

Atlantic's Canning Season of 1902 • Kate Shelley and the Chicago & North Western

The
PALIMPSEST

Volume 76, Number 3

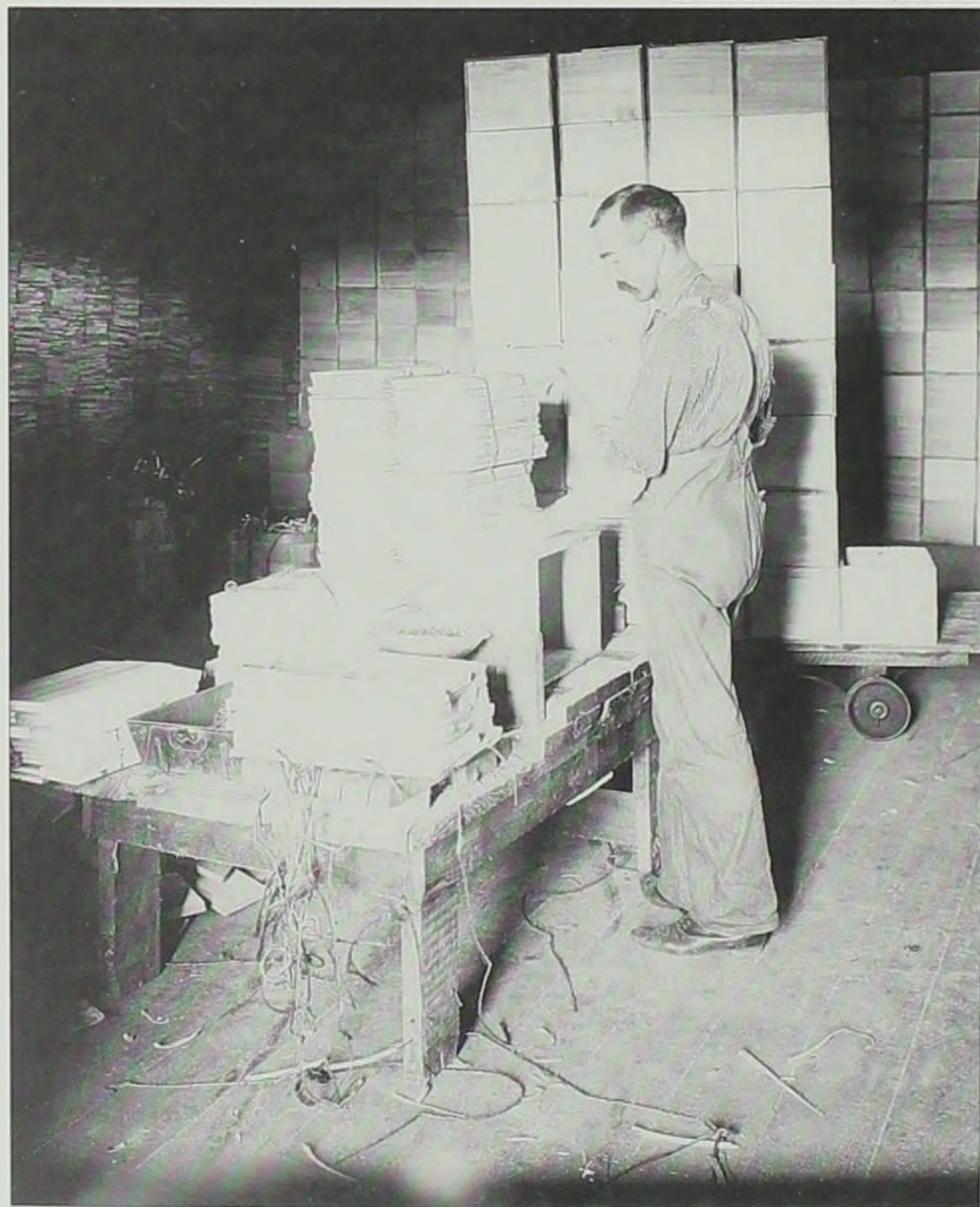
IOWA'S POPULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE

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Inside

CUYKENDALL COLLECTION, SHSI (DES MOINES)



Frank Vincent, billed as a "champion box maker," constructs crates at the Atlantic Canning Company in 1902. Through a remarkable photograph collection presented here, this *Palimpsest* explores what it was like to work in a turn-of-the-century canning factory, as well as what it was like to live in the factory owner's home.



The Meaning of the Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest (PAL' /imp/est) was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete, and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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Ginalie Swaim, Editor

VOLUME 76, NUMBER 3

FALL 1995

- 98** **Atlantic's Canning Season of 1902**
by Marcia Chinitz Goldberg and Phillip Chinitz

A remarkable collection of 1902 photographs reveals the everyday world of canning factory workers and the factory owner in Atlantic, Iowa.

- 138** **Kate Shelley and the Chicago & North Western Railway**
by H. Roger Grant

What does the story of Kate Shelley tell us about railroad paternalism and public image?



Canning in Atlantic 98



Kate Shelley 138

COVER: A factory worker stokes the furnace at the Atlantic Canning Company in 1902. Part of an important glass plate negative collection donated to the State Historical Society of Iowa, the photograph helps document the work of the cannery, where millions of cans of corn, peas, tomatoes, and pumpkins were processed each year.

