of 1911 skilled shopmen walked off their jobs on the nation's railroads in support of efforts by union organizers to win recognition from the Illinois Central Railroad Corporation. Striking shopmen at the Illinois Central's large maintenance and repair terminal in Waterloo convinced their unskilled assistants—most of them Italian and Bulgarian immigrants—to leave with them. Because shutdown of the Waterloo shop threatened to halt the company's traffic in northern Iowa and tie up railroad service throughout the Middle West, Illinois Central officials immediately tried to replace the striking machinists, moulders, and blacksmiths with non-union men. When local



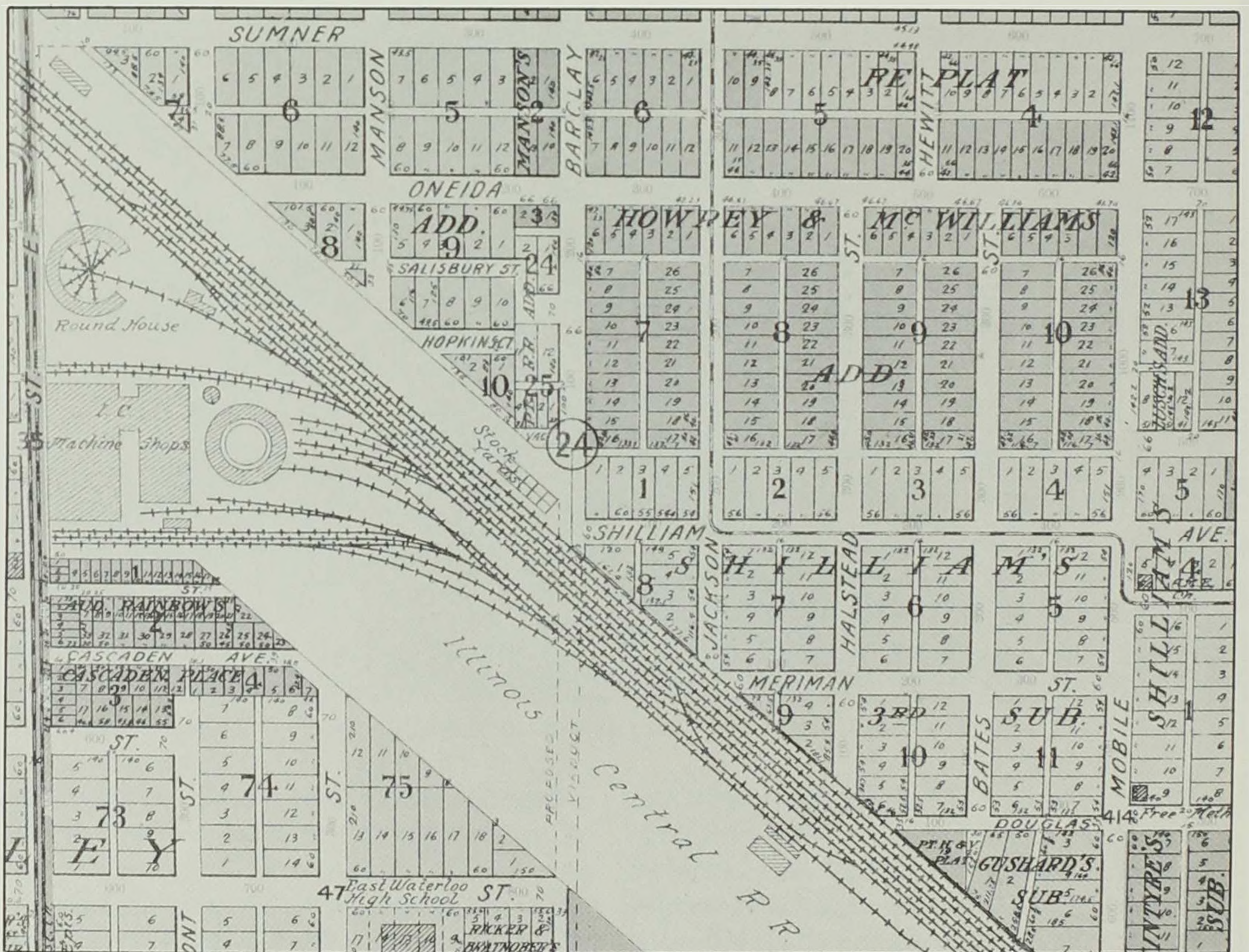
Waterloo during the years of the ICRR strike suffered special hardships beyond those common to newcomers in any American city. Many Waterloo residents supported the strikers' demands for union recognition, and most were sympathetic to their desire for greater economic security. Understandably, local people looked with hostility at the Southern workers brought into the community by company officials for the express purpose of breaking the strike. Combined with racial prejudice, this enmity made for generally hostile public feelings toward the city's growing black population. Adding to the tension was an editorial campaign in Waterloo newspapers that insisted upon identifying East Siders with vice and criminality, regardless of social distinctions among the people who had moved into the area. Local journalists argued that the rising black population brought increased lawlessness to the city, ignoring the fact that white citizens—many of them quite prominent politically—directed most underworld activity on the East Side.

In 1912 the city fathers had outlawed saloons in Waterloo. Such good intentions notwithstanding, local citizens remained as thirsty as ever and created a booming market for bootleg liquor. The first bootleggers—all of them white—set up shop in poorer neighborhoods where police patrols were infrequent. In time the East Side, home for generations of newcomers to Blackhawk County, became a haven for distillers and liquor dealers, and their barrooms attracted gamblers, prostitutes, dope peddlers, and all kinds of underworld characters. Waterloo's newspapers found enough evidence of black participation in this illegal activity on what became known as "Smokey Row" to convince most readers of the *Courier* and the *Times-Tribune* that the responsibility for crime in the city rested with its black population. That most blacks had come to work in factories rather than in gambling halls or that

recruits proved insufficient to the shops' labor needs, the company looked for help beyond the city limits, particularly within the ranks of its own less profitable Southern lines. Extensive advertising in Mississippi and neighboring states offered special inducements—notably free passage—to men willing to relocate in the North. Within weeks, Southern workers were boarding trains for cities on the Illinois Central, including Waterloo.

