

Listening to the Voices

IN FASHIONING THIS ISSUE, I worked with three contributors who had been drawn to make personal connections with the past. Lauren Pille Robinson wanted to know about Riverside, a small town in Washington County, in the 1920s. "Those of us who were born after 1930 can experience the 1920s in only two ways: by reading the writing of historians, or by reviewing contemporary accounts of the times," Robinson explains. "I found another way — by talking to the people who were there." What she learned through oral history interviews was that Memorial Day was a day of commemorating soldiers and veterans. The memories of three Riverside citizens are complemented by photographs of girls in white dresses carrying bouquets up a dusty road to the cemetery. At the end of the essay, Robinson voices her own thoughts about oral history projects.

Donald E. Fish tells us about his work as a county agricultural agent during the Great Depression. Much has been written about the New Deal on a federal level, much less on a local level. Fish knew the experiences from those days were significant, in his own life as well as in the nation's. He writes, "My life has seemed as if it has flowed by in fits and starts. There were times that moved so fast that I was breathless trying to keep up with the events of the day, and again there were times that seemed to drag, and nothing really happened." For him, the New Deal years were one of the fast-moving times. "It's a shame that the people who worked with me on the Corn-Hog Program couldn't have seen this story in print. They were a great bunch."

Edward Vollertsen spent years researching his great-great-grandfather, Civil War lieutenant Philip Hayes Goode, and transcribing his Civil War diary and letters. Last year, on the 128th anniversary of the Battle of Shiloh, Vollertsen visited the site. On the eve of April 6, he wrote his own thoughts about the past: "I can see the faces of these men and boys lit only

by candlelight or kerosene lamps as they might be writing letters home or in their diaries and not knowing what lies ahead for Sunday, April 6, 1862. At 8:20 pm the rain begins and again I think of those lonely men preparing for battle and not realizing that many of them would not live to write home again. Their final night on earth." The next day Vollertsen wrote from the battlefield, "I am standing in the rain knowing this is where my great-great-grandfather and many brave men from both North and South were wounded or died. What am I feeling? I'm not quite sure, but I've never felt like this before."

Finally, we listen to a blend of voices in "Clothe Yourself in Fine Apparel: Mesquakie Costume in Word, Image, and Artifact." In the Summer 1991 *Annals of Iowa*, art historian Ruth B. Phillips writes extensively on the meaning of Mesquakie costume. This companion piece in the *Palimpsest*, inspired by her work, adds a visual dimension to Phillips's research and features voices of Native Americans and those European-Americans who had early encounters with them.

Each of these articles, then, presents a primary source, a first-hand account of Iowa history. One value of primary sources is that they offer texture to a historical event. They breathe life into it. They people it with individuals who disclose dreams and fears. Artifacts and photographs and artwork help us envision the environment in which these individuals lived. The words, especially when they are those of the participants or observers of the actual event, provide the voices, the dialogue.

I offer here my continual thanks to all *Palimpsest* contributors who are curious about the past, who research and record that past, and who then share their findings on these pages, helping others connect with that past. In this issue in particular, I invite you to listen to the voices of an earlier Iowa.

— The Editor