The Palimpsest

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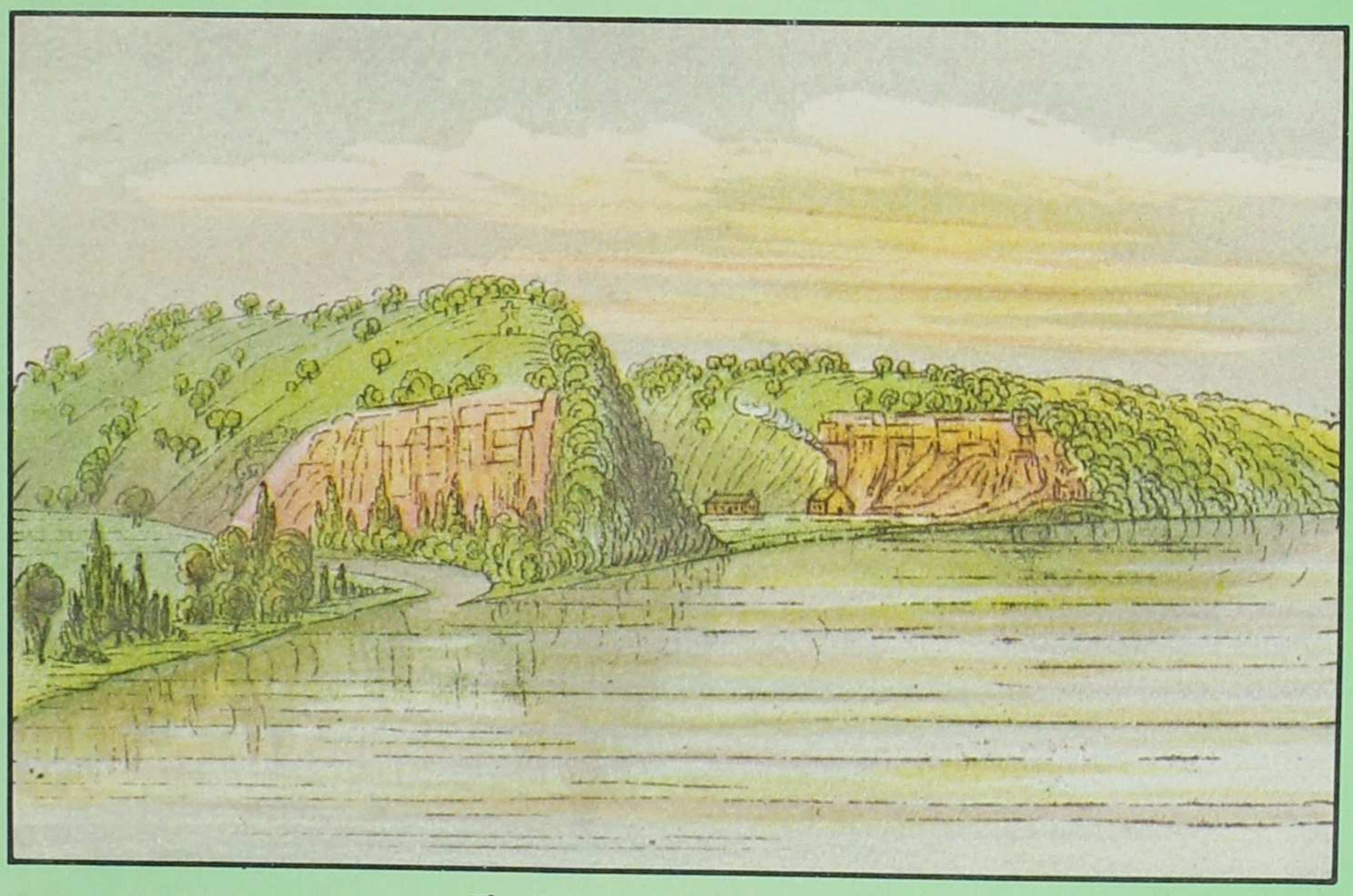

The Gravesite of Julien Dubuque

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The Palimpsest

VOLUME 57 NUMBER 1 JANUARY / FEBRUARY 1976

Peter T. Harstad, Director

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Cover: *The gravesite of Julien Dubuque, high on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi River, as painted by George Catlin in the early 1830s. The tiny cross near the summit of the central bluff marked Dubuque's resting place. When Catlin viewed the scene, a smelter was active at the foot of the bluffs. This is a lithograph version of the painting from Catlin's* Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Condition of the North American Indians (Volume Two), *published in 1841.*

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.

The Life and Times of Julien Dubuque

by Thomas Auge

Julien Dubuque has been long acknowledged as one of the first white settlers in what is today Iowa. Traders and trappers no doubt had resided in the upper Mississippi region before Dubuque's arrival in the 1780s—the French had been active in the area for more than a century. But most of these early visitors remain nameless and faceless, lost in the recordless past. The life and times of Julien Dubuque, however, can be partially rediscovered.

Earlier attempts to reconstruct the story of Dubuque were limited successes, but a full portrait of the man has yet to be drawn, a portrait that does justice to the nuances of his personality and places him in perspective against the background of his society. What kind of person was Julien Dubuque and what kind of life did he lead in the upper Mississippi Valley nearly two hundred years ago?

The basic facts of Dubuque's life can be summarized briefly. He was born in the Three Rivers District of Quebec Province, Canada. A friend, Nicholas Boilvin (Indian agent at Prairie du Chien), wrote in 1812 that Julien Dubuque and his brother had come to the upper Mississippi 30 years earlier. According to Boilvin, Dubuque served briefly as a clerk at Michilimackinac, headquarters for the fur trade, before moving on to Prairie du Chien. In 1788, Dubuque obtained an agreement from the Mesquakie° Indians (although he may have been in the area earlier) that permitted him to work the lead mines in the area now bearing his name. He lived there for 22 years until his death in 1810.

Julien Dubuque was a short, stocky, dark man, known to the Indians as "Little Night." Judging from contemporary accounts and records of his actions, he was suave, pleasant, sociable, even fun-loving. At the same time, his business dealings indicate that he was a shrewd, opportunistic fellow, ready to take a risk and prepared to cut a few legal corners if necessary; in other words, something of a speculator. Consistent with this tendency to speculate was his expansive character, for Dubuque was a man who lived as splendidly as possible and spent lavishly. Finally, he was a person of some education with cultural interests unusual in a frontier society.

Dubuque was not the stereotype frontiersman cast in a rough and unlettered mold. Survival and success in the upper Mississippi Valley in 1800 no doubt required hardy self-reliance, but traits more common to settled communities were necessary also. The Mississippi Valley of Dubuque's day was not a new frontier, just opened to whites. Fur traders had been active in the region for a long time, and if Julien Dubuque lived in a wilder-

°"Mesquakie" is the tribal name for the Indians called the "Fox" by the French. They are cousins to the Sauk, with whom their activities are associated during this period. They are often referred to as the Sauk and Fox.

ness populated principally by Indians, his world nevertheless had established patterns of social and economic life, an important feature of which was trade—buying and selling.

Before all else Dubuque was a businessman, an entrepreneur, an enterprising, clever man able to gain the confidence and respect of those with whom he dealt—whether they were Indians, merchants of St. Louis, or representatives of the Spanish and American governments. Indeed, his activities and life at the lead mines depended upon the attractiveness of his personality, upon his ability to gain the trust and affection of the Mesquakie Indians.

In 1788, the Mesquakies, who controlled the Dubuque-Galena lead region, gave Julien Dubuque the sole right to mine the area. The agreement made at Prairie du Chien on September 22, 1788, read in part:

> . . . the Foxes [Mesquakies] permit Julien Dubuque called by them the Little Night, to work at the mine as long as he shall please, and to withdraw from it, without specifying any term to him; moreover, that they sell and abandon to him, all the coast and the contents of the mine discovered by the wife of Peosta [*le femme* Peosta], so that no white man or Indian shall make any pretension to it without the consent of Sieur Julien Dubuque; and in case he shall find nothing within, he shall be free to search wherever he may think proper to do so . . .

This document set up Julien Dubuque with a permanent Iowa establishment and permitted him to live and to flourish here for 22 years.

The grant by the Mesquakie Indians was a remarkable and valuable concession, a triumph for Dubuque, one which virtually assured him an important role in the culture of the upper Mississippi. The lead region which the Mesquakies controlled had long been considered a prize of great wealth. The mineral deposits had first been discovered by the French in the late seventeenth century. They were important

Pictorial representations of Julien Dubuque are almost wholly imaginative since there are no known likenesses of Dubuque that date from his own lifetime. Most images are the pure invention of later artists who were called on to provide pictures for promotional or decorative purposes. This drawing by C. L. Trudell in 1907 appeared on a poster commemorating Dubuque area Old Settlers. It also has been on calendars and in books and magazines. There is no evidence that Julien Dubuque looked like this. On the contrary, this coonskin cap and buckskin rendition is more in line with the Daniel Boone-Hollywood image of the frontiersman.

Dubuque appeared as the central figure in a mural executed by a Chicago artist, James McBurney. The mural decorated the walls of the Federal Bank and Trust Company in Dubuque and is now in the possession of the Dubuque County Historical Society Museum at Ham House. M. M. Hoffmann in his Antique Dubuque *(published in 1930) printed the picture with the information that McBurney "devoted a great deal of time to the study of the dress, artifacts and appearance of the Fox Indians in order to make his subjects conform as far as possible to historical truth." Compare McBurney's Indians with the Catlin rendition on the opposite page.*

enough to be located and identified on maps of the Mississippi Valley drawn in London and Paris early in the eighteenth century. Over the years the mines had been worked by Indians and perhaps a few itinerant whites, but so far as we know never on the scale of Julien Dubuque's operations.

How was Dubuque able to obtain the grant from the Mesquakie tribe? He had, after all, been in the upper Mississippi only a few years and, to the best of our knowledge, had no particular training or experience in mining. (The Indians had known the methods of surface or strip mining for years; Dubuque merely supervised and expanded the operation.) It is possible that he married into the tribe, but many French traders had taken wives from the Mesquakie Indians without receiving control of the lead mines.

A popular explanation for the grant by the Indians is that he had convinced them he possessed magical supernatural powers. One story relates that he could handle rattlesnakes without harm. Another tells how he threatened to burn the river if the Indians did not give him what he wanted. He allegedly had oil secretly poured on the water which burst into flames when he fired it, to the astonishment and fear of the Indians.

These accounts of his duping the Indians into believing that he possessed magical powers are, however, only legends and do not rest upon reliable eyewitness

accounts. Still, the existence of such legends does indicate that Dubuque's position with the Indians was extraordinary.

Julien Dubuque apparently lived and worked among the Mesquakie Indians for many years without any record of tension or difficulty. In general, the French of the upper Mississippi got along well with the Indians, but Dubuque's situation appears to have been unusually good. Without exaggeration, it can be said that the Mesquakies developed a genuine affection for him, that they not only respected him but also loved him. After his death they buried him on a bluff overlooking the river and built a monument over his grave. Nor was any white man to take his place, for the Mesquakies refused to permit any other to work the mines, going so far as to burn the buildings that Dubuque had erected.

Further evidence of the affection of the Indians for Dubuque is the remark made by Blackhawk, the war chief of the Sauk, a kindred tribe of the Mesquakie. After his defeat in 1832, Blackhawk was imprisoned for a short time in the East. His return home took him down the Mississippi. Passing the lead mines he noticed whites living there. Sadly he recalled how this had been the land of the Sauk and Mesquakie, which they had given to "their relation," Julien Dubuque. Thus, the old war chief, defeated in a hopeless struggle to prevent the whites from occupying the land of his people, weary and bitter, still referred to Julien Dubuque in terms of affection, as a relative of the confederated tribes.

