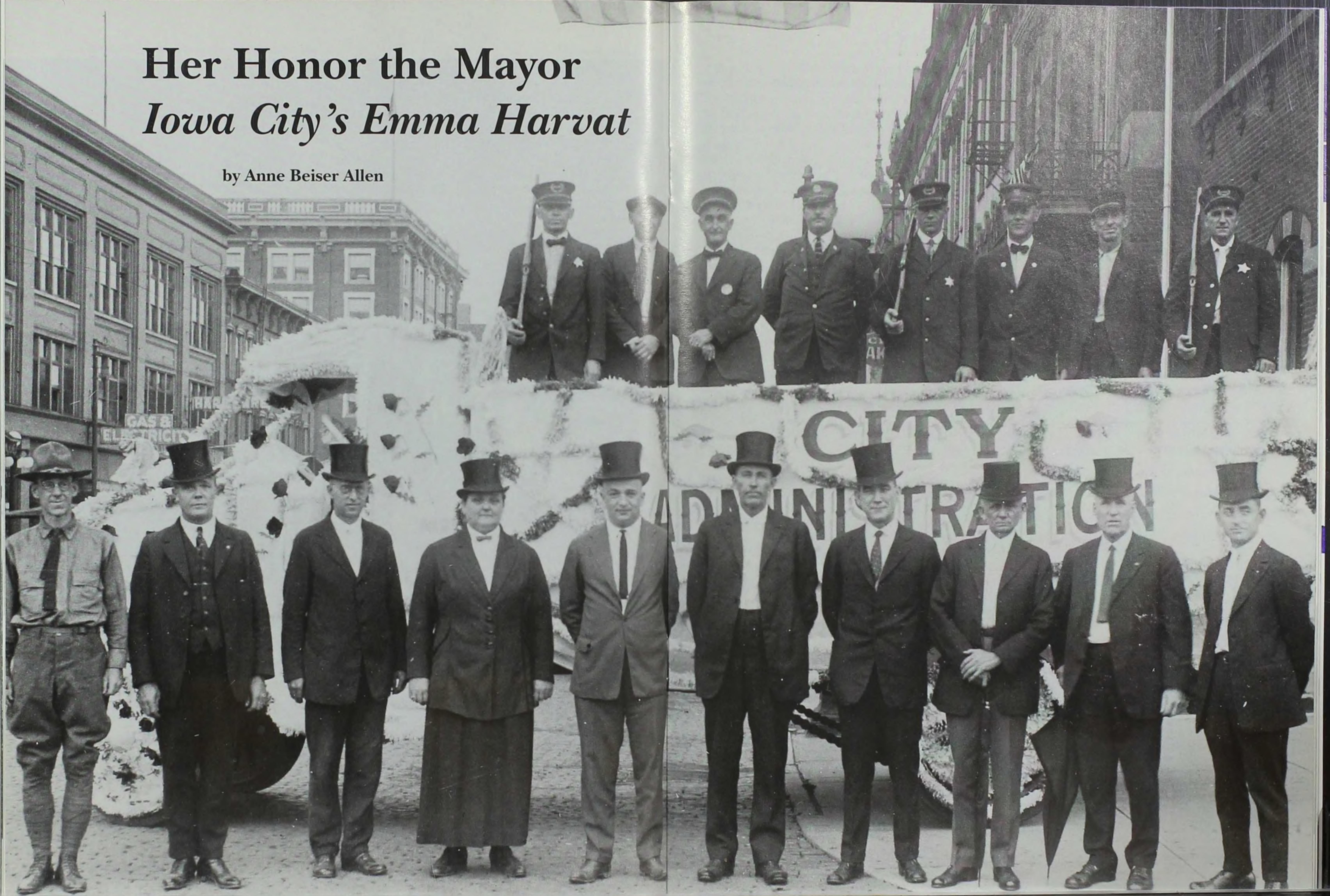


# Her Honor the Mayor *Iowa City's Emma Harvat*

by Anne Beiser Allen



**“Mayor:** *Information. Speeding 56 miles an hour on Burlington Street. Were you ever here before?*

**Prisoner:** *No. I never tried to race with a motorcycle cop before.*

**Mayor:** *Well are you guilty or not guilty?*

**Prisoner:** *I was going down the street, and somebody tried to sneak by me without sounding the horn and I just stepped on the gas—but I was only going about 40 miles.*

**Mayor:** *25 miles above speed limit. \$25.00 and costs, 2.98. Next.*

**Mayor:** *You are charged with being drunk and using bad language. Have I not seen you before? Where do you live?*

**Prisoner:** *Here in [the] city.*

**Mayor:** *How long have you lived here?*

**Prisoner:** *All my life. I was born here.*

**Mayor:** *So—. Are you any relation to Mr. Z?*

**Prisoner:** *Yes, a brother.*

**Mayor:** *Well, I don't think he has very much reason to be proud of you. But did I not see you before? Did you not call on a woman we were detaining here?*

**Prisoner:** *Yes.*

**Mayor:** *What was she to you?*

**Prisoner:** *I was going to marry her.*

**Mayor:** *Thank goodness that disgrace was averted from your folks and she is safely tucked away for 10 to 15 years in a penal institution. Are you guilty as charged?*

**Prisoner:** *Well, I was drinking a little.*

**Mayor:** *\$10 and costs. \$12.98 in all. I am letting you off cheap, but don't ever come back or you get the limit.”*

**S**uch was a typical day in the police court presided over by Iowa City's mayor Emma J. Harvat, according to reporter Fred Jensen, who visited her in late summer of 1924 and wrote the above account for his paper, the *Pocahontas [Iowa] Record*, on his return. Harvat was indeed newsworthy. The first woman in the nation to serve as chief executive of a municipality with a population of over 10,000, Harvat had been

elected by her fellow aldermen in June 1922 to replace resigning mayor Ingalls Swisher. She ran successfully for reelection in March 1923, and served nearly three full years in office.

