

Fred Kent Photographs Iowa • 1960s School Lunch Program • Cooking for Students

The
PALIMPSEST

Volume 75, Number 3

IOWA'S POPULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE

Fall 1994 \$4.50



Inside—

KENT COLLECTION, SHSI (IOWA CITY)



Scores of University of Iowa students and faculty remember Fred W. Kent, carrying his camera and tripod everywhere so he could record campus scenes and activities. But Kent photographed much more than the university, as you'll see in the article beginning on page 102.



The Meaning of the Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest (*PAL'imp/est*) 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.

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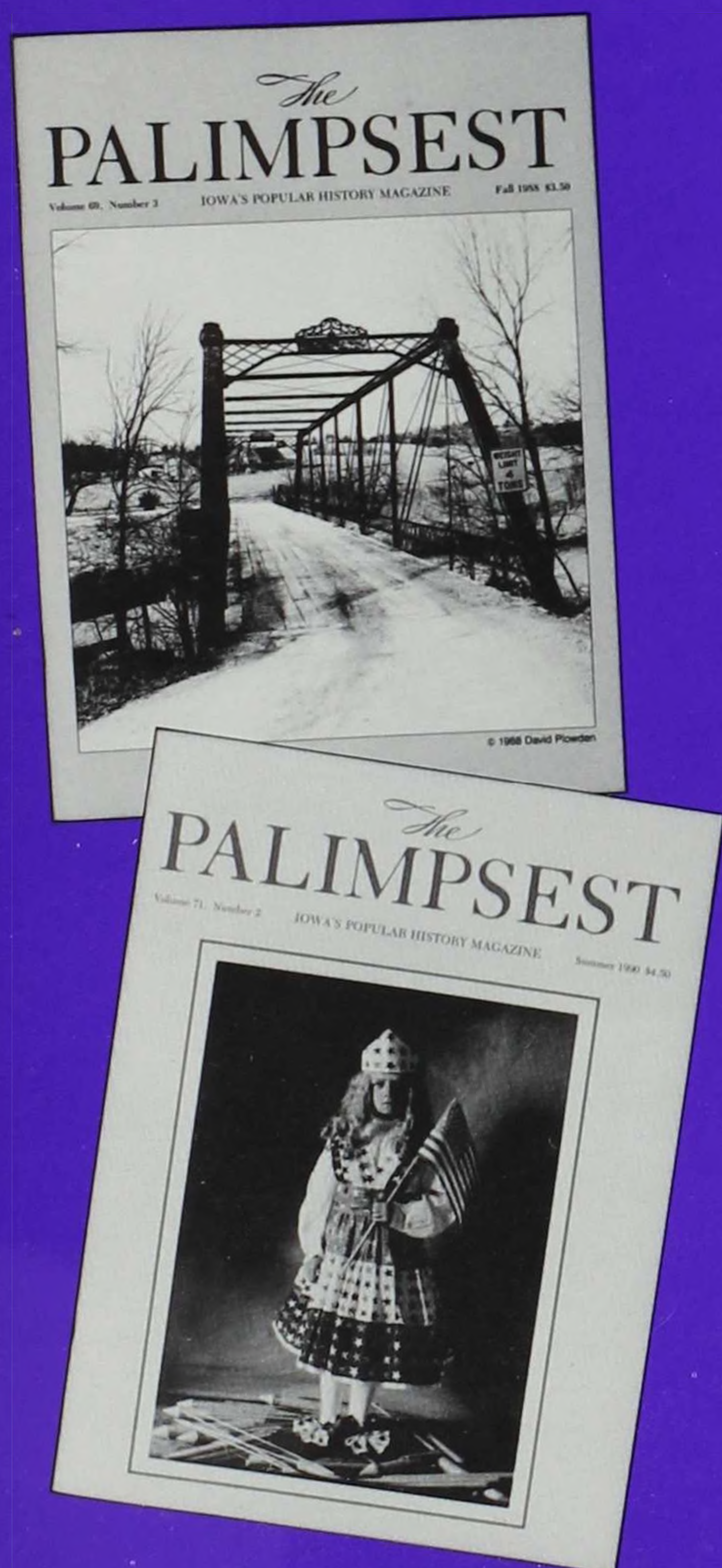
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The Palimpsest.

The PALIMPSEST

POPULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE

Shelie Swaim, Editor

NUMBER 3

FALL 1994

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The Meaning of

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The history of Iowa is a palimpsest which holds the records of the past. We must decipher these records and tell the stories which they tell of the people who write history.

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Ready for lunch 138

COVER: From left, Clara Hartman and Fred Kent enjoy cool waters of an Iowa cascade with two friends. Thousands of Kent photos have been donated to the State Historical Society of Iowa, and we're pleased to showcase some favorites in this issue.

The PALIMPSEST

IOWA'S POPULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE

Ginalie Swaim, Editor

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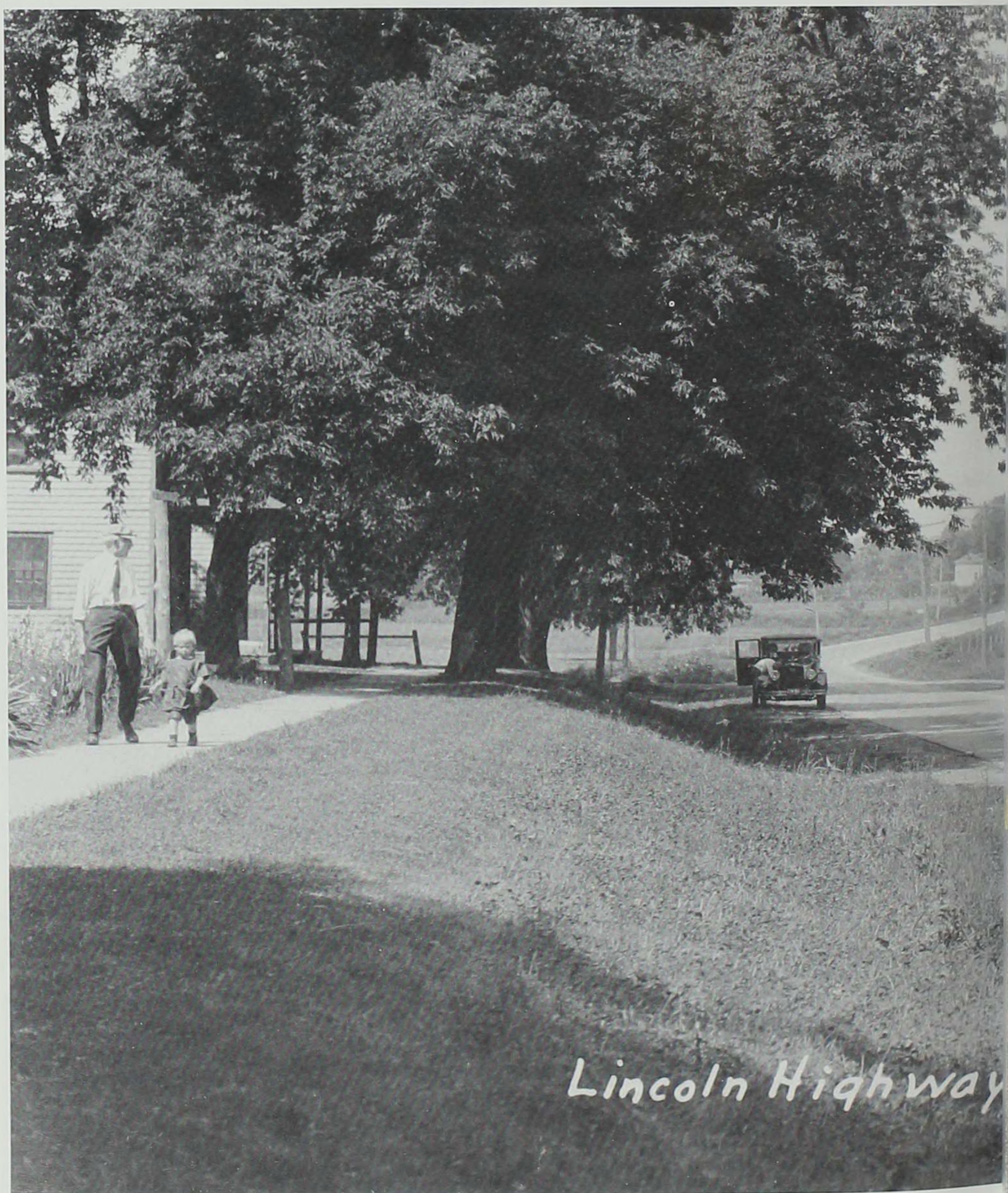
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Kent's photographs are valuable documents of life at the beginning of the modern era, for he portrays every aspect of family and community life in transition. Here, a man and child stroll along the Lincoln Highway in Kent's hometown of DeWitt in Clinton County, about 1915.



The Man Behind the Camera

Fred W. Kent

by Mary Bennett

IOWANS have just inherited a magnificent collection of historical imagery and documents, donated by the family of Fred W. Kent to the State Historical Society of Iowa. Kent took thousands of photographs at many locations around Iowa, especially Johnson County. His images are impeccable because he was perceptive and inventive enough to know exactly what he wanted to capture on film and precisely which technique he needed to achieve the shot. Whether framing a simple family portrait or rigging a fantastic vantage point for an evening landscape, Kent knew instinctively the critical moment to click the shutter.

Kent's story mirrors the development of twentieth-century photography in America. Throughout his seventy-five-year career, he mastered the latest equipment and pushed the boundaries on available film and processing materials. His investigation of stereographic and microscopic photography and his experimentation with color placed him in the vanguard of photographic innovators. Almost like magic, his images allow us to see things that our eyes could never see on their own.

Kent's love affair with photography began in 1908 when he was fourteen years old and saw a camera owned by a clerk in his father's drugstore in DeWitt, Iowa. He purchased his own Brownie box camera and soon replaced

De Witt, Iowa.