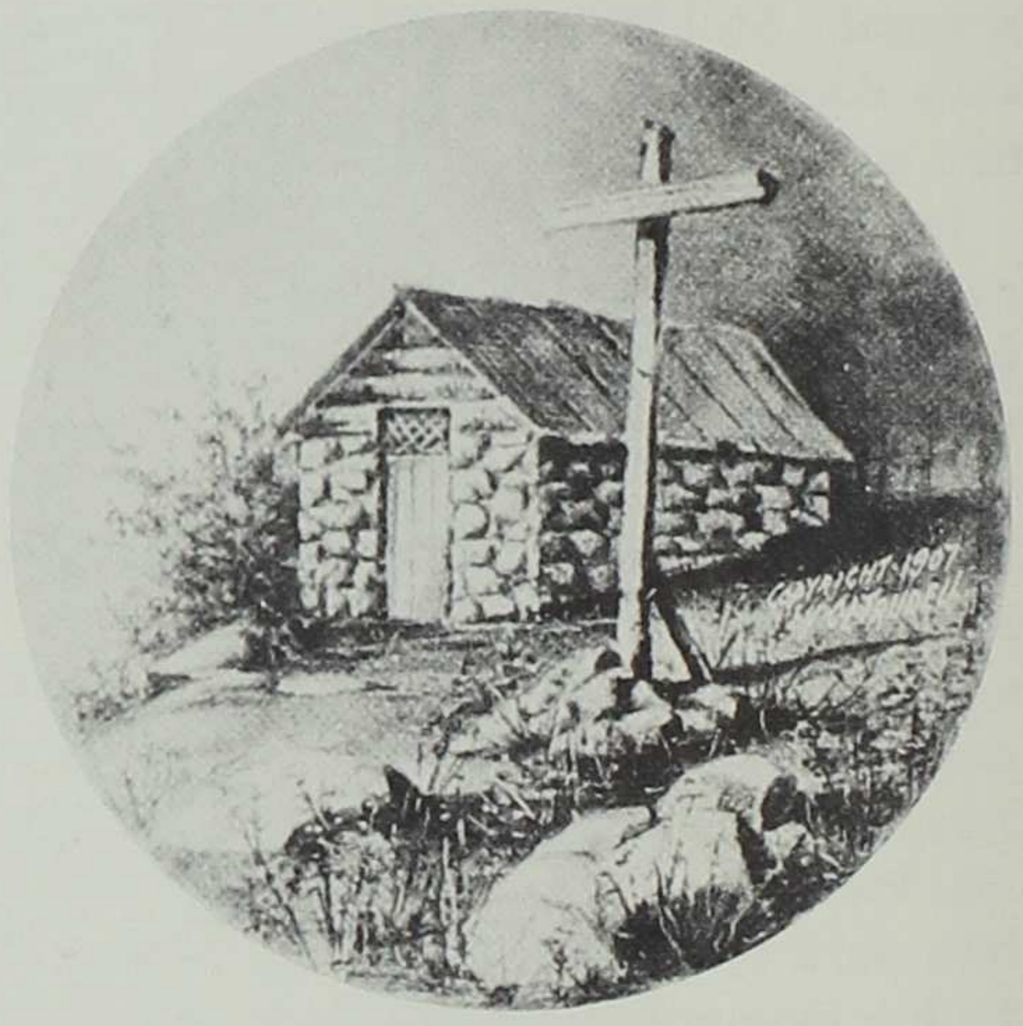
Evidently, Dubuque exercised an unusual influence upon the Indians, and was trusted, respected, and loved by them. Undoubtedly the attractiveness of his personality played a part, for he could hardly have continued to maintain such an intimate and friendly relationship over such a long period if the rapport did not stem from fundamental character traits. In Du-

George Catlin painted these "Sac and Fox" at Rock Island in the 1830s, only twenty years or so after Dubuque's death (from Letters and Notes*).*

buque's case, familiarity bred respect rather than contempt.

Further insight into Dubuque's character is found in an explanation for his success with the Indians, given by his friend, Nicholas Boilvin. Boilvin wrote: "In the course of a few years he spent a great deal of money by his generous manner of acting, making many presents to the Indians and refusing in many instances to take their furs in exchange, contrary to the custom of the traders among them. By that means he gained the esteem and affection of the Sacs and Foxes . . . ." This passage would appear to refer to the period before Julien Dubuque had obtained his concession from the Indians. If so, it offers a plausible account of how he came to be entrusted with the Indians' most valuable possession—the lead mines. If Boilvin's statement pictures Dubuque as a generous man who treated the Indians with unusual kindness, it also implies that he was calculating enough to use this generosity to advance his own interests. In fairness to Dubuque, however, it should be noted that his liberality to the Indians continued after he had taken over the mines, and to such an extent that his financial position was seriously injured.

Julien Dubuque's success at entering the social and commercial life of the growing town of St. Louis is further proof of his attractive personality. This fur-trading center had been settled by French merchants from New Orleans in the 1760s. Although handicapped by many restrictive regulations imposed by the Spanish government, St. Louis became the rival of Michilimackinac in the fur trade, in particular the increasing activity up the Missouri and Des Moines rivers. Julien Dubuque had to ship the lead downriver, because of the weight, so St. Louis became the terminus where he sold his product. Consequently, while most of the trade of the upper Mississippi continued to go eastward to Michilimackinac, Dubuque turned to the south. The Mississippi became his highway as he made his regular journey with the lead to St. Louis. In the course of these frequent trips down the river, he no doubt established locations where he rested and visited. Personal letters indicate that he occasionally stopped at the great Sauk town of Saukenuk, at the mouth of the Rock River. One letter also makes reference to a prolonged stay, due to illness, at the home of a French trader, Denis Julien, who resided above the lower rapids of the Mississippi near Fort Madison. Certainly, during these years Julien Dubuque must have been a familiar figure to both the Indians and the whites who lived along the banks of the Mississippi.



Another drawing by C. L. Trudell, this of Julien Dubuque's actual burial vault. Catlin visited the grave in the 1830s and noted that the pioneer's body had been laid out on a stone enclosed slab, and visitors could peek in the windows to view the skeletal remains.

According to James Soulard who knew him in St. Louis, Dubuque made semi-annual visits to that town. Soulard reports that Dubuque's arrival was an important event for the frontier community, an occasion for festivities. Dubuque's trips to St. Louis were as much social as commercial, and he became a participant in the activities of that village, joining in the dances and balls which were so much enjoyed by the French of the Mississippi Valley. Soulard relates that Dubuque would play the fiddle and dance to his own music. He eventually became associated with the wealthiest and most important citizen of that town, Auguste Chouteau. Doubtless Dubuque's control of the lead mines gave him status in the trading economy of this growing frontier town. In any case, Julien Dubuque was a prominent and respected person in St. Louis.

By 1803, when America acquired the upper Mississippi region in the Louisiana Purchase, Dubuque had established quite a reputation. Prominent Americans, such as Meriwether Lewis, were acquainted with him. Writing to William Clark in St. Louis prior to their departure on the historic expedition to the Pacific, Lewis requested that Clark give his regards to Julien Dubuque. Later, as governor of Louisiana Territory, Lewis included Dubuque's name on a list of the French inhabitants of the upper Mississippi whom the American government could trust to offset British influence over the Indians.

In 1808, the United States government demonstrated its confidence in Dubuque by appointing him Indian agent at Prairie du Chien. The previous agent at that frontier village was John Campbell, a friend of Dubuque. Campbell had become embroiled in a quarrel which culminated in a challenge to a duel which was to be fought at Michilimackinac. Campbell, leaving for what was to be a fatal encounter for him, asked Dubuque to perform the duties of agent should he not return. When American officials learned of the death of Campbell they immediately wrote to Dubuque to offer him the post of Indian agent at Prairie du Chien. Because of ill health, Dubuque could only serve as Indian agent for a short time and was succeeded by Boilvin in late 1808. Still, for approximately two months in the fall of 1808, Julien Dubuque was the American Indian agent at Prairie du Chien. Nor was this simply a token appointment, for he went to that village, met with Indians, distributed the goods that the government had for them, and filed an official report to the United States government.

Dubuque's prominence in the white community is consistent with what we know of his relations with the Indians. He was able to command the respect and confidence of all. This ability served him well in the trading culture of the upper Mississippi.

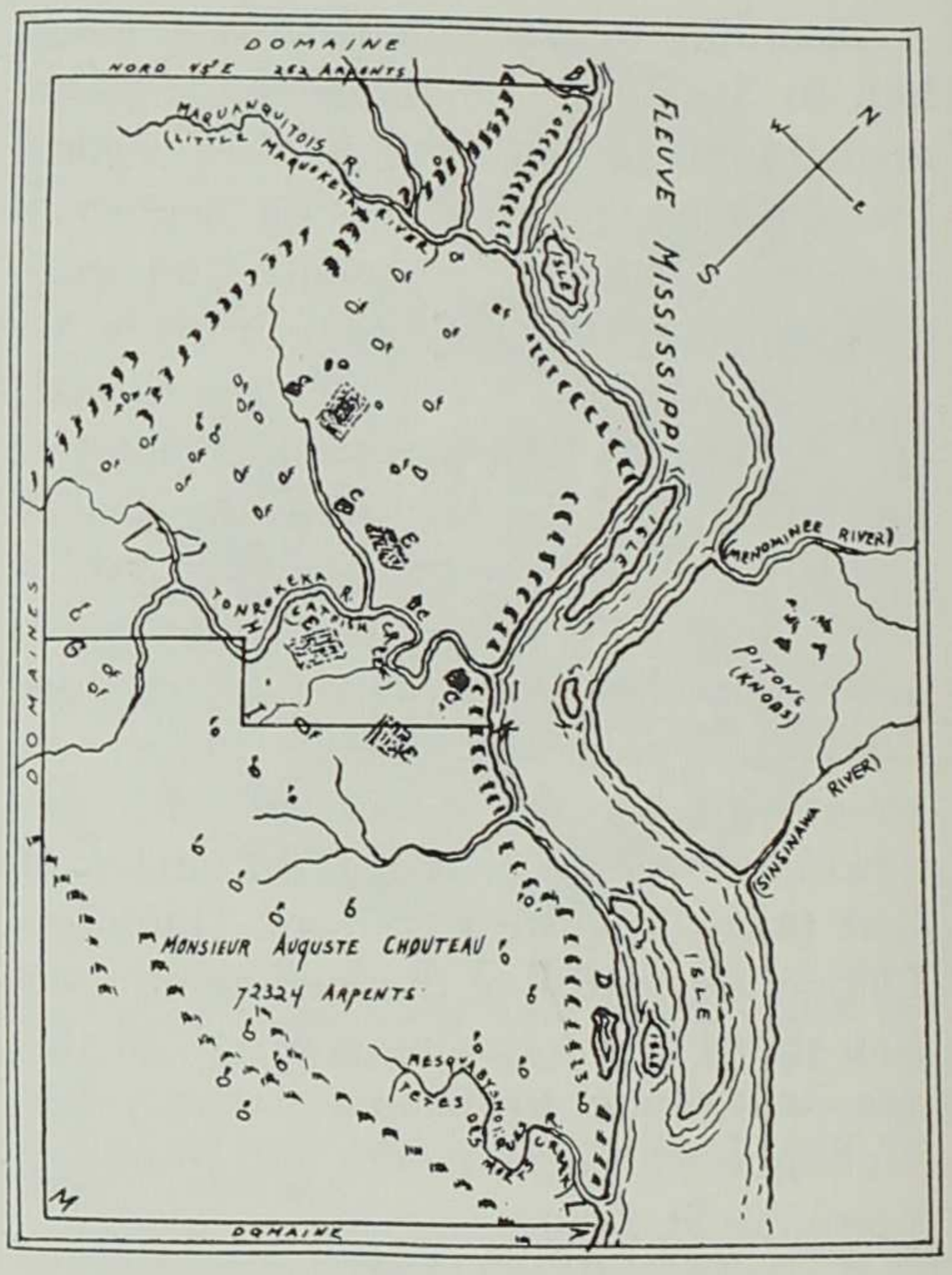
If Dubuque was an attractive personality, he was also a sharp operator, ready to take advantage of any opportunity which came to him. Dubuque's use of his warm personality to obtain from the Indians the right to use the mines brings in a note of calculation and even deceit which lessens the appeal of the man.