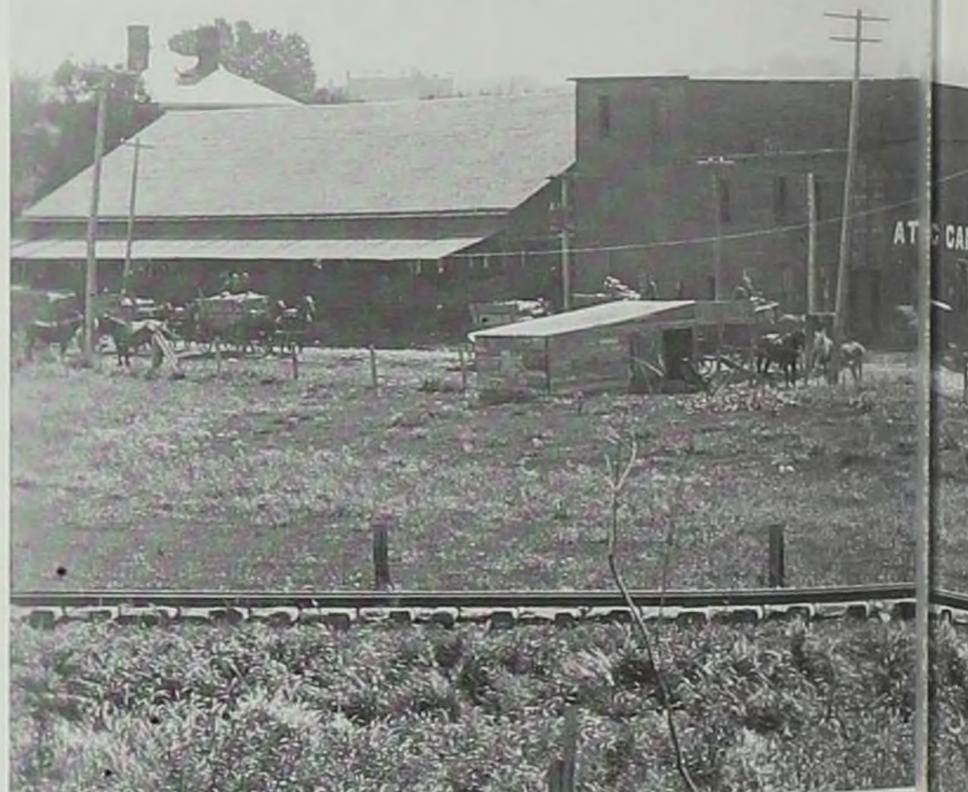
Atlantic's Canning Season of 1902

*by Marcia Chinitz Goldberg
and Phillip Chinitz*

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down and raked into piles, the vines were then loaded onto horse-drawn wagons and delivered to the factory.

Ninety-three years later, we are witness to that harvest season, thanks to a remarkable collection of sixty-two glass plate negatives of this southwestern Iowa town. Most of the pic-





tures were taken in the summer and fall of 1902. Two-thirds of the images are of the Atlantic Canning Company and of the house of J. W. Cuykendall, the owner of the canning factory for more than two decades. The remaining third of the collection includes views of the town, landscapes, informal groups of

young people, portraits of individuals, and pets. The photographer of the collection is unknown. The name "Frank Kirk" appears on one box of negatives, but that name does

Above: Wagons line up at the Atlantic factory. Below: Harvesting peas was step one in the canning process.