The Man Behind the Camera

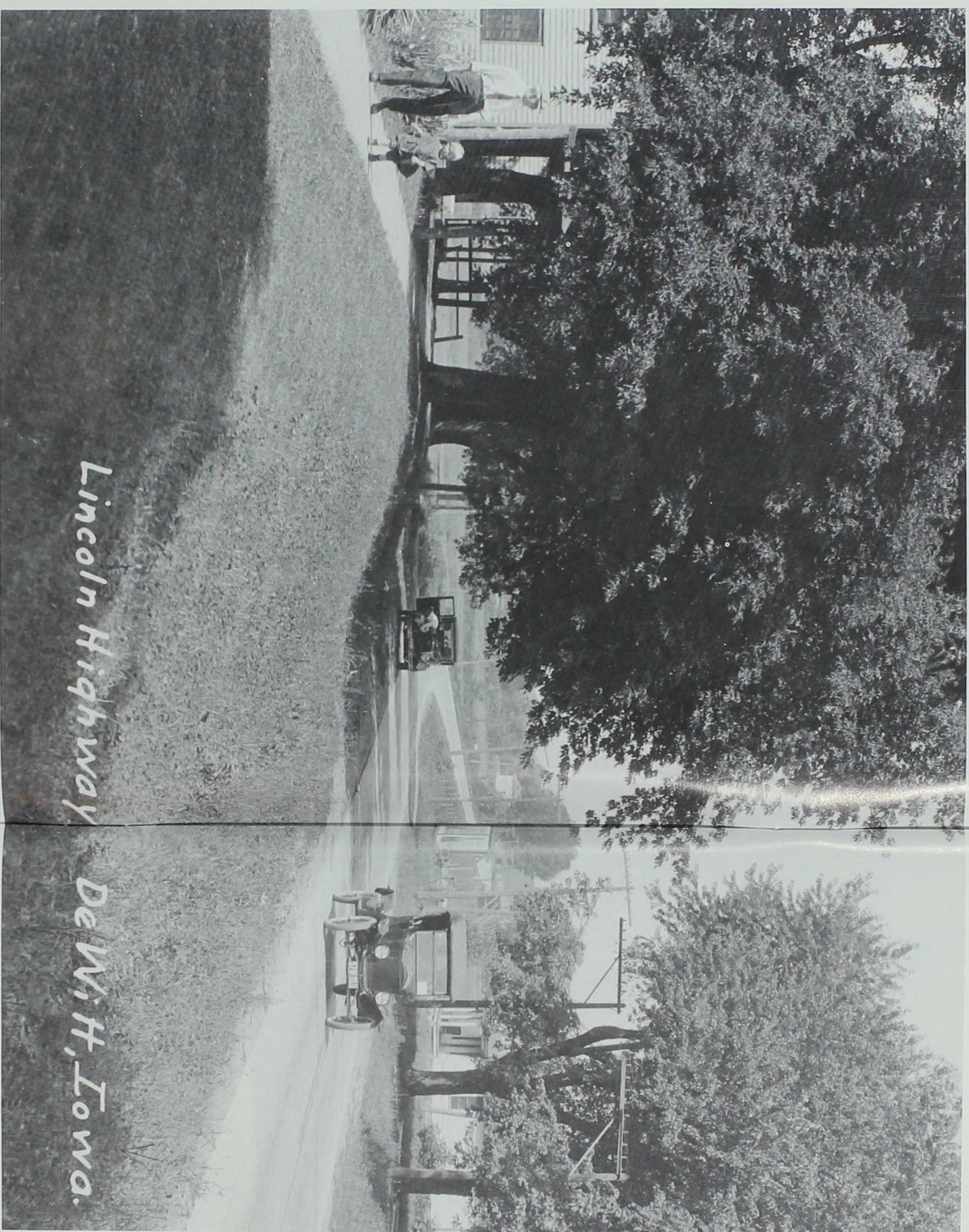
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Kent's photographs are valuable documents of life at the beginning of the modern era, for he portrays every aspect of family and community life in transition. Here, a man and child stroll along the Lincoln Highway in Kent's hometown of DeWitt in Clinton County, about 1915.



By rigging up an undetected shutter release with a long cable, Kent (left) was able to pose with his friends while eating watermelon during a September 1915 canoe trip to Hills. After his marriage in June 1917 to Clara Hartman (the taller woman), the Kents went on a double honeymoon with the other two pictured here, their best friends Al and Muriel (Eggenberg) Bailey. The couples traveled by canoe from Iowa City to Burlington.

it with a larger camera. "I fixed a darkroom in the drug store, another one in the basement at home, and another one upstairs," Kent recalled in a 1979 interview. "I kept enlarging it all the time." While in high school, he apprenticed to a local photographer and "made up postcards of the local towns to sell as souvenirs."

In the fall of 1911, Fred Kent traveled by rail to Iowa City to enroll at the University of

Iowa. He brought along a big locker of clothes, an old 5 x 7 camera, a tripod, and \$160. "I had to make a go of it," he remembered. "So I started taking pictures." In the boarding house where he rented a room, he rigged up a sink for developing pictures.

Kent soon found other quarters. "There was a chap, a photographer, who worked his way through school taking photographs—he was a senior—he had a job at the old Townsend

Studio on Clinton Street," he recalled. "Before he left, he traded me out of my good camera for another one which was a piece of junk, but I got the job there where he was in the studio. I got a room there taking care of the place, firing the furnace, cleaning and sweeping. Down in the basement, there was a temporary darkroom. Very primitive, but it worked and I used it, and was there until I was, maybe, a senior."

Kent's enterprising spirit led him to take pictures of campus life and, in particular, of football games. In 1912, the university athletic director designated the hard-working sophomore as the official photographer for all athletic events. Kent's college years were profitable during the summers as well; he journeyed to Iowa's Great Lakes, where he set up a "pantatorium" for cleaning and pressing tourists' clothes, and shot and sold photographs. (See the Summer 1987 *Palimpsest* for Debby J. Zieglofsky's photo essay about Kent at Lake Okoboji.)

After graduation in 1915, Kent became the official photographer for all University of Iowa events. An office and photo lab were provided in MacLean Hall. "I made all my money by the job; I wasn't salaried, and I didn't have a boss." Always "on call," he was a fixture on campus throughout the 1920s, lugging his camera equipment around on a bicycle.

Although often celebrated for his work as a local historian documenting Iowa City and the University of Iowa, Kent deserves serious consideration as one of a handful of "fine art" photographers, carving out a niche in Iowa's photographic history. He used his technical and artistic skills to make valuable contributions to researchers in medicine, engineering, biology, and ornithology.

In post-World War II America, Kent served as a catalyst in merging photography and science. His articles illustrated the technical aspects of color photography and his methods of obtaining correct lighting. An expert problem solver, Kent was skilled with all types of lighting, including regular, electronic, and flash; he had come a long way from the early days of using explosive flash powder in the Townsend portrait studio. Researchers were grateful for his photomicrographs, which

offered accurate and precise renderings of specimen slides of tissue or microorganisms. In his other medical photography, his rapport with patients and his ability to work quickly and efficiently endeared him to the doctors for whom he worked. Ignacio Ponseti, professor emeritus in the Department of Orthopaedics at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics, recalls, "When he came to the hospital to take a picture of a patient there was never a flaw. He knew exactly what you wanted. He was an acting biologist, really, as far as we were concerned, because he was interested in the disease, the disorder. He was a great technician, of course, but he transcended it. He was an artist."

Because of Kent's technical superiority, Eastman Kodak would send samples of color film so he could test quality and potential applications. In 1947, Kodak commissioned him to create a manual on how photography could be used as a teaching aid in medicine. Researchers at medical schools all over the country wanted to follow Kent's lead and asked him for advice on cameras and film. Other doctors wrote to comment on his "beautiful work in the medical journals." After his *Medical Radiology and Photography* book appeared in 1947, an assistant manager of a Kodak store in Chicago wrote to Kent in Iowa City: "I knew that you were doing this kind of work there but I had no idea how extensive your operations were."

Shortly thereafter, the University of Iowa responded to his national reputation by financing more sophisticated equipment and putting Kent on salary for the first time. "I have recently become institutionalized and become an official department of the University," Kent wrote, "and perhaps with a rigid cost accounting and more careful planning, I can arrive at the real cost of this kind of work." Nevertheless, Kent was more interested in achieving the desired photographic effect than in worrying about the costs involved. Although he was asked to surrender his spacious quarters in MacLean Hall, the university renovated another building for University Photo Service. There Kent worked alongside his brother Gordon for many years, and his son Jim now joined the staff as a photographer. Jim Kent



Above: Enthusiasts for outdoor recreation, Kent and his siblings marked off a tennis court on the front lawn of their home in DeWitt. Kent photographed this scene on a glass plate negative.

assumed his father's duties as head of Photo Service when Fred retired from the university in 1962.

In retirement, Kent remained dedicated to photography and history, and he continued to document Iowa with his camera. In 1978, a journalist asked Kent to estimate the number of pictures he had taken. Kent shook his head and replied, "I have absolutely no idea; not even a 'ball park' figure. The number is not important. It's the subject matter that counts."

Certainly the subject matter—and the quality—of Kent's photography is what makes it useful and fascinating to researchers and the public. Yet, equally impressive is the sheer size of this collection, donated by the Kent family to

the State Historical Society. For instance, Kent's legacy begins with twenty thick photo albums that record family history (the first album alone contains over two thousand photos). There are ten travel albums, including one of an exquisitely documented trip to visit Navaho Indians in New Mexico in 1923. The collection also includes hundreds of glass plate negatives from his youth in DeWitt and thousands of negatives from the rest of his career. About two hundred stereographs of family life and nature scenes date from 1920 to 1935. The meticulous labeling of photos and negative sleeves will benefit researchers, as will the ten audio recordings and one videotape of Kent. The collection is richly supplemented with correspondence and

writings, a few boyhood diaries, and a sizable collection of Kent's own cameras. (See "Description of Collection," page 131.)

Friends and family alike remember Kent's inquisitive mind and engaging personality. Besides photography and ornithology, he tinkered with wireless radio, stamp collecting, and gardening. But it appears family life was paramount. In fact, Iowans' favorite and most informative Kent photos will probably be found in the family albums, where he captures the spirit of midwestern life.

His delight in shooting farm and rural scenes was not limited to Johnson County; he was attracted to the Mississippi, Turkey, and Volga rivers as well as to Lake Okoboji. He created incomparable images of Iowa sunsets, trees, wildflowers, barns, winter scenes, clouds, shadows, moonlight, and fog. A lifetime of ramblings in the countryside and his many canoe trips fueled a passion for preservation and study of the natural environment. Kent "knew Johnson County inch by inch," Ponseti recalls. For more than twenty-five years, he maintained a thorough, methodical record of the birds he observed on nearly 3,500 bird-watching trips. He shared his interest in birds with his son Tom, and together they compiled the notes and bird photos into *Birding in*

Eastern Iowa, published in 1975. When Johnson County's conservation board solicited Kent's advice in locating a suitable tract of land to be developed into a park, he did not realize that 980 acres of rolling timber would be named "Kent Park" in honor of his work in resource preservation. In 1984, when Kent was ninety, he was recognized by the Iowa City Historic Preservation Commission for his work in preserving local history. He died that year.

Kent's success depended on his innate storytelling ability and his affinity for people. "I never had any formal training," he recalled. "I just started taking pictures and never stopped." In many respects, he was photographing ordinary subjects on routine assignments, but his images transcend the ordinary. He knew a photo could tell a story, provoke a debate, convey an emotion, or tickle one's fancy. His talent for composition, attention to detail, and total control of the camera and film were matched with an incisive mind and a clear sense of history. Like a great musician, Kent had years of practice with his "instruments" and could execute the most complicated task with the greatest of technical ease and artistic sensibility. As you'll see on the following pages, his photographs have universal appeal while helping recreate the past for today's viewers.

Kent's warmth and his talent for conveying personalities are revealed in this lovely portrait of Muriel Eggenberg and Clara Hartman in May 1915.





Above: Kent sold souvenir postcards of his hometown under the imprint "Kent & Co." Uninhibited by social conventions, he even ventured into a local DeWitt pool hall to show us the pastimes of young men in 1910.

Opposite: Kent honed his skills at nature photography as a young man exploring the woods near his native DeWitt.





Opposite: Among Kent's favorite photos is this charming shot of his future wife, Clara Hartman of Davenport, in July 1912. Kent was especially adept at capturing the rapid movement of the waterfall as Clara stood in the spill of Crystal Lake near DeWitt.

Right: The arrival of the first grandchild in the family was a special event. Shortly after her January 1916 birth, Jean Kent Warner (Kent's niece) lies nestled next to her mother, Maud.

Below: Lighting would always intrigue Kent. He photographed this campfire when he was sixteen, two years after he had purchased his first camera. An avid naturalist and canoeist, Kent photographed countless hours outdoors. Scenes of picnics, canoe trips, river valleys, and forests fill several photo albums.





Donald Kent, Fred's younger brother, cools off in tub. Kent probably shot this photograph while home from college. Nearly a decade later he would photograph Donald and the rest of the Kent family in a more formal arrangement (opposite).



Christmas 1918 brought the Kents together for a family portrait. Back row, from left: Fred, Gordon, Donald, and their brother-in-law, Ward Warner. Middle row: Fred's wife, Clara Hartman Kent (pregnant with their first child), his parents, Charles F. Kent and Elizabeth Kent (holding her grandson, John Warner), and Maud Kent Warner. Front: Marjorie, Jean Warner, and Helen.





After Fred and Clara Kent set up housekeeping in Iowa City, Fred continued to document the ordinary, providing us glimpses of their everyday life. Opposite: Their kitchen, October 1917, reveals the informal, "behind-the-scenes" details of domestic life that seldom appear in photographs. Notice, for instance, that the sink has both a hand pump (on right end) and a faucet and plumbing pipes, on left. Above: When his children Barbara and Jim came down with measles in December 1924, Kent rigged up headphones to the wireless radio to entertain them during their illness.