A case in point is his efforts to have the Spanish government recognize his right to the lead mines. In 1796, he petitioned the Spanish governor of Louisiana, Baron de Carondolet, asking him to grant Dubuque legal possession of the mines and the surrounding lands. Surely, his desire to base his position on something more substan-

tial than an Indian agreement is understandable, but his request to Carondolet went far beyond what the Indians had granted him. Dubuque in his petition referred to the lead mines as "the Mines of Spain," a title he hoped would influence the Spanish governor favorably.

The Mesquakies had given Dubuque the right to work the mines for as long as he pleased. Since the Indians continued to live on the land and refused to permit any white successor to Dubuque, it would appear that they did not intend to give him anything more than the right to work the mines until his death. In his petition, however, Dubuque requested that Carondolet grant him legal possession of an area 21 miles long and nine miles wide along the Mississippi. What he sought, then, was ownership of an area of land far greater than the mines, which he could then sell or deed to others.

Clearly, Julien Dubuque was engaging in a common American frontier practice: cheating the Indians of their lands. If Dubuque had succeeded in his efforts to gain ownership of the area of the lead mines the Indians would have lost their land. Some time after his death a group of whites came up from St. Louis to occupy the lead mines. The leaders were John T. Smith and Fergus Morehead, both of whom had bought rights in the Dubuque estate. The Indians opposed their landing and only Boilvin's arbitration prevented bloodshed. The whites withdrew, but had the United States government accepted the legality of Dubuque's claim, these men would have been the owners of the mines. In these circumstances, the American government would probably have forced the Indians to grant possession to them. Considering the Indians' kindness toward Dubuque, as well as the years he spent living and working with them, his scheme has an aura of duplicity unusual even in dealings with the Indians. In this context, the generosity that Boilvin describes appears much more calculating and contrived.



A copy dating from 1843 of Dubuque's original map for his land claim. The circled areas in the upper left, marked "f", show holes dug for mining of lead. The "house and buildings of the proprietor" are in the center, marked "c".

Carondolet granted Dubuque's petition, but in 1803, Dubuque was faced with the problem of securing American acceptance of his claim. The United States, presented with a multitude of Spanish land grants, set up a Board of Land Commissioners in St. Louis. This Board had to decide upon the validity of each of these grants. It was to this Board that Dubuque had to submit his claim to ownership of the Mines of Spain.

As might be expected, speculation in Spanish land grants was a popular investment in the Louisiana Territory. Never one to miss an opportunity, Dubuque made a second claim for 7,056 acres across from Prairie du Chien where he claimed he had lived in 1785. The Board of Land Commissioners, however, rejected this claim.

Although he had been living at the Mines of Spain for over 15 years and had apparently gained Spanish recognition of his claims, Dubuque remained anxious. No doubt he was aware that the basis of his claim, the agreement with the Mesquakie Indians, did not support his right to the ownership of the large tract of land he sought. To win the suit he would have to act cautiously and shrewdly.

In 1805, Lieutenant Zebulon Pike came up the Mississippi to locate the sources of the river. He also had been instructed to bring back information on the resources of the region that the United States had just obtained. He was specifically ordered to question Julien Dubuque concerning the mines and his claims to them. On September 1, 1805, Pike landed at Dubuque's wharf. While Dubuque received him hospitably, the answers he gave to Pike were evasive, if not false. He greatly understated the amount of lead produced by the mines, and when Pike asked to see the mines, Dubuque told him that they were six miles away and that there were no horses available to take them there, neither of which was true. Dubuque, uncertain as to the strength of his claim, was not going to give information to a representative of the United States government.

A year before Pike's visit, Dubuque had decided upon a bold move which he hoped would assure that his claim would be validated. Deeply in debt to Auguste Chouteau, Dubuque sold him approximately half of the land covered by the suit for $10,848.60. He was in need of money and in debt to Chouteau, but this may not have been the principal motive behind the transaction. From then on, Auguste Chouteau, one of the most influential men in all of Louisiana, was financially committed to securing American acceptance of Dubuque's Spanish land claim. Indeed, when the claim was filed, it was in the name of both, with Chouteau listed as Dubuque's partner. Certainly Dubuque's astuteness is well illustrated by this tactic, for it bore immediate results. United States Governor William Henry Harrison had recently negotiated a treaty with the Sauks and Mesquakies which included American recognition that the west bank of the Mississippi belonged to these tribes. Harrison was persuaded by his friend, Auguste Chouteau, to add a clause stating that the treaty did not affect any Spanish land grant in the area. Furthermore, the Board of Commissioners, meeting in St. Louis on September 20, 1806, approved the Dubuque-Chouteau claim. Thus, when Dubuque died four years later, it appeared that he had succeeded in his effort to obtain ownership of a large tract of valuable land in the territory of the Indians. In the long run, however, the claim was invalidated; nevertheless, the maneuvers Dubuque followed to secure legal recognition of his claim provide insights into his character and demonstrate his business acumen.

A last touch needs to be added before the picture of Julien Dubuque as a businessman is complete. Despite his shrewdness, his ability to gain the confidence of others, and the opportunities offered to him by the Indians' grant of the mines,

he was constantly in debt. From at least 1803 until his death he was continually under pressure from one creditor or another. After his death, when Auguste Chouteau, the administrator of his estate, closed the books the assets were $6,000 short of the obligations.

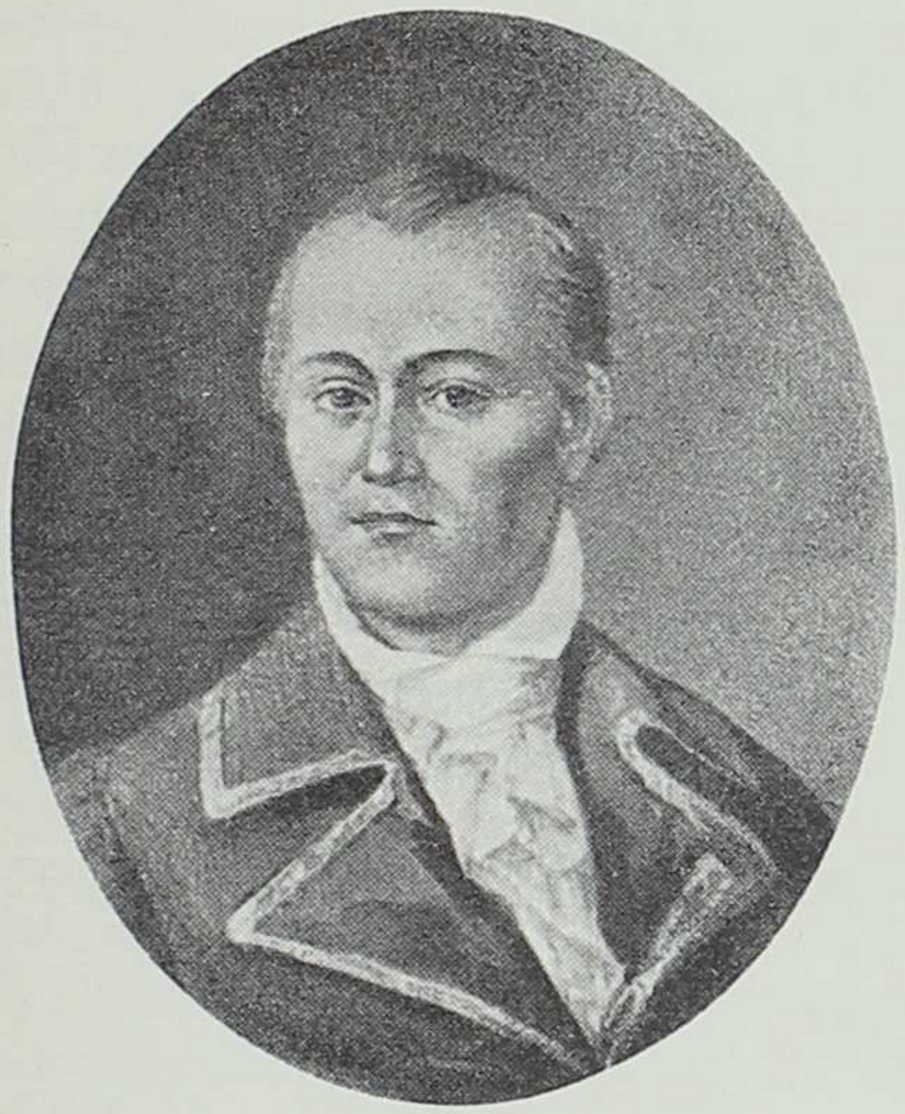
Considering the extent of Dubuque's business operations, the money he must have realized from his various enterprises, and the largely self-sufficient character of his establishment at the mines, how could this indebtedness have come about? Some notion of his income from the lead mines can be reconstructed from existing records. It appears that annually he sold hundreds of thousands of pounds of lead at a price of 5¢ per pound, which would have provided an annual income in the neighborhood of $20,000 from the sale of lead alone. In addition, Dubuque engaged in other activities—the fur trade and agriculture—which should have strengthened his finances.

To understand Dubuque's financial position, particularly in the last years of his life, we must keep in mind the significance of his claim for a Spanish land grant. The validation of the claim by the United States would determine to a large extent his economic success or failure. Thus in 1806 when his claim received approval, Dubuque was not only solvent, but even wealthy, for the sale of portions of this mineral-rich land would have provided him with funds beyond the amount of his debts. But, the reversal of this decision in 1811 by the Board of Land Commissioners insured that his estate would not be sufficient to meet the obligations upon it.

Dubuque's relationship with Auguste Chouteau complicates further our understanding of his financial situation, for an aura of mystery hangs over their partnership. As suggested earlier, the sale of half of his Spanish grant to Chouteau in 1804 may have been aimed at strengthening the case for his land claim with the St. Louis Commissioners. Although the record indicates that a considerable financial sum was involved, it may have been a purely paper transaction with no money actually exchanged. It seems unlikely that Chouteau would pay more than $10,000 for half of a claim that had not yet been approved by the United States government. Furthermore, there is reason to doubt that he ever paid Dubuque the $4,800 which remained of the purchase price after Dubuque's debt to Chouteau was subtracted. In an 1807 letter to a St. Louis firm to whom he was indebted, Dubuque referred to funds that belonged to him which would be available after his death. Was this the money Chouteau owed him from the 1804 sale? While we do not have the information to answer this question, we can conclude that the Dubuque-Chouteau partnership was no simple, clear-cut affair, but a further cause of the confusion and ambiguity which surrounds Dubuque's financial affairs.

If many questions remain unanswered concerning Julien Dubuque's indebtedness, there can be no doubt that his style of life contributed to his financial problems. A generous, expansive person, Dubuque was lavish in maintaining his establishment at the mines. He supported a large number of people; many Indians and a number of whites were domiciled there. He was kind and liberal to those dependent upon him. Furthermore, he personally lived in a fashion uncommon to the frontier.

When Dubuque moved to the lead



Auguste Chouteau

mines in 1788, he was one of the few whites living in the upper Mississippi. Aside from the few families living in the little hamlet of Prairie du Chien, the only other permanent white settlement was St. Louis, 300 miles away. Dubuque, then, was in the wilderness, isolated and remote from white settlement and society. Nevertheless, Julien Dubuque did not go native, did not adopt Indian ways and live as a member of the Mesquakie tribe. Quite the contrary, for his style of life resembled that of a feudal lord living on a manor, in the midst of retainers and workers.

