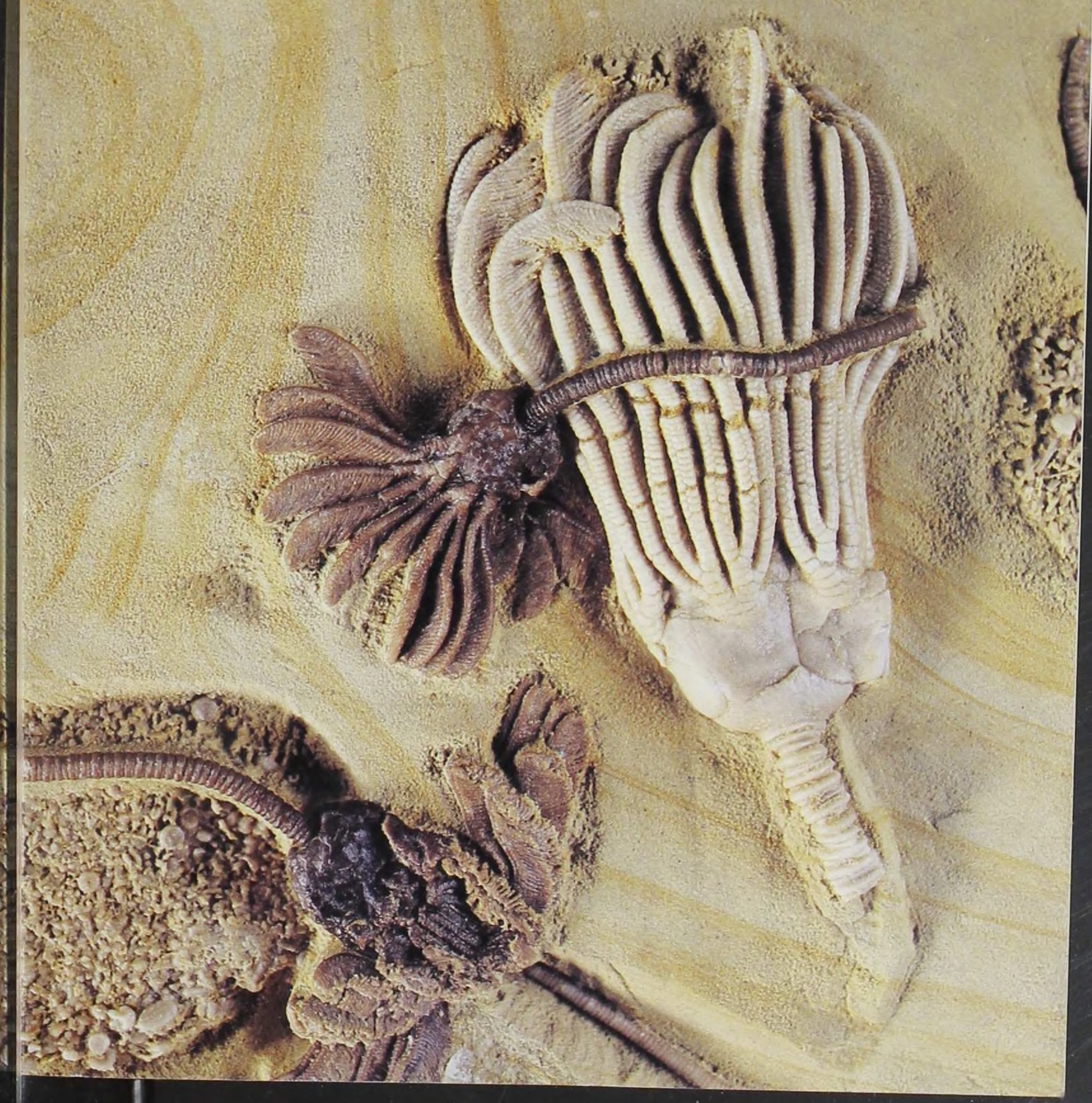
The PALIMPSEST

Volume 76, Number 1 IOWA'S POPULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE Spring 1995 $4.50



Inside—

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Meatpacking has long been an important chapter in Iowa's labor history. This *Palimpsest* presents excerpts of five oral history interviews with Cedar Rapids packinghouse workers, who described working conditions and efforts to organize workers from the mid 1930s to the mid 1950s.

The Meaning of the Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest *(PAL'/imp/sest)* 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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THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA (SHSI) is the historical division of the Department of Cultural Affairs of the State of Iowa. The Society operates from two centers, Des Moines and Iowa City. A museum, a research library, state archives, special collections, community programming, historic preservation, and membership programs are located at 600 E. Locust, Des Moines, Iowa 50319, phone (515) 281-5111. Publications, a research library, and special collections are located at 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240, phone (319) 335-3916. The Society operates several historic sites across the state.

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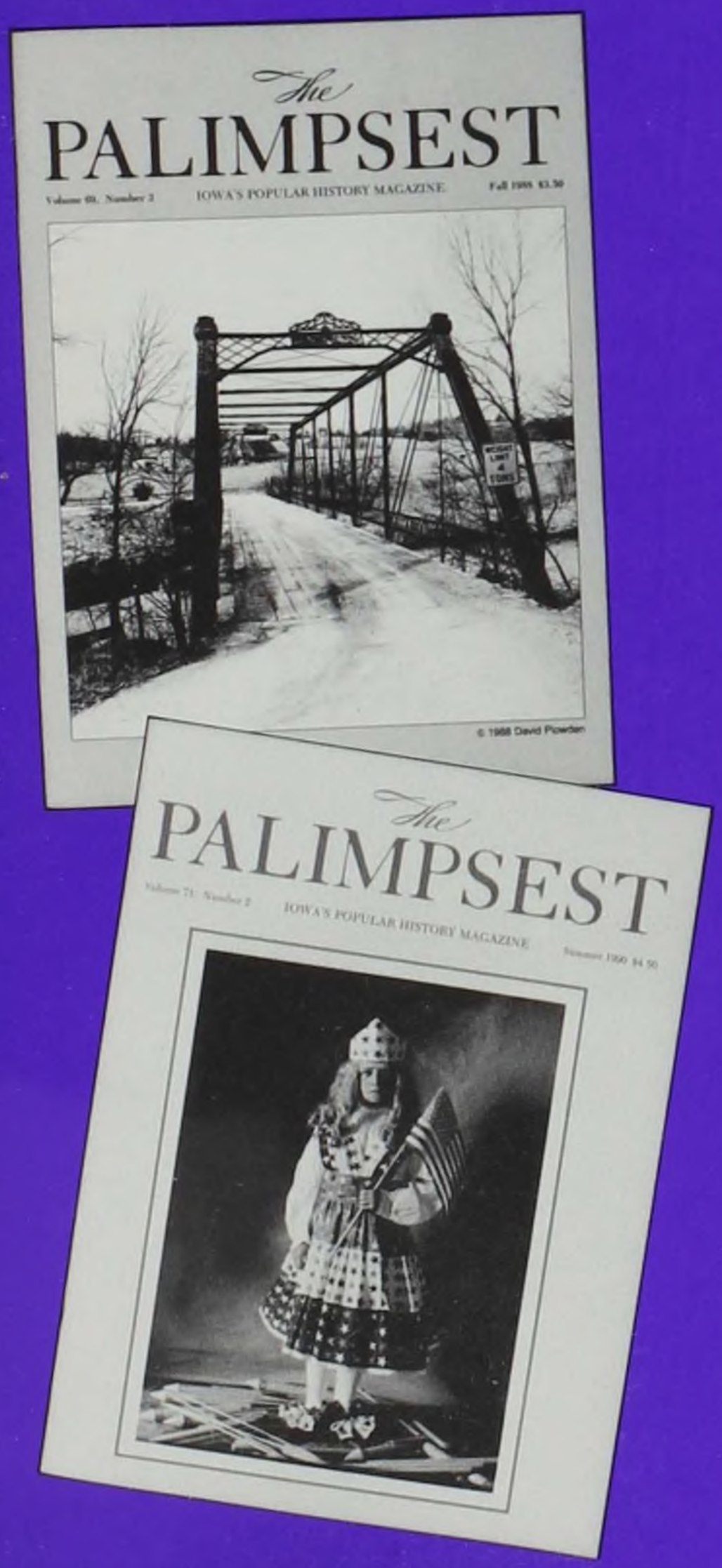
Ever wish you could travel back to the past?



Now you can -- with every issue of *The Palimpsest.*

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ULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE

alie Swaim, Editor

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Young B. H. Beane 20

Sticking together 30

COVER: As if arranged by an artist, a few fossilized crinoids remind us that this marine animal was once abundant in Iowa's ancient seas. Specimen from State Historical Society of Iowa collections; photo by Chuck Greiner, Front Porch Studio.

The

PALIMPSEST

IOWA'S POPULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE

Ginalie Swaim, Editor

VOLUME 76, NUMBER 1 SPRING 1995

PHOTOS BOTH PAGES BY CHUCK GREINER

Thick, heavy scales characterize a primitive fish fossil, found in shale by Page County coal miners. From Pennsylvanian period, some 300 million years ago.

Underwater Iowa—where graceful crinoids once swayed in ancient seas

By Ginalie Swaim

Fossil photography by Chuck Greiner

Research by William M. Johnson

Tiny, chainlike edges distinguish *Halysites catenulatus*, a fossil coral found in eastern Iowa. From Silurian period (400 million years ago).

Cluster of starfish, found near Le Grand. From Mississippian period, 335 million years ago. Entire limestone slab (about 3'x5') has 183 starfish and other species.

IMAGINE LIFTING AWAY the layers of Iowa soil down to bedrock, to rock layers that formed during mind-boggling measurements of time—epochs and periods and eras, with rich names like Pennsylvanian, Mississippian, Devonian, Silurian.

Imagine going so far back in time that the area we know today as Iowa was much closer to the equator and was covered with warm, shallow seas.

The effort is numbing. We look out the window at fields and highways and think: Tropical seas? Over Iowa? Give us proof.

The proof is in geology, of course. Experts can read time in the layers and grains of rock. Although they are alert to subtle changes in color, texture, and composition, geologists (like us) also appreciate the more obvious clues from the past—fossils.

The fossils on these two pages were all found in Iowa and represent the Paleozoic era of 225 to 570 million years ago, during which fishes, amphibians, then finally reptiles and insects appeared. Mosses, horsetails, and ferns developed. The fossils here range from coral from the Silurian period (roughly 400 million years ago), to a primitive fish from the Pennsylvanian period (a mere 300 million years ago).

Some of Iowa's most remarkable fossils, recognized internationally, are those of a class of marine animals called crinoids. These fossils, 335 million years old, are featured at the State Historical Building in Des Moines in a new museum exhibit, "Flowers of the Iowa Seas." The exhibit reveals the flower-like beauty of fossilized crinoids, the intricacy of working with them, and the passion of some Iowans who devoted lifetimes to their study.

Preserved in Iowa limestone for 335 million years or more, crinoid fossils are rock-solid evidence that their habitat—our Iowa—was once a warm, shallow sea. All that is missing is to imagine the crinoids underwater, alive with color and movement.

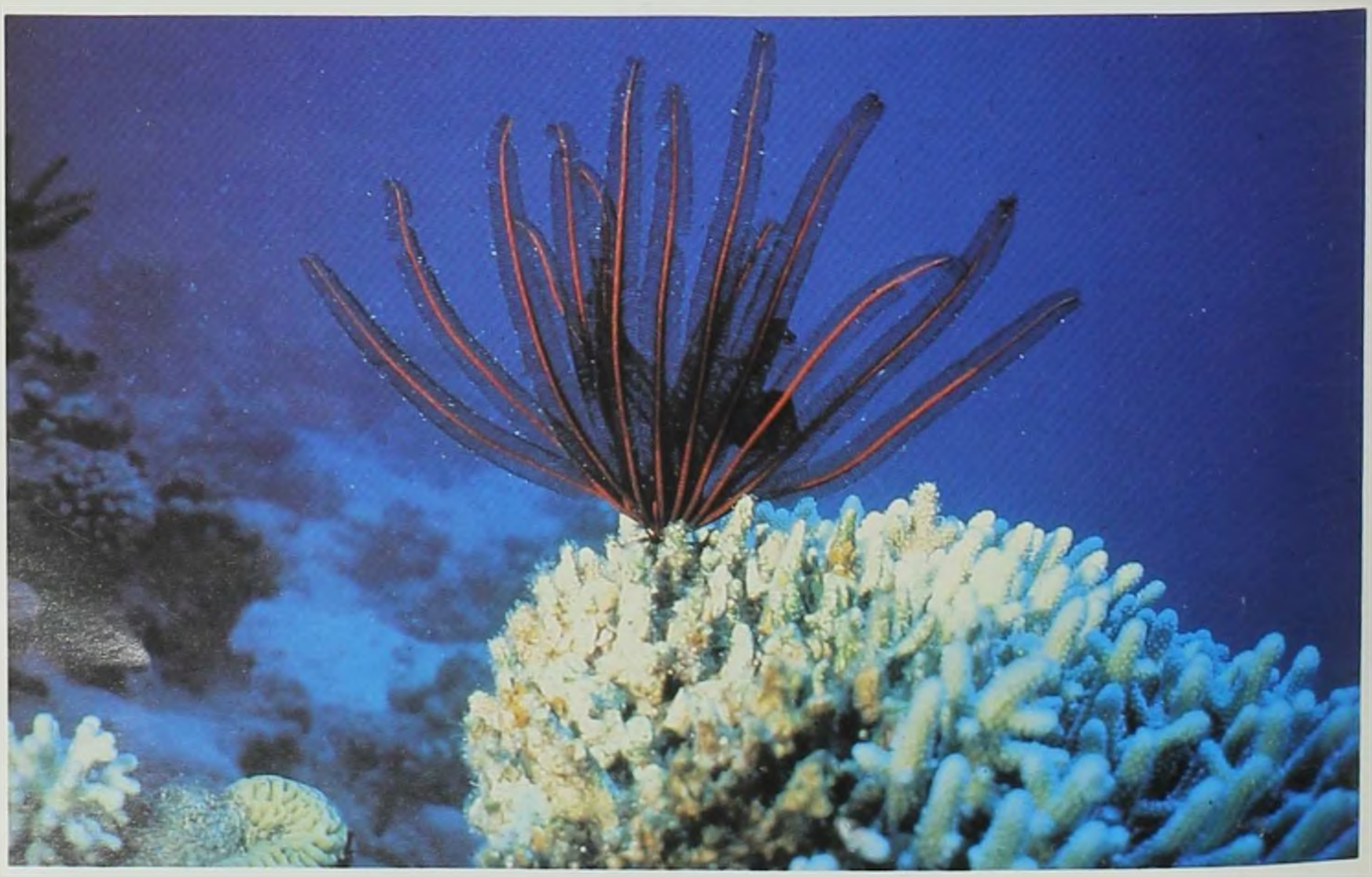
Two crinoid fossils look like pressed flowers on limestone. These marine animals were abundant during the Paleozoic era, 225 to 570 million years ago.

FOR COLOR AND MOVEMENT, we turn to modern crinoids. Photographed in the Bahamas and other shallow, tropical oceans (environments probably similar to Iowa's ancient marine seas), these crinoids are a few of about 600 species found today. (The kind that most resemble Iowa's prehistoric crinoids now live in cold, deep oceans instead of warm, shallow seas.)

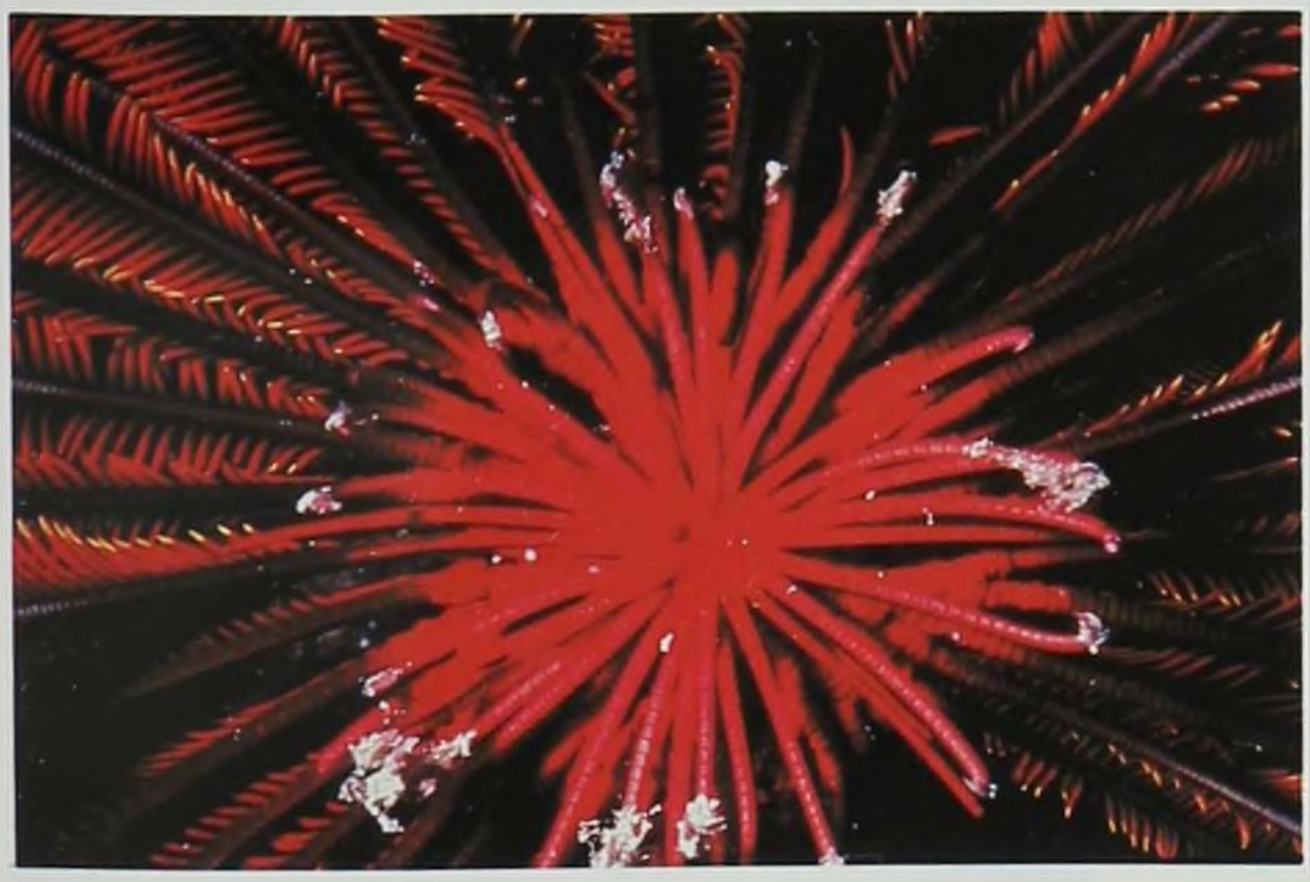
Although their beauty has earned them the popular name of "feather stars" or "sea lilies," crinoids are not plants. Close relatives of starfish, sea urchins, sand dollars, and sea cucumbers, crinoids are echinoderms, animals without backbones. Most attach to objects or to the sea floor. Some, like the ones on these pages, are stalkless. Others, like most of the ones from Iowa's ancient seas, have long, jointed stalks, perhaps stretching up to fifty feet in length. The stalk supports the animal's crown (the cup-like calyx and arms) into the currents to feed on plankton.