The railroad strike had already lasted more than a year when Earl Lee decided to leave the South with the Illinois Central in 1913. Several fellow workers from the railroad's Watervalley, Mississippi plant accompanied Lee for part of the trip northward but they disembarked before reaching Iowa. Once in Waterloo, Lee lived in a railroad bunk car inside the IC yards and began work immediately. Only after the tensions of the strike had subsided did he obtain a small room near the tracks and begin planning to bring his family to Waterloo.

Workers such as Earl Lee who arrived in



The Illinois Central shops and surrounding neighborhoods on Waterloo's East Side, from The Atlas of Waterloo, 1916

the halls themselves were owned by white businessmen, escaped the newspapers' attention. It was simpler to blame men like Earl Lee for robbing the community of its moral fiber.

Housing among Waterloo's blacks resembled that in other American cities in the 1910s. Generally speaking, it was crowded, dilapidated, and overpriced. Despite popular references to a "Negro section," however, initially black citizens did not live in strict segregation in one neighborhood. They lived wherever they could afford the rent, all over the city. Of course, many newly arrived workers found quarters as close to the Illinois Central shops as possible. Some blacks, like Earl Lee, rented

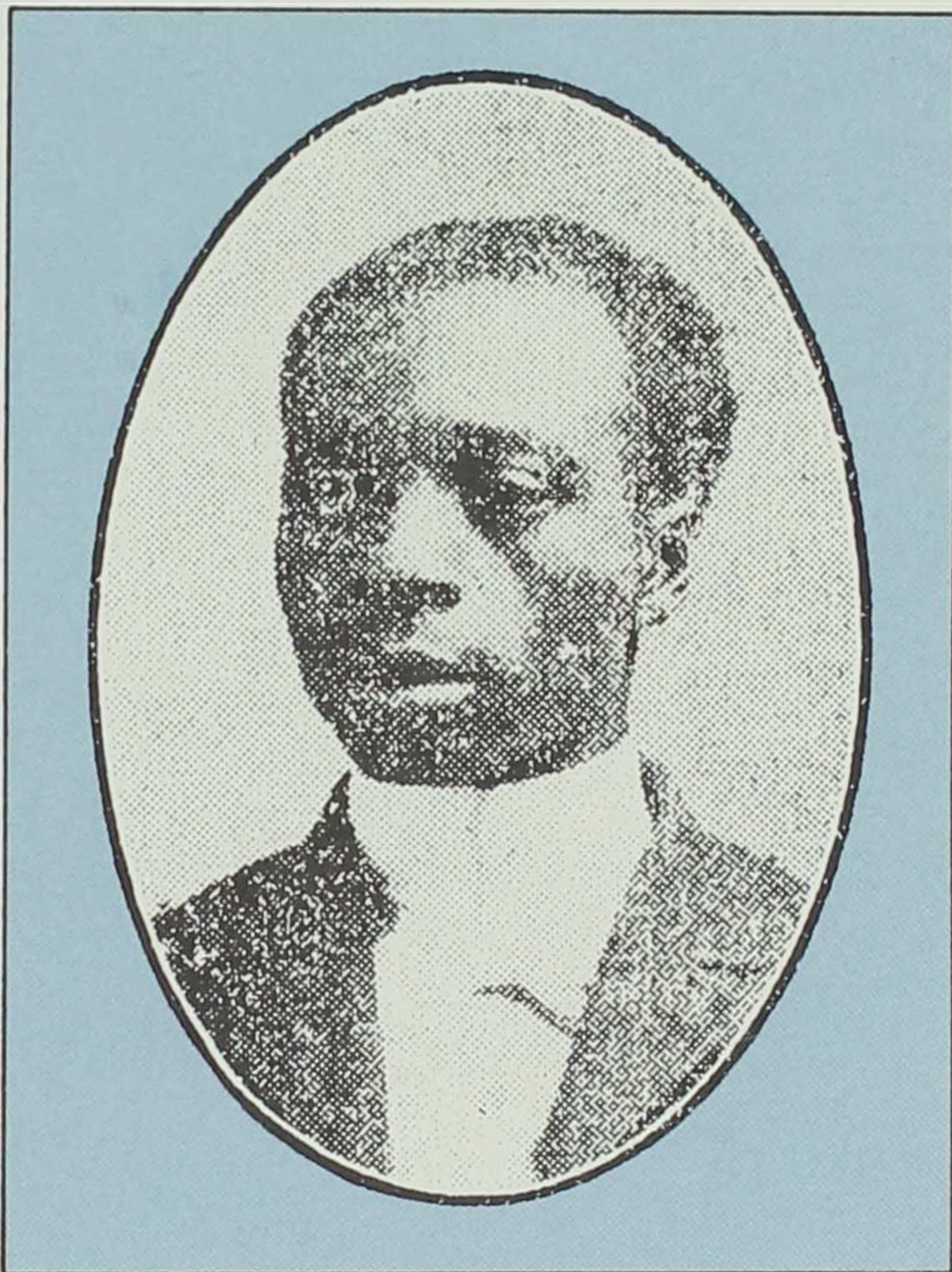
rooms in boarding houses on Dane or Halstead Street. Such places—often operated by black families—took in as many as twelve roomers. In summer months, when the number of new arrivals increased, many were forced to accept temporary shelter in box cars provided by the Illinois Central. Even in the winter, however, crowding was typical. Unusual was the black family that could afford to live without taking in boarders or sharing space with another family, at least in the early years.