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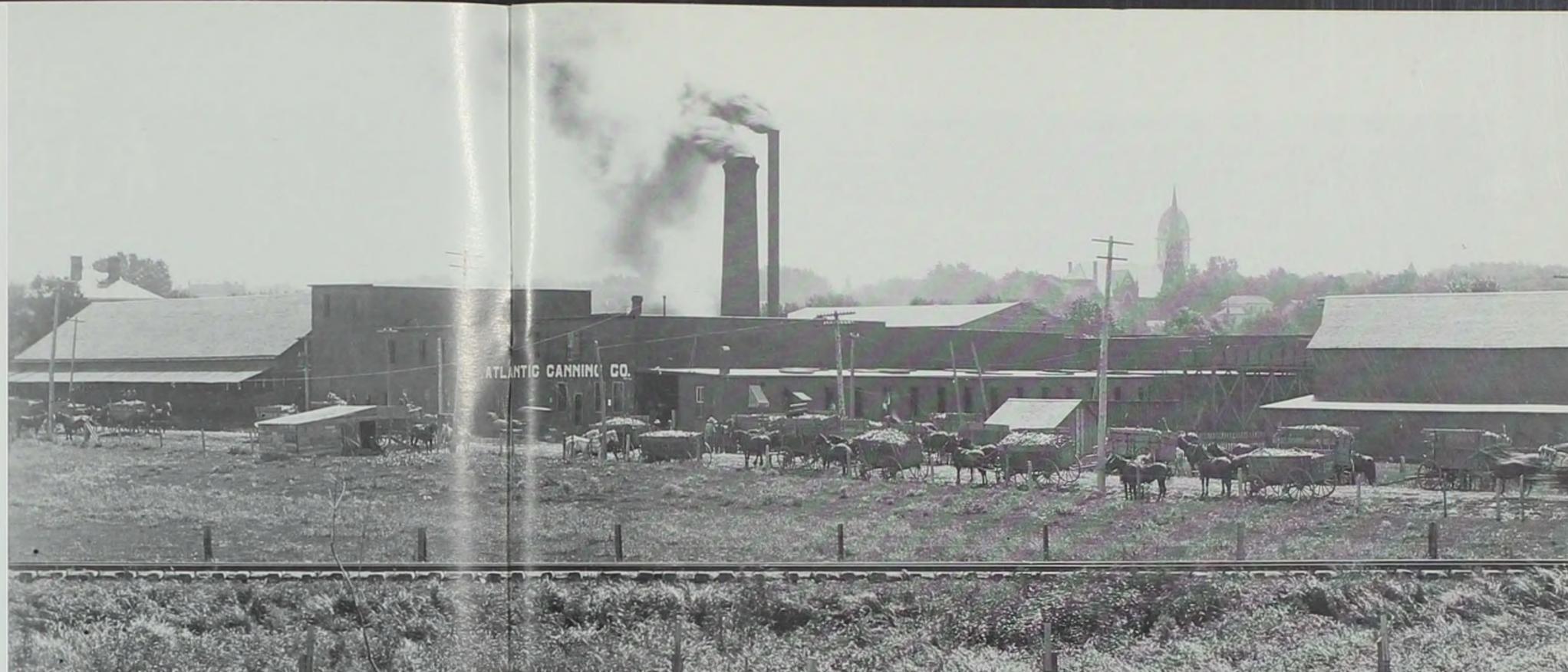
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not appear in the 1900 U.S. census records or in the 1902 Atlantic or Cass County directories. He may have been an itinerant photographer.

Preserving food by drying, salting, or smoking has an ancient history, but preserving food in portable containers for large populations dates only to the early nineteenth century. The process of canning had been developed early in the nineteenth century by Nicholas Appert in response to a call from Napoleon for a viable way to supply food to his large armies. Appert sealed food in glass bottles from which air had been removed, and then placed them in boiling water. His method proved successful and was adopted in other countries. Although it took only a few short years for inventors to substitute tin cylinders for bottles, production remained small and costly. By the end of the nineteenth century, American canners used new methods for avoiding spoilage and more efficient machinery to reduce manual involvement.

Canning was a natural industry for largely rural Iowa, but by the turn of the century only fifteen canning factories operated in the state. The Atlantic Canning Company had been founded in 1882, fourteen years after the town itself was established. Atlantic was an ideal location for such an endeavor because it could provide what the factory needed: fertile fields yielding suitable crops, sufficient employees, and a railway line. Atlantic was not, however, unique in this regard; in the 1903 *Iowa Report on Labor Statistics*, forty communities indicated a desire for a canning factory and claimed the proper essentials for success. Perhaps what the other towns lacked was entrepreneurship and necessary capital.

Atlantic had found both in J. A. McWaid, S. F. Martin, and R. D. Wilkins. Wilkins dropped out of the partnership in 1883 and McWaid became sole owner after buying out Martin in 1890. Since McWaid's move to Atlantic in 1869, he had operated businesses in carriage and wagon-making, and in selling blacksmithing services and agricultural imple-

ments. The year he started the canning factory, he was superintendent of a hog packinghouse and owner of a 600-acre stock farm. He had also, during this period, been mayor of Atlantic and president of a local bank. His new canning factory comprised a 40 X 100 foot two-story main building, a cooling shed, wareroom, and brick boiler room. The company employed between seventy-five and one hundred men and women during an average season. In its second year, the factory more than doubled its production.

John W. Cuykendall joined the company in 1889. Born in Cayuga County, New York, in 1858, he already had extensive experience

SHSI (IOWA CITY)



J.W. Cuykendall, from a 1906 Cass County history.

and expertise in food preservation, having operated several factories including a fruit-drying business he started at the age of sixteen. By 1900 Cuykendall, in partnership with William McWaid, the son of the founder, owned the Atlantic Canning Company. Sometime before 1913, Cuykendall became sole owner. He also started a branch factory, run by his brothers J. R. and C. E. Cuykendall, in Fremont, Nebraska, and another later in Shenandoah, Iowa.

Thanks to the detailed 1902 photos of the canning factory and other documentation,



we can now historically “tour” the factory and understand the canning process and the workers’ tasks. We can see the workers up close, observe their workday clothing, the equipment they used, the size of the rooms in which they worked. With a little imagination, we can hear the whirr of the machinery, feel the heat of the steam processes, and smell the combination of soldering metal and fresh produce. Sometimes, when there is a blur in a photo, we can sense the speed of movement, as workers’ hands flew to shuck

corn or as cans filled with vegetables traveled down a conveyor belt to the next step.

The 1902 pea-canning season that opened with the blast of a factory whistle that June morning was described in detail in the June 12 *Atlantic Messenger*. After the workers had cut the pea vines and brought them by wagon to the factory, the article explained, the peas and vines were fed into a thresher that separated

the two and also shelled the peas. The vine stalks were then dried for cattle feed. The peas were sent to another machine that cleaned away any remaining leaves or bits of pod and graded the peas by size. A thorough washing eliminated any leftover chaff.