In June 1922, when Harvat was sworn in, American women were only beginning to

Previous page: Emma Harvat (in skirt) and other city officials outside Iowa City's city hall. SHSI (IOWA CITY)

move into the heretofore strictly male world of elective office. Although women had won the right to vote under the 19th Amendment in 1920, they did not flock into public service in great numbers. Few ran for election to executive positions in the nation's cities and states, and most of those who did were spouses or widows of previously serving male politicians. In the whole country at that date, only fifteen women had been elected mayors, none of them in major cities. The largest town with a woman mayor in 1922 was St. Peter, Minnesota (population 4,335). In Iowa, the first towns to elect women mayors, in March 1922, were Calamus and St. Charles (each with populations of about 400). Iowa City's population when Emma Harvat took office in June 1922 was unofficially listed as 12,778; this did not include more than 5,000 students attending the State University of Iowa. Not until 1926 would Bertha Landes, of Seattle, Washington, become mayor of a major U.S. metropolitan area. By then, Emma Harvat had successfully completed two terms in office.

Emma Harvat's election received considerable attention in the press around the country. Stories appeared in newspapers as far away as Fort Worth and San Francisco. In November 1922, the English-language *Shanghai Evening Star* carried a lengthy feature on her election, citing her opposition to bootlegging and her disapproval of blue laws ("A law that nine tenths of the people do not want is no law," she was quoted as saying). She was interviewed in depth by Mollie Merrick of the *San Francisco Examiner* during her visit to that city in August 1922, and again in February 1925 by Edna Tutt Frederikson for the national magazine *The Woman Citizen*. Even the biweekly French literary journal *L'Opinion* took note of her election, asking, "When will we see this in France?"

"I intend to run this city on a businesslike basis," Harvat announced in her acceptance speech. And so she did. By the end of her first year, she had collected more money in fines and fees than any of her predecessors. City council business ran smoothly under her guidance; city records were strictly kept. She took great pride in proving that a woman was

News of Harvat's election as mayor was picked up by newspapers across the nation. "You don't realize how well advertised you are," wrote a friend in California. "On the card, find a clipping I got from a Frisco paper."

SHSI (IOWA CITY)

**Dear Emma:** Any chance of your coming out our way since you have assumed your new office as mayor. You don't realize how well advertised you are. ~~Set~~ ~~up~~ ~~the~~ ~~card~~, find a clipping I got from a Frisco paper. Set us hear from you once in awhile and if you intend coming out this way, please pay us a visit - my new address (we bot a home) after July 5 1128 19 Prospect Row San Mateo, Calif. Congratulations and love from us all - Bertha Hanzlik.

**Woman Named Mayor By Iowa City Voters**  
 IOWA CITY, Iowa, June 19.—A woman mayor will rule Iowa City.  
 The city council today presented the town with a new mayor—Miss Emma Harvat. Miss Harvat, previously an alderman, was the unanimous choice of the council at a special meeting this morning, following resignation of Ingalls Swisher.  
*San Francisco Journal*

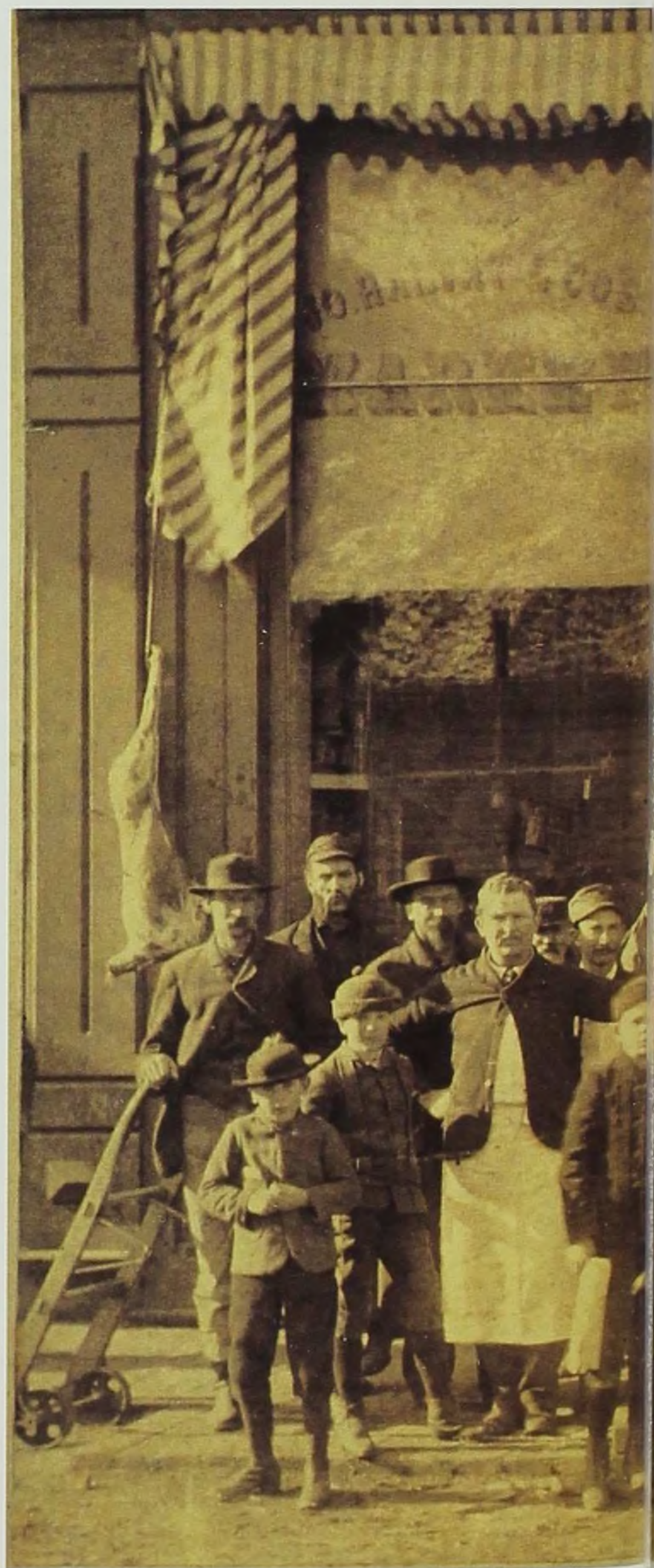
capable of running a fair-sized city as well as any man. But then, she had proved herself the equal of any man several times in her business life before becoming mayor.