Dubuque brought with him from Prairie du Chien ten or eleven Frenchmen to assist him in his mining operations. We can identify only a few of these early residents of what was to become Iowa. Thomas Forsythe, later an Indian agent at Rock Island, mentioned that his interpreter, G. Lucie, had lived with Dubuque for 20 years. Also, the document settling the estate of Dubuque indicated that at the time of his death two persons, Patrice Roy and Josette Antays, were living at the mines with him, as his servants. In any case, during Dubuque's tenure at the mines, a number of whites lived there with him.

From existing records we can identify six buildings which were a part of Dubuque's establishment. These include his house, a couple of storage buildings, a mill, a blacksmith shop, and a building near the river. It often has been assumed that his dwelling place was by the mouth of Catfish Creek, south of the present city of Dubuque, near the Mesquakie Indian village. The inventory of his estate in June 1810, a few months after his death, however, shows clearly that his house was away from the river, in the hills to the north and the west. The inventory begins: "First in an apartment in the north . . . ." Here the appraisers found the personal possessions of Julien Dubuque: his clothing, books, dishes, and other furnishings of a house. Evidently, Dubuque's house was north of the other buildings. Furthermore, later in the inventory, the term "at the river" was used to identify another building. From this document, then, we must conclude that he did not live down by the river, but rather in the hills behind it. Since most of his work must have been away from the river, at the mines and the farm, such a location for his house would be practical. Furthermore, land near the river had the reputation up and down the Mississippi, of not being conducive to good health.

The personal possessions of Julien Dubuque listed in the inventory are most revealing. Evidently, although isolated in the wilderness, his house contained furnishings and dishes of some value. Since

the purpose of the inventory was to determine what assets were in the estate, the items listed had to be worth the expense of packing and shipping them down the river to St. Louis for sale. We can thus conclude that the household furnishings were not simply rough, homemade pieces, but included things that must have been purchased elsewhere and were of sufficient value to be saleable in St. Louis. Here we have identified one of the reasons for his debts, for it must have been very expensive to ship furniture, dishes, clothing, and other personal possessions the hundreds of miles into the wilderness.

The most enlightening information in the inventory, however, is that Julien Dubuque had a library of at least 58 books. Included were such works as an encyclopedia of business and art, the works of Montesquieu, and eight volumes on political science. Considering the general level of culture on the frontier, where important and prominent men were sometimes illiterate, the presence of books in the Dubuque household is revealing. As the earlier description of his personality implied, Julien Dubuque was no illiterate frontiersman, but a relatively educated person with intellectual interests. His letters are well written and correct both in grammar and spelling, not necessarily the rule for the frontier society in which he lived. These furnishings and books were apparently brought to the mines only at great expense and trouble, evidence that they were important to him.

Included in the inventory of his house were women's clothing. Does this tell us that he was married? If so, to whom? Here again the records fail us. There are legends concerning his marriage to the daughter of an Indian chief. There is indisputable evidence to indicate that he was married, at least in the informal sense that this term was used in the French Mississippi Valley culture. Several personal letters to Dubuque make reference to Madame Dubuque. Who she was has escaped the net of history, for we have no means of identifying any particular person as his wife, but we can surmise that his wife may have been a Mesquakie Indian woman. This type of marriage between a white man and an Indian woman was common in the upper Mississippi of that time. These arrangements were quite informal and easily broken off. Certainly it is difficult to believe that Dubuque could have lived for 22 years in the midst of the Indians without contracting such a union. Evidence that Madame Dubuque was an Indian woman can also be inferred from the absence of any reference to her claims

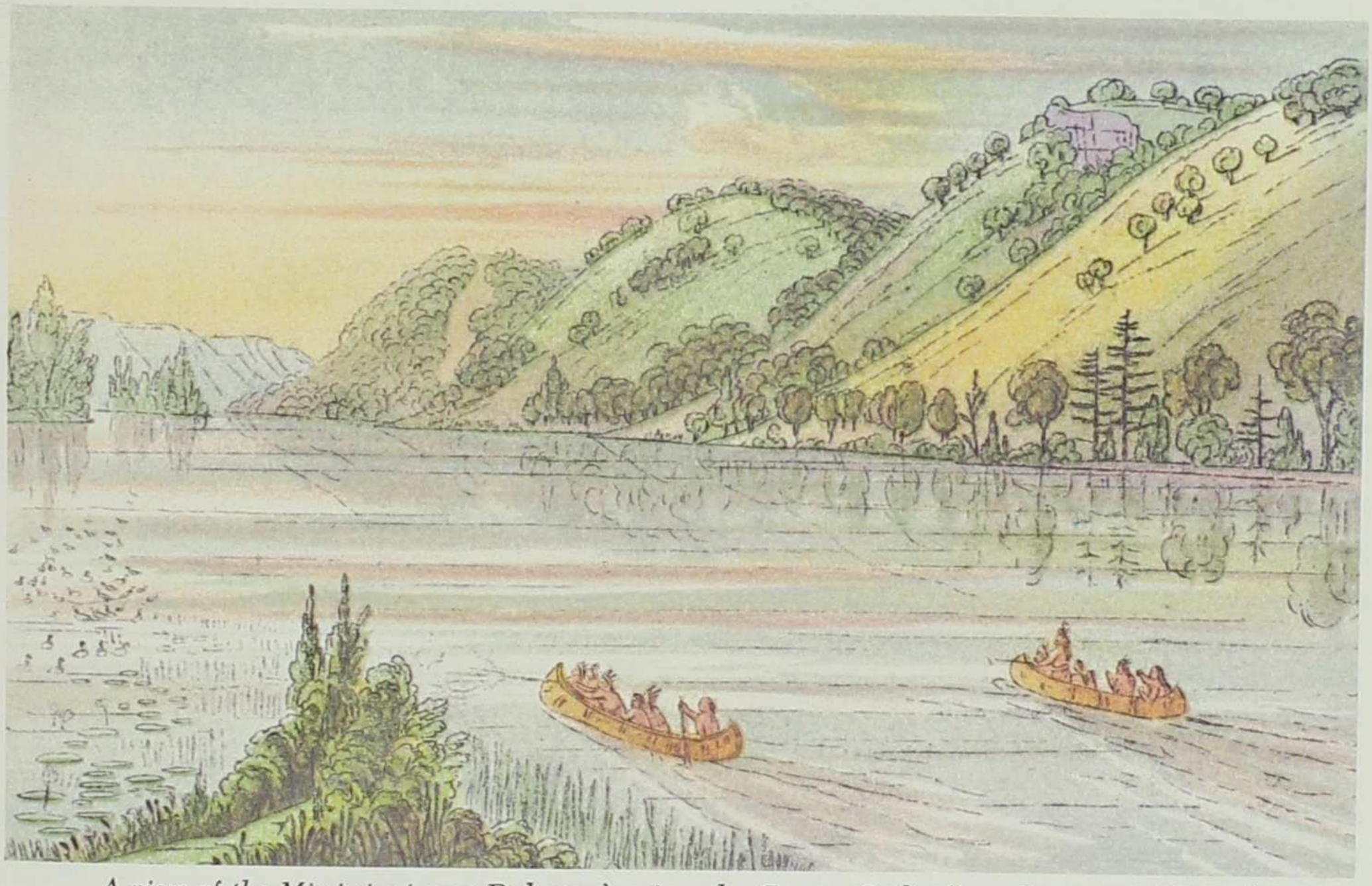
Note on Sources

Previous accounts of Julien Dubuque include the following: M. Hoffmann, *Antique Dubuque, 1673-1833* (Dubuque: The Telegraph-Herald, 1930), 63-126; Joseph Tasse, *Les Canadiens De L'Oeust* (Montreal: Imprimere Canadienne, 1878), 239-62; M. M. Ham, "The First White Man in Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* (3rd ser.), 2, 5 (April 1896), 329-344; and O. P. Shiras, "The Mines of Spain," *Annals of Iowa* (3rd ser.), 5, 5 (April 1902), 321-334.

While these efforts have added to our knowledge of Dubuque, they are to some extent vitiated by the limited information available and the lack of trustworthy records. For the most part, these earlier writers depended upon legends, oral accounts of early settlers, journals of travelers to the mines, and isolated letters from Dubuque himself.

This article benefits from more direct and reliable sources which have permitted a fresh interpretation of Julien Dubuque. Volumes 14, 16, and 17 of C. Carter (ed.), *The Territorial Papers of the United States* (Washington: United States Printing Office, 1950) contain letters by Dubuque, his associates, and government officials. Most valuable were unpublished documents from the Missouri Historical Society, in particular those from the Pierre Chouteau Jr. Collection. Of these, the inventory made of Julien Dubuque's estate by Pierre Chouteau Jr. in 1810 is the most revealing. Xerox copies of these documents are available in the Loras College library, Dubuque, Iowa.

An annotated version of this article is available in the files of the Division of the State Historical Society, Iowa City.



A view of the Mississippi near Dubuque's mines, by George Catlin (from Letters and Notes).

in the estate at the time it was settled. If our conclusion is correct, after Dubuque's death his Indian wife returned to her people, taking with her any children that might have been born of their marriage.

In March 1810, at the age of 48, Julien Dubuque died. He had been in bad health for some years. In 1808, when he declined the post of Indian agent on the grounds of ill health, he described his sickness as a lingering illness. Like so much of the life of Julien Dubuque the precise nature of his malady will never be known, but his death temporarily marked the end of white residence in the area. More than 20 years were to pass before substantial numbers of white men crossed the Mississippi to occupy the land where Julien Dubuque had lived and worked.

Such were the life and times of Julien Dubuque, a half a century before Iowa became a state. Whatever else can be said, he was an unusual and interesting personality. So often, accidents of history push to the front of the stage men and women whose personalities do not measure up to the roles they are given. They are of interest to us not for themselves but because of the circumstances which placed them in a particular place at a particular time. Julien Dubuque, aside from his early arrival in Iowa, is of interest as a remarkable person in his own right. In his quarter of a century in the upper Mississippi, Dubuque established himself as an influential and prominent person, both to Indian and white. He lived as lord of the manor in the midst of a wilderness and maintained a standard of culture quite out of keeping with the primitive world around him. Certainly not everything about him is admirable, but his achievements are unusual enough to warrant a footnote in the pages of American history. □

A Year of Struggle:

Excerpts from a Farmer's Diary, 1936

CO-EDITED BY
H. Roger Grant and L. Edward Purcell

Iowans who lived on farms during the Great Depression undoubtedly remember 1936 as one of the most difficult years of their lives. The severe economic dislocations of the Depression left many ill-prepared to face a year of brutal weather.

One Iowa farmer caught in the 1930s cycle of low prices, debt, and bad weather was Elmer G. Powers. Elmer lived on a 160 acre farm in Boone County, near the village of Beaver. He became owner of the farm (he had been a tenant since 1908) following the death of his father in 1933. The land was heavily mortgaged to an eastern insurance company, and it was only with the assistance of New Deal relief programs such as the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) and the Federal Land Bank that Elmer managed to hold on to his property.

Elmer's story was similar to many others in the Midwest. What set him apart was his passion for diary-keeping.

Every evening from 1931 until his death in 1942, Elmer drew his battered Oliver typewriter to the fading summer light or the warm winter stove and pecked out several hundred words of personal record and observance, based on shorthand notes taken during the day's work. The result of his nightly labors was a massive farm diary—more than 2,500 typewritten pages in all. Elmer began the diary at the urging of Donald Murphy, then associate editor of *Wallaces' Farmer* magazine. Small sections were published in the farm periodical, but most of the diary remained intact and unread after Murphy deposited the typescript in the Manuscript Collection of the State Historical Society in 1953. An edited version of the diary for the years 1931 to 1936 was published recently by the Iowa State University Press as *Years of Struggle: The Farm Diary of Elmer G. Powers, 1931-1936* (co-edited by H. Roger Grant and L. Edward Purcell, copyright 1976 by the Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa) and excerpts from 1936 are presented here through the courtesy of the Press.