In the next stage, the peas were spread out on tables where women and girls inspected them for imperfections. Then the peas were put in a filler and briner machine that could fill eighteen cans at a time with peas and brine. The excess was brushed off and the cans were placed on a conveyor belt. After

the lids were put on, the cans were sent to a soldering machine. Placing the lids on the cans was done manually, mostly by women employees, and required quick hands. The photo on the opposite page shows a young woman demonstrating how this was done; behind her stands a mechanic, ready with an oil can to keep the machine running smoothly. The woman seems to have had advance notice because that day she wore both a ribbon and a flower in her hair.

Cans and lids were then soldered together, a man's job, as suggested by the photo below. The cans were then inspected and submerged in water to determine whether they were indeed airtight.

From the soldering station the cans were

Left: Holding stacks of lids, women workers place lids on cans flying by. Below: Lids are soldered to cans.





Left: Cans filled with produce are placed in enormous crate-like trays and then lowered into the retorts (above) for steam heating.



sent to the retorts, large steam kettles resembling oversized home pressure cookers (see above). The cans were placed in round, crate-like trays (left) and lowered into the retorts, which were then hermetically sealed. The retorts were steam-heated to 240 degrees for twenty minutes.

Age of 'hog and hominy' ends as refined American tastes shift to canned goods

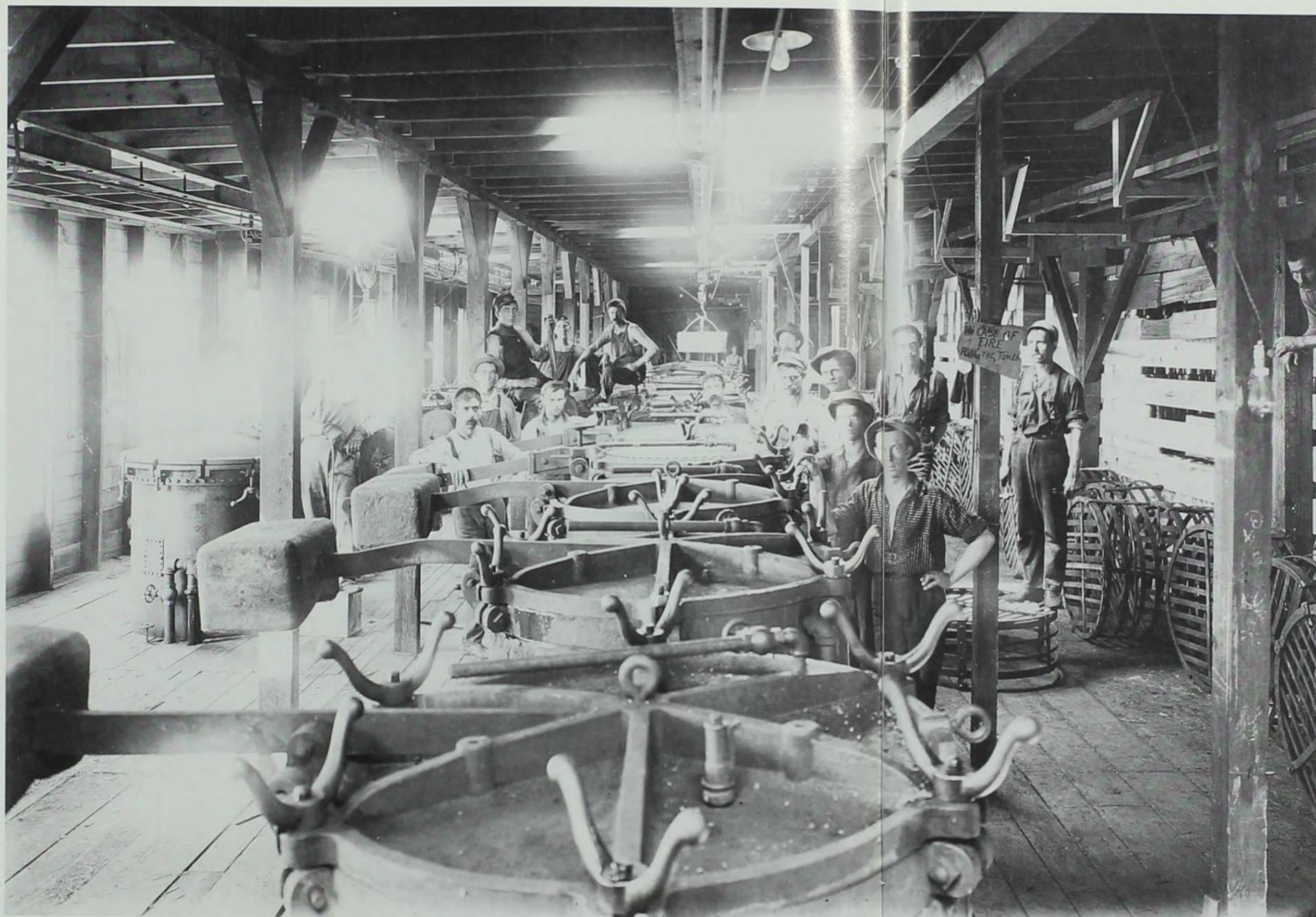
"The age of 'hog and hominy' is long since gone by. The tastes and desires of humanity have so multiplied and have become so refined that the crude, meager means and methods of a generation ago, will not suffice. Farmers do not take their families to town in lumber wagons, seated on plain boards, but have top buggies and carriages instead; they have pianos in their parlors, gold watches in their pockets, pictures on their walls, books on their tables and in keeping with these environments, they must have greater variety of choicest foods. . . .