Born in 1870, Emma Harvat was the ninth of ten children of Joseph and Mary Harvat, who arrived in Iowa City from Czechoslovakia around 1854. Like many Czech immigrants of that era, the Harvats had left Europe to escape the economic dislocations that followed the revolutions of the 1840s. So many Czechs and Slovaks settled in Iowa City's northeastern neighborhood that the area was referred to as Goosetown (for the geese some Czechs raised in their backyards). By 1913, fully 20 percent of Iowa City's population was of Czech descent.

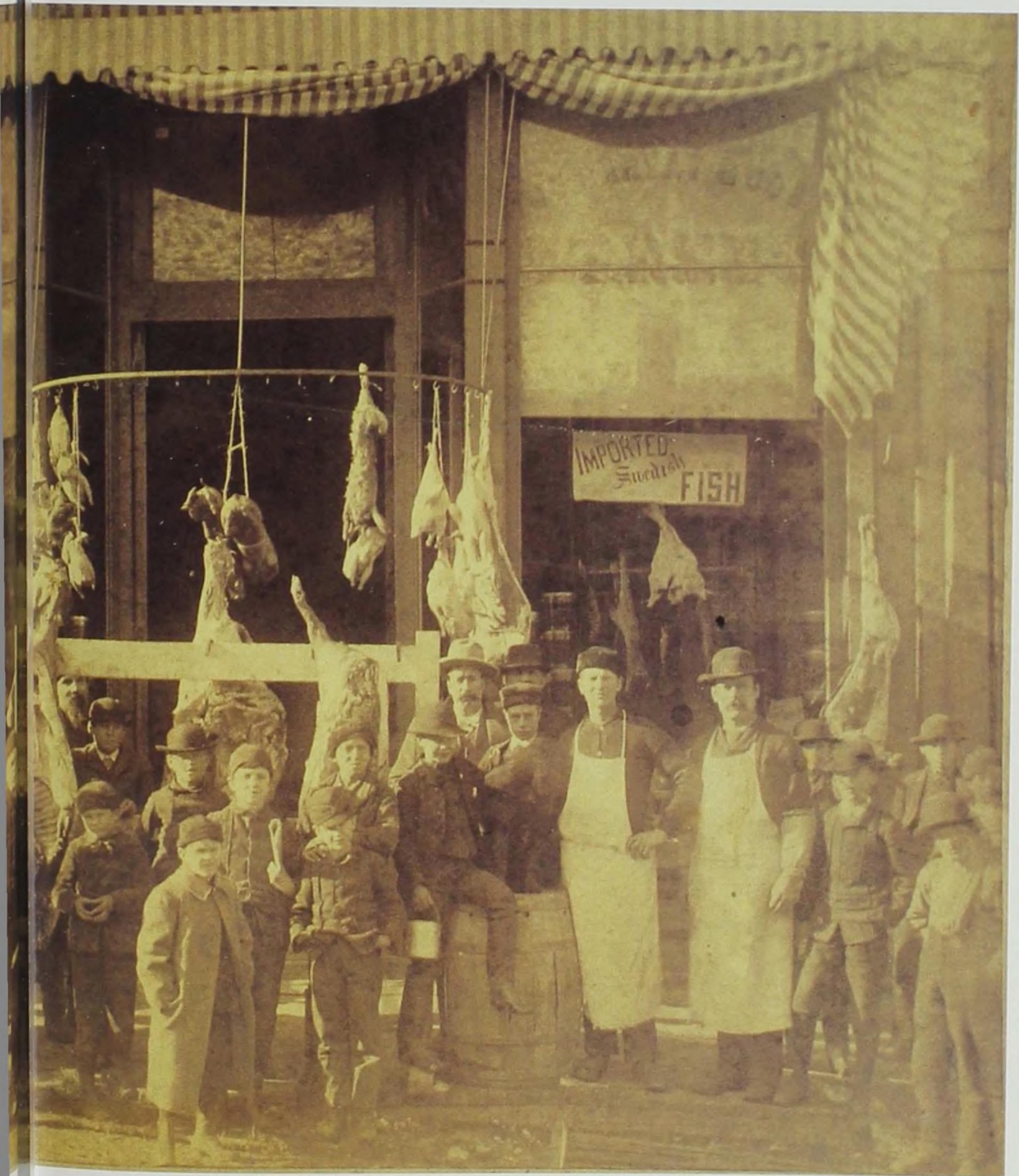
The Harvats were a hard-working family. Joseph had begun as a hired laborer, and worked as a traveling salesman before opening his own meat market on Market Street in the early 1880s. Mary supplemented the family income by selling produce from her garden. Loyal members of St. Mary's Catholic Church, they sent their children to St. Mary's parochial school. Emma later attended the Iowa City Academy and Williams Commercial College, where she prepared herself for a career in business. She was one of a new breed of ambitious young American women who were preparing to move into the newly opening field of clerical work, which until the 1880s had been a primarily male preserve. By the turn of the century, however, men were