Elmer entered 1936 with cautious optimism. The relief programs of the Roosevelt administration had provided cash income for farmers like Elmer through the AAA. Elmer, for example, received payments for cutting back his production of corn and hogs. Not only did the payments see farmers through a difficult period, but the decreased production shortened the supply of farm products, allowing the market prices to rise. Elmer anticipated that a good crop in 1936, sold at prevailing prices, would allow him a modest measure of personal recovery.

Unfortunately, the fates conspired to crush the optimistic hopes of Elmer and his fellow Iowa farmers. The first months of 1936 were the fiercest winter weather in many years. Storm after storm swept across the state, leaving huge drifts and blocked roads in their wake. For many Iowans, isolated on farmsteads and already worn down by the previous hard years, the weather proved to be an awesome foe. There was, of course, nothing unusual about snow and cold weather in Iowa, but because of the thin resources caused by the Depression, farmers were low on feed for livestock and groceries for them-

selves. In addition, many farmers had dropped telephone service because of lack of income, thus making farmsteads even more isolated. Finally, the problem of clearing roads was made more difficult by the poor quality equipment used by the county, likely a result of low tax revenues.

SUN., JAN. 19

A very cold day today. Fifteen below zero this morning. By noon this thermometer stood at zero and at chore time this evening ten above. We were indoors all day excepting when taking care of the stock. It is hard work to care for livestock and poultry when the weather is so cold.

Community activities are almost at a standstill. Our farm ladies attended church services in the village [Beaver] church this evening and reported an attendance of 26 persons.

The snowplow, working on nearby roads, today, got as far as Jim's place [a neighbor] and found the drifts too deep for it to handle. Several years ago when the snow was deep, plows were in operation day and night until the roads were clear, but this year they are not working so steadily.

While I was at home alone this evening I happened to look out of the window and saw a dark red light on the sky. I knew it would mean only one thing, a farm fire and very likely a farm house. Using the phone I learned that a farm house was being destroyed. The ladies returned from church about that time and Bill [Elmer's brother] and I drove as near the farm as we could get and walked the remaining distance. The snowplow had not been on nearby roads. The fire had started from a defective flue and the entire home destroyed. A few things were saved from the lower story, but the upper story and basement things were lost. Fortunately the wind was blowing away from the other farm buildings and they were not lost. Only a few neighbors were aware of the fire or able to get to the unfortunate farm.

The Elmer Powers farmstead as it is today. Elmer's grandson Dennis and his family still live in the modest house, built in the late 1870s by Elmer's grandfather.

Elmer, his son Daniel (D. L.), daughter Lillian, and wife Minnie. The family struck this self-conscious pose for the camera in the late 1920s (courtesy Powers Family).

SAT., JAN. 25

Just out[side] of our community a farm house was left without a mother today. There are four children, from one to 14 years of age. Three boys and one girl. The flu, the severe weather, no phone, and the bad roads were a combination that took a very much needed farm wife and mother. This is one of the saddest farm tragedies that has come to my notice.

SUN., JAN. 26

Another farm home burned yesterday forenoon. There are more than the average number of farm fires the past few weeks. I am rather inclined to blame the house fires on the women folks and farm barn fires on the men. Just a little more care and attention and these things could be avoided in many cases.

MON., FEB. 3

The bad weather continued today, in fact it became much worse. A northeast wind was blowing and the thermometer was below zero this morning. Later in the forenoon the wind shifted to the north and light snow began to fall. This snow began to fall faster and heavier and by dinner time we were having the ugliest blizzard of the season.

Living is becoming rather a problem for many farm folks. As the years have gone by more and more farm people have been depending on the stores in town for their living or a greater part of it at least. Now with blocked roads the groceries etc., soon run low. Fuel is a problem for some and feed for the stock for others. The days continue to go by without any warm, thawy

weather. Apparently there isn't to be any let up of the cold weather until spring comes.

TUES., FEB. 4

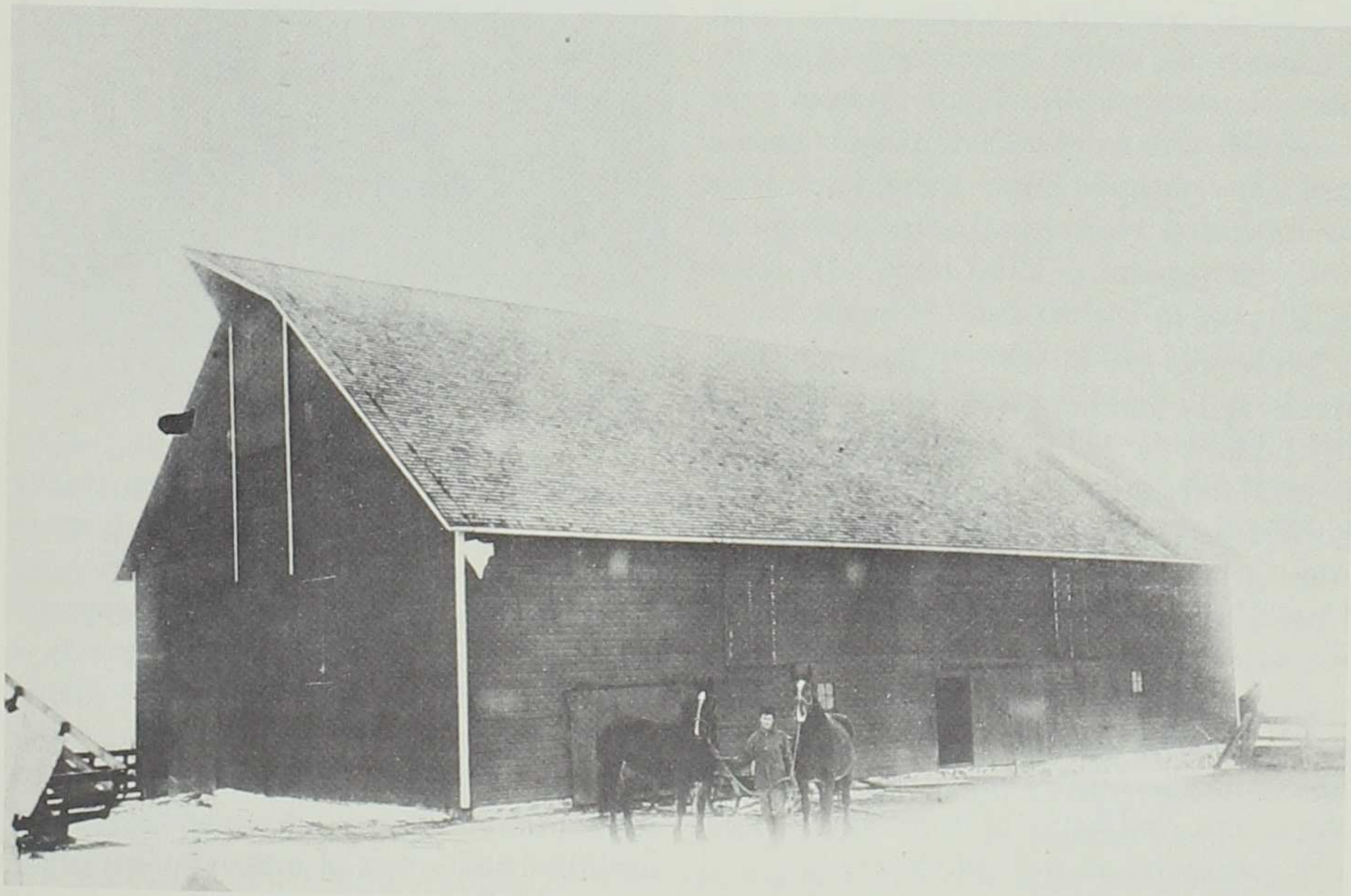
For the past several nights I have been sleeping in a reclining chair until midnight, then going to the barn to look after the stock, but last night I did not go to the barn in the night and this morning I found a new calf. As the thermometer registered 20 below I took the calf to the basement and will keep it there until we have warmer weather. Our barn is not warm enough for these new arrivals this winter.

SAT., FEB. 8

Yesterday afternoon and last evening the weather was quite good compared to what we had been having, but some time in the night last night the wind turned to the northwest and this morning we were having what turned out to be the worst blizzard of the season and one of the worst for many years. The wind blew harder, more snow fell, and the drifts piled higher and the cold was more intense than any storm that I can remember of. We thought that the storm would quiet by evening but it did not and in fact became worse, the wind blowing harder.

SUN., FEB. 9

Stormy weather all day today, and we were at home all day too. After I had finished work with the stock I spent my spare time reading and looking up weather statistics. Going back over the history of this particular farm I find there have been many unusual instances and many varia-



Elmer and a team in 1920. The large barn remains on the farm, although altered in later years. (courtesy Powers Family).

tions. I am the third generation of the same family that has been here during the past 60 years and I can recall and recollect the things my father and also my grandfather talked about in connection with the weather. Droughts, floods, unseasonable warm and unusually cold and numerous unequalities have followed one another with a regularity that we soon forget until we begin looking into the past.

With so many of the highways and the roads closed with snow each farm is almost compelled to look after itself. First of all we are all very careful about fires, then accidents, and lastly our water supply for the livestock. Our stoves, lights, and wiring are attended to very carefully because if a fire should start it would mean disaster. Then we think, move, and act with particular care to avoid accidents. We would not get to a doctor and he could not get to us, so we are careful all of the time. Lastly we watch the pump very carefully. Our well is a four-inch casing and if the pump breaks we could not draw water with a bucket and could not get to town for repairs.

MON., FEB. 10

We must get to town tomorrow. Two weeks ago something went wrong with the light plant [a wind-powered generator]. Several days later the high test gas was all gone for the lantern, then the kerosene was [nearly] all gone, and we used one kerosene lamp. The same way with the groceries. Flour, sugar, coffee, tea, soap, matches, etc., were nearly all or entirely used up and we kept eating something else from the canned meat and fruit from the cellar. And many of our neighbors are not getting on as well as we are.

TUES., FEB. 11

Cold weather again today. We drove

Elmer and Minnie on their wedding day, 1908 (courtesy Powers Family).

the car to where we quit scooping on the road last evening and began working again and by noontime we met a bunch of neighbors coming from the other way and our roads are open again. Every day I phone to the county supervisor in charge of our part of the county, about the progress the snowplows are making, and he tells of the broken and disabled machinery and the tired crews of men who are working with them.

We drove to town [Ogden] this after-

noon and returned late this evening. We drove in a round-about way to get to town. We had broken and loaned all of our scoop shovels and drove to town without any way to scoop out with. In town I found that the county had bought all of the shovels, but three had come from a wholesale house at noon and I bought one of them. At the grocery store I bought a large supply of groceries and had them charged. The first time I did not pay cash for years and years. Business is at a standstill. Crews of men and tractors working to keep [coal] mine roads open. Little dabs of coal trickle out to towns and families. No school anyplace. Doctors getting to patients in bobsleds and walking. No favorable weather in sight. Altogether one of the worst situations we have ever had. We have another new calf and I carried it to the basement right away.