University of Iowa geologist Brian Glenister, who has studied living Pacific Ocean crinoids, emphasizes the fragile nature of a crinoid's body. "Within a few hours of death of a modern crinoid, it will fall to pieces," he explains. "The ligaments that hold together the skeletal plates will break down. If you take a living crinoid out of the water and place it on a flat surface, it will soon break itself into pieces, slowly writhing."

It seems a miracle, then, that any remnants of a crinoid's delicate structure could remain together long enough to become fossilized, that something so fragile as a crinoid could be preserved in stone for hundreds of millions of years. The key to preservation must lie in rapid burial, commonly in a flow of lime mud and sand, before the bonding ligaments decay.



PHOTOS BOTH PAGES BY DONALD B. MACURDA, JR.



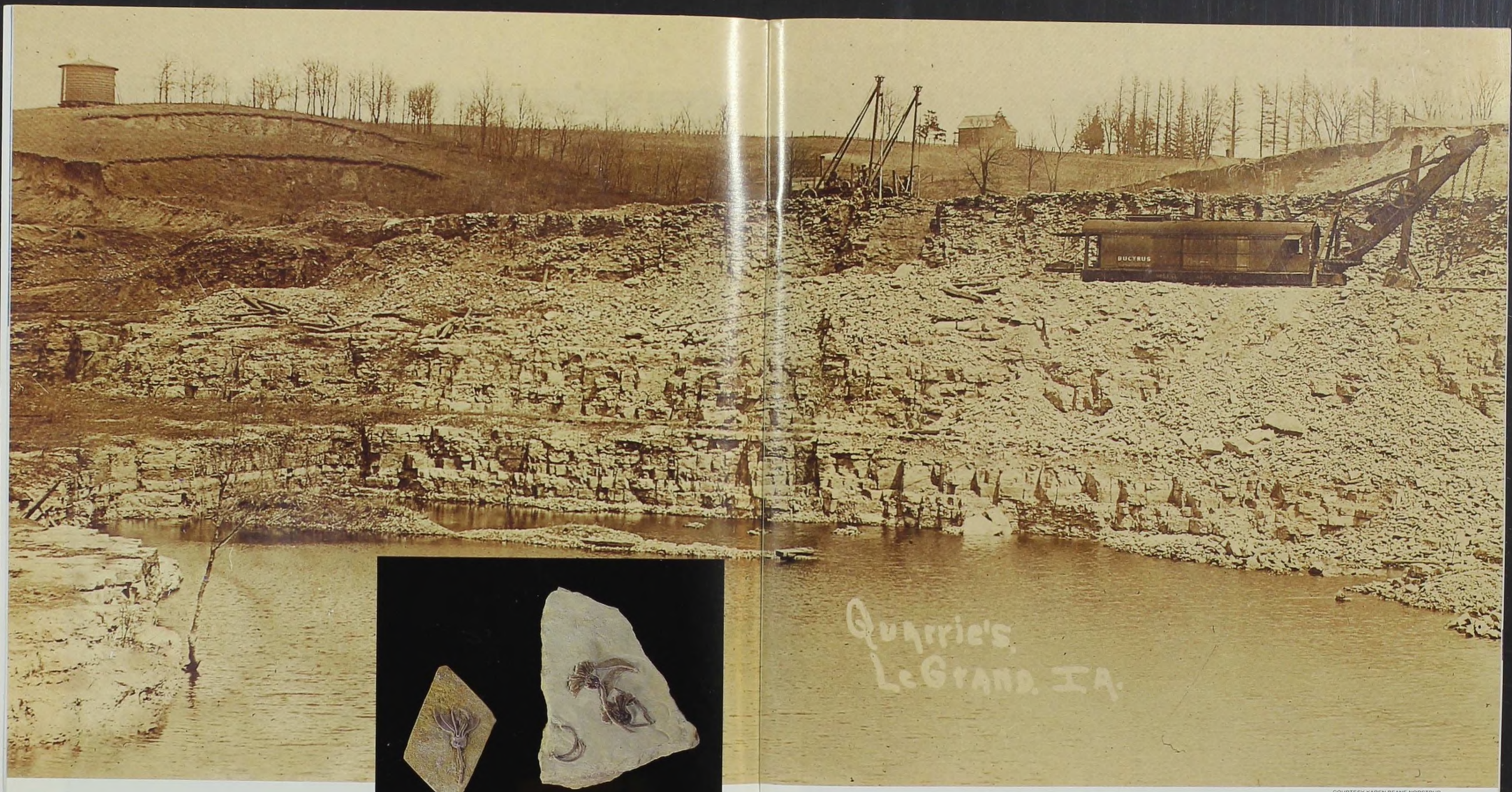
Brilliantly colored, shallow-water living crinoids lack stalks but, like Iowa's ancient crinoids, have millions of food-gathering pinnules on their graceful "arms." Donald B. Macurda, Jr. photographed these crinoids at depths of twenty-five to seventy-five feet on coral reefs at locations cited. Top left: Note tiny, hair-like pinnules on *Nemaster rubiginosa* (Jamaica). Top right: *Comanthina schlegeli* uses some of its arm to cling to rocks (Australia). Bottom right: Bright red *Himerometra robustipinna* is one of the larger crinoids (Australia). Bottom left: *Capillaster multiradiatus* fans out its arms to filter the passing currents (Israel).

Crinoid fossils secured from the Le Grand quarry can only hint at the abundance of this marine animal that once lived in the Paleozoic seas that covered Iowa. Long stalks anchored to the sea floor held the animal's crown up into the currents, where its pinnules could bring plankton to the animal's stomach in the calyx.

PHOTO BY CHUCK GREINER

COURTESY KAREN BEANE NORSTRUD

ONLY A FEW PLACES in the world—especially sites in Indiana, Montana, and Germany—have yielded ancient crinoids as well preserved as those from the Le Grand quarry in Marshall County, Iowa. Quarried since the 1860s, the limestone has been used as ballast in railroad beds, for agricultural lime, and as road gravel. Some layers of limestone, better suited for building and carving, were quarried by Italian stone cutters from Chicago; in fact, the Old Historical Building in Des Moines was built of Le Grand limestone. But the Le Grand limestone that has been most treasured is not that which housed history, but that which represented history itself—the thousands of crinoid fossils found there between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries.



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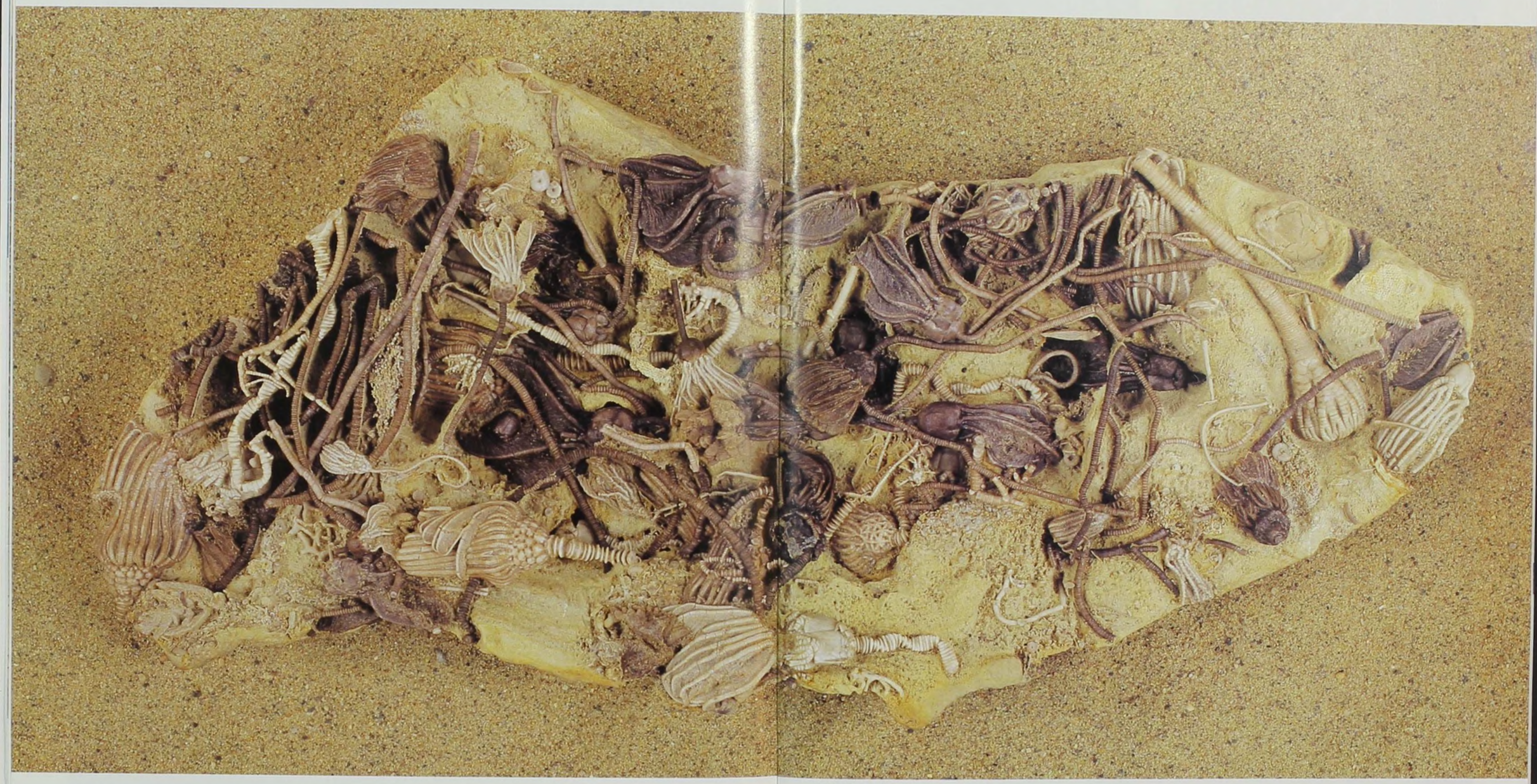
Opposite: Workers at the Le Grand quarry. Above: Gritty beauty of fossilized crinoids. Even though crinoids are animals, the fossils are sometimes called "sea lilies"; the word "crinoid" comes from the Greek *krinon*, meaning "lily." (For close-up of this specimen, see front cover.)

DESPITE THE DYNAMITE and rock crushers used at the Le Grand quarry, many slabs of limestone with fossil crinoids were salvaged. In 1874 the first "nest" (or accumulation) of crinoids was found, indicating a shallow depression in the sea floor where the bodies of dead crinoids had collected. Quarry operators learned to watch for clues—sometimes no more than a cross-section of a stalk—to such deposits. The quarry attracted paleontologists throughout much of the nineteenth century and into the next.

LE GRAND CRINOID FOSSILS are phenomenal because they are so complete. Experts believe that the dead crinoids drifted into a shallow depression in the sea floor and were quickly buried by fine-grained lime mud. Over time, the mud turned to limestone. As the crinoids turned into fossils, the stalk, the calyx, the petal-like arms, the feathery pinnules—all remained intact, despite their own fragile nature, the roughness of water currents, and the weight of sediment that buried them.

PHOTO BY CHUCK GREINER

Crinoid fossils lie in a tangle, exactly as the dead marine animals were buried millions of years ago. Note the jointed, button-like stalks, the plates on the cup-like calyx, and the petal-like arms. In the 1970s museum curator Richard Boyt prepared this slab, carefully clearing away the surrounding limestone. He even removed the limestone under portions of the stalks, so that the stalks bridge over open space.



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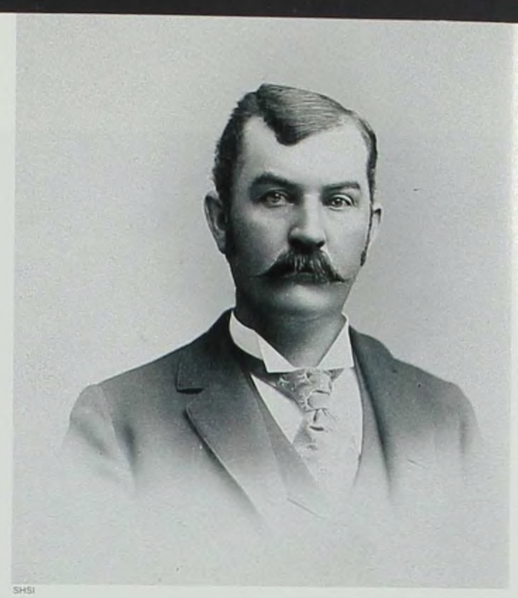

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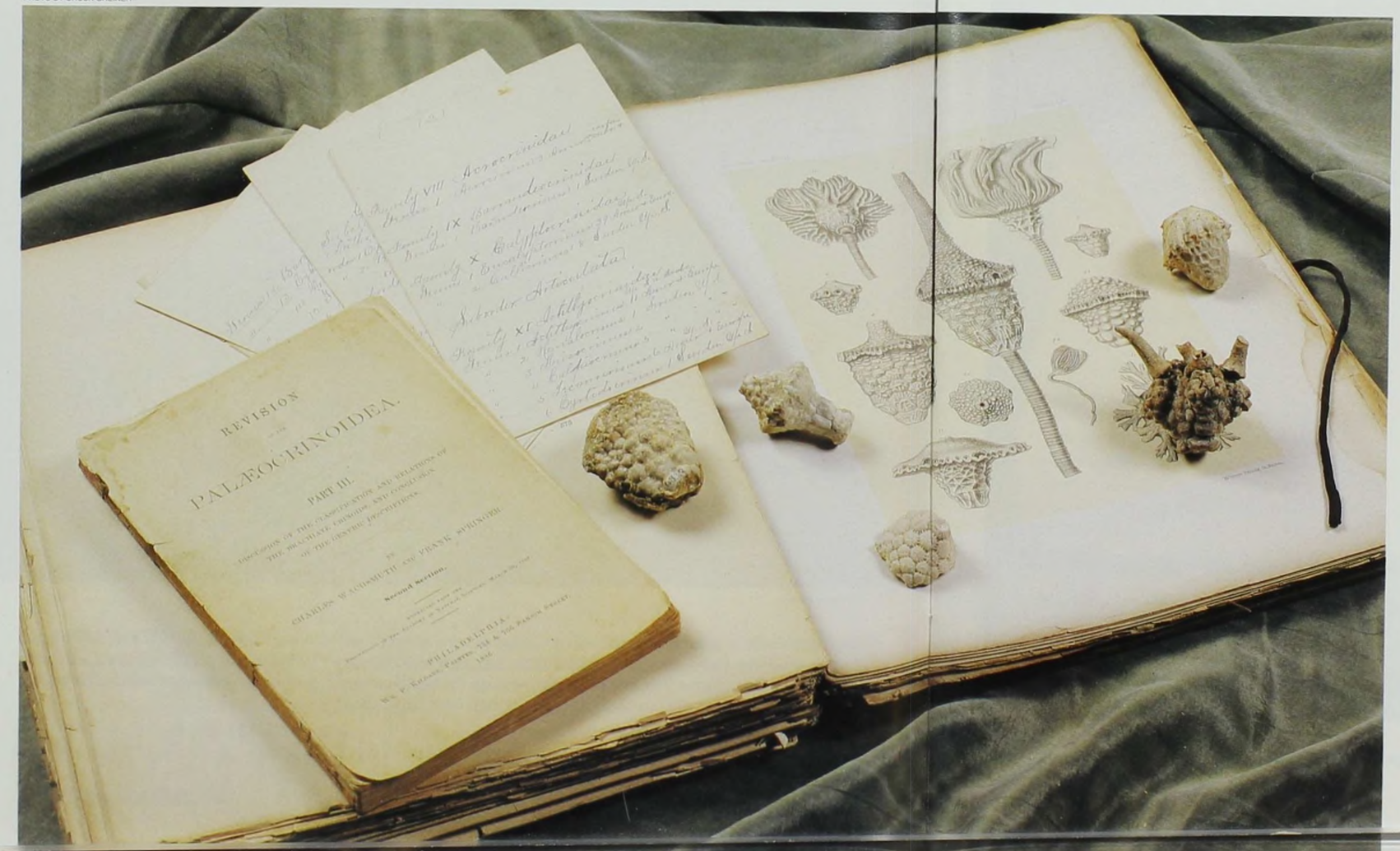

WHAT IS IT ABOUT CRINOIDS that they become the passion of amateur and professional geologists alike? Is it the wonder that these animals once swayed in the ancient tropical seas that covered Iowa? Is it the fragile beauty of a crinoid embedded in gritty limestone? Is it the good fortune of finding a fossil complete with stalk, calyx, and arms?

Whatever it is that attracts individuals to crinoid fossils, Iowa has had its share of self-trained amateurs who have contributed significantly to the science of paleontology. Years before the great crinoid finds at Le Grand, German emigrant Charles Wachsmuth (far left) moved to Burlington, Iowa, and started a grocery. Plagued by ill health, he sought exercise by exploring the nearby limestone cliffs, and collecting and studying the portions of fossilized crinoids he found there. As his collection and knowledge grew, so did his reputation. In 1873 renowned geologist Louis Agassiz hired him to study crinoids at the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University. Wachsmuth's wife, Berhardine, often joined in his collecting, researching, and writing.