Time brought improvement for some of the city's blacks. By 1915, for example, seven black citizens owned homes. Each had been financed without help from local lending institutions;

banks rarely granted mortgages to black families, regardless of economic standing. Among those so denied who became homeowners in Waterloo were a minister, a chiropodist, a machinist, a cook, two laborers, and a housekeeper. Few of them faced restrictions in choice of location, but in time local realtors adopted restrictive covenants and forced black homeowners and renters into specific neighborhoods. Signs of this trend appeared in a statement issued by land developers in 1915 that a new residential area near the Illinois Central yards was closed to "Indians or persons of African, Chinese, Japanese, Greek, Italian, Serbian, or Bulgarian descent." Few blacks took comfort in being grouped with other immigrants; memories of the railroad strike prevented mutual aid between, for example, the Italians and the black Southerners.

Exercise of the restrictive covenant gradually produced definite territorial boundaries between white and non-white residential districts. Whether by design or accident, the white realtors' restrictive covenants forced Waterloo's Afro-Americans to set up housekeeping shoulder-to-shoulder with pimps and bootleggers. The emerging black district filled a triangle bounded by the Illinois Central tracks, Sumner Street, and Mobile Avenue, about twenty square blocks in all. Less than fifteen percent black in 1915, this triangular neighborhood was ninety-four percent black five years later.

While employment and housing trends reinforced black isolation within the community as a whole, important forces were improving conditions among Waterloo's blacks and opening lines of communication between them and the city's white population. Church groups took the lead here, beginning in 1913 with the organization of an A.M.E. Church, whose congregation soon raised enough money to appoint a minister—the young Reverend I.W. Bess—



Reverend I.W. Bess, 1914 (courtesy Waterloo Courier)

to a full-time salaried position of \$600 annually.

Gathering at first in the parsonage on Bates Street, the church requested the help of the inter-denominational Ministerial Union in securing a lot and a meeting house. The ministers' group agreed to underwrite purchase of a church site and then arranged the donation of a railroad chapel from the Illinois Central. By 1914 the refurbished chapel had been relocated on the corner of Mobile and Albany Streets. In the same spring, a second black congregation organized in an empty store on Mulberry Street. Headed by Reverend R.A. Broyles, the Antioch Baptist Church received financial assistance from the city's white Baptist churches as well as from the Waterloo Ministerial Union. It too thrived, despite Broyle's reputation for strict adherence to very traditional methods of worship, including a profes-

sion of conversion from each member of the congregation. An internal dispute forced the pastor to resign in 1915, but under his successor—Reverend J.W. Bowles—the church maintained its position of leadership within the black community.

The two churches continued to be important outlets for the expression of black opinion on public issues, but as the congregations increased in size the ministers began to place greater priority on internal discipline and self-sufficiency and to spend less time as spokesmen for the community. The fate of Reverend Bess's protest against *The Birth of a Nation* illustrates just how far Waterloo's black community had come in three years, but also shows how far it had to go. Although carrying the weight of the city's two black congregations—and thus most of the respectable black citizens in Waterloo—the protest was largely ignored, both by the theatre, which showed the movie, and by the city's two daily newspapers, neither of which took a stand.

Reverend Bess remained in Waterloo until September 1916, when he was transferred to Illinois and replaced by Reverend H.C. Boyd. To the end, he continued his work for better race relations and a stronger community, concluding his tenure by writing the Saturday Sermonette in the *Courier*. Sensing his conference would reassign him, Bess chronicled the "good fight" blacks had fought in the face of hardships and discrimination. They had built a church, found and held jobs, purchased homes and been good citizens. The Bess legacy was that Afro-Americans of Waterloo, if given an opportunity to develop and excel, would prove to be a credit to the city.

But progress was difficult during the years before 1920, because many obstacles blocked the path to success that Reverend Bess had envisioned. The continued presence of the Smokey Row crowd, heavily patronized by all classes of Waterloo whites and many farmers

from the nearby counties, meant the public's attention centered on the bootleggers and houses of prostitution. Indeed, to many blacks and temperance people it was becoming clear that some citizens and public officials were happy to have such services provided during a period of prohibition and moralistic reform, and were content to isolate the activities so as not to corrupt their own children. However, there were other, more serious impediments to racial understanding and to the growth of black community institutions. Segregation of housing, the color line, and racial stereotyping in the press all served to limit black progress in the years after the showing of *The Birth of a Nation*.

The attempt by the Board of Realtors to prohibit sales of houses to blacks in white districts continued in 1916 when the Board petitioned the City Council to pass an ordinance to this effect. Although the Council refused to comply, the Board informally imposed the ban anyway, forcing respectable blacks to remain within the vicinity of Smokey Row. By the end of the Great War, nearly all blacks lived in the triangular area immediately north and east of the IC yards; only a handful resided on the West Side and even those lived within a few blocks of the river which divided the city. This segregation meant that impressionable children were exposed to a seamy side of life with which they had been unfamiliar in rural Mississippi. Churches had to compete with the bacchanal of nearby parties, and parishioners encountered embarrassing comments and stares from men drinking bathtub gin on porches and steps. Shootings, stabbings, and brawls were commonplace. These events, often sensationalized in the press, meant that all blacks of Smokey Row were associated with vice and crime.

Not only did the press create and perpetuate this image, it also treated blacks in a slighting fashion. While the editorial pages of both Waterloo dailies spoke of upholding racial equality



Participants at the District Sunday School Annual Meeting of 1914 gather for a group portrait. Reverend I.W. Bess is seated in the front row, extreme left. (courtesy Clifford Smith)

and giving the respectable black an opportunity to prove himself, stories elsewhere in the paper depicted the black as being roguish and childish. References were made to "red hot tempers and black reputations" and articles about razor fights were common. Other articles were written in dialect liberally laced with "yas, sah, yas sah" and other phrases suggested an ignorant and deferential behavior. Such racial stereotyping made it difficult for blacks to attain equality or respect in any social relationship with whites.