finding that stenography and bookkeeping jobs were too poorly paid, and offered too little opportunity for advancement to be considered as a career option. Women like Emma Harvat were more than willing to fill the gap.

By 1889, both of Harvat's parents had died, and most of her siblings had married or moved away. Harvat was working as a clerk



Left: Emma Harvat (standing) at age nine, with sister Clara. Above: Her father's Iowa City business, Harvat Meat Market, in the 1880s.



BOTH PHOTOS, SHSI (IOWA CITY)

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BOTH PHOTOS, SHSI (IOWA CITY)



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Holding a chicken, Emma Harvat (third from right, in light bonnet) poses with friends on a camping expedition.



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SHSI (IOWA CITY)



at Lee Welch Book Store, across from the university campus. She and her youngest sister, Clara, roomed downtown. When Clara enrolled at the university in 1893, Harvat helped to pay her tuition from her earnings at the bookstore (by then called Lee Brothers, and later Cerny and Louis).

Clara graduated in June 1896, married a doctor, and moved out of town. Now on her own, Harvat began saving her money. "I saved my first \$1000 during that time when I was on a salary," she later said. "It was the hardest thing I ever did. After the first thousand, the rest came easier."

She knew what she wanted to do. By 1902, she had saved enough to buy out John Ries's share of Lee and Ries, another downtown bookstore. Ries's former partner, Margaret Lee, then in her sixties, was apparently willing to take Harvat on in order to keep the

store (founded by her father in the 1850s) in business. Lee and Ries became Lee and Harvat. By 1904 Harvat was its sole owner. She sold it later that year to Joseph Lee, her former employer at Lee Brothers, at a good profit.

Taking her money, Harvat moved to Kirksville, Missouri, where she bought another book and stationery store. Five men had already failed to make that store pay; Harvat's landlady shed tears over her boarder's rashness in throwing her money away in such a fashion. "That store has made me more money than any other single thing I have ever done," Harvat later told a reporter, laughing. She spent nine years in Kirksville. During that time she bought and sold several stores, in Kirksville and other Missouri towns, each time running them successfully and later selling them at a profit. By the time she



BOTH PHOTOS: SHSI (IOWA CITY)

By the 1890s Harvat was clerking, a popular but deadend job for American women. Opposite: Harvat is second woman from left, at Gramling Bros. Dry Goods. Above: in center at bookstore. Both stores were in Iowa City.



was forty-three, she was financially independent and ready to retire in Iowa City.

When she came home to Iowa City in 1913, Harvat rented a room from Theresa Stach, whose family ran a downtown shoe store. Theresa's daughter Mary (known as May) was an old friend of Harvat's. When May Stach asked Harvat what she ought to do with the \$2500 she had inherited from her father, Harvat suggested they open a ladies' ready-to-wear store. "It's the coming thing," she assured her friend. They acquired premises on the ground floor of the newly opened Jefferson Hotel.

Their store, Harvat & Stach, was a great success. The partners traveled twice a year to New York on purchasing tours, visiting the couturiers in the garment district and selecting their lines. Harvat provided the business acumen, while Stach provided the fashion



### IF WE SELL YOU A GOSSARD CORSET

These original front lacing corsets are a conspicuous example of that superior quality of merchandise that justifies our unvarying policy of making every sale conditional upon your complete satisfaction.

We offer you a highly specialized corset service, and you may buy every Gossard with our assurance that it will be worth every cent you pay for it—worth it in style, worth it in comfort, worth it in wearing service.

All Gossard Corsets go on Sale Tomorrow at Special Prices

**HARVAT & STACH**

Women's Apparel Exclusively 10 So. Dubuque St

### Iowa City Retailers Style Show Association

#### MEMBERS

COAST & SONS	YETTER'S
BLOOM-MAYER CLOTHING Co.	BENNISON
SLAVATA & EPPEL	HARVAT & STACH

#### DOVE SISTERS

Rugs and Carpets from YETTER'S.  
 Millinery from DOVE SISTERS, BENNISON, YETTER'S.  
 Furniture from RUPPERT & SEEMAN and SCHNEIDER BROS.  
 Electric Coupé from VOSS & CONRAD.

#### FALL STYLE SHOW

Englert Theatre	Iowa City
Sept. 28th and 29th	
Director of Exhibit	
FRED H. MORGAN	

### Programme

Matinee Curtain 2:30 P. M. Evening 8:15 P. M.

#### PART I. SHOPPING

Vaudeville  
 MISS HAZEL ARLINGTON on the violin.

#### PART II.

The Arrival at a Week-End House Party.  
 Vaudeville  
 MR. JOSEPH WYCOFF, Tenor Solo.

#### PART III.

THE MORNING WALK  
 Vaudeville  
 The Musical Tolans, "Two Crazy Musicians".