Another Iowan, Frank Springer (near left), was a law student at the University of Iowa when he became interested in paleontology after hearing Agassiz lecture in Iowa City. Springer established a law practice in Burlington, and later New Mexico, but his real passion was fossils, and he often joined Wachsmuth in collecting.

The crinoids Wachsmuth and Springer found in the Burlington area were mainly nut-size balls (only the calyx of the crinoid) that weathered out of the limestone bluffs. Combining these with crinoid fossils found elsewhere, they diligently studied the crowns, distinguishing the species by the number and arrangements of plates on the calyx. (Living crinoids secrete calcite plates to provide support and protection for their soft tissues.) Wachsmuth and Springer collaborated on several publications, including the massive volume titled *North American Crinoidea Camerata*, which expanded and refined the identification and systemization of many species.

Like many geologists, professional or self-trained, Wachsmuth and Springer visited the Le Grand quarry. There they encountered a young farm boy named Burnice H. Beane. Talking with experts fueled Beane's passion for crinoids. He would bring amateur crinoid collecting into the next century.

Opposite: Above from left, Charles Wachsmuth and Frank Springer. Below: Burlington crinoid fossils rest on the pages of Wachsmuth and Springer's *North American Crinoidea Camerata* (1897), and across from another of their collaborative publications and B. H. Beane's handwritten field notes.

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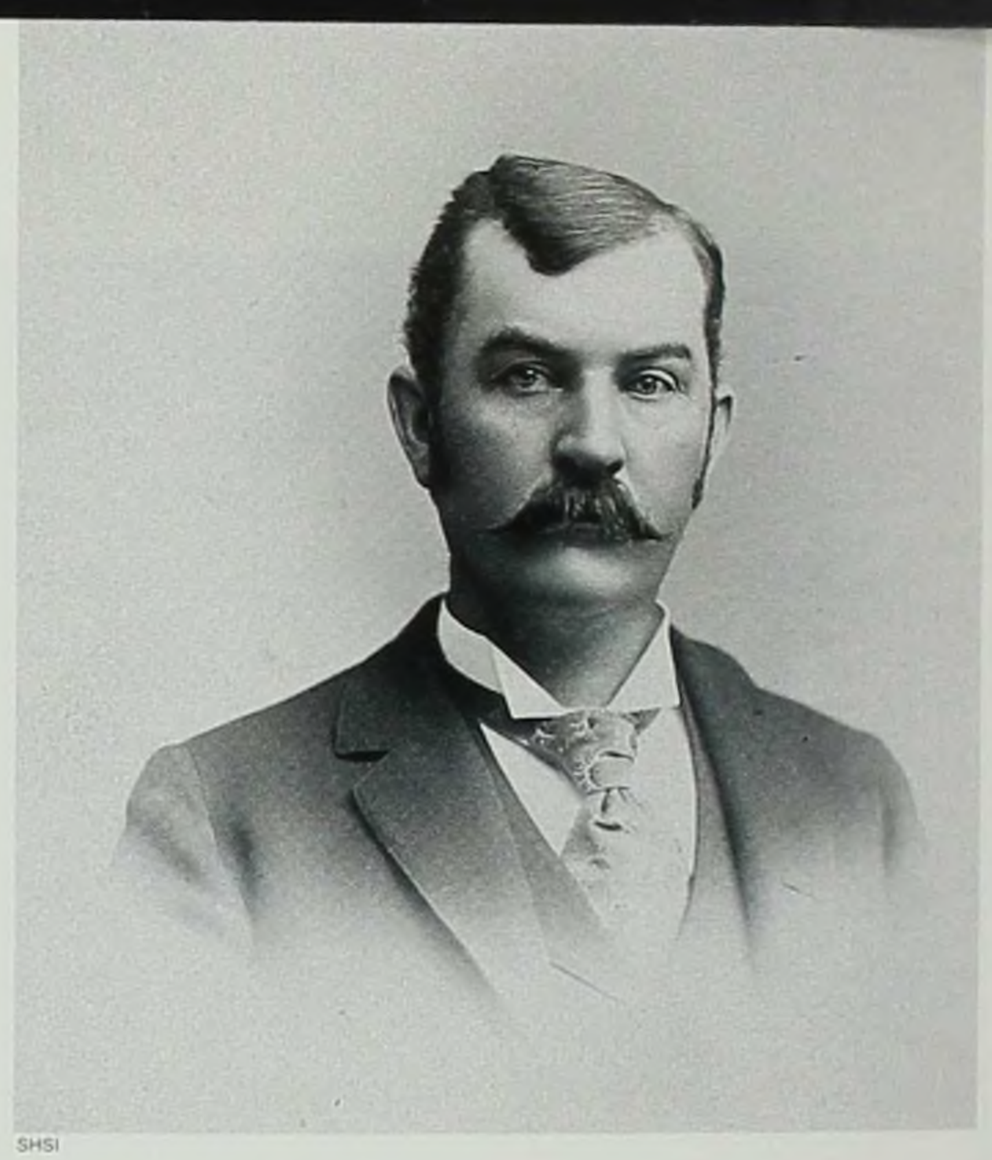

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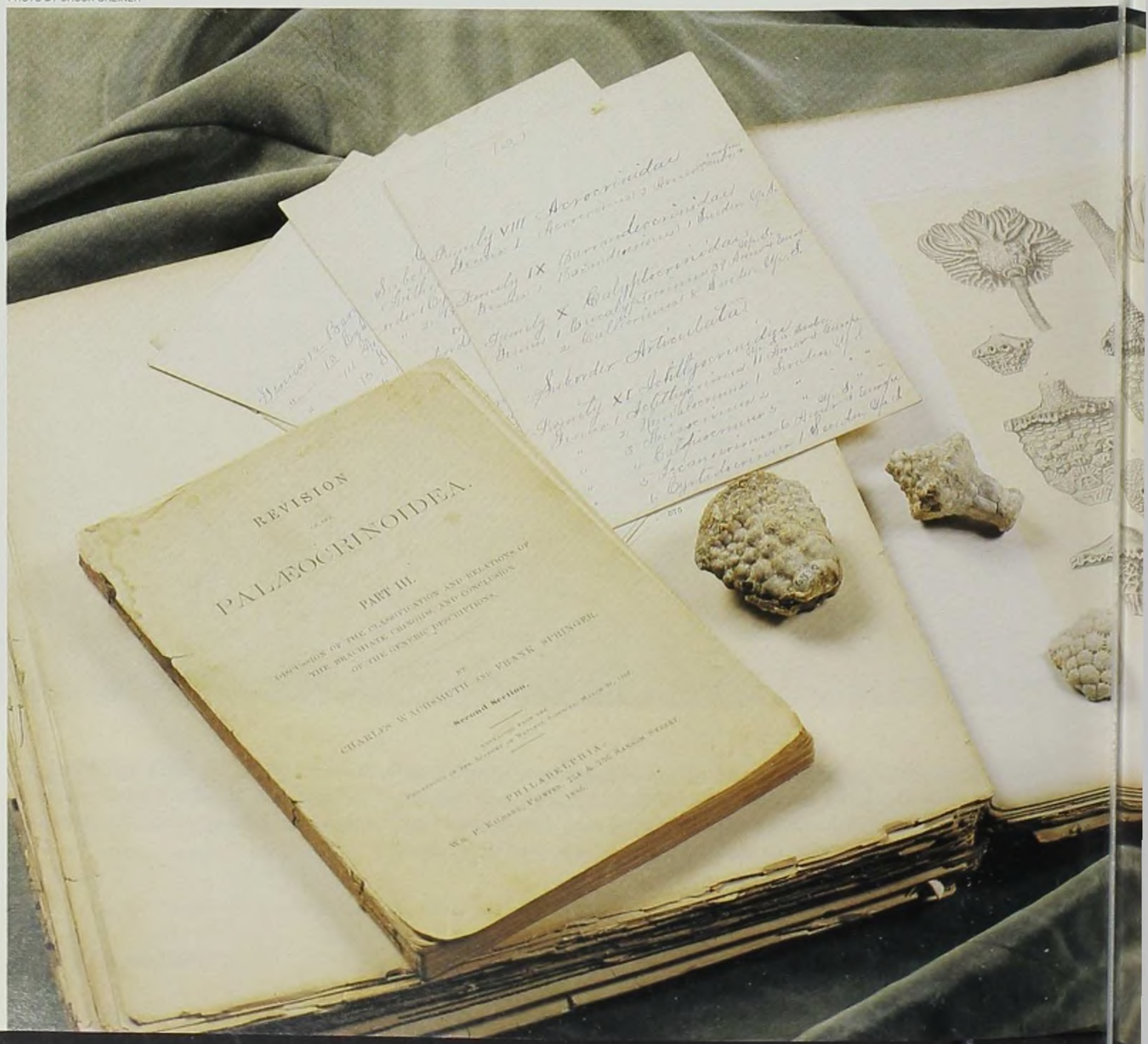

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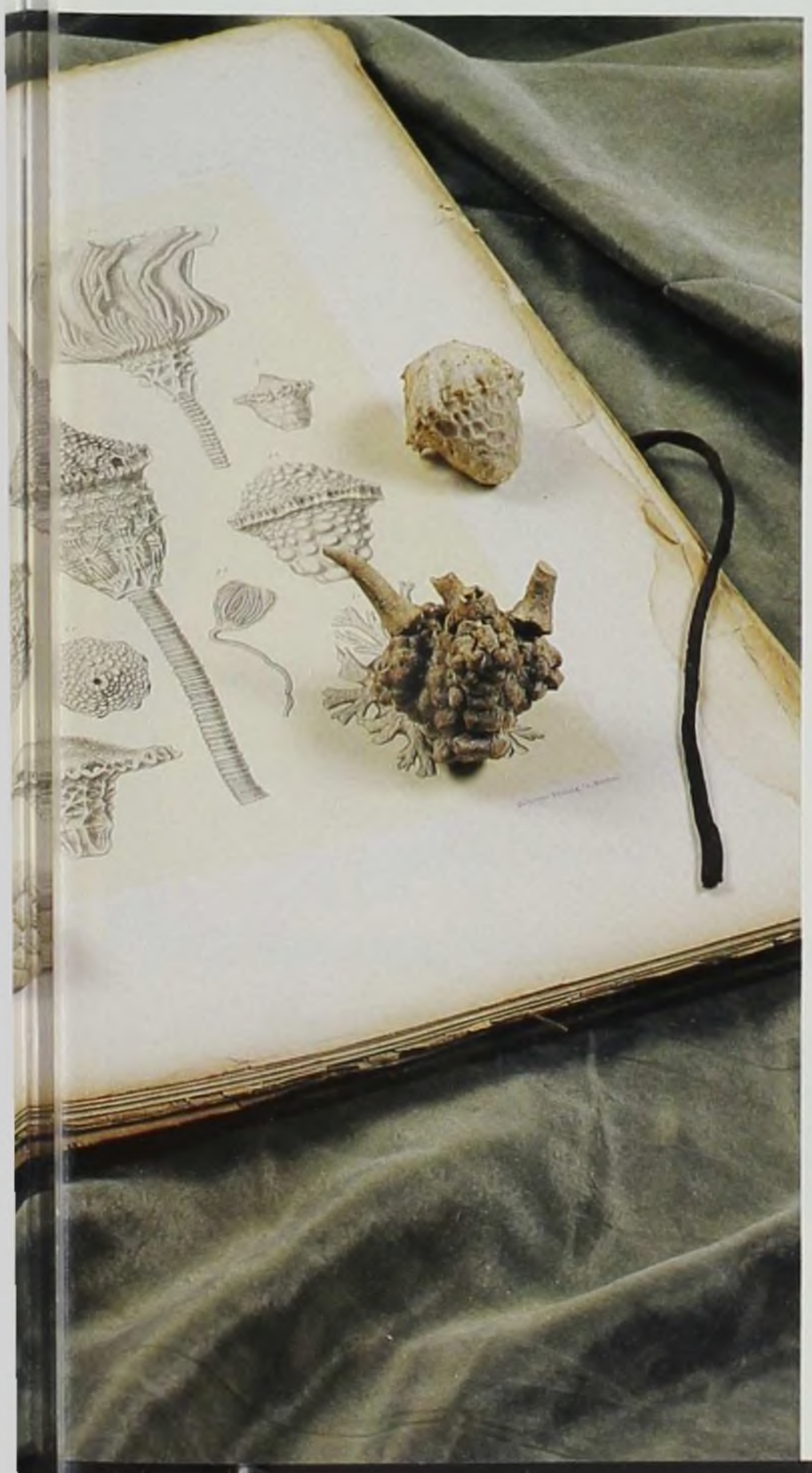

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COURTESY KAREN BEANE NORDSTRUD

Burnice H. Beane points to an individual crinoid on a large limestone slab covered with crinoid fossils.

PHOTO BY CHUCK GREINER

This species of crinoid, *Rhodocrinites beanei*, is named for Beane and recognizes his work in collecting crinoid fossils. This fossil is about the size of a quarter.

BURNICE H. BEANE was fortunate to grow up on a farm adjoining the Le Grand quarry. Over the years, his watchful eye, and those of cooperative quarry workers, spotted many chunks of limestone that likely held deposits of crinoids.

Others in Le Grand and nearby Marshalltown, such as editor Corwyn O'Neal and quarry operator George Kirby, also collected crinoids. But none amassed collections to match Beane's.

Beane discovered eleven species of ancient crinoids at the Le Grand quarry. Yet one of his most significant finds at the quarry occurred in 1931 when blasting exposed a cluster of ancient starfish, close relatives of crinoids. "The best discovery I ever made was a slab of starfish," Beane later said, "and that slab, when I saw it it was about five feet wide and about three feet thick, I think. And it took me two days to get it to work down from the wall [of the quarry] so I could move it. When I got it so I could handle it at all, I used a plank to slide it onto a truck and took it home."

For twenty-six years he worked on the 600-pound slab, scraping away the surrounding limestone to eventually reveal 183 starfish—a remarkable specimen because it is so unusual to find starfish fossils in groups of more than a few. (See page 3 for starfish detail, page 20 for more on Beane.)

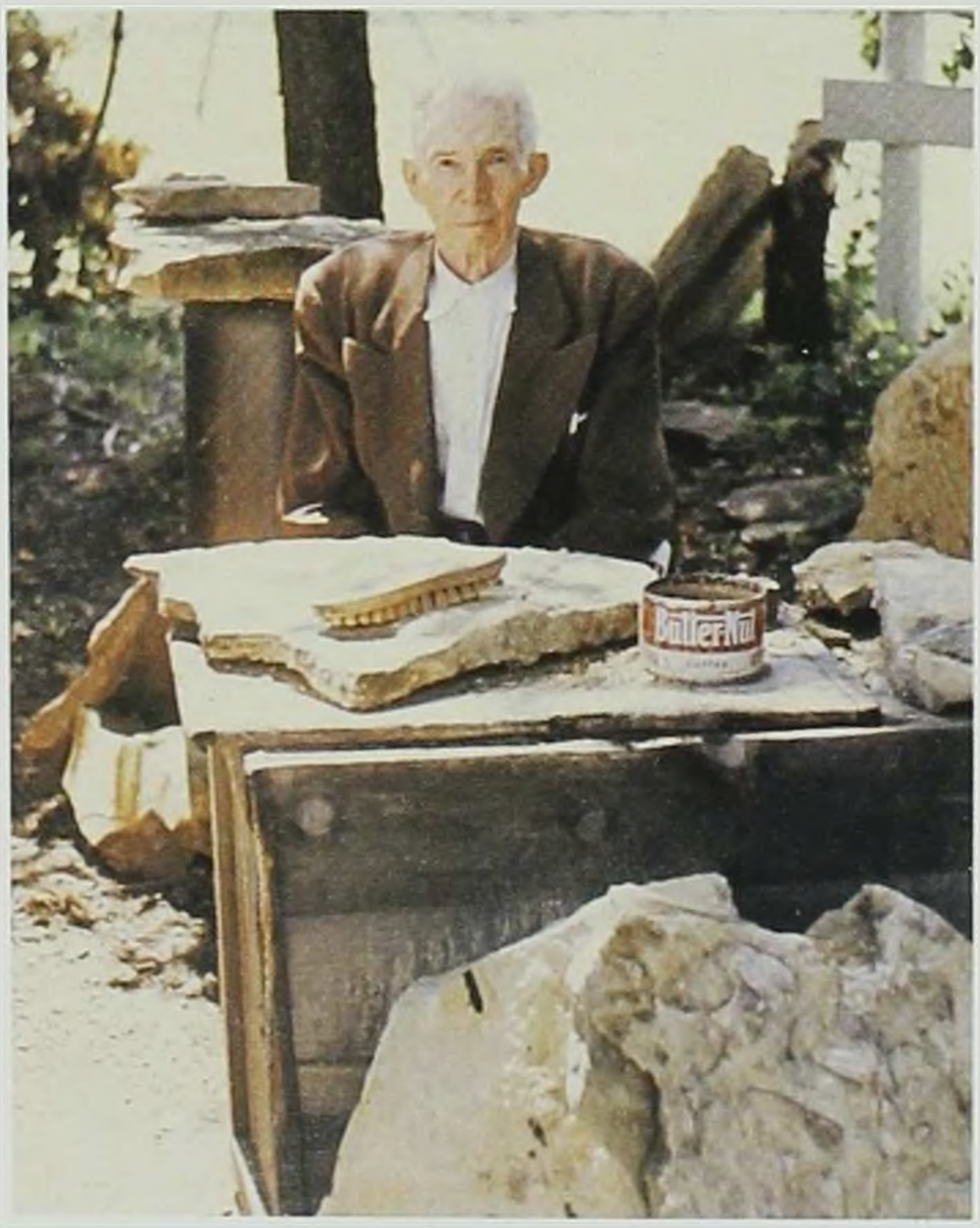
CRINOIDS WERE SO ABUNDANT in Iowa's seas that their fossilized body parts are a major component of much of Iowa's limestone. Nevertheless, finding a chunk of limestone with a complete, still-assembled crinoid fossil buried within it is like finding a needle in a haystack; perseverance is vital. But the next step requires perseverance, too. "Preparing" the fossil, so it stands out in three dimensions above the surrounding limestone matrix, is tedious work, regardless of the available tools and technology. Sitting out in his yard, Burnice H. Beane used a steel probe, chisel, and hard-bristle brush. Others have used hydrochloric acid, but this tends to dissolve the fossils as well as the surrounding limestone.