The color line was also present. While no segregationist Jim Crow measures became laws in Waterloo, an unofficial color line began to emerge as the black population increased. Many restaurants and cafes would not serve blacks, and some theatres limited the seating available to them. A Buxton, Iowa lawyer,

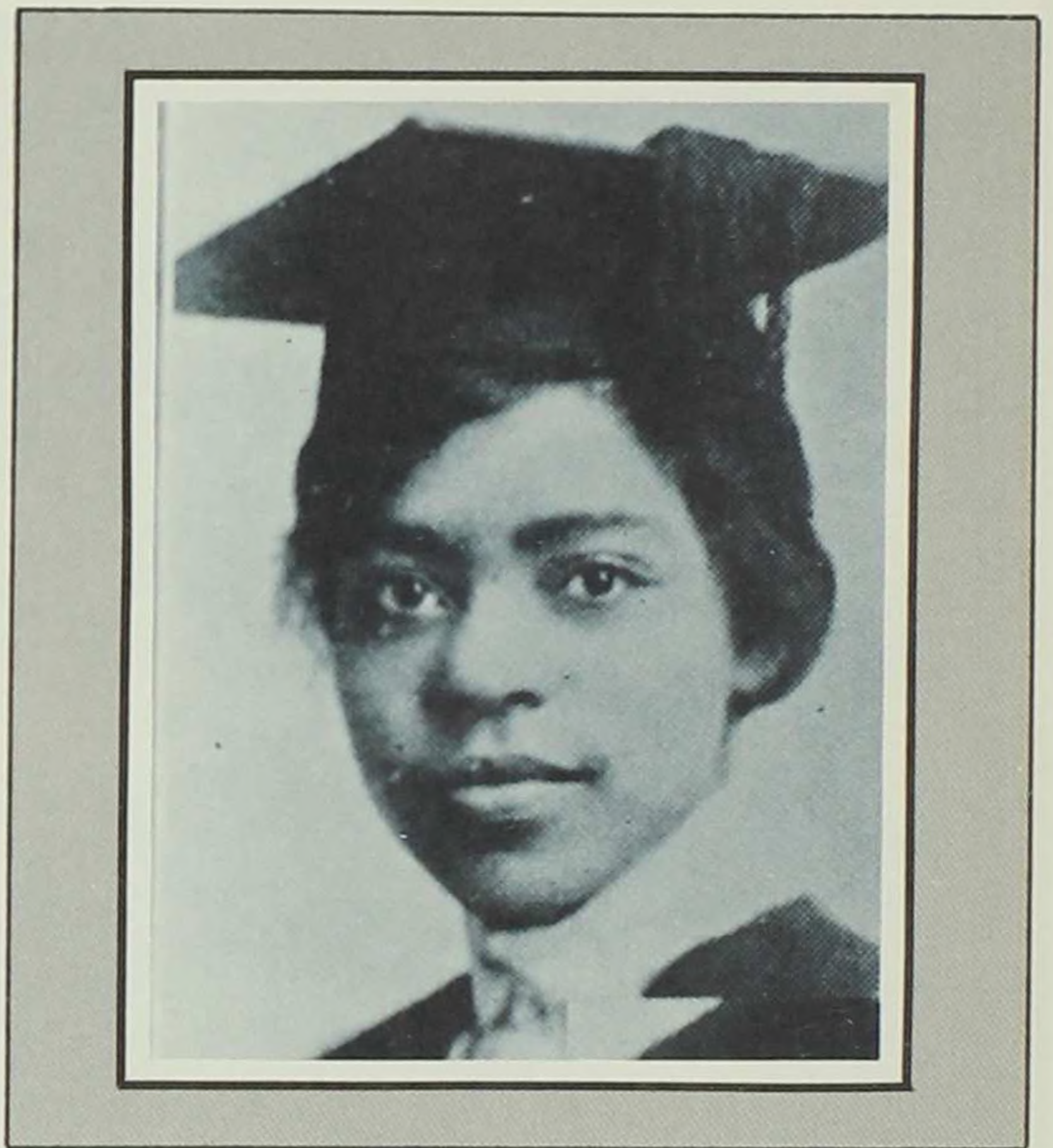
George Woodson, who was in the city to participate in a court case, was denied service in a local cafe. He pressed charges but the case was eventually dropped after several court delays and other obstacles were placed in his way. Public transportation was not segregated but many blacks found it convenient to sit towards the rear of the trolley cars in order to avoid hostile comments and possible confrontations. In 1918 the white workers in the IC shops were invited to march in the Memorial Day parade but black workers were not. Only after they had reminded the organizers that they too had contributed to the war effort were they allowed to participate, and then only at the end of the march. Ironically, the only place in Waterloo that did not apply the color line was the Smokey Row area, where blacks and whites could carouse on an equal footing.

Despite the difficulties and harassment there were many individuals who were able to excel and, in the tradition of Reverend Bess, develop feelings of pride and self-respect within the black community. Lovely and talented Vivian Smith was one who exemplified such excellence and commitment. Her family moved from Kentucky to Waterloo shortly after the IC strike began. In 1916 she received a B.A. in English from Iowa State Teachers College in nearby Cedar Falls, the first black to do so in the school's history. An accomplished violinist and pianist, she was active in nearly all A.M.E. Church activities. But her interests went beyond this, for she was a dedicated suffragette. She served on the Waterloo Suffragette Council and was active in seeking passage by Iowa of the constitutional amendment giving women the right to vote.

Another who sought to improve the status and image of the black community was J.D. Hopkins, proprietor of a small restaurant and pool hall across from the IC yards. From this vantage point he could see the hardships of those less fortunate than he and the need for action to obtain help for those in distress.

In 1918 he organized the Colored Settlement Association located in the St. Paul Masonic Temple. It sought to discuss the problems that confronted blacks in the city and to find assistance from the appropriate agencies for law-abiding citizens. Organizations like the Association established important community programs, including one conducted at the YWCA to help black women from the South adjust to urban life. In addition, black citizens' groups asked that the police and city officials drive the lawbreaking element from the city and provide protection for respectable black residents.