#### PART IV.

The Tango Tea featuring LaPaige & LaPaige, Society Dancers.  
 Vaudeville  
 MR. JOSEPH WYCOFF, In Popular Songs.

#### PART V.

IN THE EVENING.

Vaudeville

MISS ERMAL

PA

To C

## GOING FAST!

Since our Announcement of last week, pricing our Handsome Winter Coats at:

**\$25.00 and \$35.00**

These Coats have been going fast. Practically every Woman who called, bought

There are many wonderful Values left. But they won't last long at these prices.

## HARVAT & STACH

"WOMEN'S APPAREL EXCLUSIVELY"  
 10 SO. DUBUQUE ST. IOWA CITY

PROGRAM; SHSI (IOWA CITY). ADS: IOWA CITY PRESS-CITIZEN 1/3/21

Opposite: By her mid-forties, Harvat (in dark coat) had bought and sold a series of stores in Missouri and had returned to Iowa City. She and longtime friend May Stach (in lighter coat) opened Harvat & Stach, a women's clothing store. They drove there in this electric car, after the twelve batteries had been charged. Above: Harvat & Stach ads for corsets and coats, and 1914 program from Iowa City Retailers Style Show Association, to which Harvat & Stach belonged.

PHOTO COURTESY CARL STACH



PHOTO COURTESY CARL STACH

Harvat (left) and May Stach at their Iowa City home. Although Harvat often dressed severely, she sported a \$2000 two-carat diamond ring. A bootlegger in police court had once paid his fine with the ring, in lieu of cash. When the ring was never reclaimed, Harvat bought the ring from the city. One day while driving to city hall in her Velie auto, the diamond fell out of the setting. She turned out all available police and firemen to search for it; the police chief eventually found it by a streetcar track.

sense needed to guarantee their firm's success. By 1915 they were ready to move to larger quarters at 10 South Dubuque Street, across from Stach's Shoe Store.

The two women were a contrast in many ways. They were both tall and large-boned, but Stach was more delicate, while Harvat was simply big. Harvat favored severe styles in

her clothing—suits or dresses with simple lines that de-emphasized her prominent bust. Stach preferred frilly dresses, with ruffles and gay prints. Stach was an accomplished seamstress and avid gardener, while Harvat's interests were confined to business and social issues.

Soon after Harvat & Stach moved to its new location, Emma and May built a house for themselves. It was a fine, substantial home on a corner lot. Designed in the latest style, it had four bedrooms, two parlors, a dining room with a table that sat fifteen, and a sun porch for summer entertaining. The floors in the dining room and front parlor were covered with oriental rugs. A large crystal chandelier hung in the entry hall. There was enough room on the landing of the carpeted staircase in the hall for a three-piece orchestra to sit and play on formal occasions. The garden was filled with Stach's prize dahlias. She also made needlepoint seats for the parlor chairs, lace for the tablecloths, and slipcovers for the chairs on the sun porch. A maid and butler helped keep the house running smoothly. The house was a fine setting for entertaining their colleagues in the city's commercial community.

Harvat relished her prominent position among Iowa City's major business figures. The former bookstore clerk, daughter of immigrants, was now one of the city's leading citizens. Among her close friends were the president of the Johnson County Savings Bank, George Falk, and his wife, Pearl, and Professor Carl Seashore, graduate dean and head of the university's psychology department, and his wife, Mary. Harvat liked to point to her role as co-owner of the largest woman-owned enterprise in town as proof that a woman could succeed at business just as well as any man—if she was willing to make the necessary "sacrifices," in terms of the popular view of woman's ideal role in society. Despite the increased number of women working outside the home, and the apparent success of the movement to acquire full political rights for women, the notion remained strong—among women as well as men—that a woman's highest calling was to be a wife and mother.

Among their employees at Harvat & Stach were two young women who had worked at major department stores in Chicago. Celeste Suhr had been a bookkeeper at Mandell Brothers, and Cecilia Curran was a top saleswoman at Marshall Fields until they were hired away by Harvat & Stach. The Iowa City store didn't benefit from their experience for long, however, as the two young women eventually married May's brothers Carl and Phil Stach. When they left Harvat & Stach to work in their new husbands' businesses, Harvat discovered, to her dismay, that instead of hiring top-quality staff, she had been playing cupid!

Although she had not been active so far in politics, Harvat was flattered in 1921 to be asked by Emma Watkins, a teacher and chair of the women's branch of the local Republican Party, to run for alderman-at-large. This was the first city election held since Iowa women gained the right to vote in 1920. Emma Harvat was elected by a large margin. Indeed, of the dozen or more candidates running for various offices in that election, she received the second highest number of votes.

Although city council meetings were officially held only once a month, the press of business involved in dealing with demands for street paving, sewer extension, street lighting, and other issues often led to additional meetings. Alderman Harvat served on the council's finance committee, which dealt with the thorny issue of finding ways to pay for all of these projects. She also took her turn serving as mayor pro tempore during the mayor's absence at council meetings, inspiring a reporter on a local newspaper to comment, "The choice of Miss Harvat as mayor pro tempore illustrates the rapidly growing tendency now in effect to place women in positions of responsibility formerly only occupied by men."

In January 1922, when Harvat had served on the council nine months, she and Stach sold their store. Although she was now free of the daily demands of running the store, Harvat by no means retired from business affairs. Over the years she had acquired a variety of real estate property, and she would con-

tinue to buy, sell, and rent property for the remainder of her life. In the summer of 1922, for example, she and Stach purchased property on Muscatine Avenue, on the rapidly developing east side of town, where they built five new homes. They sold these houses over the next two years for approximately \$5000 each—some before they were completed—and they had plans to build at least three more the next year.