. . . The climax in the art preservative is to can these fruits and vegetables in such a way as to perfectly maintain the original flavor and food qualities, and render them available. . . .

Much depends upon getting these goods to the factory in prime condition. Tomatoes must be ripe, but not too ripe, and perfectly sound, as well as clean. Corn must be at its best, not too old, not a chaffy, flavorless, semi-barren variety, but juicy and full of dextrine qualities. This is one of the most valuable food products. The factory that can get hold of such materials as described will surely succeed, both in the process of manufacture and on the way to the market centers. . . .

There is a great temptation in this business to use adulterations. . . . Factory men are besieged on every hand by men with certain preparations, which are said to restore the flavor of over-ripe tomatoes, or give the ruddy glow to green ones, or restore the youth of over-ripe corn, or vouchsafe keeping qualities to any of these products that shall be proof against certain chemical changes to which they are subject. All these things are wrong from a health point of view, and in the light of honest dealing, one with another. Our business can never be firmly established and built up until these practices are eradicated."

Excerpts from "The Canning Industry," by Walter Elliott (of Knoxville, Iowa) at the 1900 State Farmers' Institute (1901 *Iowa Year Book of Agriculture*).



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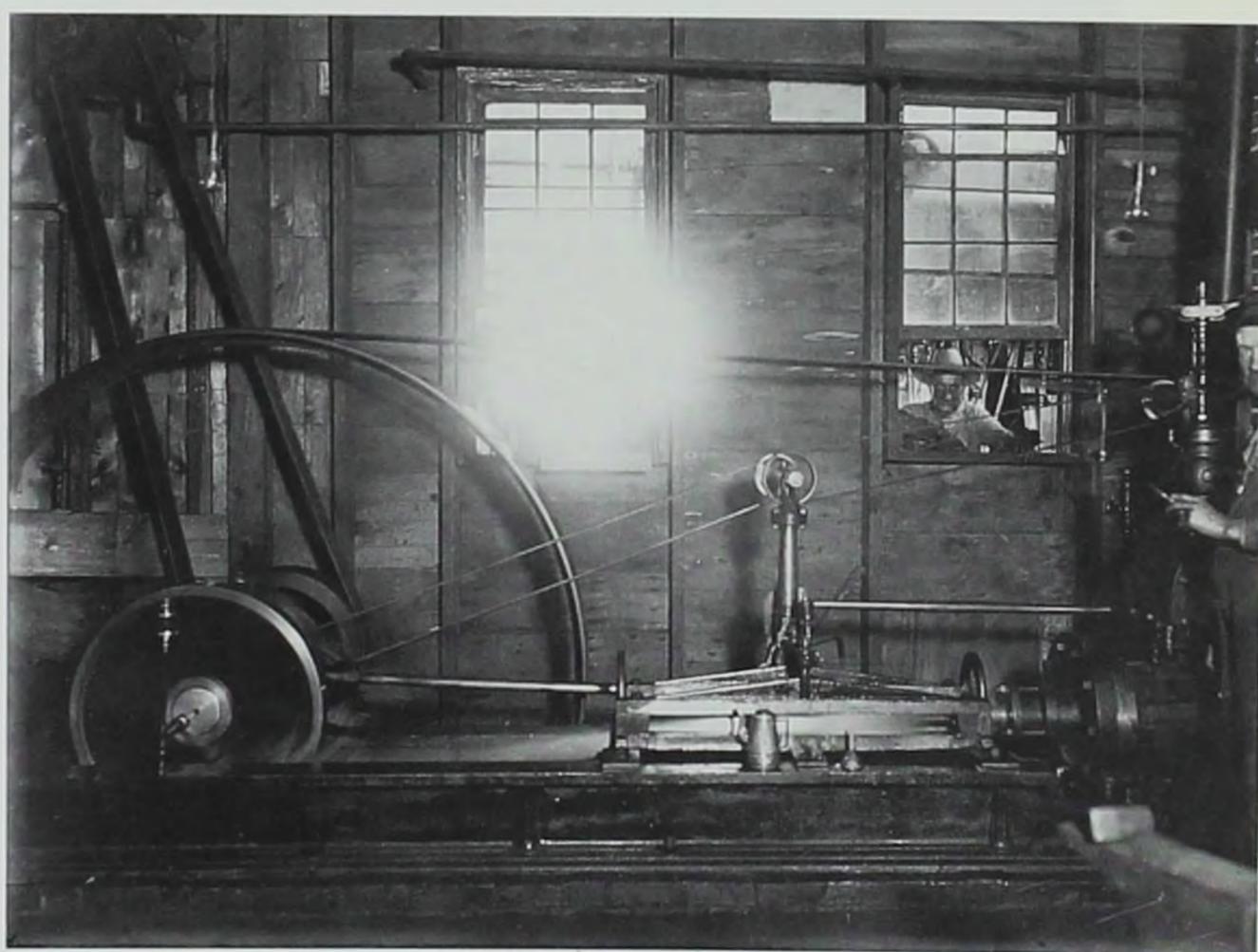
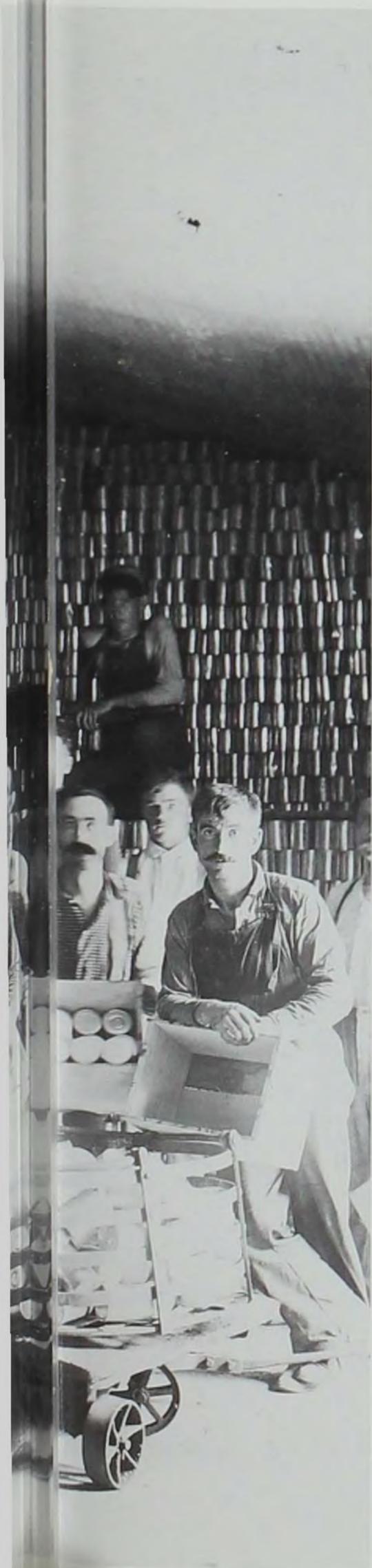
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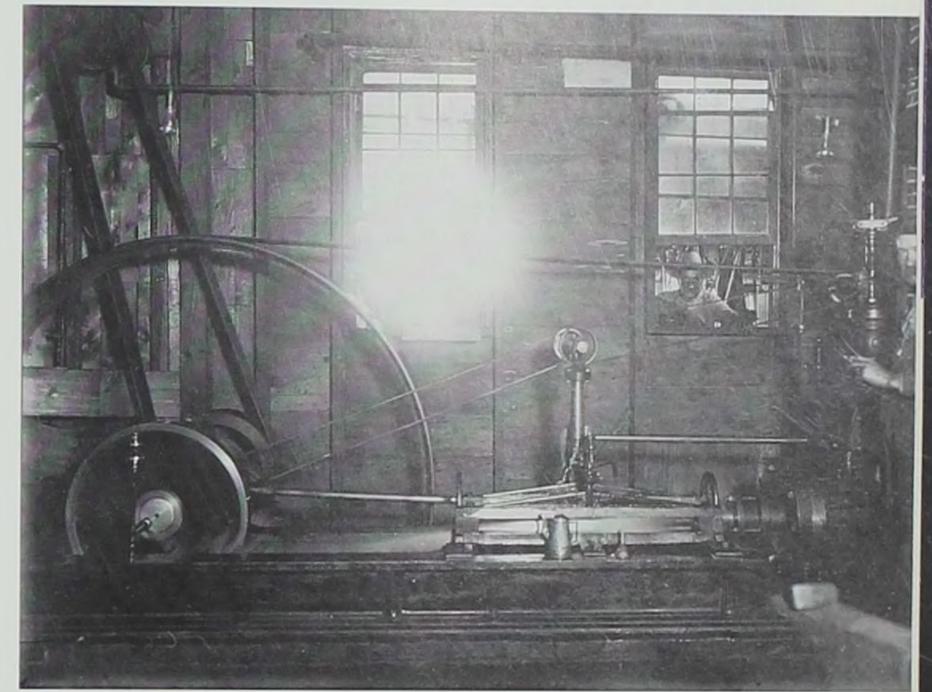
Above: Apparently intent on documenting both the people working in each factory area, as well as the function of that area, the photographer included two workers in the photo above—one in the right window and one on the far right of the huge wheel.

Left: Amid a mountain of cans, workers pack more into wooden crates. Next page: Crates await shipping.

After cooling, the cans were taken to the wareroom where they were boxed to await transportation to the wholesaler. A *Messenger* reporter, indulging in a bit of local pride, proclaimed the 1902 crop of peas excellent: "As to the quality of the product it is not excelled by any in the United States. It was tested by the writer and he knows whereof he speaks."