Other organizations reflected the growing strength of the community as well. A brass band was formed by Sidney Scheers to entertain local people. The Colored Giants baseball team won fame by defeating opposing teams in



Vivian B. Smith in 1916, from The Old Gold, yearbook of Iowa State Teachers College (courtesy UNI)

cow pastures and sandlots of the area. A community committee organized the Emancipation Day celebration at Electric Park every August. Visitors came from around the state, from Chicago, and even from Mississippi and Louisiana to watch the parade, listen to speakers and then dance well into the night.

Perhaps there was no greater effort made by blacks to show they belonged than that made during the Great War. When patriotic appeals for service in the Army went out in mid-1917, blacks in Waterloo responded by volunteering, only to learn that the few Negro Regiments were already oversubscribed. It was not until after the 92nd Division, a black combat unit, was formed that they could be enrolled and sent off to Camp Dodge near Des Moines for basic training. On a glorious morning in July, 1918 the largest contingent of young black soldiers-to-be left Waterloo for Camp Dodge. Most of the black population had turned out to see them off, and the parade wound its way through the city to the Chicago Great Western

depot. The mayor, city councilmen, and other public officials headed the march while the young men and their well-wishers followed in step to the music coming from a large truck carrying the brass band. At the station an informal concert was held, with patriotic songs and traditional favorites from the South being played. As departure time neared, the Red Cross distributed cigarettes and farewells were made. The train left amidst tears of joy and fear and cries from the crowd of "bring back the Kaiser." During the course of the war over fifty black men from Waterloo served in the Army. Several lost their lives in the European combat.

While the men were overseas, those remaining also did their part for the war. Individuals bought Liberty Bonds and the churches were organized to sell war savings stamps. In December 1917, Carrie Bright became the operator of the elevator at the Paul Davis's Dry Goods Store the first black woman to take over a man's job, and thereby free him for military service. She took great pride in her contribution to the war effort. Others soon followed, and many black men, unable to gain acceptance into one of the military units, were able to fill positions vacated by Greeks, Italians, and Bulgarians. Only the denizens of Smokey Row did not contribute. Many of them soon found callings elsewhere, as the police used the local labour shortage to "offer" them positions or find them regular, respectable employment.

The period of World War I was relatively harmonious, but the harsh economic and social consequences of the War were to bring changes. Returning soldiers reclaimed their former positions, creating large numbers of unemployed, and after a decline in the vice and crime rate during the War, there was a resurgence, resulting in an adverse reflection on all blacks. There was a general increase in the informal segregation policies applied to blacks

as their numbers increased and they became more visible in society. Blacks could no longer passively accept these conditions and by 1920 their attitudes were beginning to change. A recently formed chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People began to demand equal treatment under the law. Additional black citizens moved into Waterloo and brought with them new economic ambitions and a heightened concern for education and social services.

Thus the period of community isolation and self-reliance nurtured by Reverend Bess was ending. The years from 1911 to 1919 had been ones of building and consolidation from within for the black community. Faced with a new environment and unfamiliar social conditions, the majority had relied on their religious traditions for strength during a difficult time of adjustment. Reverend Bess's leadership proved instrumental in establishing a sense of pride and a feeling of stability that helped offset the various restrictions placed on black residents. Bess's successors in positions of community leadership, men such as the local Baptist ministers and businessman J.D. Hopkins, upheld this tradition of self-help. Vivian Smith's career, for example, served as an important symbol of the possibilities for individual advancement. Yet by also demonstrating the benefits of increased interaction between black and white residents, this new generation of black community leaders pointed the way to continued progress in the future. □

Note on Sources

Resource material for this paper includes the manuscript Iowa State Census of 1915, Waterloo city directories for the years 1911-1920, articles in *The Waterloo Evening Courier* and *The Waterloo Times-Tribune*, and numerous interviews with early black settlers in Waterloo.

An annotated version of this article is on file at the State Historical Society of Iowa.