WED., FEB. 12

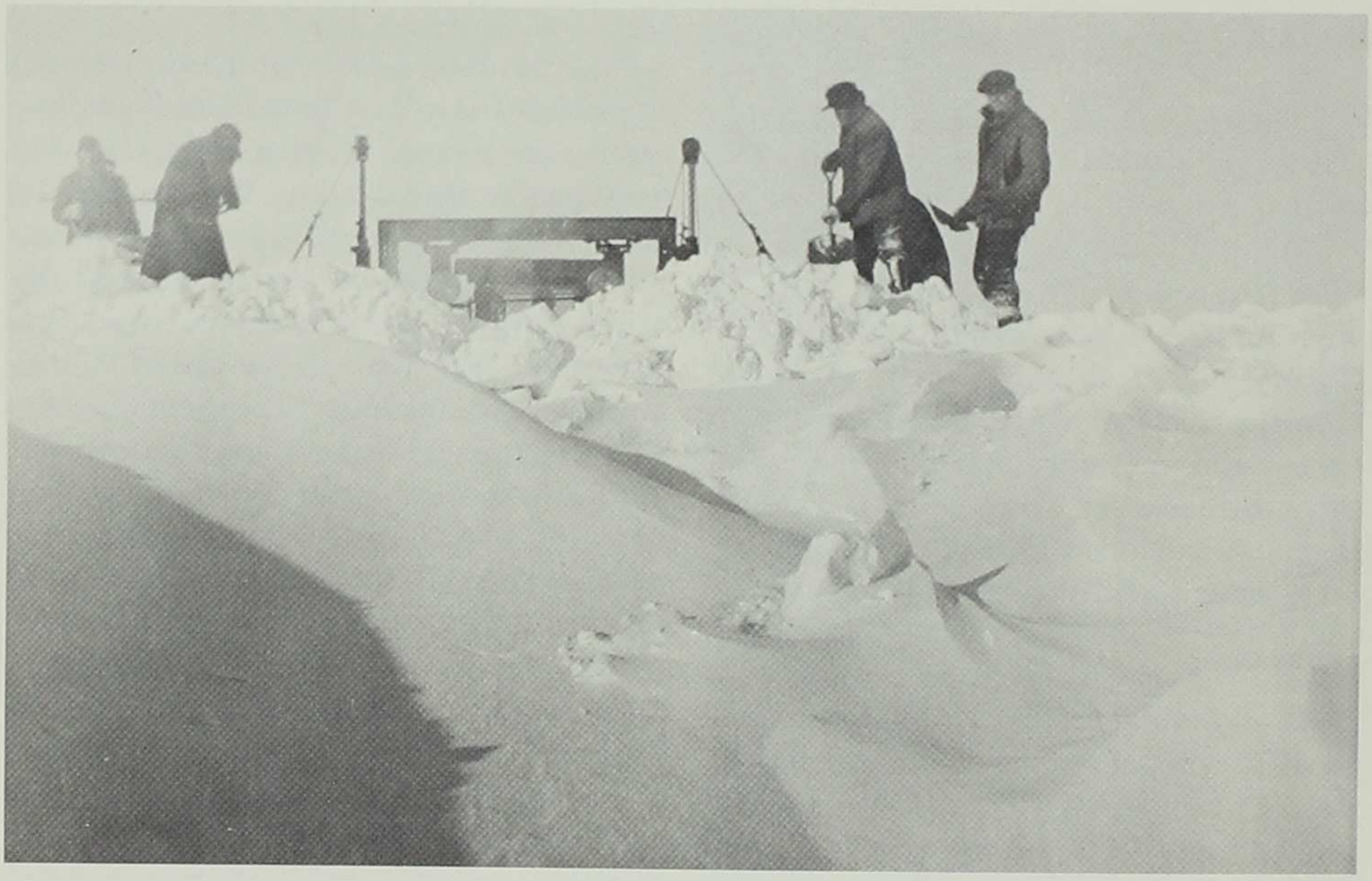
Another of those discouraging winter days that we have been having so many of this winter. There is more snow and deeper snow than our oldest residents can remember of. Everyone has been hoping and praying for days for a break in the severely cold weather and a let-up of the snow fall, but it does not come. Life is a problem of existence until spring. Groceries and food for the people and fuel to keep them warm, then feed for the livestock, which is gradually getting weaker and thinner. Many farmers who must move this spring are selling their cattle. Others who have sufficient feed but cannot get it to the stock are selling them. Our hogs have been penned in the hog barn for weeks, because they would walk on the drifts, over the fences, if they were outside.

SAT., FEB. 15

Today will be a day that many of us will remember for a long time. The snowplow came over a part of our roads today. We were on the road all day. We made every effort to keep it traveling as much as possible and all of the men on our three miles of road were out to meet the plow and shovel out the bad places ahead of the machine. We did keep it traveling steadily, only we stopped for coffee one time and for lunch another time. At one place in the road where drifts were very deep we took the machine through the fields and this brought it close to our place, where we stopped for the first time, for hot coffee. Then we continued and by noon we were at Jack's place [a neighbor] where a short stop was made for dinner. Then on again where we met 15 men who were to work with our ten, but these men seemed to rather stand and watch the machine than work to help it. We finally turned on a road where the snow was very deep and as a snow storm was coming up the outfit was turned around and taken back to town. The eight families on our three and a half miles of road consist of exactly 40 people. Our men worked like veterans and were always ahead of the machine scooping the deepest snow. They continued on past their own farms. I am of the opinion that if the men farther on the road would have been more inclined to assist, the plow crew would have continued on farther.

TUES., FEB. 25

Our road has been open for cars for several days, but there are many roads in the community still blocked with drifted snow and a new snowplow came in this morning and did a little work near us so that the school bus would have a better road, then went on to clear other roads.



Clearing a country road in front of the snowplow, winter 1936.

This new plow is a four-wheel drive truck, with a plow on it. I learned that it cost the county $6,500 and the plow is extra. The truck gives it a faster traveling speed than the crawler type of tractor, and it does very well plowing in slow speed. We had one stretch of 50 rods of snow, five feet deep, with a thick frozen crust on top of it and the outfit nosed its way through this 50 rods in 40 minutes, then galloped on to another place. The old plow we used last week is said to be wrecked beyond repair. Now the community is preparing to resume normal activities again.

THUR., FEB. 27

The wind had stopped blowing this morning and we are going about the business of working ourselves out of the results of another blizzard. The thermometer did not get down to zero this time and by midafternoon the sun came out but it did not thaw very much.

I worked around the place this forenoon and found drifts as high or higher than any we have had yet. I phoned to the highway tool shed and learned that all roads are drifted quite badly again and that it will be a long time before they can be all plowed out. The plows will attempt to get to farms where sickness and moving need first attention.

WED., MAR. 4

This evening we learned that the big snowplow had been repaired and was out of town for a short trial run, then it was headed our way. I phoned all of the farmers on our road and a few of the first of us met it. As we progressed down the road we continued to pick up men until we had 21 of them. Sometimes we rode on the back of the truck and when necessary

worked ahead of it, breaking out the heavy crust or shoveling the deeper drifts. Then when we were through and to a clear road we all loaded on and traveled at a fast speed to the next drift. Around midnight we turned the plow around and began working back nearer home, dropping off farmers as we passed their place. At one thirty o'clock we came to Jim's farm. There was only Jim, Hank, D.L. [Elmer's son] and myself and the crew of two men left and we went in to Jim's for lunch and coffee. We almost had to lift the driver down from the cab. He had been driving for more than ten hours.

THUR., MAR. 5

After lunch we left Jim's place and continued on, clearing the remaining distance on Jim's road. Then D. L. and I came home and went to bed at three o'clock this morning. Jim and Hank went home and the plow continued on alone. When I had finished the chores at eight o'clock and phoned the county shed to report our night's work, the plow wasn't in yet at that time.

We will all remember last night. Early in the evening all of the men were in good spirits and jolly. Every farm house was lighted and our progress closely watched by the farm ladies and the children. However, along toward midnight, after we had toiled through many deep drifts and the men and plow crew were very tired and the weather had turned very cold it wasn't nearly so pleasant. Many of the men did not have their heavy coats along and some of them became chilled. Several times we came very near to having a bad accident and someone seriously injured. At one place we took the plow over a long stretch of flooded roadway. The plow was one of the new modern four-wheel drive truck outfits and worked very efficiently. When we men rode in the truck box we were with a load of barrels and miscellaneous

Scooping out, winter 1936.

tools and gear, and after midnight this seemed a very uncomfortable place to ride. Working in the very deep drifts seemed better than riding in the load.

This afternoon we were all rested and many of us went to town and began to take up our community and private affairs again. I saw the first robin of the season today.

The robin was a good omen. The snows ended, and Elmer moved on to spring plowing and planting. Because of the late season, the work was hurried, and Elmer expressed uneasiness about the future. In January, the United States Supreme Court had ruled that the Agricultural Adjustment Administration was unconstitutional, so farmers like Elmer entered the new growing season uncertain about the role of the federal government in support of farming, even though Congress had passed the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act less than two months after the Court's invalidation of the AAA. The new program called for farmers to take part of their land out of production by planting grasses or legumes instead of commercial crops. The idea was to cut production and rebuild depleted soils through a long-term conservation program. Farmers were to receive cash bounties for participation in the program. In the long run, the soil conservation concept worked, probably better than had the AAA, but in the midst of the Depression, farmers were nervous about the change.

Although the spring months passed relatively smoothly for Elmer, the growing season proved to be disastrous. By the end of May, farmers in Elmer's vicinity were having trouble with heat, blowing dust, and lack of moisture in the soil. Elmer realized how important the crop would be when he wrote in early June: "Nature must be very kind to the corn crop this season if we are to have plenty of it. And a farmer has a sacred obligation to produce, if not abundantly, at least sufficiently, for the needs of his nation." Unfortunately, Nature was not kind. As June wore on, the accustomed rains failed to materialize. To make matters worse, plagues of grasshoppers invaded Iowa. The drought of 1936 was a time of trial for Elmer and his fellow Iowa farmers.

FRI., JUNE 26

Another day of drought and heat, until evening, when dark clouds gathered, but only a light rain fell. Not enough to settle the dust.

Our field work, today, was cultivating corn and I thought several times when I was in the field, that there were more chances of injuring the crop than benefiting it by cultivating at this time, if the weather should continue dry and warm.

SAT., JUNE 27

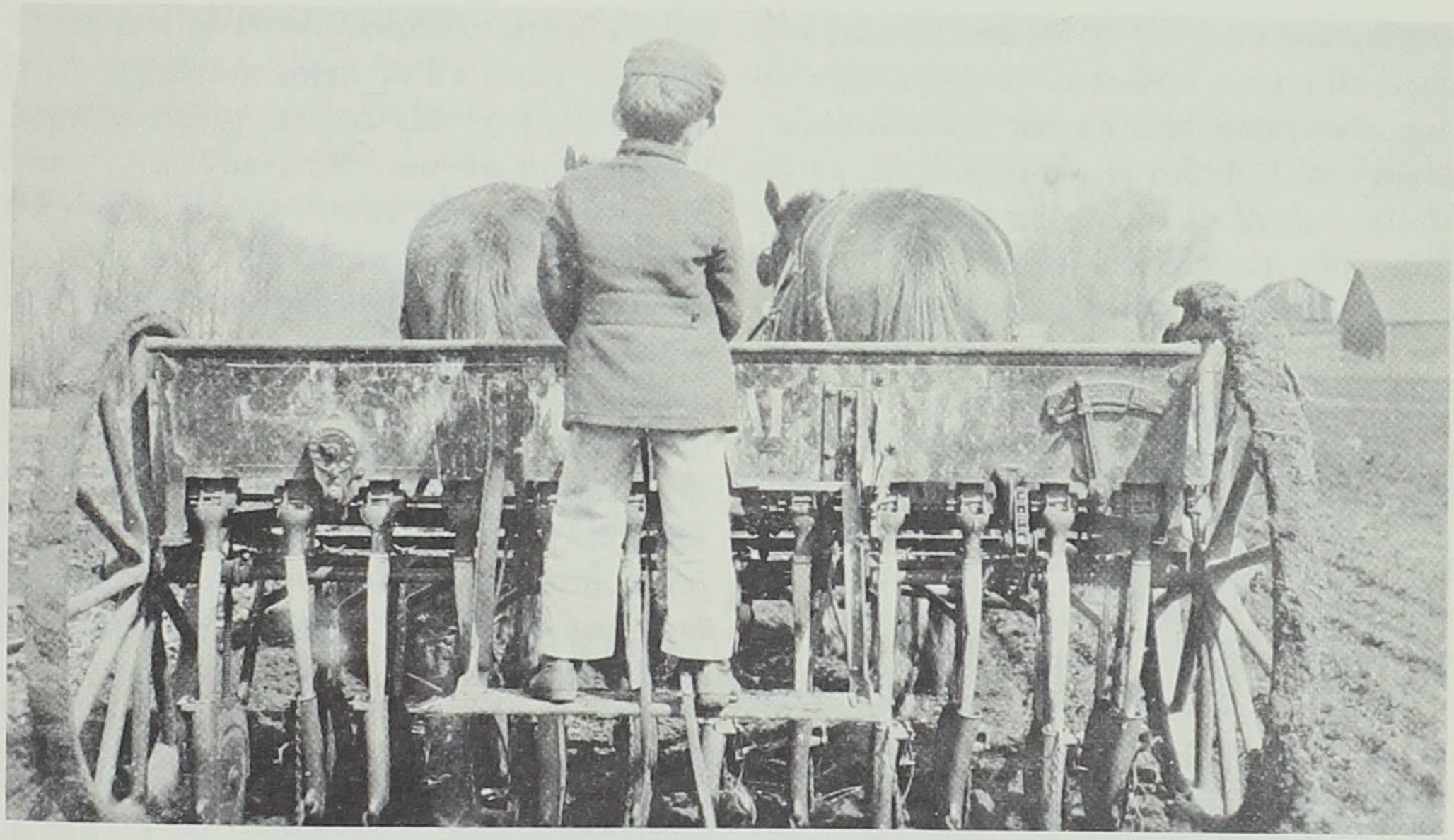
The heat in our corn fields today was very intense. The corn rolled badly. The pastures are rapidly turning a deep burned brown in color. I do not know just what effect the heat will have on the oats crop at this time.