Top: Kent captured classic interactions like this playful moment between Grandfather Hartman and his grandson Charles, and then printed them on stereograph cards, which added dimension to the image when viewed through a stereoscope. Bottom: Fresh innocence of childhood is preserved in this stereo portrait of Kent's daughter, Barbara, close to her sixth birthday in September 1926.



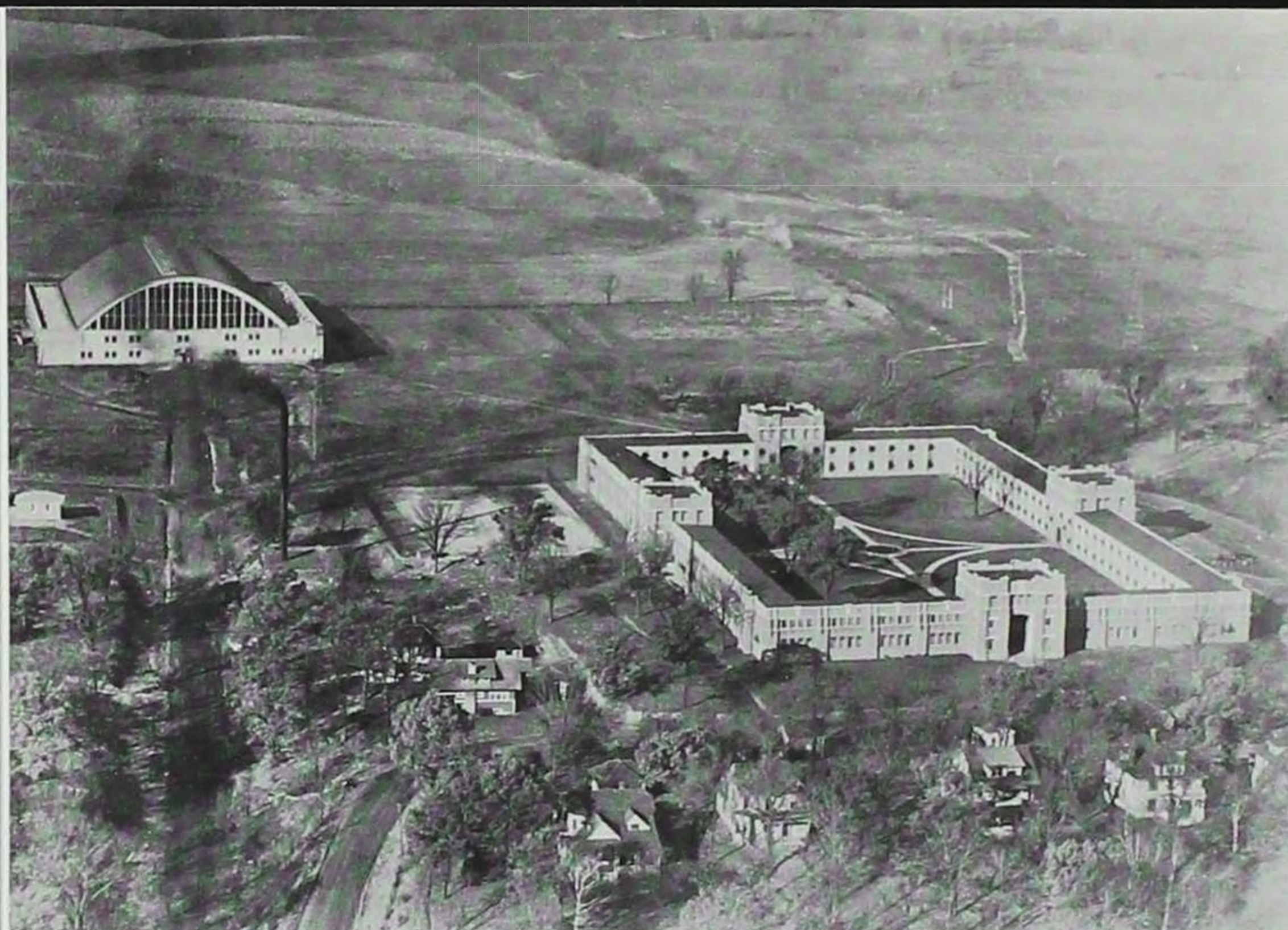
Shooting in the filtered light of the University of Iowa greenhouse, Kent captures the curiosity of his son's classmates. Jim Kent was a kindergartner at the university's Experimental School in 1925.



Running fast enough to blur on the photograph, two children chase around a circle of playmates at Jim Kent's school in 1925. The children's movement is even more apparent when the image is viewed in the original stereograph format in which Fred Kent shot it.



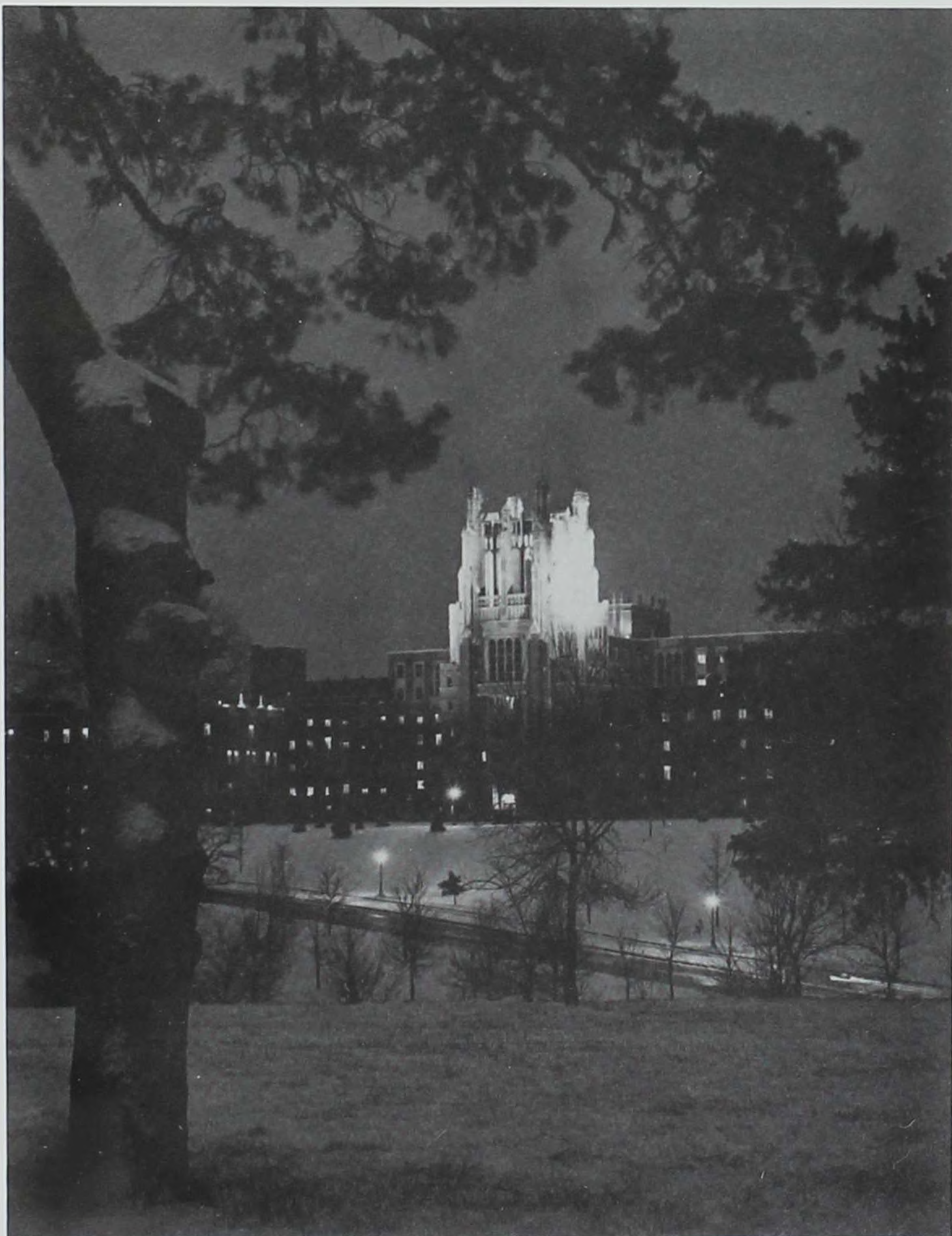
By March 16, 1924, an early spring thaw had melted all but the heaviest snow in the bottom of this Johnson County ravine. The perfect perspective of this shot creates the illusion of depth when viewed through a stereoscope.



Left: Witness to the expanding University of Iowa campus, Kent chronicled each new building, beginning with the first buildings west of the river—Quadrangle dormitory in 1920 and the Armory in 1921. Kent gained aerial photography skills during his stint at the USA School of Aerial Photography in Rochester, New York, during World War I.

Below: Enthralled Hawkeye fans watch a University of Iowa football game against Denver, October 29, 1927.

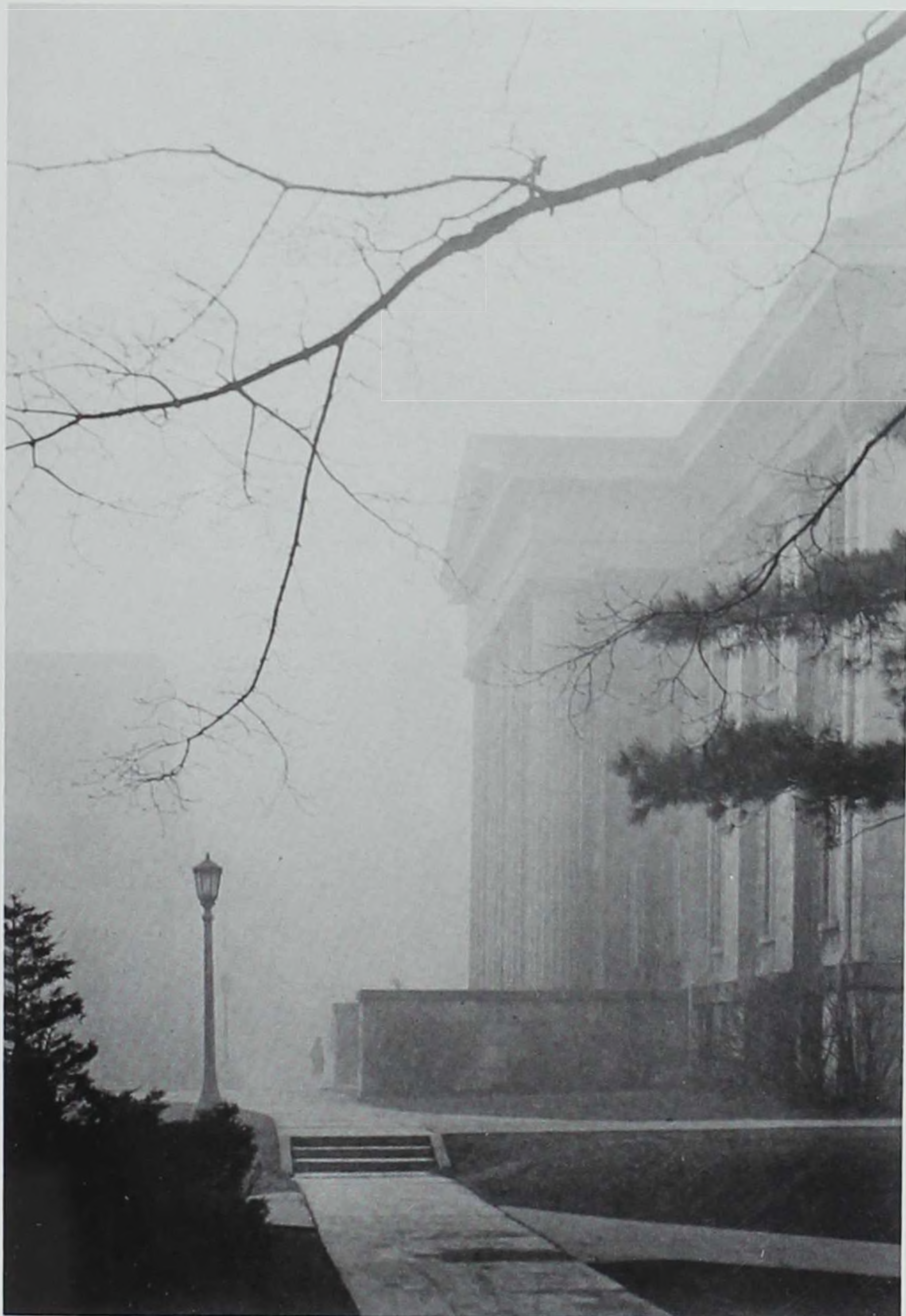




The Gothic tower of the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics has been a local landmark since its construction in 1928. Kent stayed up half of one wintry night to achieve this artistic time exposure.