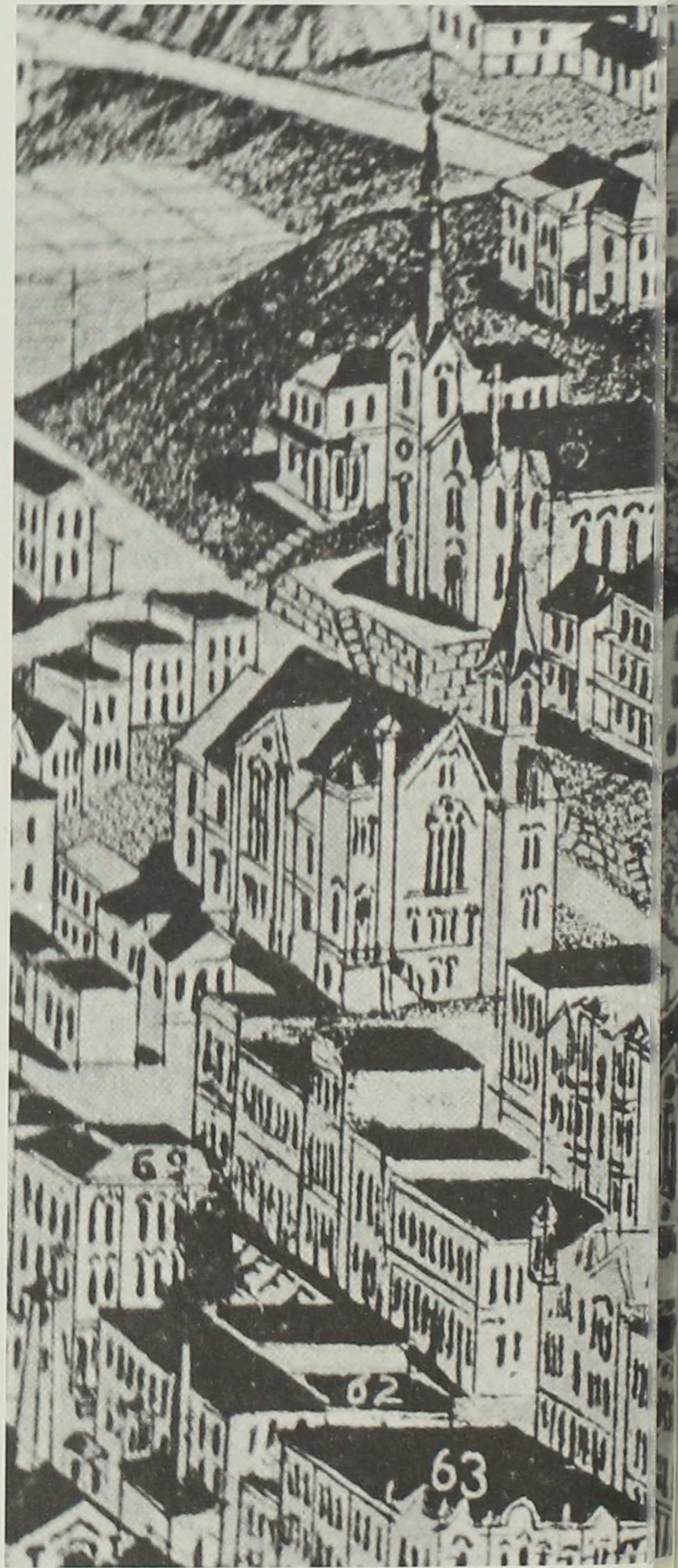
THE DURABLE BUILDINGS

by Steven
Brower

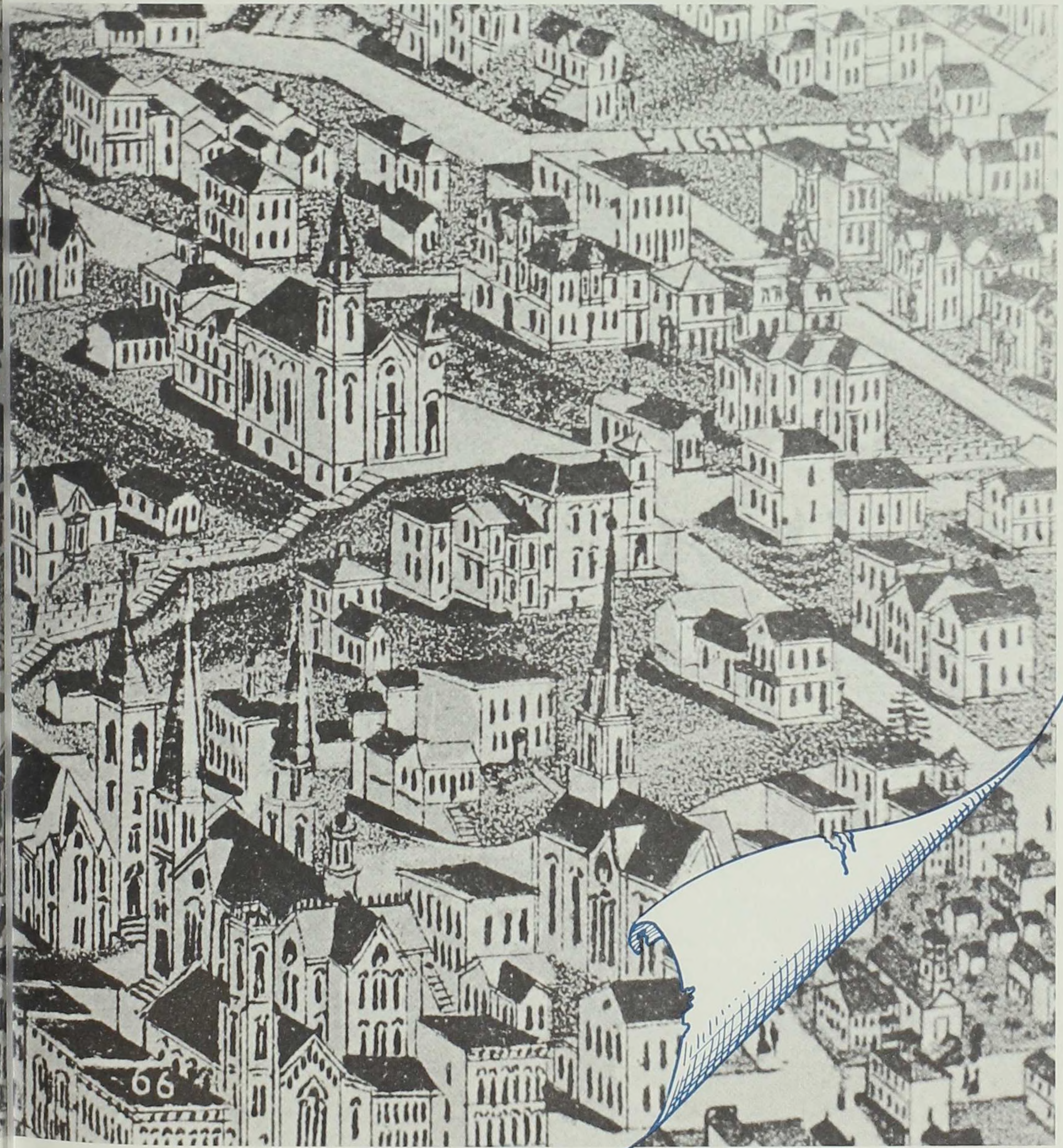
This article is based on a report titled "The Cultural Landscape of Burlington," prepared for the Iowa State Historical Department, Division of Historic Preservation.