One hundred and fifty workers started the season that Monday in June 1902. This was less than half the work force needed, but the number would increase as various crops matured. By June 26, the factory was so busy that people worked overtime every day, sometimes running into the midnight hours. In 1902, the Atlantic company's season was

(text continued on page 110)



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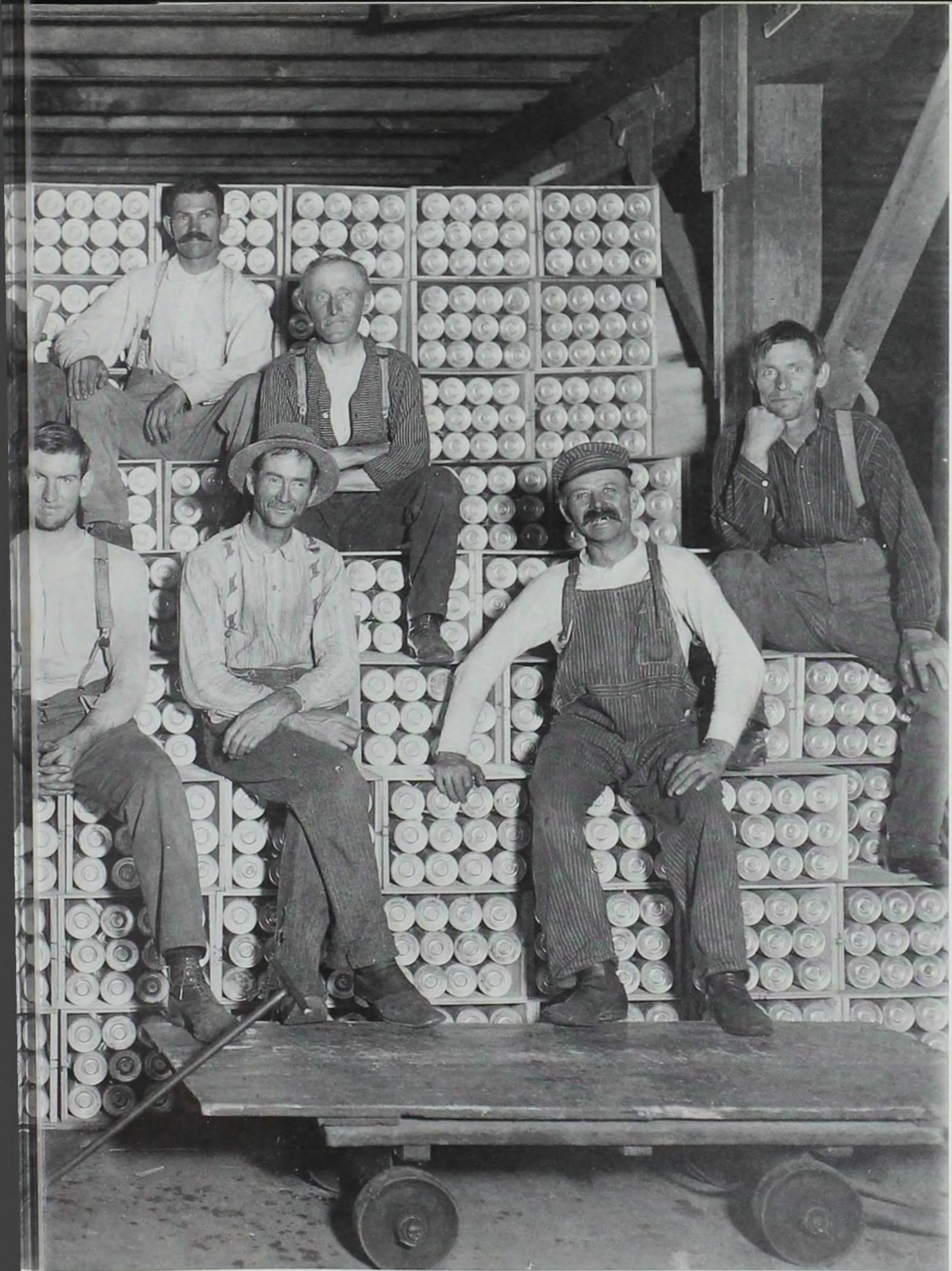
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Wagons loaded with sweet corn started rolling into town the third week in August. Farmers lined their wagons up and down Second Street under the hot summer sun. Sometimes, if the wait was long enough, they unhitched their horses and let them graze by the side of the road. On the best days, the factory could handle up to 225 wagon loads, converting these into 135,000 cans of corn.

At first it had not been easy to convince farmers to raise sweet corn rather than field corn. Because sweet corn was ready for harvest much sooner than was field corn, farmers would be harvesting in hotter weather. They also disliked the long wait sometimes required before they unloaded their wagons. At a 1900 State Farmers' Institute in Des Moines, agricultural officials assured their audience that sweet corn did not deplete the

AD FROM IOWA FACTORIES (JULY 1912)

Iowa Canned Corn for Iowa People

Buy it and encourage Iowa Manufacturers. None better, the majority not as good. If you are not satisfied after a trial purchase return what you have left and your grocer will take it back and refund your money. Buy a case of 24 cans, by doing so you can get it cheaper.

**HAWKEYE BRAND IS ONE
OF THE LEADERS.**

**ATLANTIC CANNING CO.,
ATLANTIC, IOWA**





Factory smoke fills the sky and corn husks litter the road, as farmers wait with wagons full of sweet corn.