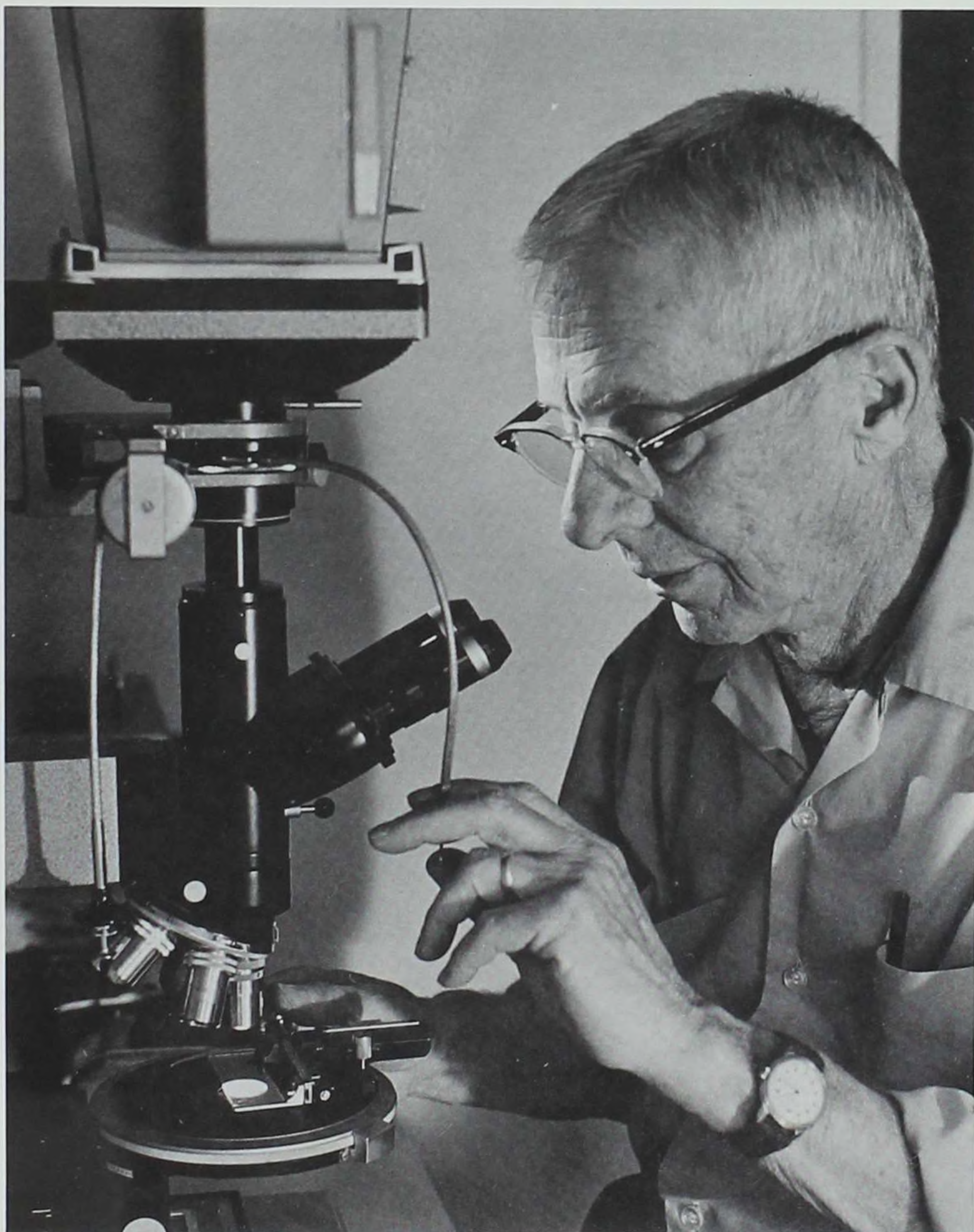


Well-worn face of a University of Iowa janitor smiles at us in this photograph, revealing the power of Kent and his camera to seize upon the familiar and convey its special meaning.

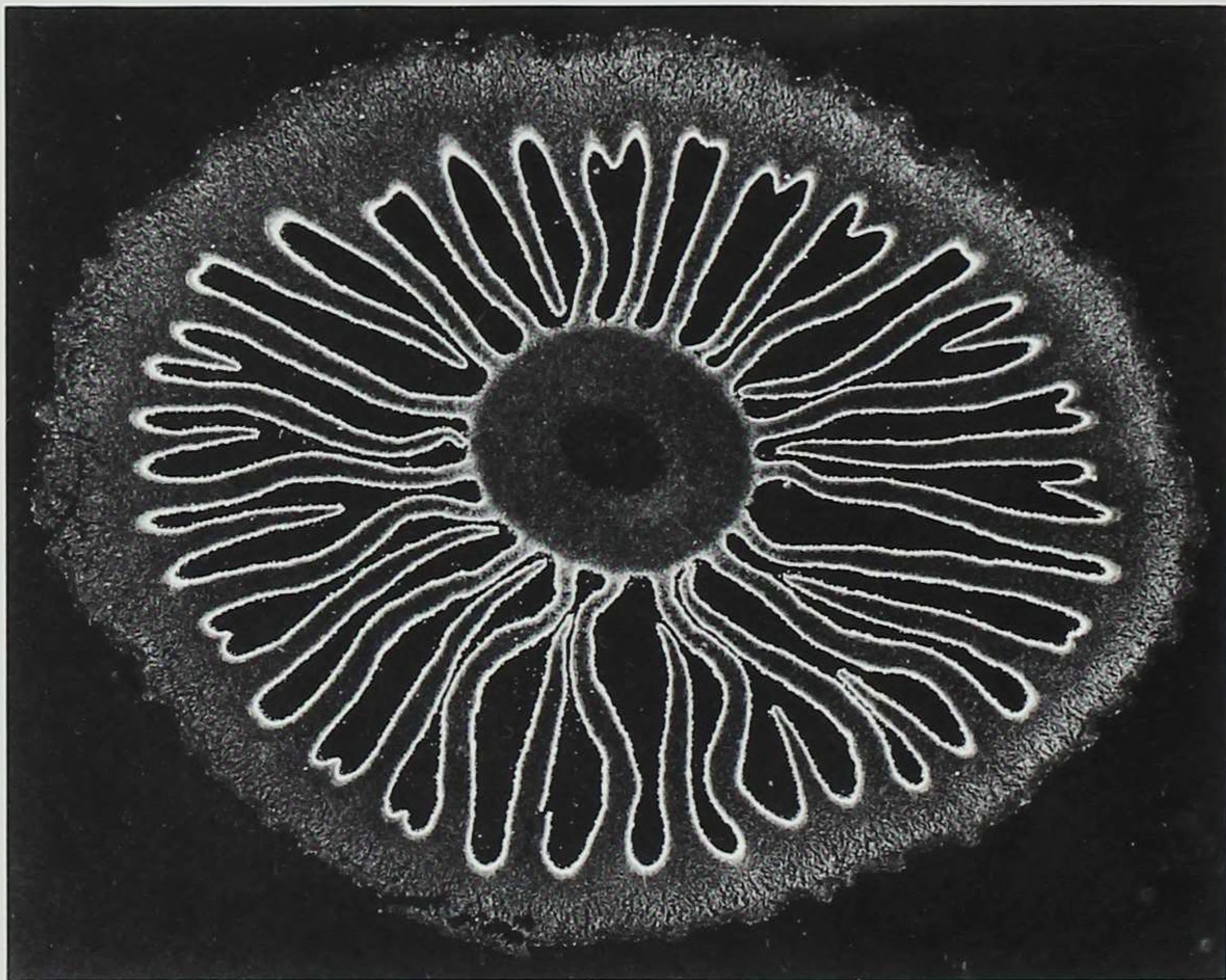


Kent artfully captured the dreamy atmosphere of Old Capitol cloaked in mist.





Photomicrography was a specialty for Fred Kent (above). He delighted in fooling viewers, who had difficulty identifying the source of an image—for instance, a mosquito antenna (opposite). Photographed under the microscope, it opens our mind's eye to the power and mystery of nature. In the 1940s, Kent entered some of his photomicrographs in a national art exhibit, "Art in Science," which eventually traveled around the country under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution.



Above: "Plant Stem #3," also entered in the "Art in Science" exhibit, reveals the uneven growth pattern of the stem. Responding to Kent's expertise in medical and scientific photography, a colleague wrote: "The suggestions you have given us should eliminate a lot of experimenting and save us a great deal of time."

Opposite: Photomicrograph of a leaf vein allows our eyes to re-examine the obvious and study more closely the intricate patterns found in an ordinary leaf.