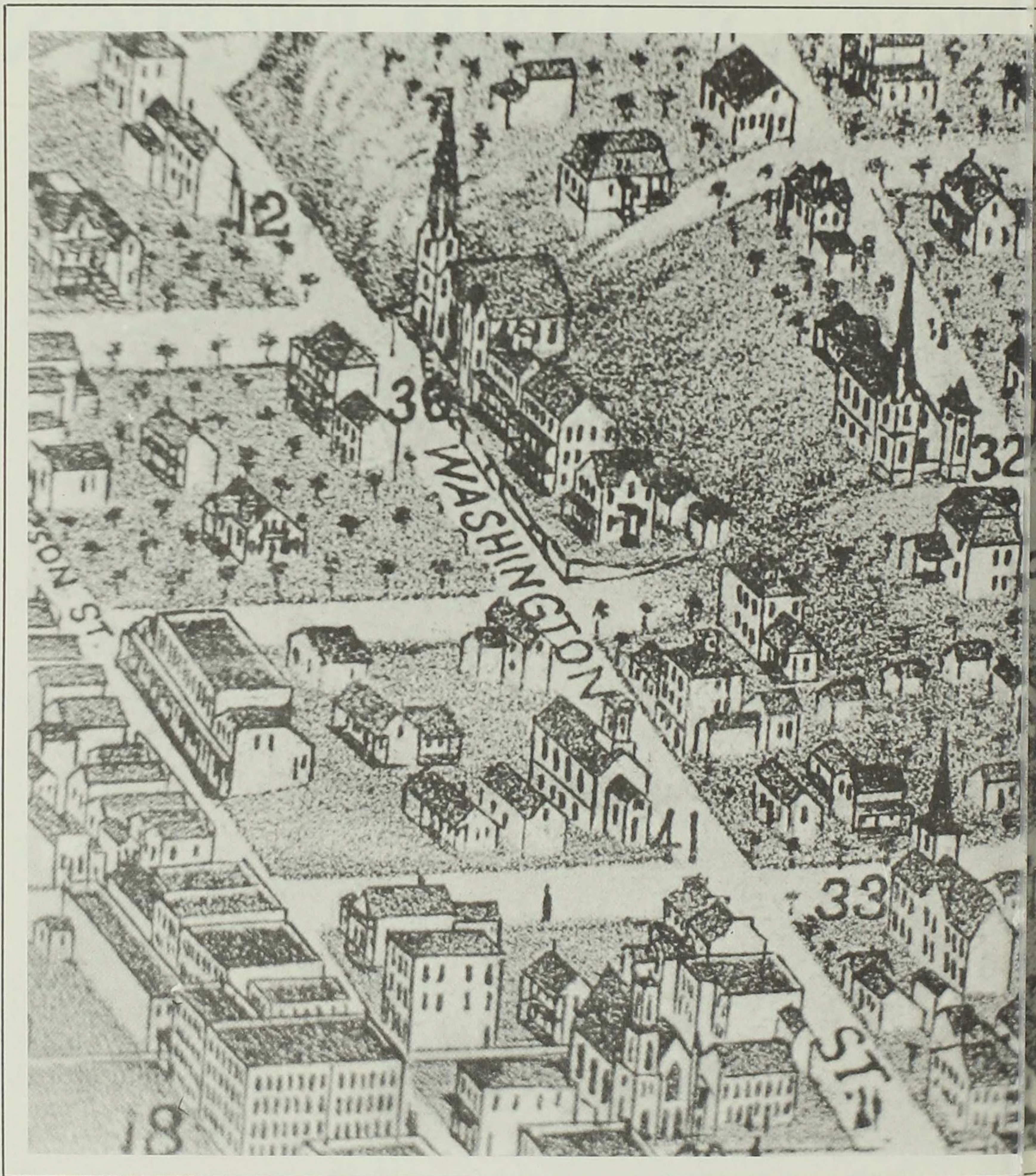
The Victorian character of many Iowa communities is still evident as we enter the final decades of the twentieth century. Burlington, for example, exhibits many of the physical features of a town from the 1880s. Particularly noteworthy in this respect are the Victorian churches that grace the hillsides of Iowa's former territorial capitol. In the late nineteenth century, when the railroad was the major mode of transportation, people coming into the city were treated to an impressive view of these buildings as they travelled the length of the downtown basin. They could see a townscape marked by "church buildings [that] would be a credit to any modern city." As described in a promotional booklet of the era, "a majority of the churches are located in the central portion of the city, and from the hills around one sees a cluster of spires emerging from the leafy bowers which surround and beautify them."

In many cases, these Victorian edifices were built to replace older Greek Revival structures that had fallen out of fashion. Before the turn of the century, in fact, Burlington's churches enlisted in a citywide effort to erect more impres-