MON., JUNE 29

At 10:30 this forenoon there were so many [grass]hoppers in the corn field that I looked at my watch to note the time of our first general invasion. I do not look for very many of them, or for much damage by them, but they are here, much thicker than I have ever seen them before. Perhaps they are passing, or were blown in[to] the community by the wind. However, if they are the advance guard of hordes to follow it will be bad.

TUES., JUNE 30

The weather was hot and dry again to-



D. L. seeding a field with a horse-drawn drill, circa 1922. Because of the financial pinch of the Depression, Elmer retained the methods of farming by horsepower well into the late 1930s (courtesy of the Powers Family).

day and all grain markets continue a little higher. Our small grain is beginning to suffer. There isn't any moisture in the soil to sustain them and the intense heat is turning the heads white rather than ripening them in the natural way. Our horses continue to work despite the heat. We water and rest them frequently and work them short days.

THUR., JULY 2

Corn cultivation was our field work again today. We work in the fields and look around the landscape. What is going to become of it? The corn plants look thrifty but we know they are not growing the foundation for a crop that they should. Sufficient moisture is not available, though there is abundant heat.

I attended the community sale again this afternoon. The usual offering of livestock came through the ring, but it went out at substantially lowered values. The heat in and around the sale barn was intense. It had a depressing effect on all. A common expression among the farmers was "Well this will finish the oats." Many farmers in that community were cutting and storing their oats crop for whatever hay it might make, believing that the heat and drought had ruined it for grain purposes. The farmers in attendance at this sale were a serious minded crowd of men. Market news was closely watched and discussed. All grains advanced again today. Small groups of men were in serious discussion as to the best way to meet the

coming situation. They are bewildered and uncertain now and will be for a day or two. But plans and leadership will come. Many are hopeful of rain in the next 36 hours and all of them did not think anything like this could happen again. The corn crop is still safe for a few days.

SUN., JULY 5

The drought and heat continues. Dry hot winds were blowing from the southwest again this afternoon. This was very bad for the corn and especially bad for the oats. It seems to me that the potato crop here must be entirely dried up.

Late this afternoon I drove the truck to my brother-in-law's place and borrowed enough iron pipe to reach from the windmill pump to our garden and will pump water on the garden all night. We do not expect to water all of the garden, but may save some of it. The vegetables that will be most useful for canning purposes.

Not a chance for rain tonight. We are studying the problem of what is best for us to do with our oats crop.

MON., JULY 6

This afternoon we began cutting [oats]. I found the grain just a little different than any I had ever handled before. Many of the straws had been cut off by grasshoppers. Also many were broken over. I do not know what threshing returns will be. The ground in the oats field is very dry and hard. The binder jolts along and is rough riding. Great cracks are in the ground. I could drop my pliers down out of sight in many of these cracks. I am pulling the binder with horses. Almost every binder in the community is in the fields today. Nearly all of them drawn by tractors. Whether oats appear green or ripe, they are being harvested anyway. Many farmers have a feeling they will be as well in the shock as standing. Also the general opinion seems to be that one would do better not to cultivate any corn now. Our wind mill pumped into the garden all day today. We are making an effort to save the garden if possible. Reports are that all grains advanced again today. Many farm fires are occurring. Both buildings and fields are burning. No rain in sight tonight.

THUR., JULY 9

The oats continue to dry up and I think I will finish the harvesting as soon as I possibly can. The earth is dry and hard and many large cracks are appearing in the stubble field. Any tools that I carry on the binder may be dropped down in these cracks. I tied a string on the handle of a 12 in. crescent wrench and lowered it down a crack. I will not mention the distance. Some things are better left unsaid, even about a drought.

A farm house burned today. From another nearby community comes the story of a 20 acre field of oats being devoured by grasshoppers during one day's time.

SUN., JULY 12

Today is the tenth consecutive day that the thermometer has registered above the 100 mark. The reading today was 105. There are newspaper and radio forecasts of approaching rain but I fail to see any indications of them. Our various weather

instruments do not indicate any rain in the near future.

I walked around the place some today and wherever I went I found the grass crackled and crushed under my feet as I walked. I can recall several times when we had a severe drought but I do not recall anything as bad as this.

Our livestock and poultry are standing the extreme heat much better than the growing crops. This present drought covers more territory than perhaps any other on record.

TUES., JULY 14

More heat again today. The 12th consecutive day above 100 degrees, reaching 108 this afternoon.

I drove into the city this afternoon and it was the most disagreeable trip I ever made as far as the heat was concerned. At every filling station I found travelers with burned faces and some of them nearly overcome with the heat.

Fires continue to be one of the great hazards of the dry weather. Today I saw a place where a fire had apparently started by the highway and burned across a pasture and several rods in a corn field before it had been extinguished. There isn't very much moisture in some of the corn plants.

Iowa corn in the 1930s, photographed by the federal Work Projects Administration.

It seems strange to think of what seems to be a green cornfield burning.

SUN., JULY 19

The greatest corn crop disaster that our country has ever experienced is upon us. It may take some little time yet for the fact to become apparent to all of the citizens to grasp the idea and some of them may miss it entirely, but all of them will know eventually that something is wrong some place.

Clouds gathered in the northwest this afternoon and a very light shower of rain fell here. Hardly enough to wash the dust from the shrinking corn. And the thing we have been worrying about happened. We knew that the corn plants were not developing normally and when the wind that accompanied the sprinkle of rain came along it blowed the corn over nearly to the ground. Perhaps the flattest I ever saw corn blown down. Many hills of corn were hardly rooted and these tipped right over, loosening the plants in the dry soil. Many stalks are broken off several inches above the ground too. The wind damage to the crop amounts to much more than the small amount of moisture benefits. Our oats shocks are blown every which way, but this is not a damage, just an inconvenience.

THUR., JULY 30

The dry, discouraging weather continues and each day seems more hopeless than the one just passed. I hitched to the mower and mowed along the fences, around the stubble fields. The few weeds and scattered grass are quite dry and dead but I thought the field would look better this way.

TUES., AUG. 4

The grain markets broke badly today. Scattered showers were reported as the reason. There is much speculation in the grain business. The producers and the consumers and their rights and interests are entirely ignored in the matter. Cash corn went down seven cents. I am still holding mine in the belief that when the crop disaster is fully known that corn will sell at around $1.25 cents per bushel. That amount will pay my notes at the bank and my Land Bank payment. Then too I am testing my corn to see if it will do for seed. In a day or two I should know about this.

I drove to town this afternoon. Quite a few farm folks were in town this afternoon. Farming is changing again. So many farms have passed into the hands of banks and insurance companies that the people living on them do not have anything to do but the actual farming of them, and because of the drought they won't have much to do but the fall plowing. Corn husking will be a short job this year.

Finally, on September 5, a two-inch rainfall broke the drought. The 1936 crop, however, was lost. Elmer's eventual corn yield was a mere 12 to 15 bushels per acre. Because of the anticipated nationwide shortage of grain, the market price for corn rose sharply during the late summer and early fall, and Elmer hoped to recover some of his losses by selling corn he had on hand from the previous year's crop. During the fall of 1935, Elmer had sealed much of his crop in cribs under the aegis of the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC), one of the New Deal "alphabet"

agencies. The CCC loaned money to farmers on grain sealed and held off the market. The original loan price was 45¢ a bushel, so the higher prices of 1936 could have meant a good profit. Elmer counted on this money to help meet his mortgage payments on the farm. During 1936, Elmer had switched his mortgage from a private insurance company to the federally subsidized Land Bank, a move which lowered his payments. Alas, as his diary narrates, Elmer's luck was bad.

TUES., SEPT. 8

When I had finished the morning work I went to the radio and listened to the opening grain market quotations. Then I drove to the village elevator and found that I could sell the corn for Saturday's price which was $1.00½ for grade No. 2, and I thought by sorting the corn some as we shelled it we could make it this grade. Crossing the street to the garage I met the sheller operator and learned that he could shell the corn this afternoon if I sold it now. And going back to the elevator I sold 1300 bushels. Last December we had sealed 1375 bushels but I thought it would shrink perhaps a hundred bushels anyway.

The sheller came after dinner and we began shelling. Our truck and the truck with the sheller hauled the corn to town. Several neighbors whom I had exchanged work with and who now owed me work shoveled the corn from the crib and during the shoveling sorted out any discolored ears of corn they happened to see.

We finished the shelling in several hours and the sheller operator and some of the neighbors thought there was around 50 bushels of corn that we had thrown out as unfit to sell and corn that might spoil the grading of it. Later in the afternoon when I drove to the elevator I learned that only 1025 bushels of shelled corn had come in. That quantity, with the 50 bushels we had thrown out made a total of 1075 bushels. Leaving a shortage of exactly 300 bushels. Certainly it had not dried out and shrunk that much.

WED., SEPT. 9

This morning I went to the elevator to settle for the corn and I was still trying to account for the shortage of 300 bushels. The elevator man said no other crib had a shrinkage like that. Thinking back to December when the corn was sealed I remembered that the folding ruler that the sealer used had one or two lengths broken off of it. I decided that he had made an error in measuring the crib. I recalled that I had left the measuring etc. all to him because I was busy figuring out a way to raise money enough to meet the old mortgage and clear up the Federal Land Bank

Note on Sources

The Elmer G. Powers Diary (1931-1942) is in the Manuscript Collection of the Division of the State Historical Society in Iowa City, along with a parallel private diary kept by Powers during the 1920s and 1930s. Additional materials in the Powers Papers include an interview with Daniel L. Powers (E. G. P.'s son) and Lillian Lenore Powers Gonder (E. G. P.'s daughter), copies of correspondence, copies of family obituaries (including E. G. P.), and a few miscellaneous farm records. The fuller published version of the Powers Diary, H. Roger Grant and L. Edward Purcell (co-ed.), *Years of Struggle: The Farm Diary of Elmer G. Powers, 1931-1936* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1976) provides annotation of the excerpted portions of the text.

The sections of the diary for 1936 published here have been selected from the original. Individual entries have been shortened and many entries deleted entirely. Punctuation and grammar have been corrected for ease of reading.