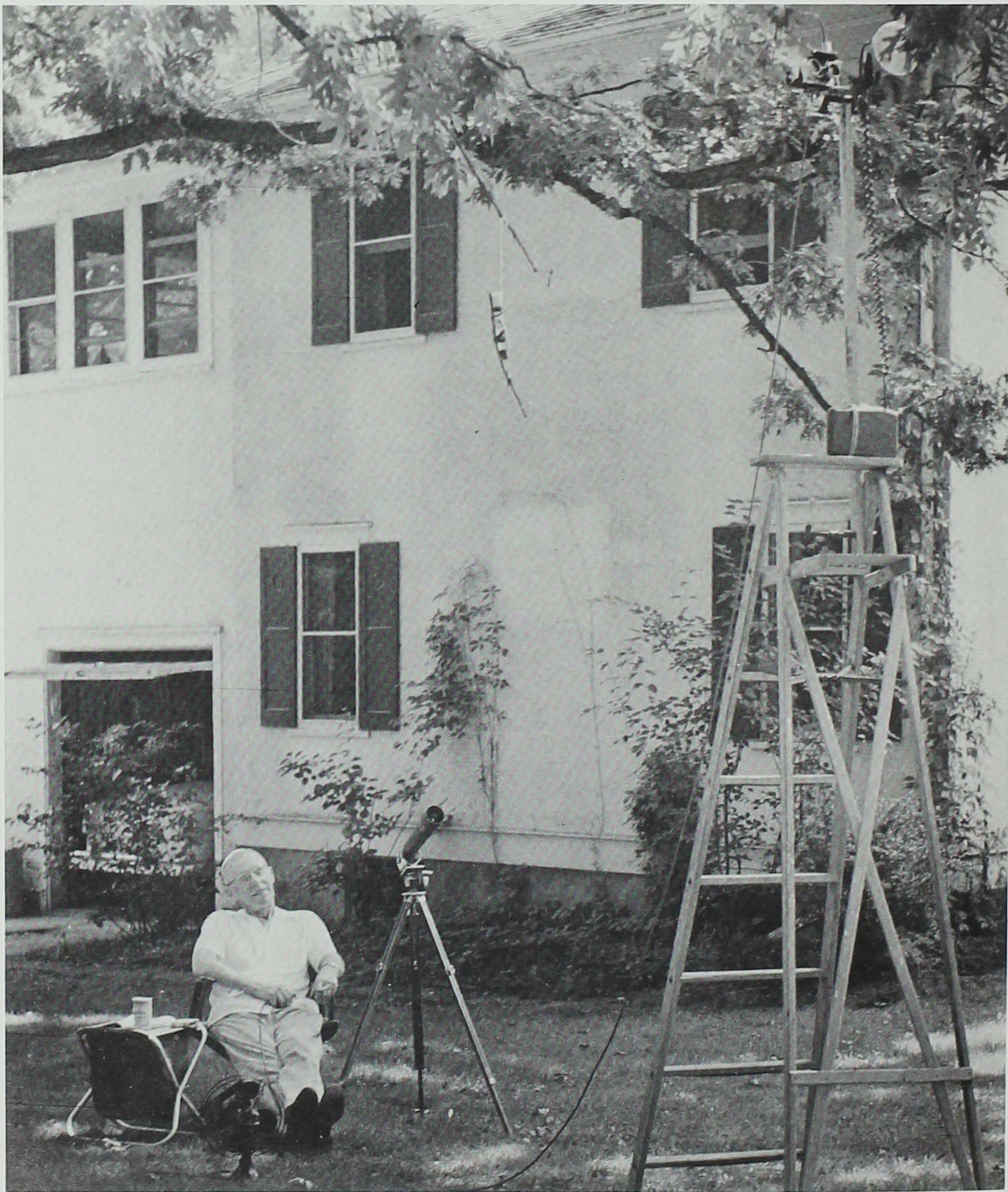




Few photographers have the technical and artistic skills required to record the illusive lighting of clouds in the sky. Kent stands among elite photographers like Alfred Stieglitz, Edward Weston, and Ansel Adams, who spent lifetimes trying to achieve stunning results with clouds. Here, clouds dwarf the Gothic tower of the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics.



It became a Kent tradition to come up with a gimmick for the family Christmas card. Top: This trick photograph from 1938 shows Tom, Clara, Barb, Chuck, Fred, and Jim Kent preparing their yearly greeting. Bottom: Using photos of a snowdrift and of Fred and Clara in their car, Kent created this composite photo for the 1964 card, showing his beloved Volkswagen Beetle engulfed in snow, with no apparent escape route. For another example of a Kent family Christmas card, see the previous *Palimpsest* (Summer 1994), page 60; on that Christmas card, Kent customized the household radio to look like a television screen showing "Station Kent."



With shutter release in hand and telescope nearby, Kent relaxes in his yard. Expecting a hummingbird to return to its nest in the branches overhead, Kent had rigged his camera and flash on a ladder positioned several inches from the nest. Always determined to get just the right angle and exposure, he was known for ingenious—and playful—methods of setting up his equipment. He occasionally used a shutter release with a cable up to thirty feet long so he could include himself in a photograph.



Northern saw-whet owl peering through the branches symbolizes Kent's love of nature and birdwatching, life-long passions rivaled only by his pursuit of photography.

NOTE ON SOURCES

Fred Kent's daughter, Barbara Buckley, has kept her father's collection neatly organized and ready for preservation and use. This article would not have been possible without her generous assistance and enthusiastic support. As author, I wish to thank Irving B. Weber, Ignacio and Helena Ponseti, and Ruth Nelson McCuskey for participating in oral history interviews regarding Kent. Besides the holdings now at the State Historical Society of Iowa, thousands of bird photos are held by Kent's son Tom, and campus-related shots can be seen at the Fred W. Kent Photographic Archives at the University of Iowa.

—Mary Bennett, SHSI audiovisual librarian

DESCRIPTION OF COLLECTION

Besides countless photographs, the Fred W. Kent Collection at the State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City facility) consists of documents, diaries, and letters from 1858 to 1978. Pre-1907 documents relate to Fred's grandparents or parents and consist of legal records, maps, and letters (including an 1858 agreement between Fred's grandfather and Antoine LeClaire). Charles F. Kent correspondence

(1885-1939) relates to Fred's father's DeWitt drugstore and gives insight into the character of father and son.

The earliest letter to Fred Kent is dated July 2, 1907, from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Biological Survey, thanking eleven-year-old Kent for his notes on the arrival of the birds in the spring. Birding remained a life-long interest. His 1909/10 diary conveys his love of nature and a poetic bent.

Letters to Kent as a University of Iowa student are from relatives and friends, and, of course, Clara Hartman. Her letters reveal their developing relationship and, eventually, plans for their wedding in 1917.

Correspondence to Kent over the years covers many topics (photography, birding, music, stamp collecting) and reflects many long-standing friendships. Letters from his friend and fellow naturalist Jim Gurney span sixty years (from 1918 to 1978). Other letters are photograph requests—many by doctors, some for customized Christmas cards, a few for advice on where to study medical photography. (In answering the latter, Kent often expresses the desire to set up such a course at the University of Iowa.) Although most of the correspondence is to Kent rather than from him, it nevertheless reveals his personality, humor, and compassion. Even without a camera, we get a very clear picture of Fred Kent.

—Mary Hansen, SHSI volunteer archivist

A little collecting, and a little celebrating!

Ballet and traveling clothes, Manhattan and bungalows— All the world's a palimpsest

by Ginalie Swaim

EVERYBODY COLLECTS something, right? My son collects basketball cards. My daughter used to collect water. She had dozens of samples—from Lake Superior, a Florida lake, Norway, the Mississippi, the River Thames. I hope they have not evaporated in the attic, where the little bottles are now stored.

I store my collection in a manila file folder in my office. It's labeled "Use of the word 'palimpsest.'" After I started editing this magazine in 1986, I began collecting examples where the word was used. Occasionally colleagues or readers added to my collection. Last year, my work-study assistant Becky Hawbaker pulled out of a University of Iowa Libraries computer no less than 198 examples of the word "palimpsest" used in newspaper articles in the last seven years. I don't know if computer searches are a fair way to expand one's collections, but those 198 examples have shown me that "palimpsest" isn't quite as an obscure word as I had thought—although it's still hard to pronounce. (Remember: accent on the first syllable.)

To celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of *The Palimpsest*, I'm reprinting some of my favorites here, followed by the writer's name. I begin with an illustrious name in history, Frederick Jackson Turner, who used the "p-word" in his landmark thesis in 1893, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History." I end with a blank sentence. This is where you get to be the writer. Have fun coming up with your own sentence or two using the common noun "palimpsest" and send it to

The Palimpsest, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240 (fax 319-335-3924). Include your name, address, and phone. We hope to publish some in future issues.

"Particularly in eastern States this page is a palimpsest. What is now a manufacturing State was in an earlier decade an area of intensive farming. Earlier yet it had been a wheat area, and still earlier the 'range' had attracted the cattle-herder."—*Frederick Jackson Turner*

"A palimpsest is a parchment or tablet that has been recycled—written on more than once, with the previous text imperfectly erased and visible beneath the new."—*David Sterritt*

"Land is also a palimpsest. A succession of human cultures, each with different priorities, has painted its record on the basic environmental canvas. Today's shopping center was yesterday's orchard and before that a frontier farm and an Indian council ring."—*Roderick Nash*

"'Palimpsest'/Scrub this one, cancel that./All those canvases painted over—/years piled upon years./...Words scratched out on the pad/stand tall under the weight of the pencil./What's left under the erasure?"—*James L. McPherson*

"For her, the map of Manhattan is a palimpsest—scratch the surface of any block, and you'll find the memory of a past love or a

piece of family history."—*Diana Postlethwaite*

"Helen Keller had a miraculous gift for deciphering the fragrant palimpsest of life, all the 'layers' that most of us read as a blur. She recognized 'an old-fashioned country house because it has several layers of odors, left by a succession of families, of plants, of perfumes and draperies.'"—*Diane Ackerman*

"The walls of New York's SoHo, the artists' enclave, are palimpsests of aesthetic and social concern, as the 85 color photographs make clear."—*Chuck Twardy*

"The land is a palimpsest of marks and tracks left by Cahuilla Indians, colonial Spaniards, American soldiers, gold-seekers and stage-coach drivers."—*R. V. Deneberg*

"Irish place-names are spots in time as well as space, palimpsests in which a whole disrupted history lies waiting to be deciphered."—*Terry Eagleton*

"Great comedians cannot help thinking of the world they live in as a palimpsest, a series of submerged texts and acts that must be made intelligible."—*Gerald Early*

"Sicily, with a landmass of around 10,000 square miles, is the largest island in the Mediterranean and its history is a palimpsest of European culture. One could peel it like an onion, discovering riches at every layer."—*Michael Mewshaw*

"Closer inspection reveals that it [the house] is a palimpsest: Behind the quirky new skin is an old ordinary bungalow sheathed with pink asbestos shingles."—*Benjamin Forgey*

"'The Name of the Rose' is billed as a 'palimpsest' of the Umberto Eco novel. You may or may not know what the heck a palimpsest is, or whether you can order one out of the Sharper Image catalogue, but the point is that Sean Connery could hardly pronounce it."—*Paul Attanasio*

"In fact, all of Palestrina is a good study of the

kind of palimpsest that Henry James so often praised when speaking of the monuments he had seen in Rome. He called them traces of successive moments."—*Louis Inturrisi*

"Unlike the layer of deposits typical of a deeply stratified site, what comes into view is a palimpsest of pits, wall trenches, postholes and graves, which frequently overlapped."—*Peter Bogucki and Ryszard Grygiel*

"The Corcoran [Gallery of Art], to me, is a palace of echoes, a palimpsest of remembered people and events—hilarious, bizarre, edifying, moving."—*Benjamin Forgey*

"Paintings now look like palimpsests, with every stage of the work showing through the layers of paint, glaze, collage, or whatever else."—*Mary S. Cowen*

"From experimental work done on the brain, Sagan extrapolates that it is a kind of evolutionary palimpsest, in which 'the deep and ancient parts are functioning still.'"—*David Gelman, et al.*

"And so, when one wonders what makes the Bolshoi dance the way it does, the answer lies in a historical palimpsest. It is hardly a secret that Italian and French ballet dominated Russian ballet in the 19th century."—*Anna Kisselgoff*

"Indeed, clothes became palimpsests of the journey's mishaps and meals: a slippery mussel in Milan sullied my blue and white sundress, while a poorly closed bottle of mouthwash stained my husband's pajamas."—*author unknown, The New York Times*

"
_____ palimpsest _____
_____."—*you're the author*

Please send us your creations, as part of this seventy-fifth anniversary celebration of Iowa's only popular history magazine . . . *The Palimpsest*.

Thanks. —*The Editor*

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AUGUST 15, 1921

BULLETIN NO. 70



THE SCHOOL LUNCH

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IOWA CITY, IOWA

The Roots of Iowa's School Lunch Program

IOWANS who attended school before 1973 probably know that not all public schools provided lunch programs. The fight to bring this about is recounted in the next article, which begins in the year 1958. But the roots of today's

Cover and pages from 1921 university extension bulletin. The bulletin notes that "a cheerful environment at meals materially aids digestion," yet the basement lunchroom (opposite) at a school in Gilbert, Iowa, 1921, is less than cheerful. No doubt the teachers were grateful for any mealtime space.

SHS LIBRARY (IOWA CITY)

night in the fireless cooker. Similarly the pearled barley, which needs long cooking, may be partially cooked the afternoon before it is to be served, if there be no fireless cooker in the equipment.



Serving the hot dish.

The dishes suggested, besides milk, are made of foods which are easily procured in the country, most of them being the winter vegetables or home canned and dried foods.

HOW TO OBTAIN SUPPLIES

The method of obtaining the food material for the noon-day meal must be worked out by the individual community. In general it is better for each child to pay, for the individual lunch served, enough to cover the cost of material. In certain instances the cost of material may be defrayed by the school or by a local organization; or the necessary food material may be brought from the homes by the individual pupils, each home in turn being responsible. If the latter method is adopted it will be necessary for each mother to know before hand on just what day she is to furnish the material, that she may make her plans accordingly.