In the 1960s, Richard Boyt, a museum technician at the Iowa Department of History and Archives (now the State Historical Society of Iowa), began preparing crinoids by micro-sandblasting. The Smithsonian and the Field Museum had used this technique on vertebrates, but Boyt was one of the first to micro-sandblast invertebrates such as crinoids. Society curator William M. Johnson explains the procedure: "Fine, dust-like particles of dolomite, glass, and other material are propelled by air pressure against the stone. When fossils are slightly harder than the surrounding rock, the micro-sandblasting cleans away the matrix and exposes the delicate organic structures." By varying air pressure and type of particle, micro-sandblasting can be used on materials as hard as limestone, steel, and glass, or as soft as leather. It can even remove fly specks or pencil writing from paper.

PHOTO BY CHUCK GREINER

Micro-sandblasting the limestone from the long hairs, or pinnules, on crinoids and blastoids required curator William M. Johnson's steady hand and numerous hours. Blastoids are close relatives of crinoids.

COURTESY KAREN BEANE NORSTRUD



B. H. Beane prepared crinoid fossils in his yard, using simple tools and steady devotion.

Johnson has micro-sandblasted several crinoid slabs, including the close-up above. This slab took only sixty to eighty hours because the stone was relatively soft. The slab on pages 10-11 prepared by Boyt took much longer because the limestone was harder and the mass of crinoids more complex.

"I'm fascinated by the discovery and by the intricacy," Johnson explained. "You have to feel your way through. You have to have an idea of the anatomy of the animals and to be able to visualize the shallow where they settled at the bottom of the sea floor, so you don't cut too deep."

PHOTO BY CHUCK GREINER

Society curator William M. Johnson micro-sandblasts the limestone matrix around a small crinoid specimen.

THE LE GRAND QUARRY that yielded such amazing fossil specimens through the 1930s is now overgrown, and geologists doubt if any more crinoid deposits will be found there. Quarry operations have moved north across the Iowa River.

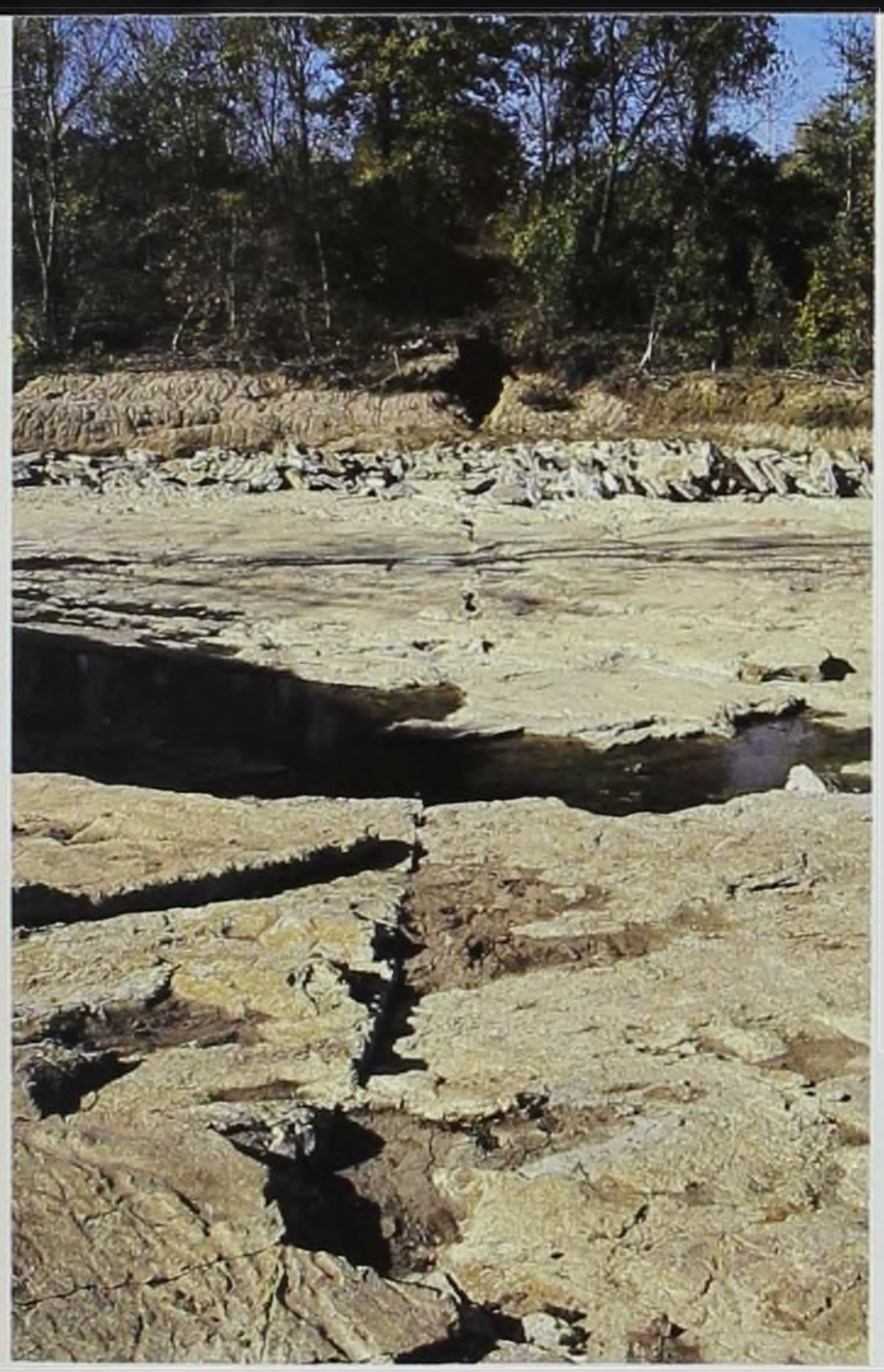
But other fossils that tell Iowa's prehistory are deep under Iowa's rich soil. Embedded in layers of limestone, sandstone, shale, and coal, fossils of prehistoric animals and plants wait to be uncovered and studied.

Sometimes it takes centuries for wind or water to erode softer rock and reveal fossils. Sometimes it takes decades—and chance—for quarry excavation to uncover fossil deposits. And sometimes, as in the summer of 1993, it takes only a few weeks.

At Coralville Lake in Johnson County (shown here), flood waters surged over the emergency spillway. In a matter of days, the rushing waters carved away as much as fifteen feet of soil down to bedrock. Geologists have named the exposed channel "Devonian Fossil Gorge" because the bedrock and fos-

PHOTOS BOTH PAGES BY RAY ANDERSON, IOWA DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES

In 1993, floodwaters surged over the Coralville Lake emergency spillway, washing away trees, soil, and glacial-age deposits, and carving out a gorge down to bedrock. Alert visitors can now spot fossil crinoids, corals, and brachiopods in the limestone. Spectacular, fossil-laden slabs that would have deteriorated as people walked on them (as well as from normal weathering) were salvaged and prepared. They are now on display in the adjacent Corps of Engineers visitor center. Testimony to the power of the recent flood, the Devonian Fossil Gorge is also testimony—like the Le Grand quarry and Burlington's limestone bluffs—to the life forms that once lived in Iowa's ancient seas.

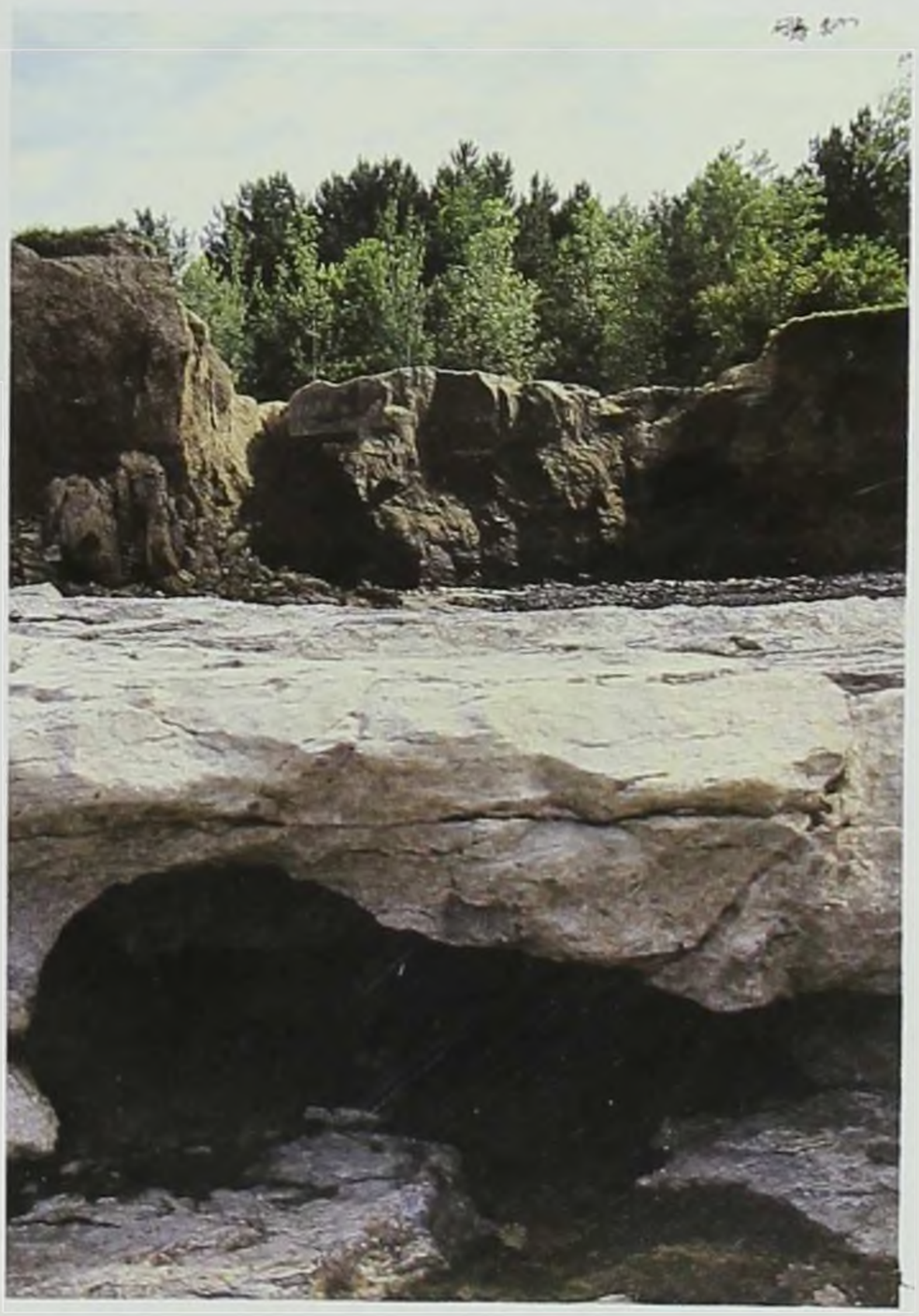


The 1993 flood revealed more than fossils at Devonian Fossil Gorge. This fracture, a plane of weakness in the bedrock, was probably formed millions of years ago and may be hundreds of feet deep. As groundwater follows such fractures and dissolves the limestone, fractures may gradually enlarge into caverns. Note in the background how the force of the moving floodwaters shoved together these limestone slabs as if they were books on a shelf.

sils date to the Devonian period, about 375 million years ago (slightly older than the Mississippian period represented at Le Grand). Within three months after the 1993 flood had receded, a quarter of a million visitors toured the gorge, essentially walking on successive floors of an ancient Iowa sea. Geologist Jean C. Prior of the Department of Natural Resources calls it a "spectacular new place in Iowa" to see fossilized corals, crinoids, and brachiopods. (This isn't the first time that Johnson County fossils have attracted attention. In 1866 Louis Agassiz lectured at the nearby state university on "Coral Reefs of Iowa City;" soon thereafter, in recognition of the area's abundance of fossil corals, a new town site northwest of Iowa City was named "Coralville.")

At Saylorville Lake north of Des Moines, the flooding Des Moines River in 1993 deepened a similar gorge into limestone, sandstone, shale, and coal, uncovering more fossils there, though they're not as accessible to the public.

Many of us will remember the summer of 1993 as a time when Iowa again seemed like a shallow sea. In fact, the surging rivers and widening streams did what our imaginations must labor to do—lift away Iowa soil to reveal the life forms of Iowa's ancient tropical seas. □



Subterranean movement of groundwater had long ago carved out this small cavern in the limestone, but it was not revealed until 1993 floodwaters below the Coralville Lake emergency spillway washed away the soil down to bedrock. Soil layers in background show amount of material washed away; various brown layers represent different glacial-age episodes, when an ancestor of the Iowa River flowed here.

Iowa's long tradition of self-trained paleontologists has helped advance the study of fossils. Although their stories cannot be told through the example of only one individual, the requisite passion, devotion, and discipline were all exemplified by one—B. H. Beane. Here his granddaughter offers her perspective on his work.

Crinoids in the Sugar Bowl

Remembering my grandfather, amateur paleontologist B. H. Beane

by Karen Beane Norstrud

MY earliest memories of my grandfather, B. H. Beane, are of him rocking me on his lap as he sang this ditty to me:

There was an old man
And he had a wooden leg
And he had no tobacco,
No tobacco could he beg,
So-o he saved up his money
And he saved up his rocks
And he always had tobacco,
In his ol' tobacco box.

Once I asked him, "Why did that old man save rocks, Grandpa?" and he answered simply, "So it would rhyme, child," and I accepted his rationale.

Unlike the old man in the ditty, my grandfather did not have a wooden leg and did not use tobacco. He did, however, collect rocks—and fossils. As a self-trained paleontologist who became known internationally, he collected thousands. Although the most notable and choice were the remarkably complete crinoid and starfish fossils from the Le Grand quarry bordering his farm, he also hunted rocks and fossils throughout Canada, Mexico, and in every state in the Union except Florida.

Grandpa studied and collected fossils from many eras; however, his main interest was the fossilized remains of the animals and plants of the Paleozoic era. By the time I was born, he had sold and donated scores of fossil slabs to museums and universities around the world. The hundreds still in his home were everywhere—leaning against the walls and doorways, resting in cabinets, reclining on couches and chairs. Out in the yard, they were propped up against sheds and apple trees. Although his discoveries were often written about, my recollections of him may offer new perspectives.

Grandpa was born on the Beane family farm, a half mile north of the small Iowa village of Le Grand on November 17, 1879, to Abbie (Jacobs) Beane and Rev. Joseph L. Beane. Joseph was a Quaker pastor, author, inventor, and farmer.

My grandfather was educated at the Friends Academy in Le Grand, and also attended William Penn College in Oskaloosa. In 1902 he married Nellye Carey. Grandpa and Grandma had four sons—Raymond, Ralph (my dad), Lewis, and Elmo. (Grandma died when I was an infant so I have no memories of her.)

On the Beane farm, Grandpa and his brother Albert raised Poland China hogs and other livestock and grew beans, hay, watermelons, cantaloupes, strawberries, and raspberries, selling the produce in Marshalltown, eight miles away. The Mesquakie sometimes traveled to the farm from their settlement near Tama to trade beaded headbands, moccasins, and other handmade items for fruit. They shared some of their legends of the area, which Albert promptly recorded in his notebook. Uncle Albert taught school in Tama and Marshall Counties, but like his brother and father, had avocations as well. He was an antique collector and poet, widely known in American art circles.

Although farming was originally my grandfather's livelihood, his real passion was collecting fossils, and by 1922 he had rented out the farm so he could devote more time to fossils. Collecting had been his avocation since childhood. As a young farm boy living next to a quarry and near the Iowa River, he had done a great deal of swimming, hunting, and fishing. "It was within these environments, at an early age, there grew within me a drive to collect," he wrote years later. "Bird eggs were the first; no wonder, as I knew where all the bird nests were! Wood was the next, with a leaf and a piece of wood of each species. Butterflies were next, then stamps and coins." His collecting extended to pretty pebbles and rocks, and he found the ever-changing quarry an interesting place to hunt fossils. In 1874 (five years before Grandpa was born) a major nest of crinoids had been uncovered by quarry workers in Le Grand. To the delight of paleontologists from all over the Midwest and some from the East, this nest continued to produce for the next sixteen

Opposite: The author, photographed about 1950 with her grandfather B. H. Beane (left) and cousin Will Pickering (right) in Everly, Iowa.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY THE AUTHOR

As a boy, Beane was never far from the Le Grand quarry and the paleontologists attracted to its crinoid fossil nests. In the Beanes' nearby farmhouse, dishes rattled in the kitchen during blasting at the quarry.

years. As a boy, my grandfather met up with these scientists at the quarry, dogging their steps and plaguing them with questions. The ten-year-old met Iowa amateur paleontologists Charles Wachsmuth, Frank Springer, and other amateur and professional geologists. "They were the idols of my boyhood," Grandpa related years later. He continued to find fossils somewhat prolifically until the turn of the century.

By the early twentieth century, the major nests of crinoids had been exhausted, but Grandpa had learned how to spot where crinoid fossils might be located, and, with the help of quarry workers, kept an eye out for fossils year after year. "I must have turned over and examined a thousand tons of loose rock and kept a close watch on the entire quarry face," Grandpa wrote later about the period from 1900 to 1930. "I used an extension ladder which enabled me to scrutinize the cliff for telltale showings of cross sections of stems and heads. Only about one rock in 500 would prove to be fossiliferous, and only one to two percent of these contained specimens worth saving." Finally in 1931, when Grandpa was fifty-one, he found several deposits, which yielded many fine crinoids and some starfish (including one remarkable slab of 183 starfish). These Le Grand crinoids, like those found there in the 1870s and 1880s, were in their utmost perfection, complete with calyx, arms, and stalk. Grandpa's discovery attracted international attention in academic circles.

My father remembers coming home for weekends during the early 1930s and seeing crinoid slabs laid out on the parlor and living-room floors, along with the massive volume by Charles Wachsmuth and Frank Springer, *North American Crinoidea Camerata.* Grandpa and professors from the University of Iowa would be down on the floor on their hands and knees, studying and comparing Grandpa's specimens to the illustrations in the book.