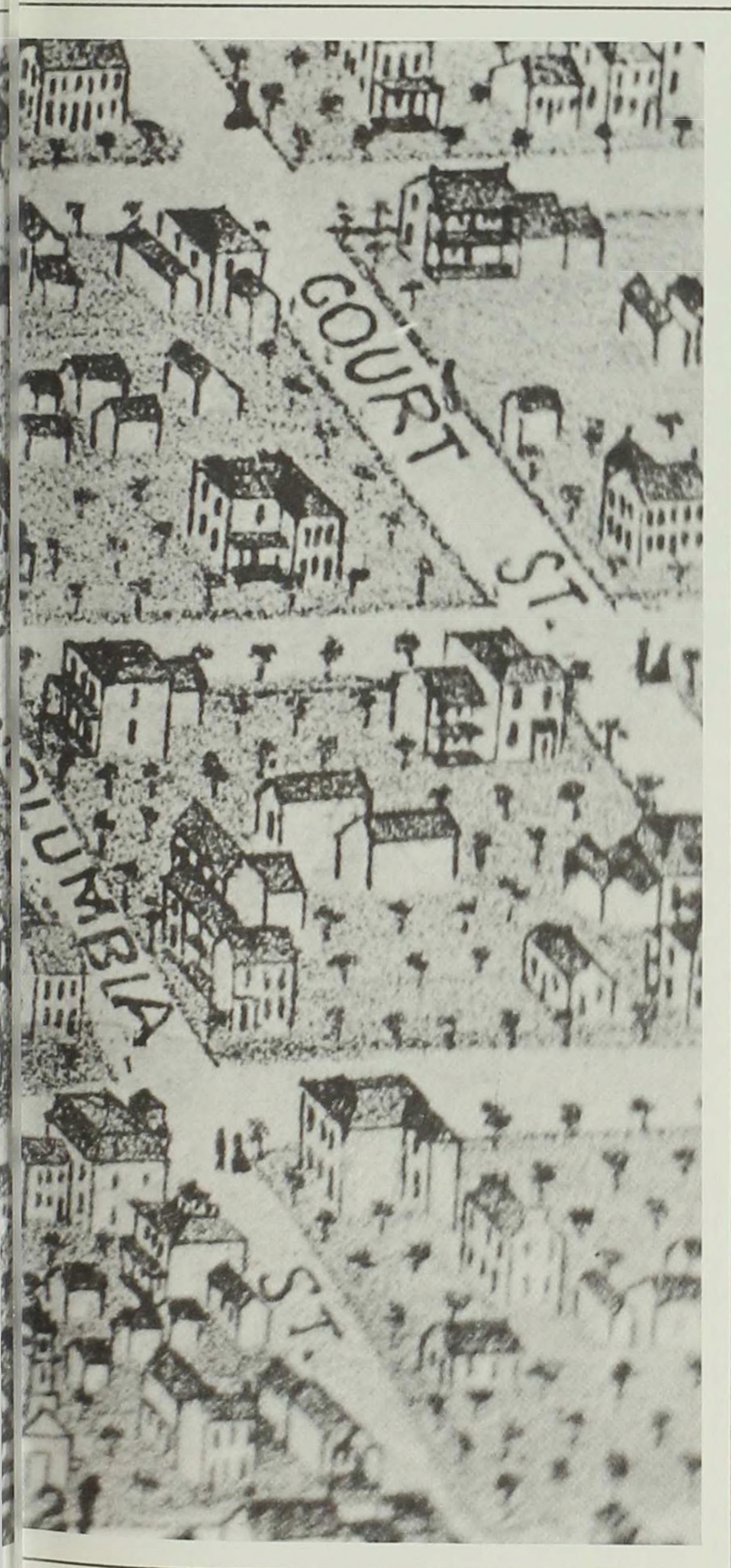


INGS OF BURLINGTON





Two views of Burlington: above, a bird's-eye view by August Koch, ca. 1879; preceding page, a perspective map probably by N. Wellege, 1889 (both courtesy Des Moines County Historical Society). The numbers on the two views refer to an identification key that originally accompanied each of them.



sive buildings in light of current architectural taste. Because of the tremendous competition at this time between the growing cities of the Middle West—all of them eager to become the Gateway City of the West, the western terminal of the Chicago railroads, and the rival of St. Louis—Burlington's citizens felt it necessary to present their city in the most prosperous image possible. The community's appearance was of course a key to such an image. Writing in the 1878 annual report of the Burlington Board of Trade, a local publicist insisted somewhat defensively that his town's "church edifices are not as costly and attractive as they are in some large cities, but they are large and commodious." A year later, the Board's report struck a happier note, announcing that "several of the church organizations are looking forward to the erection of new and elegant buildings in the near future." The same writer predicted that "with the numerous wealthy congregations we now have in the city, it is probable that all church improvements hereafter made will be of a very superior order."

Pictorial representations of Burlington's changing skyline in the nineteenth century show the results of the improvement effort. A bird's-eye view of Burlington from around 1879 (this page) shows the hillside landscape between Washington and Columbia streets just above the city's central business district. The view includes the First Congregational Church (1867) on Fourth Street and St. Paul's German Methodist Church (1868) on Seventh Street. The next decade brought dramatic changes to the area, as shown in the perspective sketch dated 1889 reproduced on the preceding pages. Readily evident is the dense development of the hilltop neighborhood and a large increase in the number of substantial brick buildings on the streets of the business district (lower left corner in both drawings). In between, on the hillside, the perspective sketch of 1889 depicts a cluster of new Victorian churches on Washington Street. The new



Burlington in the late 1860s (SHSI)

buildings reflect current taste and likely also the influence of Burlington's foreign-born residents (more than half the city's adult population in the Civil War era). Immigrants no doubt welcomed the stone spires of the Gothic style so familiar to them in their European homelands; these same spires became a central element of the Victorian look in the United States. Because of the accuracy and the amount of detail included in this perspective sketch, the artist—thought to be N. Wellege—has left a vivid testimony to the intensity of the Victorian style throughout the city.

In retrospect, Burlington's desire to replace the Greek Revival churches dating from the early years of settlement poses an interesting concept of progress. The older churches would be much prized if they were still here today. But early residents felt these small structures did not contribute to the progressive image needed for an industrious town. Today Burlington faces a similar situation as other nineteenth-century buildings are steadily

being replaced with more modern structures. Since the Victorian buildings have endured, however, and since their styles support the overall character of the community, maintenance would seem more appropriate than replacement. Communities across the nation are discovering that such durable old buildings provide a unique town identity that is an important resource for future commercial growth. □

Note on Sources

Sources for this study include panoramic views of Burlington by August Koch, *Bird's-eye View of the City of Burlington* (Chicago: Charles Sholer and Company, ca. 1879), and by N. Wellege (?), *Perspective Map of the City of Burlington* (Milwaukee: American Publishing Company, 1889). Both are reproduced by courtesy of the Des Moines County Historical Society.

Other sources used: *Burlington Illustrated* (Burlington: H.R. Page and Company, 1889); George Boeck, "An Early Iowa Community: Aspects of Economic, Social, and Political Development in Burlington, Iowa, 1833-1866," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1961); and David Carey, "Republican Factionalism in Burlington, Iowa, 1906-1908," (M.A. thesis, University of Iowa, 1960).

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 History and Archives (formerly Iowa Department of History and Archives) and a Division of Historic Preservation.