Whatever method is adopted, it must be such that every child will receive his share of the food furnished. In country homes it frequently happens that food is more abundant than pennies and the child who cannot pay for his lunch in money may be made uncomfortable. For this reason the first method suggested is least desirable. It must not be forgotten that children are quite as sensitive, if not more so than adults, and under no condition should the child who has little be made uncomfortable because he is un-

able to cooperate in the same way as the other children. The main purpose of this noon-day lunch is to make the children more nearly physically fit. The arrangements must be such that all children may share equally. The increase in the school budget incident to the introduction of school lunches will decrease the cost of education. There will be fewer failures and fewer children repeating grades.

EQUIPMENT FOR THE RURAL SCHOOL LUNCH

The equipment for the noon-day lunch will vary with the type of school. The individual equipment, bowl, cup and saucer, etc., may be brought from home. Less confusion will result, however, if all is owned by the school.

EQUIPMENT FOR RURAL SCHOOL

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 Coal oil stove | 1 Can opener |
| 1 Portable oven | 2 Baking dishes 3-quart |
| 1 Aluminum or granite kettle | 1 Dipper |
| 8-quart | 1 Tea kettle |
| 1 Saucepan | 1 Water pail |
| 1 Saucepan 2-quart | 2 Trays |
| 1 Double boiler 6-quart | 6 Dish towels |
| 4 White enameled bowls | 2 Dish cloths |
| 2 2-quart | 1 "Mystic mit" |
| 1 5-quart | 1 Dish mop |
| 1 pint | 2 Dish pans |
| 1 Ladle, long handle, holding | 1 Dish drainer |
| one cup | 24 Cups and saucers |
| 4 Spoons | 24 Soup bowls |
| 2 tablespoons | 24 Serving plates |
| 2 teaspoons | 24 Soup spoons |
| 1 Meat grinder | 24 Tea spoons |
| 3 Knives | 24 Forks |
| 1 butcher | 1 Quart measure |
| 2 paring | 1 Asbestos mat |
| 2 Forks | 1 Dover egg beater |
| 1 small | 1 Measuring cup |
| 1 large | 1 Wire potato masher |
| 2 Strainers | 1 Fireless cooker |
| 1 purée | (This may be made by the class |
| 1 colander | in manual training) |
| 1 Wooden spoon | 6 pkgs. paper napkins (500 each) |
| 1 Scrubbing brush | |

A cupboard for holding the necessary materials and cooking equipment may be built into the lower part of a kitchen table, if a kitchen cabinet is not possible. The top of the table may be covered with white oil-cloth. A one-compartment fireless cooker will aid materially in decreasing the labor involved in preparing

school lunch program lie in previous decades, as the photos on these four pages show.

In the 1920s, extension offices at Iowa State College and the State University of Iowa published bulletins on why and how to set up lunch programs. Addressing a largely rural state, a 1921 SUI bulletin notes that "the child who walks two miles to school needs more food than the child who rides, other things being equal." Yet the food children carried in their tin lunch pails was "cold, often unattractive and not infrequently poorly selected, consisting of a too large proportion of fried foods, meats, sweets and pickles." The solution was a hot meal, donated by parents or cooked by a teacher. The bulletin listed simple equipment to purchase, and it assured school officials that any increases in the school budget for lunches "will decrease the costs of education. There will be fewer failures and few children repeating grades."

In the Great Depression, the federal government tried to resolve the paradox of coexistent malnutrition and surplus through the Surplus Commodity Administration (SCA),

which provided surpluses for locally run, non-profit school lunch programs. In rural areas, mothers often donated their time. But in urban schools, cooks employed by the Work Projects Administration (WPA) supervised National Youth Administration helpers. Thus, the program could reduce surpluses and employ citizens while feeding children. During World War II, SCA was replaced by the War Food Administration.

Yet lunch programs were slow to take hold in Iowa and elsewhere. According to Paul Edwin Nelson, Jr., in his 1949 Iowa State dissertation on the school lunch program, "Many parents in rural areas tended to eye with suspicion the adoption of any additional functions by the school, particularly if the Federal Government was connected with the program. They objected, individually and through their Congressional representatives, to any action which might be contributory to an undesired, overpowerful, centralized state." In 1945, an Ohio congressman remarked, "I would much rather see one of these little communities use food that is contributed locally, so that these



COURTESY BUREAU OF FOOD AND NUTRITION, IOWA DEPT. OF EDUCATION



Above: A woman cooks beans for school lunches in Sheldahl School, Polk County (photographed by Work Projects Administration on November 17, 1941).

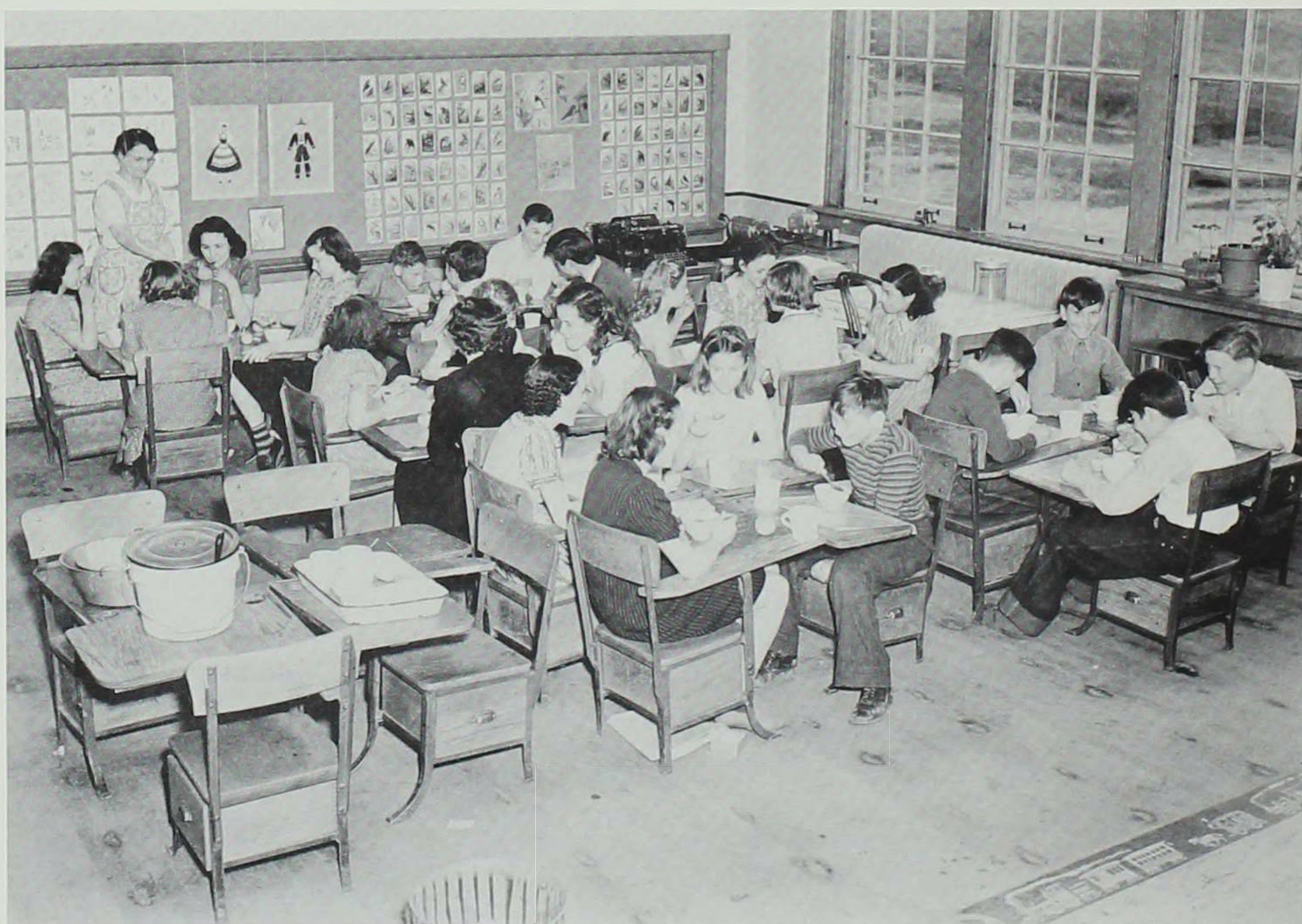
children feel that they are being fed food that they helped to raise, or that their people raised. In fact, I want to raise sovereign citizens and not citizens fed on the nursing bottle of the Federal Government."

Concern would grow, too, over whether the real goal was feeding children nutritional meals or providing agricultural price supports, making the issue even more political. "Stuffing children full of surplus potatoes," Nelson writes in his dissertation, was not the nutritional answer.

In 1946, Congress passed the National School Lunch Act. But as you'll read in the next article, this was only the beginning of the fight to feed Iowa's schoolchildren.

—*The Editor*

WPA PHOTOS (SHSI, IOWA CITY)



Students use classroom desks as lunch tables at Jefferson School in Des Moines (WPA photo, April 30, 1940).



Above: Students of various ages eat lunch at a rural school seven miles west of Centerville. Below, left: At the same school, two women wash dishes in a crowded workspace. (WPA photos, December 1941).

SHSI (DES MOINES), DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE



Above: Grace Derr helps herself to food from an electric roaster, while Jerry Koboc waits (rural school near Cresco, February 1942). The Rural Electrification Association (REA) suggested that rural schools with electricity could set up "low-cost food centers" with a hot plate, electric roaster, and steel burr flour meal (to grind locally grown wheat into cereal).



Senior Jerry Freight runs the cash register in his high school lunch line, April 1958. Although many junior high and high schools had lunch programs by the late 1950s, elementary schools in older buildings often lacked them.

Feeding Iowa's Schoolchildren

The Fight for the School Lunch Program

by Vern Carpenter

WITH THE START OF THE 1958/59 school year, unknowingly I became a soldier in what would be called "America's war on hunger." That year I started a new job as a field consultant and auditor for the School Lunch Section of the Iowa Department of Public Instruction (DPI). My job was to visit all public school buildings in every county in Iowa. In schools without lunch or milk programs, I learned that some teachers were purchasing half pints of milk out of their own pockets to give to grade school pupils before they left school at the end of the day. These teachers were aware that those children might have little to eat at home before they returned to school the next morning.

A dozen years had passed since the 1946 National School Lunch Act, through which the federal government assisted states in establishing and expanding not-for-profit school lunch programs. Iowa had gotten off to an excellent start: by 1948/49 a quarter of Iowa's public school children were participating in school lunch programs. Nevertheless, by 1958 many schools in Iowa and across the nation still were not offering the lunch program or even the milk program—although most families could probably have afforded to pay the few cents per half-pint of milk.