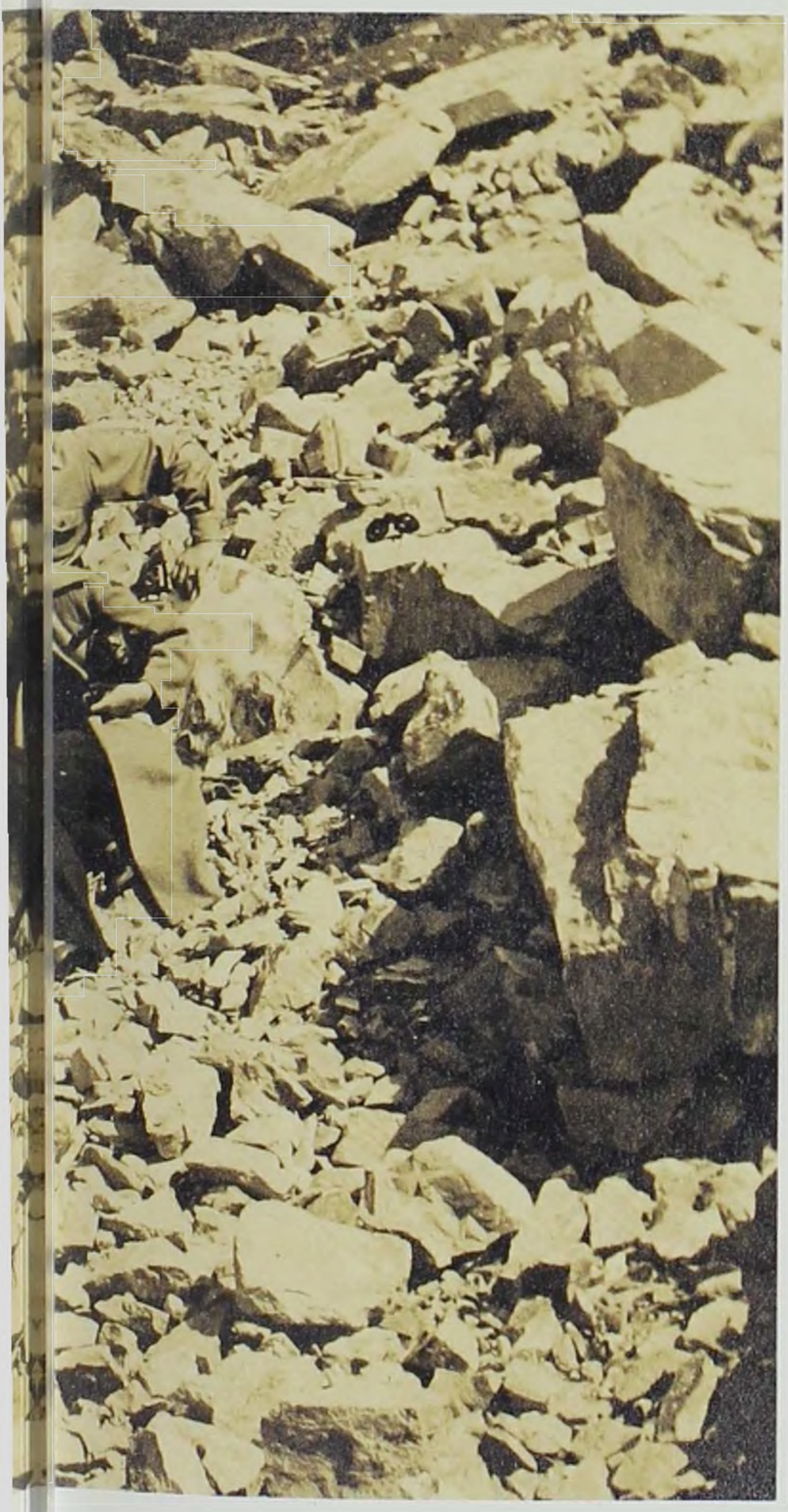
Residents of Le Grand as well as newspaper reporters and authors of scientific journals often referred to the family home as "the Beane museum," I suppose because it was filled with things collected by my grandfather and Uncle Albert. I visited the house often, as a child and as an adult, and have always resented that description as sounding cold and austere. It was a simple, square house, eight rooms and two stories, painted white with a single black door in the center. I remember vividly that front door swinging open and my grandpa—a tall, slender, white-haired man—welcoming us with smiles, hugs, and kisses.

Upon entering his living room, I was assailed by smells of old tapestries and furniture, of oil stoves and limestone. Each room was crammed with antiques a few hundred years old and with fossils 360 million years old. There was an eighteenth-century looking glass; an olive-oil lamp from the time of Christopher Columbus; a Queen Anne par-

Right: A lifelong collector, Beane filled his farmhouse with fossils and antiques. Even before his major find in 1931, the farmhouse was overflowing with crinoid fossils from the Le Grand quarry.

The Le Grand quarry and Beane (in hat) attracted many visitors who shared his fascination with fossils.

lor chair that had once belonged to George Washington; and a fragile cup and saucer that had been Napoleon Bonaparte's. There were family heirlooms, too—a mid-eighteenth-century bed curtain of hand-blocked English chintz, and a chest brought from Maine in 1854. In the parlor sat a mammoth cupboard with "Sermons in Stone" inscribed above the glass doors; it was filled with fossils. Cabinets and curio stands in every room were packed with brass candlesticks and pewter, a goodly amount of silver, pottery and china, crystal, and glassware, and yet more of the smaller fossils.



I treasured the fossils, and they became as familiar to me as well-loved toys. One that was propped against the colonnades between the living and dining rooms was shaped like the state of Texas. Another, my favorite, was a small slab with three crinoids, the calyxes complete with stem and arms, the stems entwined. In one of his writings Grandpa romantically described the three "as formal as if a lady had placed them together for a nosegay." These crinoids and many other specimens now belong to Beloit College in Wisconsin, and I recently visited the science department there to have a "reunion" with Grandpa's fossils. The "nosegay" and the "state of Texas" brought tears to my eyes.

In my early years I must have assumed that all grandparents' homes were cluttered with slabs of rock. At least, I never thought it out of the ordinary that in order to sit in Grandpa's house, I often had to move a cluster of fossils, a pile of his notebooks, or stacks of correspondence (with international postmarks from places like Cape Town and London). To have tea with Grandpa at the dining-room table, I learned to look for sugar in the bag in the kitchen, not in the old pewter sugar bowl, where tiny, single crinoid fossils nestled.

When I was thirteen, Grandpa was interviewed on television. The next day at school my teacher asked me, "Karen, what do you think of Dr. Beane?" I'd never heard him referred to as "Doctor" before, so I uttered, "He's just Grandpa." She went on to tell the class about him, using phrases such as, "highly regarded" and "world famous." After school I asked Dad if Grandpa really was famous. Dad admitted that, yes, one could say that in scientific circles he could be considered quite well known. "Wow!" I thought, "a real-life celebrity in the family." I could hardly wait for my next visit to "Dr. Beane."

In the following days I studied Grandpa's published writings, as well as journal articles written about him and his findings. I memorized the names of as many species of fossils—especially crinoids—as I could, paying particular attention to the eleven that Grandpa had discovered, described, and named. I daydreamed about my next trip to the quarry, where I would find a crinoid, maybe even one that hadn't been discovered, and I could give it a Latin species name *kareni*, after my own name, Karen.

When the day finally arrived and Grandpa and I were walking toward the quarry, I told him of my hopes. As I rambled on, he replied simply, "It's possible, but not probable." He guided me through those zealous moments

The Le Grand quarry and Beane (in hat) attracted many visitors who shared his fascination with fossils.

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On a subsequent visit, undaunted by my fruitless search for an echinoderm fossil, I decided I, too, could become an expert in "preparing" the numerous slabs already discovered and waiting for exhibition. This involved scraping away the limestone in which the fossils were embedded. Grandpa warned, "It takes a good deal of patience and time to clean out just one crinoid," but this did not discourage me. So, out in the yard at a wooden table, he set me up with a small slab and a needle in a vise, and we commenced to work. I had watched him chiseling away often, so I needed little instruction on the basics.

After fifteen minutes or so of scratching, I quipped, "What's this made out of—concrete?"

"Kinderhook limestone," he corrected with a grin.

An hour passed. "They make courthouses out of this stuff that have stood a hundred years," I complained. "Surely a needle can't chip it."

"Took me twenty-six years to clean the starfish slab," Grandpa replied.

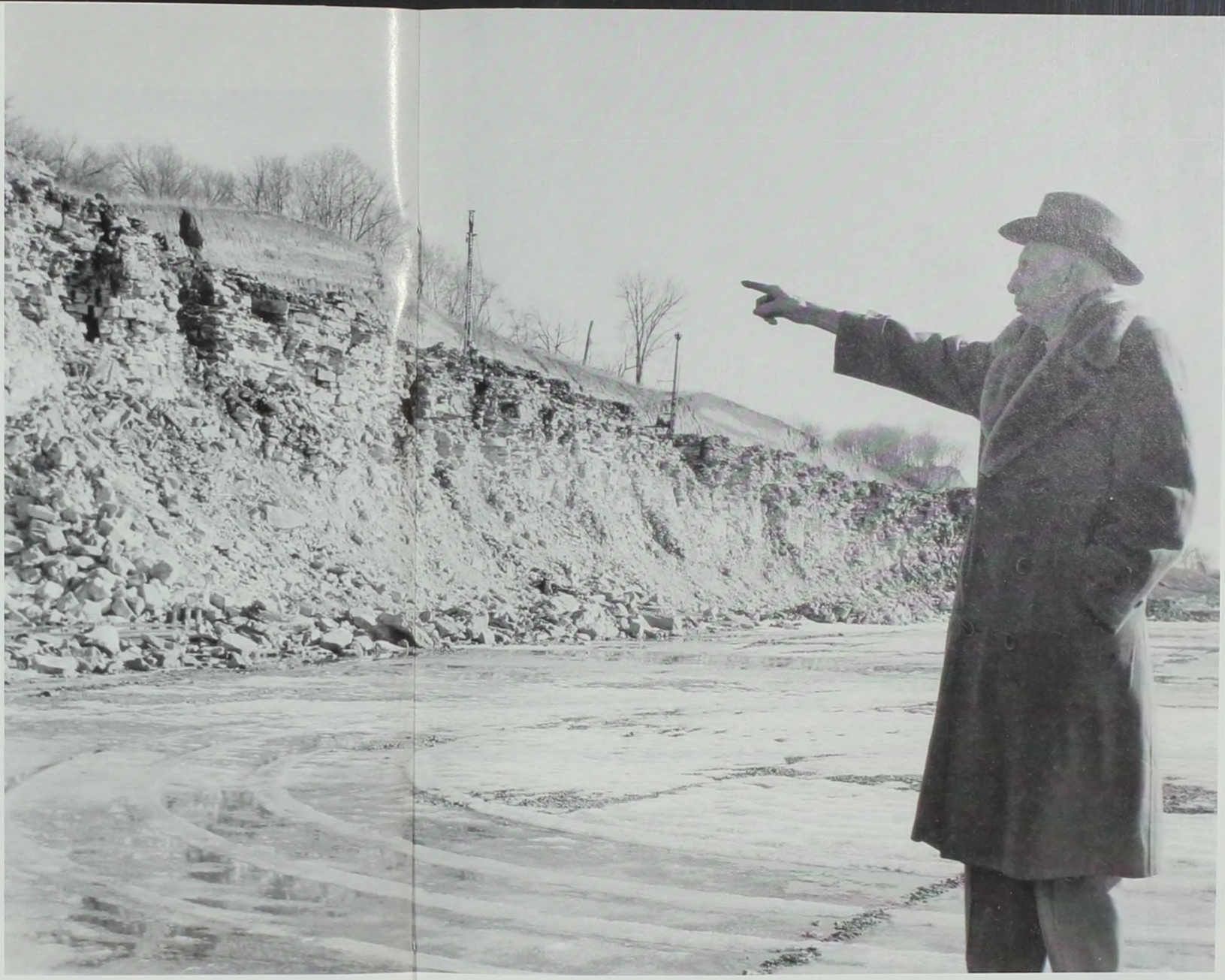
"Shouldn't we be doing this in a cooler place?" I suggested a few minutes later.

"It's best to do it in the bright sun so we can see it well," he patiently responded.

Although I watched him prepare many more crinoids after that, I don't recall offering to help again. I had gained a profound appreciation for the thousands of painstaking hours he had dedicated to preparing crinoid slabs.

I suppose one could say my grandfather was a "gentleman farmer," as I never saw him in anything resembling everyday work clothes for farmers, even on the hot summer days when Grandpa helped me "walk beans" on his farm. It must have been a sight to see a young girl in shorts and halter pulling weeds alongside a white-haired man wearing a white shirt, tie, and three-piece suit.

Although in that sense he was formal, Grandpa was a gentle, caring man who smiled and laughed easily and lived his life by Quaker values. He seemed to live at a slower, more relaxed pace. Now and then, Grandpa got behind on his voluminous correspondence, even to the point of not reading all that he received. The inner pockets of his suit jacket bulged because he carried his filing system on his person. I've been told of the day in 1932 when the president of Penn College called to confirm details for the ceremony to be held that evening—they were going to bestow an honorary doctor's degree on Grandpa. He scanned through his pocket-files, opened the month-old letter for the first time, and calmly verified he would be there that evening (and he was).



In a 1950s photo Beane points to where the crinoid "nest" was found in 1931 at the Le Grand quarry.

Grandpa often traveled by bus to search for fossils, to display specimens at mineral conventions, and to lecture at colleges and

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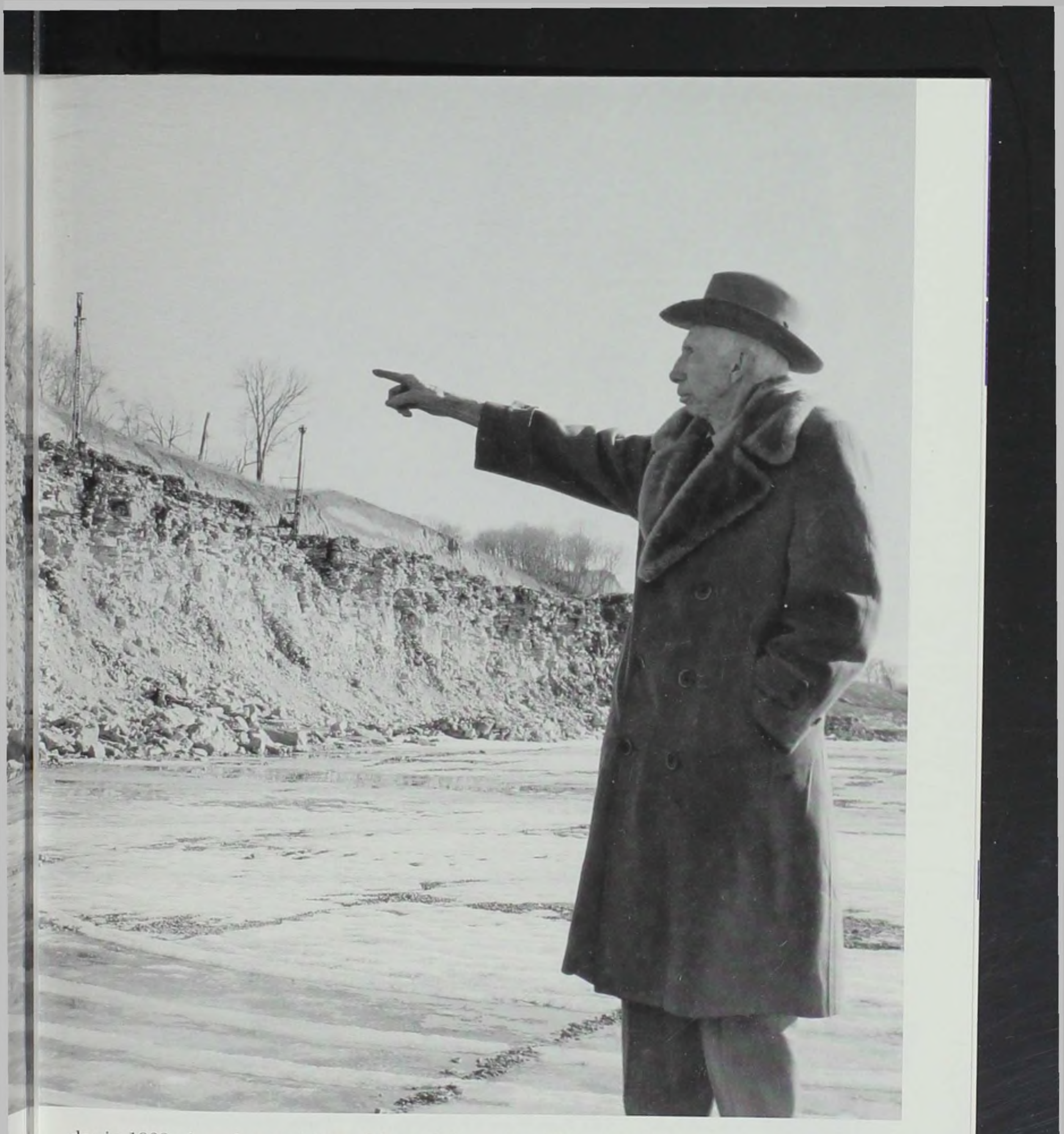

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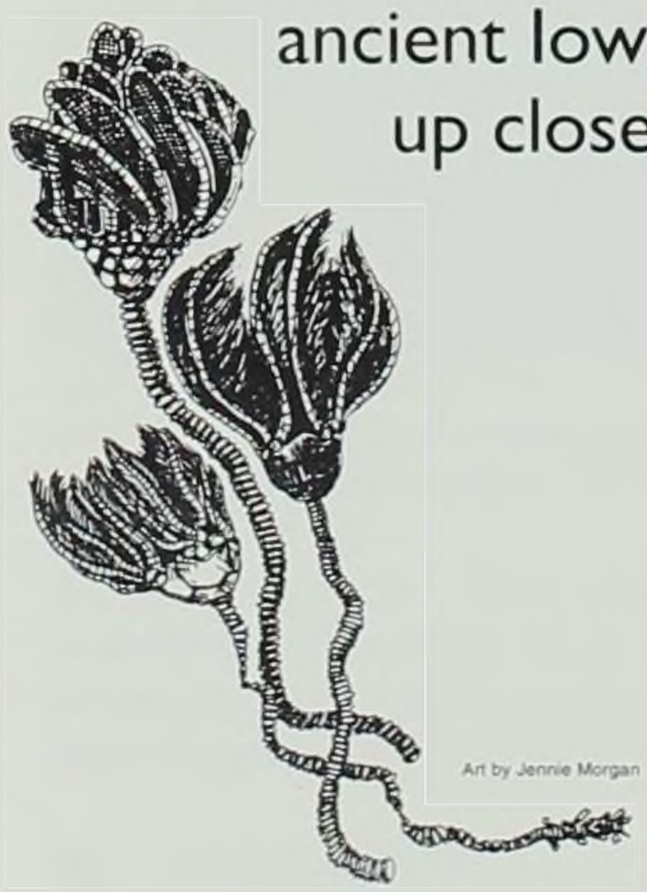
Photographed in spring 1994, the quarry site in which Burnice Beane found spectacular nests of crinoids and starfish six decades earlier is now overgrown and no longer excavated for limestone.

universities. He carried along a carpetbag full of fossils that he intended to donate or to sell on the road to pay his fare. When I inquired as to why he didn't fly, he said he saw more of the scenery and met more people when he rode the bus, and that he would "leave the flying to the birds." In one bus trip he logged more than ten thousand miles.