In June 1922 the city council faced a crisis. Mayor Ingalls Swisher had dismissed the police chief, Michael Malone, in the wake of a major bootlegging raid by federal and county officers. More than eighty-six people were indicted in the incident. Although Swisher insisted that he meant to cast no aspersions on Malone's performance of his duty, there was considerable controversy about the police chief's dismissal, especially among the city's Irish population. The council refused to confirm Swisher's nominee, a World War I veteran named H. I. Jennings, as Malone's successor. Swisher, who had only reluctantly agreed to run for a second term as mayor the previous year, resigned, claiming that being mayor made it impossible for him to run his private law practice effectively.

On the occasions when she had served as mayor pro tempore during the previous fifteen months, Harvat's brisk administrative style had impressed her fellow aldermen. At a special meeting held the day following Swisher's resignation, she was unanimously elected as his successor. "I have no glittering promises to make," she said in her acceptance speech. Nevertheless, she assured her public that she would "respect the laws" and devote herself to "a single purpose—the continued purity, cleanliness, decency and law-abidingness of Iowa City."

Harvat had no qualms about her qualifications for the job. "Running a city," she told the *Iowa City Press-Citizen* in 1922, "is like running any business. A woman can do it just as well as a man, but more men have had the necessary business training. In some ways a woman can make a better mayor than a man. A councilman told me the other day that I shouldn't try to be a mother to all these fellows that come before me, but I think I have

persuaded several men to stop drinking. Women, too, come to me to talk things over when they would not feel free to visit a man mayor. It takes a bit of tact at times to manage matters."

"There have been other women Mayors," she told the *San Francisco Examiner* in August 1922, "but they're Mayors of villages, not of a city, like I am. It's a different proposition running a city of the proportions of Iowa City and managing a village of 500 inhabitants. . . .

"We have a splendid university," she continued. "My aim is to put the city on such a basis that a mother can send her daughter to that university without feeling that she will return a brazen flapper, utterly devoid of old-fashioned charm; and a father will feel that his son will not return to him as a 'cake eater,' whose only accomplishments are knowing the precise length a cigarette holder should be, what combination in necktie will attract feminine approval, the latest jazz steps and the correct, careless manner of consulting a wrist watch."

Harvat's term in office coincided with a major economic growth spurt in Iowa City. Homes were being built at an unprecedented rate, and the need for paved streets and sewers rapidly outran the city's ability to provide them. The city's population had grown nearly 13 percent between 1920 and 1922, according to an unofficial census sponsored by the business community that year. Between chairing the monthly city council meetings and presiding over the police court, the mayor's job was a time-consuming one. It was just the kind of challenge Emma Harvat liked.

Following her election, Harvat plunged enthusiastically into her new role. During the

remainder of June and July, the council met frequently to deal with the issues before them: selecting a new police chief, appointing an alderman-at-large to replace Harvat, approving the purchase of a new fire truck, and signing various paving contracts. Because of concern over increased traffic and speeding in the city, a motorcycle policeman

was hired and equipped; in his first four days on duty, the *Press-Citizen* reported, he earned his whole month's salary in fines and costs. When Harvat reported this to the council, the newspaper remarked that "she was warmly applauded," adding that "it proved that she proposes to run a business administration, and to enforce the laws."

A routine check of Mayor Swisher's books by the council's auditors revealed no malfeasance, although considerable carelessness was found. Two of his books, the cash book and the license book for 1921, had been lost during renovations in the mayor's office, and could not be found. The records that were available were far from neat and showed numerous erasures. Clearly Swisher's claim that he had been overwhelmed by the pressures of the job were true. He and his wife, who was in poor health, went off to Wisconsin for the

summer, but not before rumors spread that he had received a death threat from the Black Hand—the notorious Irish terrorist organization—for his treatment of Police Chief Malone. Malone himself, to whom Swisher had written a formal note assuring him that his competence was not in question, had no comment on the situation.

Despite public agitation by Malone's supporters to have the former police chief reinstated, the council, under Harvat's guidance, voted on July 22 to appoint John J. Lorack, a

SHSI (IOWA CITY)

### SEES NEED OF MORE WOMEN IN OFFICE.



MISS EMMA J. HARVAT, THE MAYOR OF IOWA CITY, IOWA, WHO SEES ROSY FUTURE FOR HER SEX IN POLITICS.

(By a staff photographer of The Daily News.)

"Running a city is like running any business," Harvat said. "A woman can do it just as well as a man."



local grocer and real estate agent who had once run for county supervisor on the Democratic ticket, as the city's new chief of police. For the next three years, Lorack and Harvat worked closely together in seeing that the city's laws were properly enforced.

Emma Harvat's brisk administrative style extended to her service on the police court. Those brought before her on charges of public drunkenness, speeding, disturbing the peace, or improper behavior soon learned that she was no easy mark. By the end of her first year in office, Harvat had collected \$6,213.20 in fines and licenses, more than any mayor since prohibition cut off the city's income from liquor licensing. Every penny was scrupulously accounted for. She made a point of having her quarterly financial reports published in the newspaper, to keep the public informed.