As I began visiting every public school building in Iowa, I realized part of the problem was the lack of facilities. In Iowa's larger districts, lunch programs were in fact available in most senior high schools and in many junior

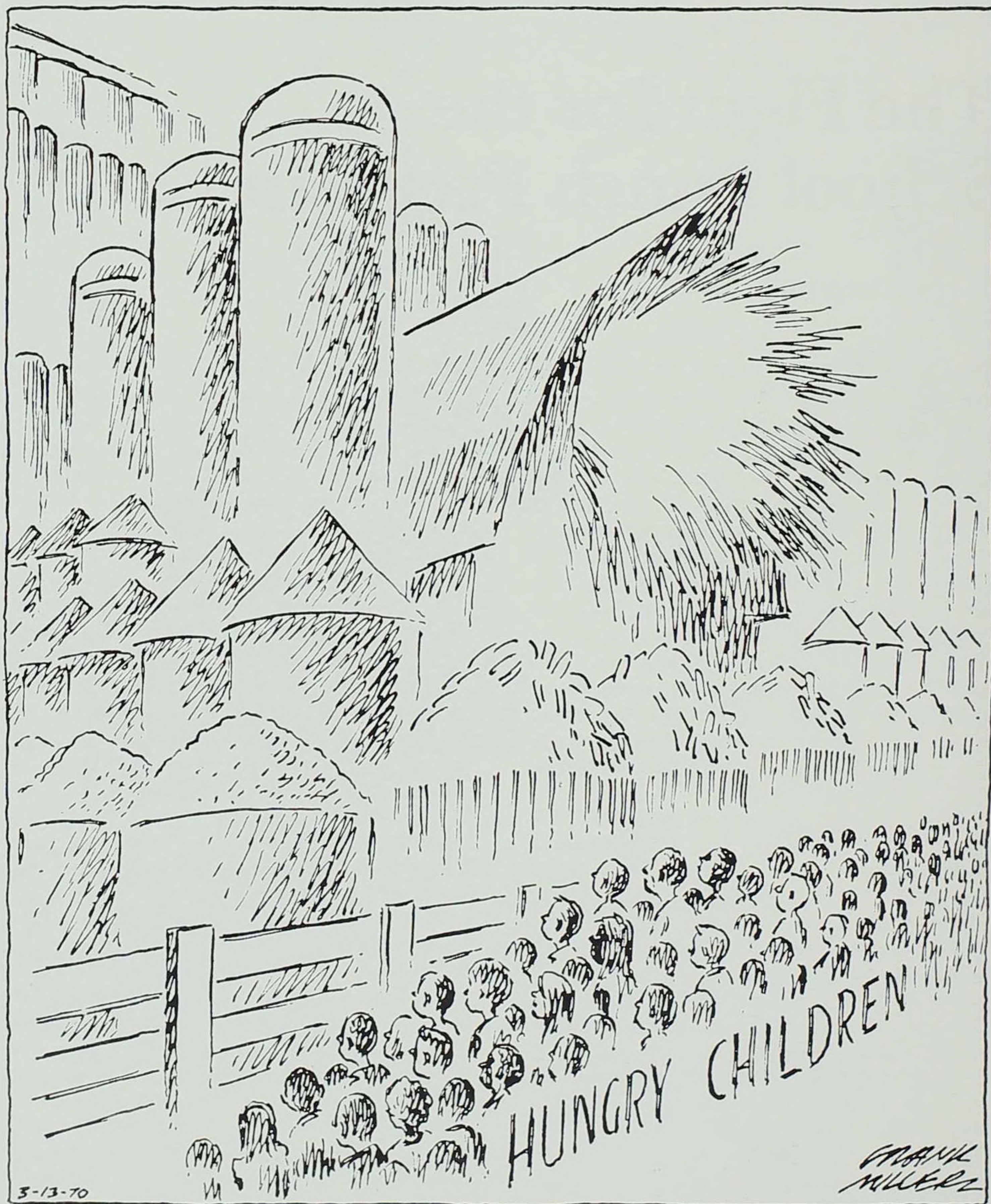
high schools. But in the state's elementary schools, most of which were in the older buildings in the oldest sections of town, fewer students had access to the school lunch program.

When most of these older school buildings had been constructed, naturally no thought had been given to a school kitchen, cafeteria, or food storeroom because there was no school feeding program. Some schools that took advantage of the School Lunch Act cleaned and converted basement coal storage rooms into kitchens. On other floors, former "domestic science" classrooms or other available rooms were turned over to a food service program. A few school districts had even moved one-room schoolhouses onto the school site to accommodate lunch programs. Town halls and Quonset huts were rented as kitchens and lunchrooms. But far too many school buildings had not managed to set up any lunch program.

After two and a half years of traveling across Iowa, I had seen enough. I was convinced that Iowa could—and should—do better. In March 1961, I proposed that our office of the DPI push to expand the lunch and milk programs to every public school building in Iowa. (We did not then administer programs in nonpublic schools.) My supervisor, the chief of the School Lunch Section of the DPI, Elmer E. Cowan, readily agreed. We also agreed that reaching the thousands of economically needy children in Iowa be given top priority.

Thus began a decade of trying to sell the idea to school administrators, legislators, and

RIGHT HERE IN IOWA



Titled "Right Here in Iowa," Frank Miller's editorial cartoon in the *Des Moines Register* (March 13, 1970) pointed to the irony of hungry children amidst Iowa's agricultural abundance.

the public. We were not alone in trying to make this happen. Across the nation, grassroots organizations were springing up to help the needy, and the school lunch program was part of their agendas. But there would be frustrating obstacles ahead.

Graduate courses in school-community relations had taught me the importance of working with the media, parents, church organizations, women's clubs, the legislature, universities, and anyone else who would listen to the idea. My goal was to blanket the state with news stories about the lunch program—why it was vital, the number of needy pupils, the need for making free and reduced-price lunches available, congressional action (or inaction). The media was tremendously cooperative. For instance, one of the many news releases I sent out was picked up by seventy Iowa newspapers. The *Des Moines Register* was most supportive, particularly Bill Leonard. Leonard wrote numerous editorials about the lunch program and kept the issue before the public. Del Monaco, a radio announcer for KIOA in Des Moines, frequently covered the issue. He would call me for direct quotes for his stories and then pass them on to the Iowa Radio Network, which in turn relayed stories to about sixty-five other Iowa stations. I appeared on numerous radio and television programs. My hope was that enough groups and individuals would realize the need for the school lunch and put pressure on those who didn't understand it or opposed it.

There were plenty who opposed it. I encountered many Iowans who held to beliefs prevalent in the 1920s and 1930s that everybody should pay for their own and no one should be given anything free (although there were also many Iowans, like me, who had lived through the Great Depression and therefore remembered what hunger felt like).

Iowa farm families who were accustomed to stopping work and gathering together for hearty meals were sometimes less ready to realize that urban families, where parents left at different times for work, had to follow other schedules. Sometimes older children were responsible for feeding younger siblings before going to school in the morning.

Others insisted that the government and

the schools should not be feeding children—rather, that parents should feed their own children. Who could argue with that? I agreed that they should, but they weren't always doing so. I remember working with one superintendent who knew his school needed a breakfast program. At a school board meeting, a minister's wife came and objected. She held to the ideal of every family sitting down together and eating breakfast after they had said their prayers. We agreed. This was ideal, but it wasn't happening in many cases. I wrote in our newsletter: "Our pride compels us to force ourselves to think that there are no hungry children in Iowa. But there are many. We would like to think that every child has eaten a good breakfast (rich and poor alike) but we are mistakenly prideful."

Many who opposed school lunch programs doubted there was poverty in Iowa, of all places. I told them they should visit the welfare office and inquire about the number of children on Aid to Dependent Children in their county. I knew there were plenty of Iowa's schoolchildren who didn't have one well-balanced meal a day, or even in a week. And then there was the unresolvable question: where is the poverty line? No matter where it was set, there were those who thought it was too high or too low.

A few people opposed the school lunch program because they thought their property taxes would increase. In reality, they seldom rose to any great extent. Schools that hired capable food service directors often had well-managed programs that either broke even or carried a surplus into the next school year, so there was little cost to the school district. Only schools that didn't manage their programs well had to use property taxes to cover deficits at the end of the year.

One of our goals, therefore, was to help schools develop well-managed food service programs. Our monthly newsletter provided updates on federal and state legislation, policies and procedures on reimbursements, information on surplus commodities (which could save schools thousands of dollars), and news on kitchen equipment. We also published menus and hints from school cooks.

While I remember talking with numerous

people who opposed the idea, I also heard from those in support. I remember one mother who called me. Her children were enrolled in a school with a high percentage of needy pupils. She and a group of other mothers wanted to get a lunch program started in the worst way. She was rightfully frustrated that one building in her district not only had a lunch program but also a swimming pool, yet her children's school didn't even have a lunch program.

What she had observed was no surprise to me: In Iowa's larger cities, the "haves" had it, and the "have-nots" did not have it. The older, ill-equipped school buildings were usually in the inner-city neighborhoods, where children attended school sporadically or were moved around during the school year as parents searched for better jobs or housing. Principals told me that the pupil turnover in some of these buildings reached 90 percent a year. Think of it—nine out of ten children who enrolled in a building in September would not be in the same building the following May. It was hard enough to consider the difficulties these children faced by being moved from school to school, facing new teachers and curricula—much less the effect of hunger and poor nutrition on them.

Part of our task was to compile a list of all schools in Iowa. This proved to be difficult and time-consuming because of differences in terminology and reporting. For instance, our office distinguished between "school buildings" and "schools." One school building might house three schools—elementary, junior high, and high school. By early 1968 we had identified 352 buildings without lunch programs. This was roughly 20 percent of Iowa's school buildings.

Although the numbers documented the need, the stories from teachers and school administrators put a human face on the problem. "One administrator identified a needy child after the cooks reported that the child had asked what 10¢ would buy," we reported in a 1966 newsletter. "Another needy child was identified after teachers had observed one boy (elementary pupil) who made a B-line out the door as soon as classes were dismissed at noon. He did this even in the wintertime. The teach-

ers observed the boy and found that he went directly to the bird feeder and ate the bread crusts that had been put there to feed the birds."

The stories were heartbreaking. But educators also knew what hunger meant in the classroom. For instance, in the fall of 1966 an elementary principal began a breakfast program on his own through donations. The positive results were immediate. Teachers noted that their students were more alert. The school nurse reported that fewer pupils came to her office at midmorning complaining of stomach aches or headaches. In another school with a new breakfast program, the principal reported less tardiness.

Our observations concurred with those of the American Home Economics Association, who met in March 1965 and reported that "hungry children get restless, then sleepy, consequently they are more difficult to teach. The reports from many schools, for example, on the effect of food distribution programs indicate that the children of families who have been using extra food for a time have improved attendance records, are more alert, and consequently achieve more academically."

This is not to say that lunch programs were no extra burden for a school. To their busy days, teachers often had to add selling tickets, collecting money, and supervising lunchrooms. Office clerical staff had additional paperwork. School administrators had to hire food service workers and work out a method of financing set-up costs for new lunch programs.

The 1966 Child Nutrition Act helped some in this last respect. Congress appropriated funds to help schools without programs purchase minimal kitchen equipment and to help others upgrade their kitchens. In 1967 Iowa's first appropriation was only \$12,583, but it was a start for many school districts. And some were really needing the basics. For instance, in September 1966 the food service workers at one school had high hopes that some day their kitchen might get a dishwashing machine.

By the late 1960s momentum had grown considerably. As we reported in our September 1966 newsletter, "Congress received more mail concerning the School Lunch and Spe-

COURTESY PAULINE BAXENDALE



From left, Elaine Dubbs, Marian Netley, Carol Davey, and Mary Kail, at Indianola High School cafeteria, June 1966. Pauline Baxendale, who directed the lunch program there, recalls that this was after the school began receiving institutional equipment. For more on Iowa women who worked behind school lunch counters, see page 148.

cial Milk Programs and the Viet Nam struggle than any other legislation in the history of our country." In 1968 I was involved in a four-state "Great Plains School District Organization Project." In my report on child nutrition programs, I tried to address why needy children still weren't getting lunch programs in their schools. "People living in areas without lunch

programs haven't yelled long and loud enough about their needs," I had concluded. "People living in needy areas haven't asked for programs often enough. They aren't in contact with school board members and with school administrators often enough. Seldom are they asked to serve as members of a committee appointed to solve their problems." (But it

wasn't always for lack of a willing superintendent. I had observed that new superintendents were more likely to get new programs started during their first years of their tenure rather than later, after the "spirit of change" had evaporated.)

That year, on November 13 the State Board of Public Instruction adopted the resolution I had drafted, urging all school districts without food service in their buildings to "make a determined effort to do so." But without a state or federal law to that effect, we had no real clout.

Nationally, the government seemed serious about focusing on the problem, through the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition and Health in 1969 and the enormous National Nutrition Survey that followed. In Iowa, we had local organizations in different towns and cities that were pushing for the lunch program to be expanded. This might be an American Legion auxiliary, a women's church group, and so on. Mothers would call in and offer their help. Women were the ones who made the tremendous difference.