It was clear that he loved collecting fossils, but it was also important to him that others

Where can you see ancient Iowa up close?



Art by Jennie Morgan

"Flowers of the Iowa Seas," a new exhibit at the State Historical Society of Iowa, features hundreds of fossils; a marine reef aquarium with living crinoids, corals, and chambered nautilus; profiles of early Iowa geologists; and an overview of Iowa geology. Open Tuesday-Saturday 9-4:30; Sunday 12-4:30, State Historical Building, 600 E. Locust, Des Moines. Call Sarah Macht, museum education coordinator (515-242-5193) for school tours and exhibit guidebook.

Devonian Fossil Gorge, below emergency spillway on Coralville Lake, Johnson County. (See photos on pages 19-20). Walk on ancient sea floors and observe fossil remains on the bedrock. Fossils removed from the gorge can be seen in the nearby Corps of Engineers Visitors Center on weekdays 7:30-4, weekends noon-5.

Iowa Hall at the University of Iowa, Iowa City. Housed in Macbride Hall on the Pentacrest, this museum of natural and cultural history includes a colorful diorama of an ancient Iowa sea, complete with colorful crinoids and a menacing, prehistoric shark. Gives you three-dimensional picture of what Iowa was like as a

learn about and value these prehistoric phenomena. Grandpa enjoyed company and sharing his knowledge of fossils. It always amazed me how he could adapt his lectures to his audience. Busloads of college students would come to meet him and see his collection. When this coincided with my visits, I was not always happy to share him with strangers, even when I was an adult and had brought my own children to see him. On just such a day, two buses pulled up. He rose to greet his visitors as I silently groaned my annoyance.

My three-year-old son wanted to go out with him. Grandpa took Davin's hand and assured me it was perfectly okay. As I sat on the daybed by the window and watched through old lace curtains, Grandpa, with Davin in tow, led the group to some crinoid slabs on a large wooden table outside. As he held up a specimen and began to explain its characteristics, Davin, mouth agape, pulled on Grandpa's pant leg. While sixty or so students and professors grinned at each other and patiently waited, Grandpa promptly and agilely lowered himself to his haunches and answered his great-grandson's questions.

Grandpa always had time for on-the-spot teaching and for young people Our vocabularies broadened because of how he spoke to us. In 1952, a long cold walk back to Grandpa's house at midnight (we had been watching wrestling at one of the few houses in Le Grand that had television) became his chance to teach me about different constellations in the clear night sky. When two of his grandsons played college basketball, he attended every one of their games. Wrapped up in an old buffalo robe to keep warm, he seldom even missed a local high school football game, and very few away games. At his funeral one of the high school football players told me that the team was in attendance and that they were really going to miss "the old fossil," as they affectionately called him.

Age never seemed to stop him in his pursuit for fossils. In the 1950s, when Grandpa was in his seventies, he descended five hundred feet in a mine to collect crystals and minerals. When he was in his eighties—and I in my twenties—I was still asking him to slow down on our walks to the quarry so I could keep up with him.

Nevertheless, Grandpa died in January 1966 at age eighty-six. I remember standing beside the coffin with my dad. All his life he had seen Grandpa surrounded by fossils. Now in a final act of farewell, Dad quietly slipped a tiny, single crinoid under Grandpa's hand. □

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tropical sea. Monday-Saturday 9:30-4:30; Sunday 12:30-4:30.

Are you an armchair traveler?

Check your public library for access to these articles on Iowa geology, amateur paleontologists, fossil crinoids, and living crinoids.

Iowa Geologist 1994 (No. 19). Recent yearly issue of this free publication features Paleozoic, glacial-age, and 1993 floods and their effects on Iowa, and Devonian Fossil Gorge. For a free copy or to be added to the mailing list, contact Geological Survey Bureau, 109 Trowbridge, Iowa City, Iowa 52242-1319. Phone 319-335-1575.

"B. H. Beane and the LeGrand Crinoid Hunters" by Charles S. Gwynne in *The Annals of Iowa*, Winter 1961.

"An Epoch in the History of American Science" by Charles Rollin Keyes in *The Annals of Iowa*, April 1896. Profiles of Charles Wachsmuth and Frank Springer.

"Iowa's Self-trained Paleontologists" by Wayne I. Anderson and William M. Furnish in *Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science*, 90:1 (1983). Profiles Wachsmuth, Springer, Beane, as well as Charles Herbert Belanski, Arthur J. Gerk, Carlyle B. Campbell, Harrell L. Stimple, Calvin O. Levorson, and Amel E. Priest.

"Sea Lilies and Feather Stars," *Sea Frontiers* (July-August 1988).

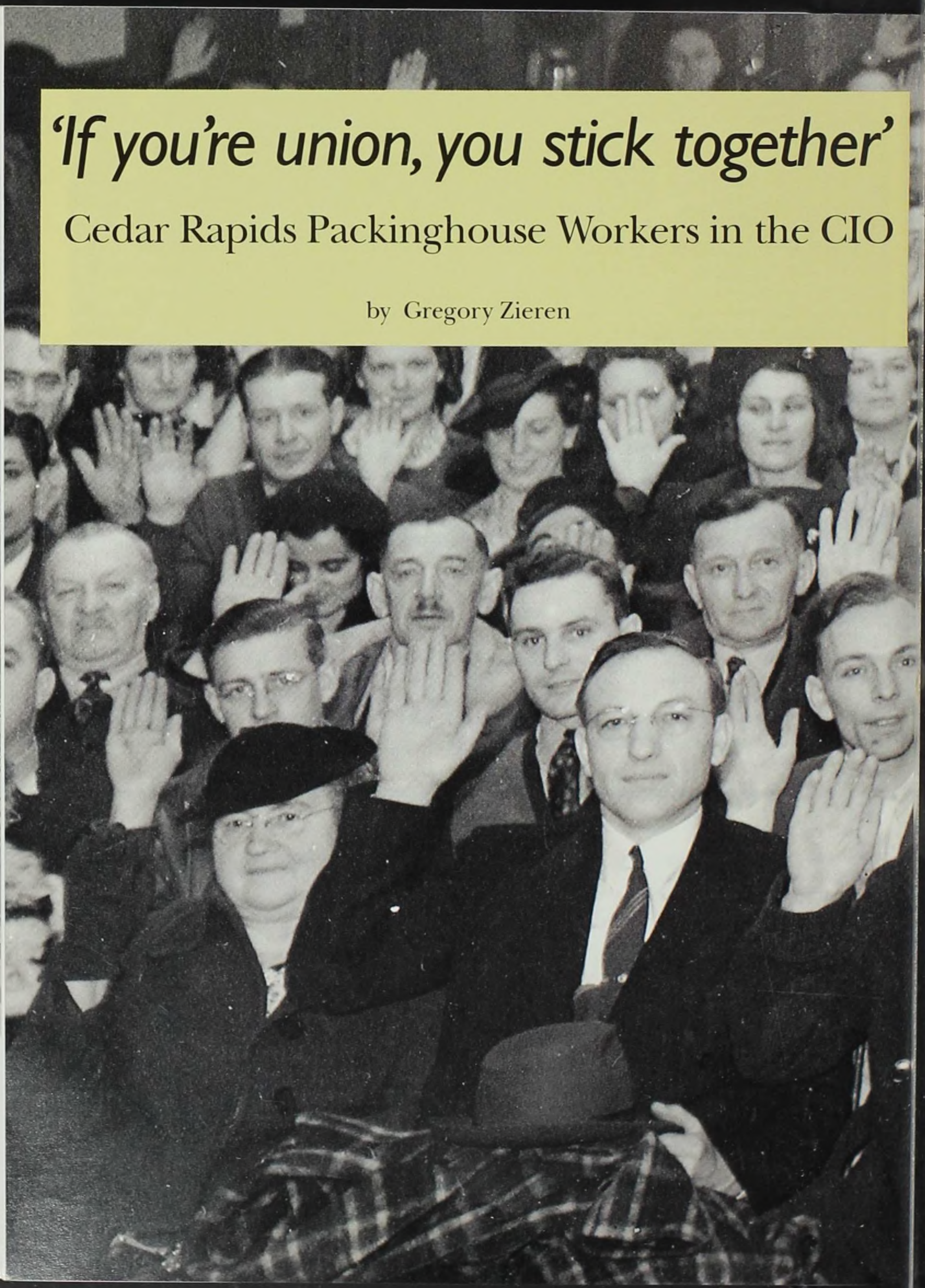
"Creeping Through the Crinoids," *International Wildlife* (May-June 1992).

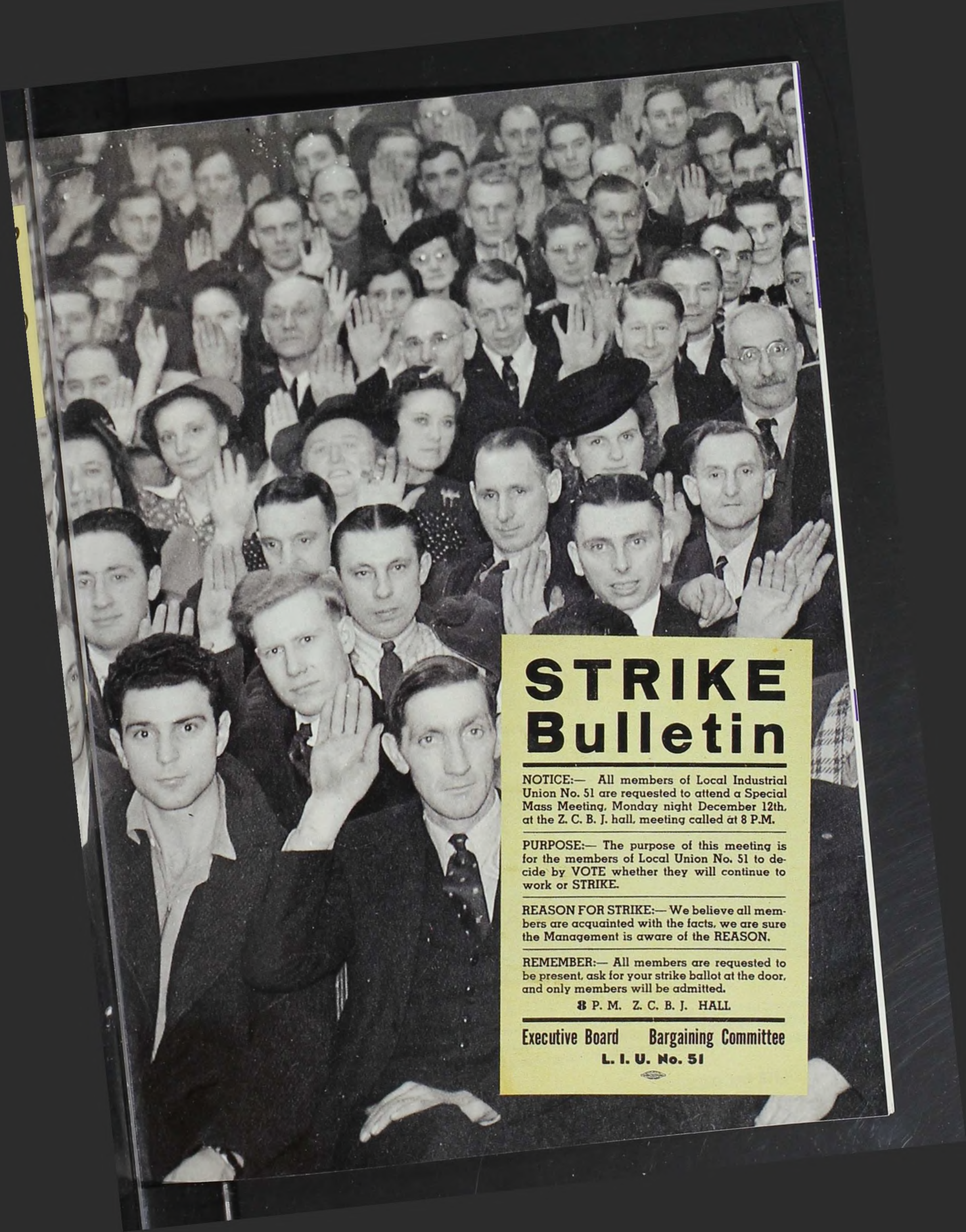
"For Crinoid-ing Out Loud," *Skin Diver* (January 1991).

'If you're union, you stick together'

Cedar Rapids Packinghouse Workers in the CIO

by Gregory Zieren





STRIKE Bulletin

NOTICE:— All members of Local Industrial Union No. 51 are requested to attend a Special Mass Meeting, Monday night December 12th, at the Z. C. B. J. hall, meeting called at 8 P.M.

PURPOSE:— The purpose of this meeting is for the members of Local Union No. 51 to decide by VOTE whether they will continue to work or STRIKE.

REASON FOR STRIKE:— We believe all members are acquainted with the facts, we are sure the Management is aware of the REASON.

REMEMBER:— All members are requested to be present, ask for your strike ballot at the door, and only members will be admitted.

8 P. M. Z. C. B. J. HALL

Executive Board Bargaining Committee

L. I. U. No. 51

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ABOVE PHOTO AND PREVIOUS PAGE: LABOR COLLECTION, SHSI (IOWA CITY)

Members of United Packinghouse Workers of America, Local P3 in Cedar Rapids, show union solidarity by distributing potatoes to packinghouse workers in another town (circa 1960). Previous page: Detail from P3 union meeting (circa 1940) and strike bulletin (inset, circa 1937). (Union local P3 was temporarily called No. 51.)

A chapter in Iowa's economic and labor history ended in April 1990 when the Farmstead Foods packinghouse in Cedar Rapids closed its door for good. Once the largest slaughterhouse in the state and the city's largest employer, the plant had opened in 1870 as the Sinclair Packinghouse. Wilson & Company took over the plant in the 1920s and operated it until the early 1980s as one of the flagship plants in the company.

The Cedar Rapids packinghouse won national attention as one of the founding locals of the CIO's (Congress of Industrial Organizations) Packinghouse Workers Organizing Committee (PWOC) in the mid-1930s. Union local P3, as it was known for over fifty years, was founded in 1933 when Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal invited workers to organize under the protection of the NRA's (National Recovery Administration) Blue Eagle. Hundreds of the early industrial unions were organized during the first optimistic months of the New Deal, but most failed to establish permanent organizations. P3 was one of the few exceptions nationwide and one of only two major locals in the meatpacking industry. P3 kept the spirit of unionism alive in the industry until the great organizing drives of John L. Lewis and the CIO in the late 1930s succeeded in signing up workers in steel, automobiles, rubber, and meatpacking.

In Iowa, CIO-sponsored unions captured headlines during the Maytag strike in Newton, and during sitdown strikes by women laundry workers in Des Moines and Ottumwa, packinghouse workers at Swift's in Sioux City, and farm equipment workers in the Quad Cities. Cedar Rapids packinghouse employees were typical of the kinds of workers attracted to the CIO in the 1930s. Mostly semiskilled or unskilled, of immigrant stock, often poorly paid with little or no job security, they were considered unorganizable by many old-line union leaders. The success of the Cedar Rapids packinghouse workers in organizing and sustaining a local union made them a force to be reckoned with in the industry.

The stories of working people, union locals, and ordinary citizens are often lost to the passing of time and the fading of memory, but Cedar Rapids packinghouse workers have preserved their history. Union records are now stored in the State Historical Society of Iowa archives in Iowa City. More important, the story of a key packinghouse union local has been preserved through the efforts of the Iowa Federation of Labor (AFL-CIO). The federation sponsored perhaps the most comprehensive effort yet by a state labor federation to capture the history of its labor movement. The Iowa Labor History Oral Project conducted over nine hundred interviews with union members, their families, and supporters in every conceivable trade in every corner of the state. In addition, the project collected scores of shelf feet of union records, newspapers, memorabilia, and photographs. The project, with financial support from the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and the United Automobile Workers (UAW) is a unique effort paid for by union members to create one of the finest state labor archives in the United States. Shelton Stromquist's *Solidarity and Survival: An Oral History of Iowa Labor in the Twentieth Century* (University of Iowa Press, 1993) is the most recent and ambitious study ever undertaken to use the collection and document the story of Iowa labor.

The five interviews that follow come from the same collection, but they focus exclusively on the experience of dedicated union members at the Wilson plant during the heyday of the CIO from the mid-1930s until the merger with the AFL in 1955. The interviews (done in 1978 and 1979) address early organizing attempts, working conditions, women's work, the influence of wartime, the 1948 strike, and the necessary adjustment in the 1950s to a new pattern of labor-management relations.

Milo Barta

Union Pioneer

The late Milo Barta served as president of the new union local at Wilson's packinghouse

throughout most of the 1930s. He had started to work there at age fourteen as a delivery boy during World War I, and was one of the workers involved in the unsuccessful strike in 1921. Throughout the Great Depression Barta worked closely with the founder and leading figure in the new union, Lewis Clark.