Loan. So now it was apparent that the sealer was in error that amount, and I had borrowed money on 300 bushels of corn that I never had. It made a low rate of interest anyway.

I have watched numerous sales of corn at country elevators and never liked the grading system they used. My own corn this morning was made to grade so that I was paid 97 and ½ cents for it instead of the $1.00½ I had rather expected to get for it.

Later in the forenoon I drove to the county seat and instead of paying off the corn loan, the loan I owed the bank and most of the land bank payment, I had to borrow all of the land bank [payment] and renew part of the local bank loans. The banker was very obliging and helped to plan to eventually get these things all paid.

This afternoon, here at home, I began to plan again for the things I hoped to do; to repair the buildings and get them painted and to plan for another year, for I can get through 1937 now. I wish everyone could do this well.

Following the corn harvest, the farming year began to wind down for Elmer. He noted the national election in November, but without much enthusiasm. Financial matters took most of his attention, and he began to show signs of growing anxiety about the nation. To his mind the Depression had created social divisions which he cloaked in terms of conspiracy and intentional ill-will. On November 26 he wrote: "The division between the two money classes each day becomes more and more apparent."

Despite hard times, Elmer always remained loyal to the land. He never faltered in his belief that farming was the most wholesome and worthwhile occupation on earth; however, by the mid-1930s he had become slightly cynical about nearly everything else. As he said in his diary entry for April 6, his twenty-eighth wedding anniversary: "If the weather, markets, folks we associate with etc. would be as fair to us as the soil has been we would have life very satisfactory." The year 1936 marked a psychological turning point for Elmer; his guarded optimism about the future of farming gave way to a persistent pessimism. Perhaps his struggle to hold on to the farm which had been in his family for three generations wore down his natural good spirits.

One problem which drew Elmer's ire was what he considered to be administrative bungling. He was happy to accept money from the federal government as relief, but he resented the lack of coordination between federal, state, and county agencies. By 1936 Elmer had come to depend on the cash from federal relief programs as a way to pay his mortgage and farm taxes. However, the timing of the relief checks did not coincide with the tax payment dates, and Elmer suffered embarrassment. In 1935, his farm was sold at a delinquent tax sale, and he was able to redeem it only after he got his relief check, several weeks later. In 1936, Elmer avoided sale of the farm, but only by making a special arrangement with the Boone County Treasurer. When Elmer received a federal payment of $250.70 on December 11, all but $33 went for taxes.

At last, however, the terrible year of 1936 came to an end. In his diary entry for December 20, Elmer provided a benediction: "The year that is drawing to a close is mentioned more frequently, by more folks, than any year I can remember of. The happenings of 1936 must have made a deep and lasting impression on many people and these happenings are still close in their minds." □

Work Projects Administration photo, 1930s.

COMMENTARY

Will the real Ding please stand up?

Ding's farmer.

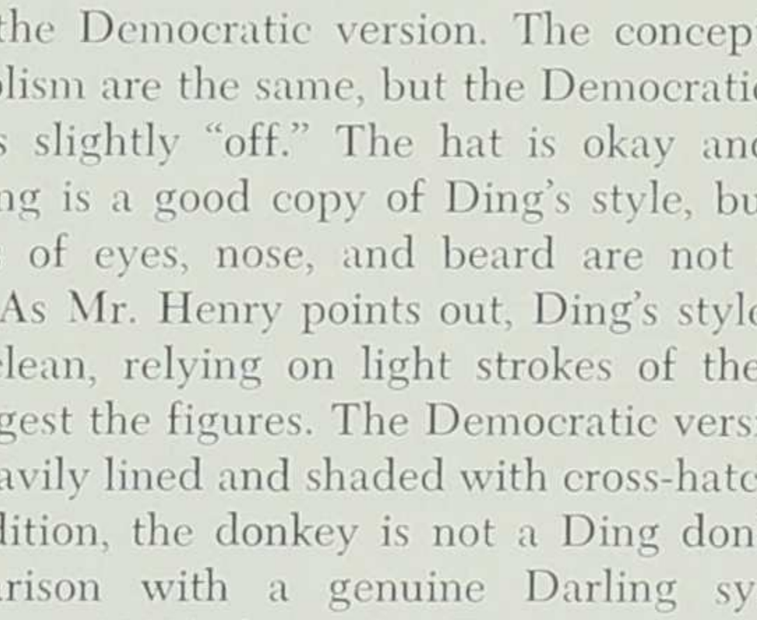
Iconography (defined by the *American Heritage Dictionary* as "pictorial illustration of a given subject") is an endlessly fascinating and sometimes imprecise form of study. Historians for generations have relied on the written and printed word for most of their insights, however some have studied visual images from the past to see what they may reveal about our forebears. *The Palimpsest*, being an illustrated magazine of popular Iowa history, often presents the raw materials of the iconographer, and we usually attempt to say something about our illustrations (for example on pages 3 and 4 of this issue).

We said something about the cover illustration of the November/December 1975 issue which proved to have been foolhardy or, at the least, incautious. While preparing his article on "Political Paraphernalia," Michael Gibson found an attractive sticker from the 1936 campaign. The image (reproduced above in black and white) was a familiar one—the well-fed farmer with bib overalls, rolled up sleeves, a floppy hat, and white-whiskered chin was one of the most powerful symbols of Iowa's great political cartoonist, J. N. "Ding" Darling. The drawing was unsigned and the sentiments did not square with what we knew of Ding's political views, but we hedged slightly in a caption that said the Democrats "used the talents of" Ding to promote their cause. This stopped a hair's breadth short of saying outright that Ding drew it, but left a pretty strong impression that such was the case. Some of our readers were not long in setting the record straight.

John Henry, now of West Branch, Iowa, a close friend and editor of Ding, let us know that he had been looking at Ding's cartoons for half a century and that our cover was not the genuine article. Other readers, including Ding's daughter, offered the same opinion. Their rea-

son for doubting the authenticity of the campaign sticker was Ding's fervent Republicanism. As anyone who has looked over his cartoons from the 1930s knows, Ding was no friend of the New Deal; in fact, he was as staunch a Republican as the party could boast. He was a friend of Herbert Hoover, for example, and had a warm personal and political relationship with the President. Even more telling was the fact that Republican leaders urged Ding himself to run for the U.S. Senate from Iowa in 1936 on the G.O.P. ticket, feeling that he would be a shoo-in on the strength of his popularity as a cartoonist (they were undoubtedly correct). Ding declined the honor, but it seems unlikely that he would have provided campaign material for the opposition.

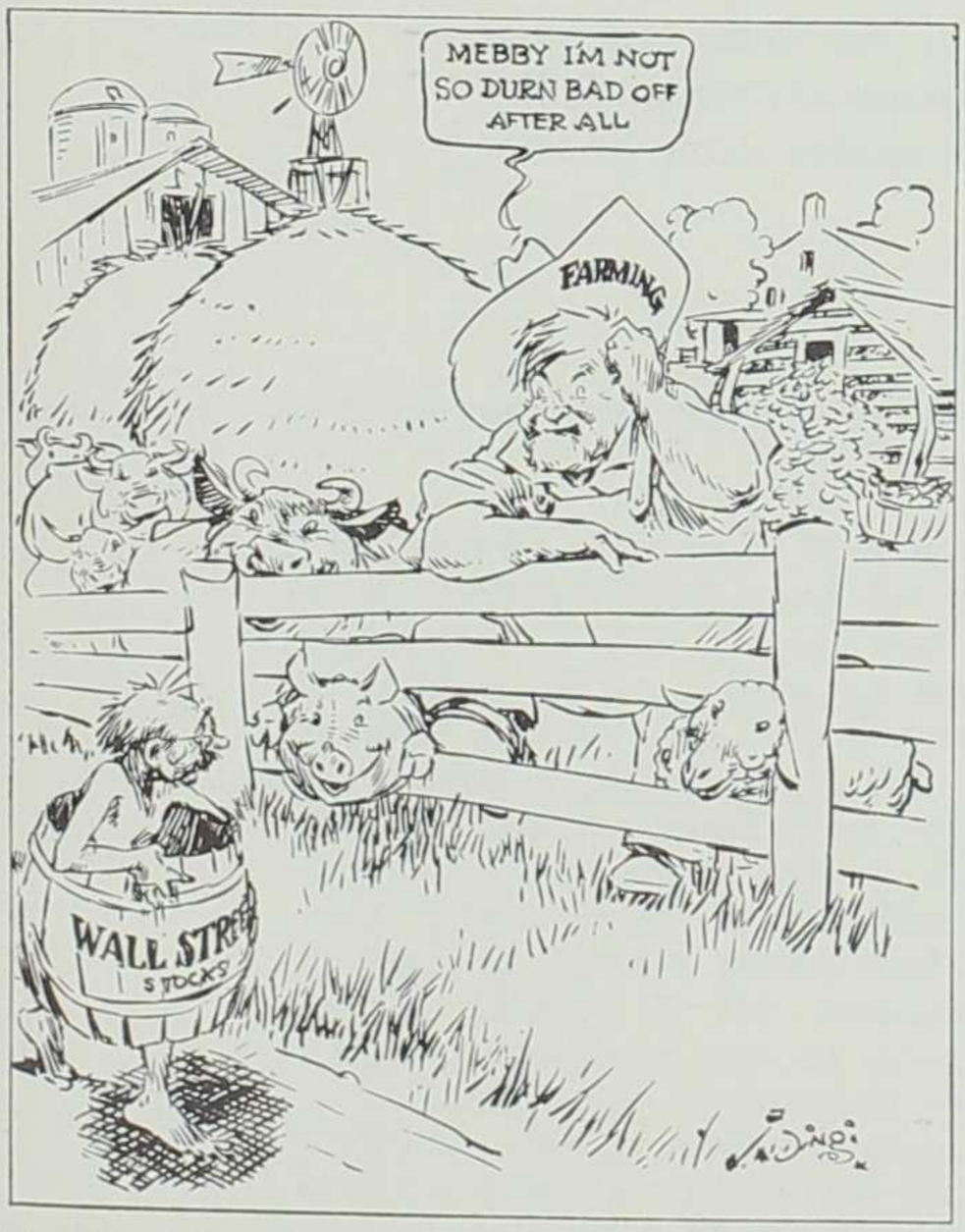
Chastened by these expert opinions, we hurried to re-study the iconography. A close comparison with verifiable Ding cartoons shows that the New Deal drawing is very much like Ding's work, but it probably is from another pen. The two genuine Ding farmers reproduced here, both drawn in the late 1920s, show subtle differences



from the Democratic version. The concept and symbolism are the same, but the Democratic version is slightly "off." The hat is okay and the lettering is a good copy of Ding's style, but the details of eyes, nose, and beard are not quite right. As Mr. Henry points out, Ding's style was very clean, relying on light strokes of the pen to suggest the figures. The Democratic version is too heavily lined and shaded with cross-hatching. In addition, the donkey is not a Ding donkey—comparison with a genuine Darling symbol (drawn in 1936) shows that Ding was less literal in his rendition of animal anatomy and much lighter with the pen. And, as Mr. Henry says, the Democratic version has too many back teeth.

Whether or not the Democratic Party really employed Ding himself, the campaign promoters recognized an extremely effective symbol when they saw it. Ding used the chubby farmer as a proto-Iowan and made him so familiar to readers of the *Des Moines Register* that no other symbol has ever quite replaced him. Our hunch is that Ding consciously or unconsciously transformed "Uncle Sam"—the traditional image of national unity—into a specific symbol for prosperous Iowa. Ding maintained that he did not model the figure on any living person, although some have claimed to have inspired him. Whatever the derivation of the symbol, it was a stroke of genius.

L. E. P.



Genuine Ding from October 1929, the day of the Great Stock Market Crash (drawings courtesy of J. N. ("Ding") Darling Foundation).

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