On March 11, 1970, the Governor's Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health met at Iowa State University in Ames. That January I had been promoted to chief of the DPI's School Lunch Section when Elmer Cowan retired. I was excited about this opportunity to report on what we had accomplished and what work remained (a ninth of Iowa's school buildings still had no lunch programs).

I was among a dozen speakers, each approaching the problem from different perspectives. Lloyd J. Filer, Jr., pediatrics professor at the University of Iowa, reported on several studies of Iowa children: "It is reasonable to conclude that within the State of Iowa where we have low-income groups, the incidence and the type of malnutrition as measured by the techniques used by the National Nutrition Survey are comparable to those seen among poverty pockets in the nation at large. In other words, migrant workers in Muscatine or black infants in Cedar Rapids manifest the findings found among their national counterparts."

Monsignor Edward W. O'Rourke, executive director of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, called for action on lunch pro-

grams: "Right now the Department of Public Instruction is trying to push in to the Iowa Legislature a proposal for a 1.5 million dollar allotment for this purpose. Why don't you write to your state legislator and express your opinion on this important matter?"

Roberta Davis, representing the Aid to Dependent Children Council and herself the mother of four schoolchildren, recounted her own experiences: "[My] high schooler has a part-time job so he doesn't partake in the school lunch program. He buys it himself. The three little ones do and I pay one-fourth. . . . I have one child that was quite sickly as a little one and she was an almost cleft-palate baby and had much difficulty in eating different types of foods, and of course I wasn't able to offer her a real varied diet. The first week in first grade she weighed not quite 30 pounds. And during that first month in participating in the hot lunch program, she gained 5 pounds."

Nathan K. "Nick" Kotz was the keynote speaker. He was the Washington correspondent for the *Des Moines Register* and author of *Let Them Eat Promises: The Politics of Hunger in America*. In his speech, Kotz traced the origins of the war on poverty, exploded myths about the poor, and lambasted the federal government for failing to feed three-quarters of the "8½ million desperately poor American children" who still weren't getting "the free meals we promised them 21 years ago."

"The place to start," Kotz remarked, "and it has taken us so long to learn this, and for liberals and conservatives to finally come to the same conclusion—the place to start is at home; the place to start is in the school nearest where you live; the place to start is to find out how many poor children there are in that school and to find it out in a way that will not be embarrassing to the children."

I knew what Kotz was referring to. Less than 3 percent of Iowa's school lunches were served free or at reduced prices, but this did not accurately reflect the numbers of children eligible. I had worked hard to get the message out that this program existed, but we were hampered by erratic and arbitrary application procedures. Each school administrator determined who received free or reduced-prices lunches, so definitions of



COURTESY DORIS BISHOP

Happy student with lunch tray at Orange Elementary School, Waterloo, Iowa, 1969. Doris Bishop, who directed the Waterloo program, used this image in a slide show presented to "PTAs, community groups and anyone who would listen to our story." She enjoyed photographing school kitchens "when we got a new piece of equipment," but has few photos of "the old things which we were so happy to replace."

underprivileged and methods of determining need varied from district to district, as well as from state to state. In one instance in Iowa, a husband and wife came to visit their school administrator to ask for free lunches for their children. The wife recounted how her husband was out of work and they were having a difficult time financially. She explained that her mother had been paying for her children's lunches but was no longer able to do so. "My mother is a whore, you know," she said, "but now that she is growing old, men don't want her any more, and she

can't afford to pay for our children's lunches." (The administrator approved free lunches to the children.)

Another problem was that in some schools, the free or reduced-price lunch tickets were marked. Sometimes this led other children to make cruel, insensitive remarks to children using those tickets.

After the conference in Ames, the *Des Moines Register* followed up with an editorial. They quoted Governor Robert Ray as saying, "Iowa has exploited every source of funds and food available—be it on the federal, state or local

level—and is getting food to those who need it. This is not to say that we do not have much still to be done.” The *Register* wasn’t satisfied, pointing out that the state of Iowa “makes no contribution to the school lunch program except for administrative costs. The State Department of Public Instruction’s request for state funds for free and reduced price meals has fallen on deaf ears.” Yet in defense of the Iowa legislature, I knew of only one state that was appropriating any money to its schools for school lunches. It wasn’t a general practice at that time. Besides, there was plenty of work to be done on the national level.

Our office had the continuing support of Iowa Congressman Neal Smith and Senator Jack Miller (then the ranking minority leader of the powerful Senate Agriculture and Forestry Committee). The support of these two Iowans was essential as I set out to correct what I considered inequities in the federal reimbursement rate for school lunches. For several years Iowa’s rate of federal reimbursement was only four cents per lunch at the beginning of the school year. Toward the end of that same school year, this rate would be reduced by prorating. Consequently, our school districts never knew how much federal assistance to plan on.

At the same time, many schools in southern states received as much as twelve cents per lunch for the entire school year. Why, I asked, did it cost more to serve a lunch in a southern state than in Iowa? I asked and asked and asked, and kept on asking. In the process I was snubbed, delayed, passed by, overlooked, and treated like poor relation. I never did find an answer that made sense. Of course, in Congress the chairpersonship of committees is based primarily on longevity. Since several southern states kept their congressmen in office year after year, the South controlled many important committees. And, of course, the chair has control over which bills leave the committee, when they leave, and in what form. Within the committee, state formulas for reimbursement are determined, and at the time it seemed to me that southern states benefited the most.

I realized I had to work on a national level to help children in Iowa, so I joined the

American School Food Service Association (ASFSA) in Denver, Colorado, and in due time chaired its national legislative committee. I testified before congressional committees on agriculture, education, nutrition and human needs, and consumer protection. With the help of many organizations (such as the hard-working Iowa School Food Service Association), ASFSA got Congress to make some ground-breaking changes. First, the rate of reimbursement per lunch was equalized so that all states were reimbursed on the same basis. Second, uniform and liberalized federal regulations were adopted for the free and reduced-price lunches. And third, Congress provided funds to help schools equip new kitchens and upgrade old ones.

To those of us who had worked more than a decade on these issues, it seemed that the school lunch program was an idea whose time had finally come. Our section started to administer and help launch school lunch programs in Iowa’s nonpublic schools, in daycare centers, and in summer feeding programs. We encouraged public and nonpublic schools to work together in broadening the lunch program to serve all students in the community and to serve senior citizens who could not obtain lunches through other federal programs. Eventually we would administer eleven federally supported programs in Iowa related to feeding.

We also continued to coordinate distribution of surplus commodities from the United States Department of Agriculture. Many years they offered concentrated orange juice. In 1968, for example, we helped distribute twenty-seven rail carloads of orange juice for Iowa schoolchildren. Many schools offered the free juice before school, at noon, midafternoon,

NOTE ON SOURCES

Iowa’s school lunch program (1960s/70s) is well documented in the “School Lunch Newsletter” and later “Lunch Line” from the Department of Public Instruction (now Department of Education). Proceedings of the March 11, 1970, Governor’s Conference on Food, Nutrition and Health (Ames) were also useful. *The Palimpsest* thanks Norma Miller, long-time staff member in the department’s Bureau of Food and Nutrition, for her help in locating photographs. Extension bulletins from Iowa State and the University of Iowa reflect early efforts to feed school children, and “The Iowa School Lunch Program: A Theoretical and Quantitative Analysis” (Paul Edwin Nelson, Jr., Iowa State diss., 1949) gives an introductory overview through the late 1940s.



Students help serve food at Longfellow Elementary School in Waterloo, about 1970. Hot food in bulk was transported to the school in heated cases, and cold food in chilled cases with ice packs.

COURTESY DORIS BISHOP

and after school. A few enterprising school lunch directors asked volunteer women's organizations to help serve. Some Iowa children had never tasted orange juice.

I was gratified that the news media had done their job so well from what we had furnished them, and that Iowa legislators understood the issue. The legislators were cooperative, particularly then state senators Charles Grassley and Charlene Conklin. The state legislature treated us right. When it came time in 1971 that states were required to match federal appropriations, Iowa legislators appropriated the money, and continued to do so, year after year without any hassle.

Then came the centerpiece of all our work. In 1972 the Iowa General Assembly made it mandatory for every public school building in Iowa to have a lunch program by the fall of

1973. Now we had some clout. I explained to school administrators that they must have a school lunch program by that date. Schools complied, and administrators were very cooperative. State participation increased rapidly. By March 1973, only 21 of Iowa's 2,064 public schools did not have lunch programs.

Among the ten midwestern states, Iowa was the first to reach the goal of having a lunch program in every building, and among the first in the nation. Georgia and Hawaii were said to have beaten us out, but tabulating methods differed so much it is difficult to say.

But we did not start this effort to win a race. We started it to make certain that every child—especially economically needy children—could eat lunch at school. We did this because of a very simple fact: a hungry child cannot learn. □



SHSI (DES MOINES), DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE

Capitalists Coleslaw and the Two Bite Club: Cooking for Iowa Students

HERE'S THE CHALLENGE: Work with limited facilities, take advantage of government surpluses, plan affordable, nutritious, and appealing menus, and don't despair if some students turn up their noses at what you've just offered them. These circumstances have faced the women who have planned, prepared, and served food for Iowa's schoolchildren since early in this century.

Anna Johnson was a rural teacher from 1925 to 1967. "We really were not cooks, but had to heat soup and beans, bake potatoes in the ashes and heat food which was brought to school after a hot lunch program was started. . . . One family each day was to see that a hot dish was furnished," she recalled in the Winter 1975 *Annals of Iowa*. "Some days we got nothing because mother forgot, or two meals were brought the same day, or it was brought just as we were about to start our classes."

In the 1940s Norma Miller attended a rural Guthrie County school. She recalls going with her father, the school director, to pick up government commodities at the railroad siding. Her teacher's cooking unit on a heating stove was surrounded by a metal box casing to protect children who might fall against it. (Miller later joined Iowa's school lunch program staff, and has worked there for forty-three years.)

By the 1960s and 1970s, food service personnel encountered new terms like engineered foods (nutritionally enriched), competitive foods ("junk" foods), and multicultural foods (reflecting ethnic diversity). But new terms didn't change finicky appetites. Adele Voss of Council Bluffs bemoaned

Left: Rebecca Simms planned and served meals in Russell public school, December 1944. Below: Food service worker at Waterloo's Logan Intermediate School, about 1981, with holiday cookies.

this in 1970: "There goes the buzzer, our lunch hour's begun,/Sore and aching feet, but smile at everyone./Hands are working fast to fill up the trays,/ Everybody rushing by, but not one word of praise." Kitchen camaraderie helped; she ended her poem: "A nicer bunch of 'gals,' I'm sure I'll never meet."

In Waterloo, food service staff Doris Bishop and Paul McClain began the "Two Bite Club" in 1974. Roosevelt Elementary students who tried at least two bites of everything on their trays received special pins. "Quite a few students still wore their pins at the end of the year, and plate waste was noticeably reduced," reported home economics coordinator Fern Hammelman.

In 1976, schools might have offered dishes like Can't-Tell-A-Lie Cherry Pie, Covered Wagon Chili, Nuts and Bolts Mixed Vegetables, and Capitalists Coleslaw. The national Child Nutrition Bicentennial Project had distributed thirteen historical theme menus to school lunch programs. Martian Milk and 2001 Biscuits saluted the future.

"There's more to school lunches than just cooking and serving them," Frances Crawford told the *Des Moines Register* in April 1967. "You have to have talents in math, business, psychology and home economics in addition to cooking skills." Crawford directed Tipton's school lunch staff and was regional director for the American School Food Service Association. "School lunches are like plays," she added. "You give a little better performance when you have a little applause."

—The Editor



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In the days before color film, Fred W. Kent hand-tinted this campfire photograph to create an orange glow reflecting on the faces of those gathered around to roast marshmallows. This *Palimpsest* showcases three dozen of Kent's insightful and astonishing images of Iowa and Iowans, taken over his seven-decade photographic career.

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