The most important challenge the new union faced in 1933 was a workforce divided by language, ethnicity, and hostility from the company. As Barta recalled, "At that time there was lots of packinghouse people, people of all nationalities and walks of life. There was Bohemian Czech people down there, and Germans. When you had a mixture of people like that, it was hard to get them organized. Some of them didn't understand when you were talking to them in American, so you'd have to almost get an interpreter that spoke the Czech language. There was a lot of Czechs in the Lower End down here at the time. In fact, it was a community that was all born and raised in this little area here. But we got out of the difficulty primarily because there was a fellow by the name of Ted Lubacek that used to run a Czech newspaper here, and he used to talk to them for the union. So, we finally got these people to understand that we were trying to go to work and build a labor organization. Of course, in the meantime, the packers were preparing themselves because they were trying to set up company unions and things like that. In the plant the company used to bring their head men around and they'd stop at a department and talk to the people and tell them why it was just the wrong thing to do to have people thinking about a labor organization when you're being treated so well. Those were difficult times because you couldn't get a labor organizer to come inside the plant and talk to you. You had to do that going from one house to another at night."

For eight months after the union was started in August 1933, company management claimed that only a small fraction of the workforce had anything to do with the union. For that reason, Wilson & Company refused demands for negotiations or recognition. In order to demonstrate to management that the union had won the allegiance of most workers in the packinghouse, the leaders called a strike in May 1934.

Milo Barta described the reaction of management when almost all of the one thousand production workers went out on strike: "The superintendent at that time didn't think that those people were so loyal to the organization that they would go on a walkout. He was just flabbergasted, and he walked among the crowd. He was just standing there shaking his head, and he just didn't know what was happening, that the people betrayed him and walked out and left him there without having anybody to operate the plant." The union had demonstrated its appeal to workers, but an incident in 1935 showed that management had not been persuaded to deal with organized labor.

"You know the company put a man here in the Wilson plant that was a spy working for a detective agency," Barta continued. "He was right among us people there getting all the information. He had a room up at the YMCA and he was running everything through a typewriter and sending it in to headquarters, until some of our union people got next to him. The company gave this guy an exceptionally good job so he could have the run of the whole entire plant and be able to talk to everybody and anybody at any time. But the people were pretty skeptical of him and were watching him quite a time until they caught him. The way they found him out was to talk to his brother without letting him know who they were. The guy was worming himself up in one of the positions in the local union so he could get closer into the office there. Of course, after his brother went to work and spilled the beans, this guy was automatically kicked out of the plant. But the company knew what was going on there at all times because they put him there. That was how they were trying to beat you down."

Also in 1935 union leaders in Cedar Rapids launched the Midwest Union of All Packinghouse Workers, a new organization independent of other labor unions. Lewis Clark, Milo Barta, and many other members of the Cedar Rapids local volunteered to travel to Des Moines, Waterloo, Mason City, Daven-

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Milo Barta (seated under framed picture) was president of the local during the 1930s. He confronted language barriers (many workers still spoke only Czech) and management's hostility. (Photo circa 1948)

port, Omaha, and other packinghouse centers.

Barta recalled his organizing experiences: "Some of the reception we got to the organizing was cold. Like I say, people were afraid. They felt threatened and a lot of them was told they were going to lose their jobs or have some mishap of some kind. There was a lot of things that was being done to try to throw labor organization off the track. When we went into a new town we always had contacts, and then we'd talk to these people. We'd probably be around for a couple, three days. In that period of time we got a chance to talk to five or ten people. And the next time we come around, we had a group. That's the way we used to go to work and get contacted around. So that way it didn't take very long when everybody pitched in and done their share of soliciting. It wasn't very long but what the group started coming up and we were starting to mushroom."

John Wolfe

Working Conditions in the Early Union Years

Packinghouses, then as now, coordinate the labor of hundreds, even thousands of hands as they transform livestock into meat and byproducts. A highly sophisticated division of labor has characterized the industry since the late nineteenth century, creating a host of conflicting interests between management and labor. Management required a flexible, efficient, and compliant workforce to exploit the savings created by the division of labor. Workers, on the other hand, wanted regular employment, recognition of seniority rights, and secure earnings. Resolving conflicts over the pace and assignment of work, working conditions, and management's treatment of labor proved to be a crucial draw in attract-

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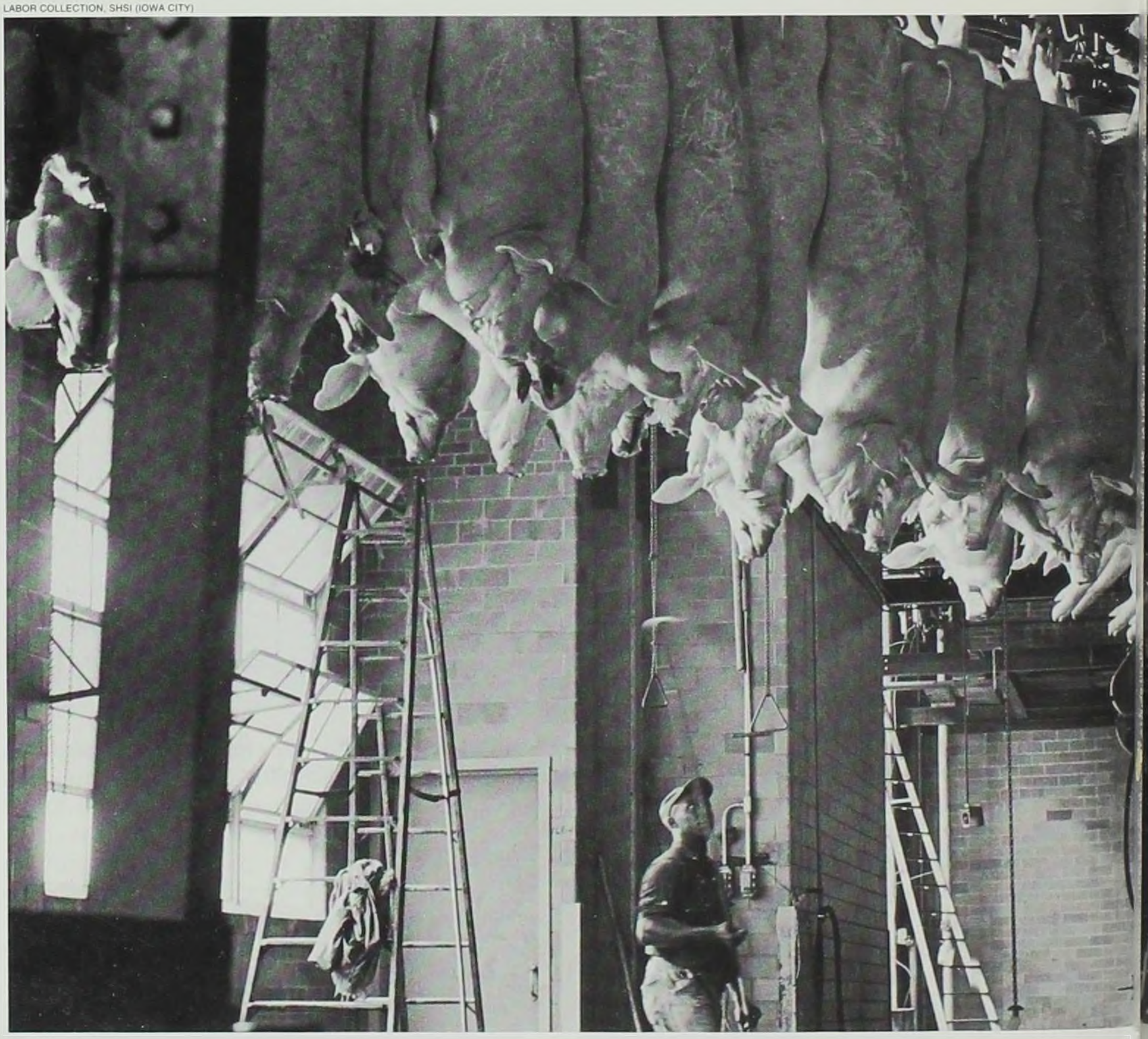

Hog carcasses move on a chain above Waterloo workers on the killing floor in 1948 at Rath, another Iowa packinghouse.

ing workers to the new organization in the early 1930s.

John Wolfe's story focuses on working conditions at Wilson's during the Great Depression. A farm boy from Minnesota whose father butchered hogs, he came to Cedar Rapids in 1935 and went to work in the sausage room grinding fresh meat. He learned quickly how working conditions and company policies could convince workers that they needed the protection that only the union could offer. Management policies angered him almost from the beginning.

"They'd tell you after you got thirty days in, you'd get a two-and-a-half cent raise from seventeen-and-a-half cents an hour. But when you'd worked twenty-nine days they'd lay you off and hire you back the thirty-first to break your seniority. So you'd have to start all over again. I started in 1935 but I didn't accumulate no seniority until 1937. It was a mess, I'll tell you. The company did just as they felt like. They didn't care. If you didn't like it you

could leave because there was always plenty of people out at the gate sitting there waiting. Well, if it wouldn't have been for the union, I don't know what would have happened down there. The people were getting thoroughly disgusted with the company, especially the elderly people."

After starting in the sausage room, Wolfe was promoted to ham boning, a skilled job that required considerable dexterity. Ham boning was a job that paid by the piece, not by the hour, so the faster he worked, the more he earned. On the other hand, if he worked too fast, the company would cut the rate and he would earn less than before. Piecework was opposed by many CIO unions because it placed the interests of the individual in conflict with the interest of the group. With the backing of the union, he was able to show workers how to act in the interest of everyone on the shop floor.

"Well, we'd get the ham from the cutting floor and we'd have to skin it," Wolfe recounted. "Then we'd have to fat it down to specifications, whatever they wanted. Then we'd have to take the hitch bone out, and chisel down the middle bone. We'd then take the shank bone out, cut around the other end of the middle bone and pull that out. That way you had a hole in it just the size of the middle bone. At that time we had a standard of nine bones an hour, or one every six or seven minutes. We had this one boner who'd do maybe fifteen but he wouldn't do it the way we were supposed to. He'd chop them up. He would never use the chisel on the middle bone. There'd be a big cut and a lot of meat still on the bone. The other ham boners, they told him he was going to screw up the standards if he kept going like that and make us all work harder just to stay even. Why don't he just work a reasonable pace and put out better work than he was, instead of just tearing it up to get the money? Finally he did. He started to see the light, and he says, 'Well, I finally understand what you guys are talking about.'"

Collective bargaining over workplace conditions began only in 1941, eight years after the union was founded, when the National Labor Relations Board compelled Wilson & Company to recognize the Cedar Rapids local. Like the Ford Motor Company's recognition of the UAW, Wilson's gave in on the question of recognition because the United States was gearing up for war, and large corporations especially stood to benefit from the flood of war orders. When the CIO signed a no-strike pledge for the duration of World War II, conflicts in the workplace could only be solved by good-faith bargaining, or by the quick, informal strikes known as wildcats. John Wolfe remembered wildcats as a popular tool during the war when bargaining between company and union broke down.

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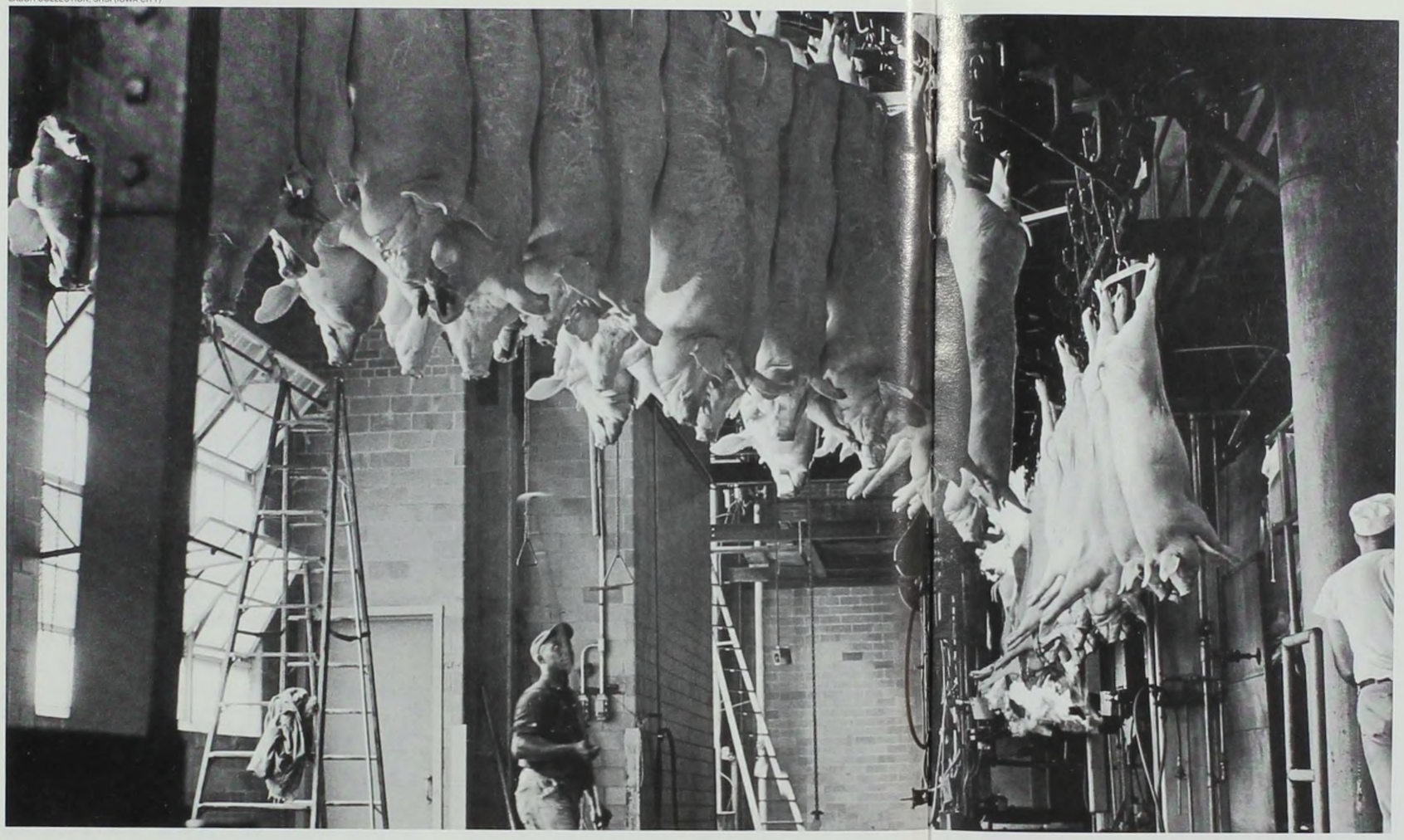

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"Just before Pearl Harbor," Wolfe related, "the company set standards for us to do in the boning room, but then someone would get a wild hair and say they was going to change it and come around and tell us, 'Well, you got to do more than what the standard requires you to do. If you don't like it you can walk out.' So that's exactly what we'd do. We'd go over to the union hall in the middle of the day and have a meeting. I recall one time we went over there and the superintendent called us over and he says, 'You're all fired.' And we says, 'Well, we got the grievance procedure and we told the foreman that we were going to have a department meeting.' And he says, 'Well you're all fired.' So we just set there, and about an hour later he called over to the union hall and he says, 'When are you coming back to work?' I told him, I says, 'Well you said we're all fired. How are you going to hire us back? First one through the gate or last one?' 'Don't get smart,' he says, 'Just come back to work and we can iron out our differences after you get back here.' So we all went back to work."

Velma Wetzel

Women's Work during World War II

Before World War II, packinghouse jobs were divided into three categories—one for women, another for men, and a third for either. Women typically performed lighter tasks that required manual dexterity, such as bacon wrapping or sausage tying. Most heavy labor, skilled work, and better-paying jobs fell to men. These job categories, however, were not flexible enough during World War II. Never were women more in demand in the

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Under the banner "C.I.O. Over 5,000,000 Strong," Iowa union members attend CIO convention, Cedar Rapids, August 1942.

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Meat cutting requires a steady pace and a sure hand. Wilson employees, like these at an unidentified packinghouse, balanced skill and speed.

packinghouses as military orders strained the industry's capacity, the Lend-Lease Act sent American foodstuffs abroad, and the draft pulled in most eligible men. Arguments over job categories and how to fill them took an important place on the agenda of labor-management relations during the war.

The increasing number of women workers changed the union as well. Before Pearl Harbor, men occupied most leadership positions in the union. During the war women assumed more power as union stewards and officers. One of the first of the new women leaders was Velma Wetzel, who began work at Wilson's in 1941.

During the Great Depression Wetzel had taken in washing and ironing, and had worked as a cook, to make ends meet. She recalled thinking then, "Boy if I ever got on at the packinghouse, that'll be some job. When I came home with my first check for $16 I just had so much money I didn't know what to do with it."

She began at Wilson's working on chitterlings and worked her way up the seniority ladder. "That's the big intestine in a hog and they unravel it. Then you have to put it on a pipe and flush that manure out. And then they clean it and put it in buckets and people eat them down south. If you didn't know how to do it, you were just covered with manure. You had to use a lot of water. See, the water came down on it from a pipe and you'd have another pipe to catch the water coming out the other end. You had to wear boots, big rubber aprons and everything else, but you still got sopping wet. You could stand there and the water would freeze right on your boots, that's how cold it was during the winter."

Next on the seniority ladder was another women's job where heat, not cold, created horrible conditions. "From cleaning intestines you went to the stomach machine where you washed pigs' stomachs with this brush with hot water going through it" Wetzel said. "I worked in 120 degree heat, I'll tell you. Right in back of the place where we were working they had these lard vats, and I'm not exaggerating one bit when I say they had cockroaches that big. The cockroaches was crawling up my legs and in my boots and on my head. I'm not trying to make a black picture, it's the truth. The union president, Joe Nemecs, came down there and saw the cockroaches and the temperature was 120 degrees and we had to work in hot water, and the company wouldn't do a damn thing about it."