"Running a city is like running any business," she told a reporter. "In the cases that come before me, I consider them very carefully, and when I decide and say thirty days or \$15 fine, I mean it." She added, smiling, that she had been told that "several prisoners declared that they didn't want to come before me again." Occasionally someone would appeal a sentence to the county courts, but generally the judges upheld Harvat's decisions. An exception was the jeweler who insisted that he did not need the second-hand goods license Harvat assessed him for, simply because he bought and sold jewelry not made in his shop. When he won his appeal in the district court, he sued Harvat's administration for the return of the \$11 fee. The council ruled that henceforth only pawnbrokers and junk dealers would be required to take out that type of license.

Harvat had no time for law breakers. A man charged with drunkenness, who protested her ruling, found his fine doubled on the spot. Another man accused of immoral relations with a fourteen-year-old girl was fined and told to get out of town, even though he claimed he planned to marry the girl when she reached sixteen. A second man accused of molesting the same young girl was only permitted to remain in town because Harvat felt sorry for his wife and children, al-

though she observed that his behavior was worse than the other man's. In December 1922 she banned Iowa City theaters from showing the films of Fatty Arbuckle, whose scandalous trial for immoral behavior had shocked even Hollywood; this act earned Harvat the public approbation of the Iowa City Woman's Club.

She was not unsympathetic, however, with those who came before her. "I should say that seventy-five percent of the cases I deal with come from the ranks of the poor and uneducated," she told a reporter in 1924. "If one will use tact and good sense a great deal can be done for them. That's why my work is so fascinating to me." She set up a separate detention room for women at city hall, so that they would not be thrown into jail with men. As mayor, she was an ex officio member of the Social Services Department, and she worked closely with Mabel Evans, the local probation and truant officer and county "Overseer of the Poor." Harvat was also involved in organizing a local juvenile home, and for a period after leaving the mayor's office served as its president.

Despite her gruff manner and sharp way with a penny, she had a generous nature. May Stach's nephew Carl Stach remembers going with Harvat at Thanksgiving and Christmas to deliver turkeys and Christmas trees to poor families. "Don't let them see you, Junior," she would admonish him. "Ring the bell and run away quick!"

The duties of her office, however, occupied the greatest portion of her time. In January 1923, she appointed a new city engineer, giving him a \$1200 raise and instructions to do whatever he thought necessary in order to put the city engineering department on a more efficient basis. A few days later, she was off to Chicago to represent the city at a regional congress on roads. She had successfully sponsored a jaywalking ordinance in Iowa City the previous September, and in February she ordered several streets closed off so that children could go sledding in safety.

When her term ended in March 1923, she decided to run for reelection. To her satisfaction, she won by a comfortable margin, re-

ceiving 2,301 votes to Democrat M. E. Hurley's 2,101. The city's business community sent her a large bouquet of roses; the scent filled her office as she took her oath on April 1.

The duties of her office, however, did not prevent her from having a private life. In August 1922, when she had been mayor for six weeks, she and May Stach took a vacation by train to California, where they visited relatives in San Bernadino and San Francisco, and went camping in Yosemite Park. Shortly before they were to return to Iowa City, they were involved in a serious three-car accident. Although no one in their car was killed, there were two fatalities, and Harvat spent several days in the hospital; her right arm was still causing her trouble over a year later. It didn't prevent her and Stach from enjoying short vacations with their friends the Falks on a Minnesota lake in 1923 and again in 1924.

Throughout this period, Iowa City contin-

ued to expand rapidly. Since the start of the century, it had spread to the west bank of the Iowa River. The Manville Heights neighborhood, built in that area following the establishment of a large city park in 1906, was now demanding paved streets and sewer connections. The university had begun building a new hospital and medical school on the west side as well. The city was also growing eastward. The Morningside addition was platted in 1924 on what had been the county fairgrounds. Two major highways, the Red Ball (running north toward Dubuque) and the Whiteway 7 (en route from Chicago to Omaha), passed through the city. In addition, the city was negotiating with the state to pave a highway to the airport, which had recently been built just south of the city limits.

This rampant growth led to demands for a zoning ordinance in 1924. Harvat backed this concept energetically, although she was careful not to rush it through without giving

When Emma Harvat was growing up in a Czech neighborhood in Iowa City, local merchants such as these gathered for card playing and, no doubt, business discussions. Within decades, she and May Stach were also business leaders. (Photo taken July 20, 1911 at the Hotz Boathouse on the Iowa River. Standing, from left: cigar merchant H. Zimmerli, ice merchant J. Englert, Mr. Dalton. Seated, from left: grocer Joseph Holub, builder J. J. Hotz, shoe store owner J. J. Stach, and clothier Charles Slavata.)

SHSI (IOWA CITY)



the public the opportunity to study it carefully. A zoning commission was established in 1924 to draw up the proposed ordinance, which passed on March 6, 1925.

A measure she advocated that did not pass, however, was a proposal to establish a municipal playground with baseball fields. Despite strong support from the council, the playground issue was soundly defeated by the voters in a special election in June 1924.

Despite—or perhaps because of—her preoccupation with civic matters, Harvat continued to take a strong interest



In their Iowa City home on Davenport Street, Emma Harvat and May Stach entertained frequently.

in the concerns of working women. "Women don't have as many handicaps in professional careers as most people believe," she told Edna Tutt Frederikson of *The Woman Citizen* in 1925. "Their only real disadvantage is their lack of business training which men have from the start." In February 1924, Harvat took part in the founding of an organization to promote the welfare of the city's business and professional women. The Iowa City Business and Professional Women's League was formed following a visit from Lucile Everett of Davenport, a representative of the recently established Iowa State League of Business and Professional Women. Emma Harvat was the club's first president.

Within a year, the club claimed an amazing membership of nearly three hundred women, indicating the enthusiasm with which business and professional women greeted this opportunity to enhance their position in the commercial world. The club's stated goals for 1925 were to set up an employment agency for women, to establish a loan fund to provide scholarships for girls seeking to attend commercial colleges, to provide educational lectures and round tables, and to hold classes in social dancing,

gymnasium activities, and arts and crafts.

Unfortunately, the new club seems not to have lived up to its initial ideals. Although it had intended to affiliate with the state and national organization, it did not do so. Its records have been lost, but the scanty information available indicates a gradual decline in membership over the next decade. Emma Harvat served a second term as its president in 1926, after she had left public office.

When her term as mayor ended in 1925, Harvat ran again for reelection, but this time she was defeated. Perhaps the novelty of having a female mayor had worn off. Her defeat seems to have been less a rejection of her record in office than a return to political business as usual in the city; voter turnout was low, and the Democratic Party (long a powerful force in liberal-minded Iowa City) swept the polls. Harvat, unfortunately, was a Republican.

She seems to have taken her loss philosophically. For several years, she remained aloof from politics, occupying herself with various business and civic projects, including the new juvenile home. She accepted a position with the Fidelity Finance Company as a real estate loan manager and worked for



them for several years, while continuing her own private real estate activities.

She and May Stach toured Europe during the later 1920s, visiting London, Paris, and Bohemia. A highlight for Harvat was their visit to Prague, where she looked up distant relatives.

Although her family was scattered, Harvat kept in close touch with them. Of her siblings, only three were still alive in 1925: Jennie in San Francisco, Anna in New York, and George in North Carolina. Her sister Clara's three children came from Ottumwa to attend the University of Iowa in the 1920s, and were presumably welcome guests at their Aunt Emma's home.

Harvat and Stach were part of a select group of Iowa City's business society that met on Friday nights to play bridge and discuss economic affairs in the city. They entertained frequently, with Harvat supervising the meat course (her Bohemian pork chops with caraway seeds were a favorite dish). After dinner, Harvat would take the gentlemen into the parlor for their cigars and (after the repeal of Prohibition) liquor, while Stach and the ladies gossiped and cleared away the table. In 1925, they gave a buffet luncheon for 138 people. Although the Depression put an end to such lavish entertaining, the two women continued to enjoy the company of friends and relatives. Stach would play the piano, and occasionally Harvat would accompany her on the harmonica, stamping her feet to the rhythm of a Czech polka.

Emma Harvat made one final foray into city politics in 1935, when her opposition to a proposal to build a municipal power station led her to run again for the post of alderman-at-large. In the fiercely fought campaign, the incumbent Democrats were challenged by a nonpartisan slate calling itself the Municipal Ownership League. The league's platform was based on the power plant proposal, which the Democrats opposed. The Republicans also vigorously opposed the proposal. Harvat—again running on the Republican ticket—argued that the cost of replacing the existing system would outweigh any possible savings from direct government ownership of the city's power plant. She was endorsed by



BOTH PHOTOS: IOWA WOMEN'S ARCHIVES, UNIVERSITY OF IOWA LIBRARIES; EMMA J. HARVAT PAPERS

Opposite: Emma Harvat. Above: May Stach.

another non-partisan group called the Consumers Protective Association. Although she was defeated soundly at the polls, her arguments and those of her supporters appear to have prevailed in the end. No city-owned power station was ever built.

Emma Harvat died on May 30, 1949. She was seventy-nine years old. For the past year, she had been in such poor health that May Stach had been appointed her legal guardian. A month before Harvat's death, Stach—in poor health herself, no longer able to handle Harvat's round-the-clock care, even with the assistance of a hired nurse—had placed Harvat in the Forest Park Sanitarium in Davenport. It was there that Harvat died. She was buried in Iowa City's St. Joseph's Cemetery. Her headstone reads simply, "Emma J. Harvat, 1870-1949."

In her will, Harvat left sums of money to

her six surviving nieces and nephews. The remainder of her \$45,000 estate—comprising the house on East Davenport Street, an apartment building, and the premises once occupied by Harvat & Stach Ladies Ready to Wear, as well as a 1939 Dodge sedan and an assortment of savings certificates—went to her lifelong friend and companion, May Stach.

Emma Harvat's other legacy was more abstract—helping redefine the professional and political status of American women in this century. She attained financial freedom and independence at a time when women's security was often reliant on marriage. Among the first generation of women to receive a formal business education, she parlayed her training as a bookstore clerk into the business skills necessary to buy and sell a series of stores. As one of a small minority of

female business owners, she had amassed enough savings to consider retirement in her early forties. Her business and personal partnership with May Stach developed their complementary skills to become successful merchants and leading members of the local business and social community. Harvat also served as the highest elected official in Iowa City during a boom period, applying her business sense to city administration and her reform interests to safeguarding the morals of Iowa City citizens and university students.

Although by 1949, when Harvat died, it was no longer unusual for American women to hold elective office, it was still not a common occurrence. It would be 1962 before Iowa City elected another woman, Thelma Lewis, to the post that Emma Harvat had filled so competently. □

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

The material used in preparing this article comes from newspaper accounts, city directories, court records, and other primary source material available in both the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City and the Iowa Women's Archives at the University of Iowa Libraries, as well as personal reminiscences by Carl Stach, an Iowa City resident who knew Emma Harvat well. Further information on Harvat's family, the location of her business properties, and the early history of the Iowa City Business and Professional Women's Club is available in the annotated copy of this manuscript, in the *Palimpsest* production files at the State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City).