Seniority was supposed to mean that workers could advance from undesirable and lesser-paying jobs to better ones, but as Wetzel discovered, workers had to contest management to win their rights. She recalled fighting for the next step on the seniority ladder: "From cleaning stomachs you went to work at the head table. That's were they took the head down, took the ears off, ripped the snouts off and trimmed the cheeks. Even took the brains out and had to pick the little glands out from behind the brain. They save them. The pituitary glands. They save everything on a pig's head, and that's what we had to work on. It was a lot nicer job, though, really. Sure it was bloody, but that other job, you know, the stomach, was full of blah. You were supposed to get these promotions by seniority but we had to fight every inch of the way or management wouldn't honor it."

Management insisted on work rules and maintaining strict discipline in the plant, a practice most workers viewed as threatening. Wetzel recalled, "When I came there I didn't dare talk to you if you were just this close to me. There were two of us girls working on this chitterling deal, one girl was on one side of the pipe and one was on the other, but we didn't dare say one word to each other. We didn't dare even go to the restroom. We had this one boss and he was around there, promenading around, and if you got caught talking to somebody, you'd be liable to get fired.

When we finally got our contract, we had to go around and get people signed up for the dues check-off, the automatic deduction of union dues from a weekly paycheck. If I wanted to sign somebody up I'd catch them

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As the midnight strike deadline approaches, members of UPWA Local P3 in Cedar Rapids wait in the Czecho-Slovakian Protective Society Hall, March 15, 1948.

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signing of the check-off."

During World War II, when management pushed to attain unreasonable production goals, the workers' only means of resistance was the wildcat strike. As a union steward, Velma Wetzel helped coordinate wildcats that broke out when the channels for resolving conflicts between labor and management broke down: "One time there was work for five hog shacklers. They put three down there and told them they had to do the work for five. Well, the shacklers couldn't keep up, couldn't even begin to keep up. So we'd go and bargain with management, try to get the other shacklers back down there. So we just made up our minds that if they don't get those shacklers back down, when the hogs are all up at relief time, we just won't start shackling until more shacklers come down there. So we wouldn't work. We might even get sent home for the rest of the day. We always stuck together. We'd call a special meeting at the CSPS Hall and we'd get up there and tell the grievance, and we'd have to talk the pros and cons and decide what we were going to do. Then we'd send the bargaining committee back in to see if they're going to get this issue straightened out. If not, we won't go to work the next morning. We got that strong at the end."

For her willingness to stand up for the rights of her fellow workers and her militancy in dealing with management, the foreman nicknamed Velma Wetzel "The War Department of the Hog Kill."

Mickey Lockhart
The 1948 Strike

The song "Solidarity Forever" was popular among recruits to the CIO in the 1930s perhaps because it expressed what a group of ordinary men and women could accomplish if united in a common purpose. Solidarity sometimes requires sacrifice for the good of the whole, a sacrifice Mickey Lockhart and her late husband, Tom, learned firsthand in the aftermath of the 1948 packinghouse strike. For Mickey Lockhart the meaning of solidarity is clear: "If you're union, you know, you stick together."

Lockhart was a union steward at Wilson's for over thirty years. Although the company had signed a contract that recognized seniority, older workers were sometimes not given their right to bid on jobs ahead of newly hired people. It was just such a violation of the contract that pushed her to run for the job of union steward and become involved in union affairs.

"When I went up in the bacon room," Lockhart recalled, "I started at night. I didn't have enough seniority for days. They had part-time workers, and when they come in, they picked the scaler's job. At that time scaling bacon was a better job. They'd work maybe five hours, and then when they would go home, they'd let somebody else have it. The foreman put me on boxing bacon, and when it come time to move jobs—I mean like I had the seniority—they hired some more people. They wouldn't let me go ahead and leave boxing. They was putting other people ahead of me. And, of course, I went to the union then. Tom belonged to the union already, and I knew a little bit about it. So I went to the union and the company still wouldn't move me. So we went to arbitration. They had to pay me all them wages back to the time when I bid on the other job, see. Well, then, right away when the people in the bacon room had a meeting they voted me in for steward. That's how I got to be steward because I kind of stuck up for myself."

The occasion that tested the union's ability to stick together came during the 1948 packinghouse strike that closed the plants of major packers throughout the nation. A demand for higher wages caused the strike; it developed into a bitter struggle, finally, for the union's existence. The union local faced serious problems simply keeping its members fed after the small strike fund was exhausted. They asked for help from the owners of a nearby small restaurant, Kacere's Cafe, whose customers were largely union members. The Kaceres generously offered the use of their place as a soup kitchen for strikers and their families.

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Holiday sign reminds passersby that turkey and fruitcake were "more than Wilson's ever gave us." (Circa 1950s)

Mickey Lockhart recalled: "We went down there all the time. They are wonderful people, too, I'll tell you. Every time you had a strike the Kaceres was right there to put up their place for a soup kitchen. If something happened today, we could take over their cafe right now. Sure, I worked in the soup kitchen, in fact in the 1948 strike I worked there when I wasn't on the picket line. You have your duties you do either on the picket line or they'd assign you to the soup kitchen. In fact, I even went out begging. You'd go out and ask for day-old goods. We even went to different stores and put up picket signs to get people to stop buying Wilson's products. This one time a few of the girls and myself, we went up to the A&P. The manager come out and he said, 'We don't have no Wilson's products.' But we knew they did because we wrapped the bacon. Just because it didn't have 'Wilson' on it, still it was from there. We done such a good job in local stores that Wil-

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The Kacere family in Cedar Rapids offered their cafe as a soup kitchen for striking meatpackers and their families in 1948 and 1957. Here, three members of the Kacere family (on left) receive award from a local union official.

son had a hard time getting some of their orders back."

As the strike continued into its second and third months, people became frustrated and angry when Wilson's started hiring replacement workers, also known in union circles as scabs. Strikers bitterly resented scabs because their work helped the company to hold out against the union, and more important, because strikers feared that their own jobs would be gone if the strike was lost. In Waterloo scabs shot and killed a striker, but in Cedar Rapids no real violence occurred. One incident marred an otherwise peaceful strike.

"Well, we were all out on strike," Lockhart explained, "and different ones they would try to talk to people [strikebreakers] not to go in the plant. And some of the union people were talking and thought they'd go out and try to talk to these people from Vinton not to come in. So my brother-in-law says, 'Well, let's just take Tom's car.' About that time my husband [Tom] walked by and he says, 'You're not going to take that car unless you take me along,' So they all got in the car and they drove out and waited for the station wagon that was bringing people in and they stopped it. But I don't think anybody had any intention of doing any damage. But when they couldn't talk them out of coming in, some of them got kind of radical. Things got a little out of hand and one of the fellows pulled out a knife and cut the tire. My husband grabbed him and he says, 'Boy, just what do you think you're doing? We better get out of here.' So then they got in the car and come back to Cedar Rapids. When the boys got back they contacted the union and they were told to go out of town. I don't know if they thought it would kind of blow over or what, but it didn't. They come back and they were arrested. They didn't arrest all of them, and the ones that they didn't arrest, nobody was going to tell on them, but they arrested my husband."

The Lockharts and the union then faced the prospect of a costly and embarrassing trial while the strike was still in progress, a trial that might discredit the entire union.

The attorney for the union advised them that if several of the accused pleaded guilty to the charges, the rest would be set free.

Lockhart continued: "Then after the lawyer told them it would be better if somebody pleaded guilty, they wanted to know who they was going to get. They was trying to get some stable guy who could stand to spend time in prison. The guy who pulled the knife was kind of nervous and excited and kind of went to pieces. So my husband volunteered to plead guilty. Tom said if they would let him plead guilty to a lesser charge, his brother, Chuck, would take the other charge, because I was working and I'd get by. The lawyer was telling him that they'd all have to do prison terms. You know how they do what they call plea bargaining, you get off with less than you would if you were convicted by a jury. So they figured, well, they better go that way because the lawyer should know best."

Sentenced on a conspiracy charge to three years in Fort Madison for a crime he didn't commit, Tom Lockhart actually spent eleven months on a prison honor farm near Des Moines. His brother served six months at the county jail. Tom never returned to Wilson's but the union compensated Mickey for the time her husband served.

"You asked me if he was bitter. He wasn't really bitter. He got along good at the farm and made friends with the guys there. And he was good friends with people from the union, too. He had nothing against them. They didn't do nothing to him. It was just one of them things, that's all. And when he got another job driving truck, he went right back in the union, strong as ever."

Tony Fetter

Labor-Management Relations in the Postwar Era

The character of industrial relations changed after World War II. Once the strike wave of the late 1940s passed, unions found an accepted role in American industrial and political life, but they were compelled to live under a new set of rules governing labor-management relations, the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947. The new rules made labor's organizing tasks more difficult, allowed states (including Iowa) to ban the mandatory union shop, and took away one of the CIO's most effective tactics, the wildcat strike. In the postwar world, labor and management had to develop new bargaining tools and cope with new problems while trying to set aside old antagonisms. Complex issues concerning productivity, time-study methods, and safety conditions came to dominate the agenda of labor-management relations in the 1950s. The generation of union leaders who had fought the organizing struggles of the 1930s gave way to the generation who had fought World War II and remembered the hard times of the 1930s only as children. The new generation was determined to avoid another depression and learn to deal with management by the new rules. One member of that generation at Wilson's was Tony Fetter, who described his first job there.

"I had no credentials to get a job in the packinghouse but I think they looked at me and said, here's a guy that knows how to work and is willing to work. I was a strong farm boy and I was not afraid to work. So they hired me into the freezer. The work there was practically all manually done. We would push truckloads of meat with one thousand or fifteen hundred pounds and go into that freezer. It was a sharp blast, thirty, thirty-two degrees below zero. It was very hard work, but it appealed to me. I always thought I was tough, you know, it sort of appealed to me to do heavy physical labor. You'd push the hand truck probably fifty or a hundred feet. You'd load it up and push it over wooden floors, in some instances. If you were lucky enough to get it on a steel plate, it would roll very easy, but not on wood. I told my foreman at that time, I said, 'Look, we used to have horses on the farm. If we hauled a ton of hay we'd put a team of horses on it.' I said, 'I'll be goddam if I'm a horse. I'm not going to push no fifteen hundred pounds.' I refused and they said they were going to fire me, but they never did. We'd argue about it and he'd let me go back to work. I guess my first impression

LABOR COLLECTION, SHSI (IOWA CITY)

As a community service, local P3 members distribute holiday turkeys and fruitcakes. (Date of photo unknown)

when I came to Wilson's was, 'God, these people really work hard!'

"When I came to work in 1951, and that's some time after the conclusion of the 1948 strike, there was still no contract that we could put our hands on. Everybody was back to work, but there was no written agreement. Things were really tough. There were a number of scabs in the plant, people who had taken the jobs of the strikers. I really didn't know what a scab was at that time or felt as strongly about it as I did probably thirty days later. But I began to realize then the need for organization. I also got the impression that there was a certain degree of, well, not necessarily fear, but too much timidness on the part of the workers. When confronted by management and told by management to do certain things, there was not enough resistance, I felt. In talking to some of the people who went through the strike, there was always some apprehension. Many of them worried that they wouldn't get their jobs back. Really, during that period of time they didn't want to do anything that might cause them to lose their jobs. I think many of them felt after the 1948 strike that they were fortunate to have a job at all."

Wilson's was the only major packer not to sign a master contract with the UPWA. In Cedar Rapids the company even filed an unfair labor practice suit with the National Labor Relations Board against the local union and tried to have the local union decertified as a bargaining agent for the workers through an election. The union won the election but lost hundreds of members embittered by the failure of the strike and lost wages. Tony Fetter took part in rebuilding the local union and in hammering out a new working relationship with management.

"In 1951 or 1952 I would say probably ten

percent of the people in the plant were strong committed union leaders," Fetter recalled. "The rest were looking to someone for some type of leadership. There were lots of people in my age group who were considered Johnny-come-latelies, who were not involved in the early years of the union before World War II. We came into the plant at the end of the war and had a different philosophy, I think, because we hadn't been kicked around that much in the plant. We didn't quite have that feeling of bitterness or fear. The people who had some years of service with the company really felt that they could depend on that for their livelihood. But those of us that were younger didn't think we did. We were passing through, so to speak. Fire me, I don't care. You know, what the hell, we'll find another job tomorrow. On the other hand, we didn't all have the same attitude of some of the older ones who'd say, 'Don't talk to the foreman, he's a no-good son-of-a-bitch.' We felt that that wasn't necessarily the right way either. We didn't want to socialize with him but we had to communicate with him. How are you going to settle a grievance if you walk in and say, 'You're a goddam liar.' We felt we couldn't accomplish anything that way, that we had to have a different kind of approach. We were coming more or less with a fresh point of view, I think, that there are other ways to accomplish things. We felt very strongly then, too, that we wanted to educate the people and try to build an organization that had some confidence. Some older workers thought we were too soft on the company, that we were too willing not necessarily to appease but to bargain and to compromise. They felt there shouldn't be compromises, that my generation was too willing to listen to the company. We were prone to try reason, and they didn't think that was the right way to do it. You know, the old way is always hard to change. But the days of 'We'll just shut her down' instead of arguing a grievance were over. And I'm not saying it was all wrong during that time. Many things were accomplished by the shutdowns and wildcats. Knife sharpening time was granted, not by negotiations, but by people taking their knives and slamming them on the steel tables and yelling, 'We got to have knife sharpening time.'

"After 1947, of course, we had Taft-Hartley coming into being. The wildcat strikes used to be taken for granted. You could shut the department down or shut the whole plant down. Then the company began to sue us under Taft-Hartley, so it began a whole new ballgame. You pulled a wildcat or a stoppage in a department and the company would say, 'Okay, you, steward and you, you're fired. You're violating the law. Wildcats are no longer legal.' The approach management took had a whole new complexion, and I think this is why it became necessary for the union to become more sophisticated. Before then, grievances weren't being followed through as they should because there was a degree of fear and lack of knowledge. Confidence is in knowing what you're doing. I think in many instances, stewards were being elected on a popularity basis. They were really not equipped to handle it. They didn't have the confidence to approach the management with a reasonable argument. This is why we stressed education all the time. The UAW did it very much, too. The CIO at that time had training schools, which I was exposed to. You'd come back from the training school, and you were equipped to cope with the foreman. It takes more time to sit and argue. We'd argue all day over grievances. Rather than walk in there and demand and walk out, we spent some time to discuss the problem. I felt that we were getting more results and the people were beginning to see more results from the grievance meetings. It began to bolster the people to become more confident and get rid of their fear."

Management in the 1950s brought new challenges to labor. Prominent in the Wilson packinghouse were the efficiency experts who introduced time-study methods to increase productivity. This was also the decade when unions became more conscious of safety conditions to ensure the physical well-being of their members on the job. For efficiency and safety, union members, too, had to become experts.

"One of the problems that sticks out the most in my mind from the 1950s would be grievances involving job loads," Fetter re-

called. "The company, by virtue of their industrial engineers, was arriving at job loads by using time-study, a sophisticated procedure that showed how many people were needed on a certain job or how fast the chain [an overhead conveyor] could run. At first we opposed that. We'd say, 'Ain't no goddam time study in this plant. How can a guy with a stopwatch determine what a job load is? We're the ones who are best equipped to do that. We know when we're performing to our physical capacity. No guy with a stopwatch is going to stand there and tell us how hard to work.' The company felt at that time that they had the edge on us. In fact, I would become embarrassed in front of these time-study guys. I didn't know what the hell he was talking about. There was a degree of inferiority because here's a guy, big dude out of college. I wasn't equipped to argue with him. Some of the locals in the UPWA starting hiring their own union time-study guys. The UAW always did. So we'd say, here's our guy who knows as much as yours. He went to industrial engineering school, too. We began to realize that if the company's becoming more sophisticated, we have to, too.

"Another thing we stressed in the Fifties was safety and better working conditions. We were able to convince the management to have lay people, workers, represented on the safety committee, not just management people, who, in most cases, would turn their backs on unsafe conditions because of the cost involved in improving them. When the unsafe condition was brought to their attention, they would whitewash it, make a token effort to try to correct the problem, but didn't really seriously try to do it. That's when we felt we had to have workers represented on the safety committee, if for no other reason than to be watchdog, to see that things were done. Now we've become more sophisticated. Our safety director is knowledgeable in the law now, is familiar with the job and can identify an unsafe condition and have some influence in changing it because he has status under contract now. He is a safety committee member, union safety director and can do more than just sit there and say, 'We've got an unsafe condition. What are you going to do about it?'"

The stories of the five union members of P3 recall early organizing efforts, working conditions, the needs of wartime, a losing strike, and the union rebuilding afterward. The testimony of the five makes clear that the meaning of union transcended wages and hours, conditions and seniority. The union was about people banding together in a common purpose, people drawing strength from that common bond, and making a decent life for themselves despite the harshness of their work environment. The plant is closed and the union local no longer functions, but the accounts of these working people survive. □

NOTE ON SOURCES

These excerpts are part of longer interviews in the Iowa Labor History Oral Project, archived at the State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City). Milo Barta was interviewed in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, on 4/14/78, by Paul Kelso. Gregory Zieren interviewed the following: John Wolfe (Marion, Iowa, 10/25/79); Mickey Lockhart (Cedar Rapids, 11/15/79); Velma Wetzel (Cedar Rapids, 10/13/79); and Tony Fetter (Cedar Rapids, 11/2/79).

For secondary sources on packinghouse workers, see David Brody, *The Butcher Workman: A Study of Unionization* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), Walter Galenson, *The CIO Challenge to the AFL: A History of the American Labor Movement* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), and Leslie F. Orear, *Out of the Jungle* (Chicago, 1968). On World War II, see Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II* (New York, 1982). General accounts of American labor in the twentieth century include James R. Green, *The World of the Worker: Labor in Twentieth-Century America* (New York, 1980), and David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the Twentieth Century Struggle* (New York, 1980).

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RAY ANDERSON, IOWA DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Like a geological palimpsest, Iowa's sediment holds successive layers of Iowa's past. In 1993, floodwaters surged over the Coralville Lake emergency spillway in Johnson County, washing away fifteen feet of those layers. Carved by the flood, Devonian Fossil Gorge (above) is one place to view fossils from the time when Iowa was covered with warm, shallow seas. Another place is in the new museum exhibit "Flowers of the Iowa Seas" at the State Historical Society of Iowa. The exhibit showcases spectacular crinoid fossils, like those featured on the front cover.

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