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Canning corn required more space than did canning peas, although much of the process was the same once the corn was removed from the cob. One of the largest areas of the complex was the husking shed, a long, open-sided building. Under the simple trussed roof, workers sat on rough boxes on both sides of a conveyor running the length of the building and shucked corn. A worker was paid two cents for each bushel shucked. If the worker stayed the entire season, the rate was raised to three cents.

The conveyor transferred the filled baskets to machines that removed the corn from the

Farmers find that marketing sweet corn to canning factories involves hot harvests and long waits

"It is hard work to get farmers to raise corn for canning factories. The work must be done in hot weather, and the farmers do not like to wait to unload. Sometimes there will be twenty-five or thirty teams waiting to unload and it takes considerable time. Some of the goods put up at Atlantic spoiled and there were considerable losses, but under the management of the present owner the factory has been a success. Pumpkins, peas and other things are canned, and large loads, like loads of hay are hauled in. In busy times the factory runs night and day, and they have two sets of hands, and the factory brings in more money than any other three institutions in Atlantic. The manager said in June that all products were sold."

George Franklin, at the 1900 State Farmers' Institute
(*Iowa Year Book of Agriculture*, 1901)





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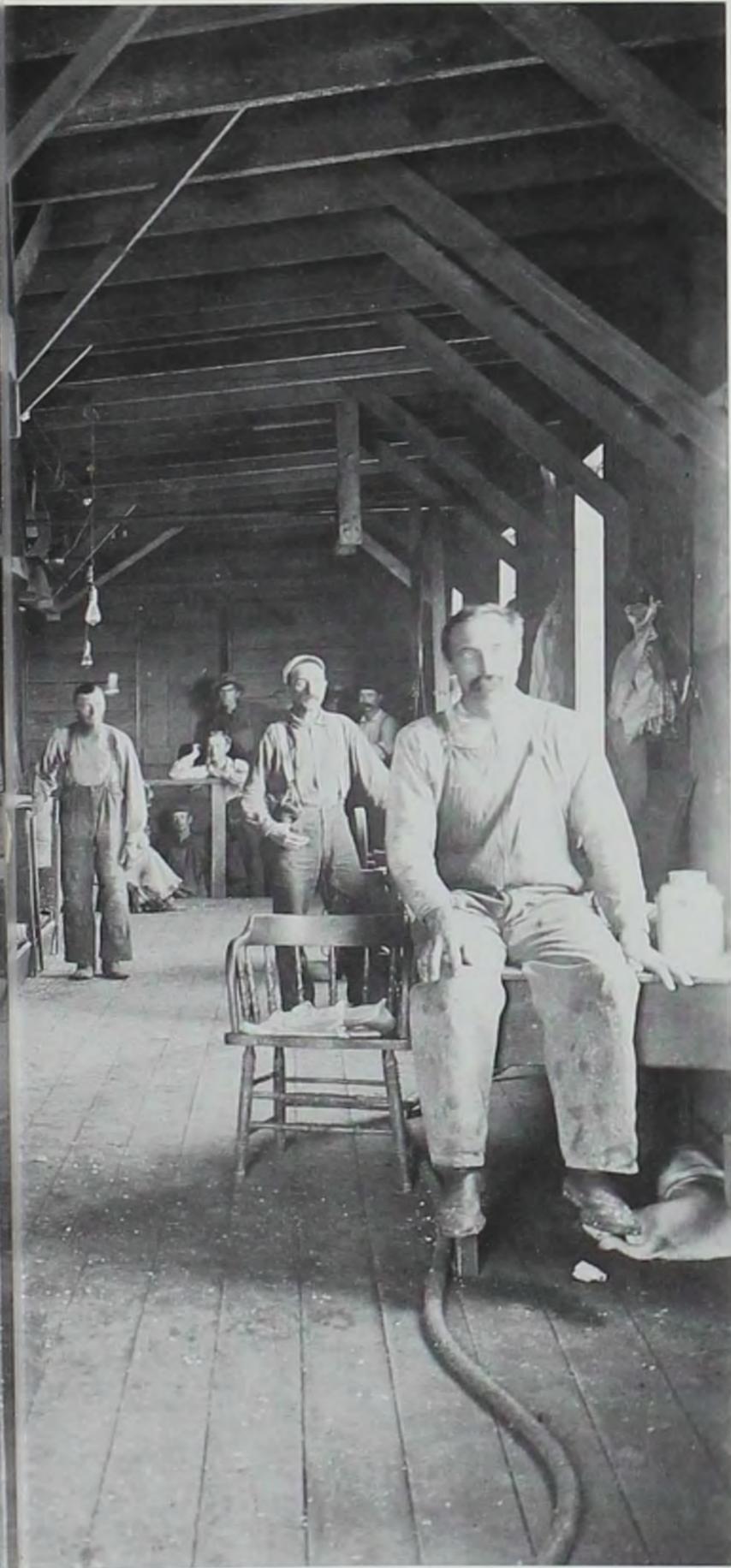
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tangled in the machinery. The exposed pulley belts look quite dangerous; apparently this problem had not yet been solved.

With safety as a consideration, periodic inspections were made by state officials. Inspectors checked the height of the building and



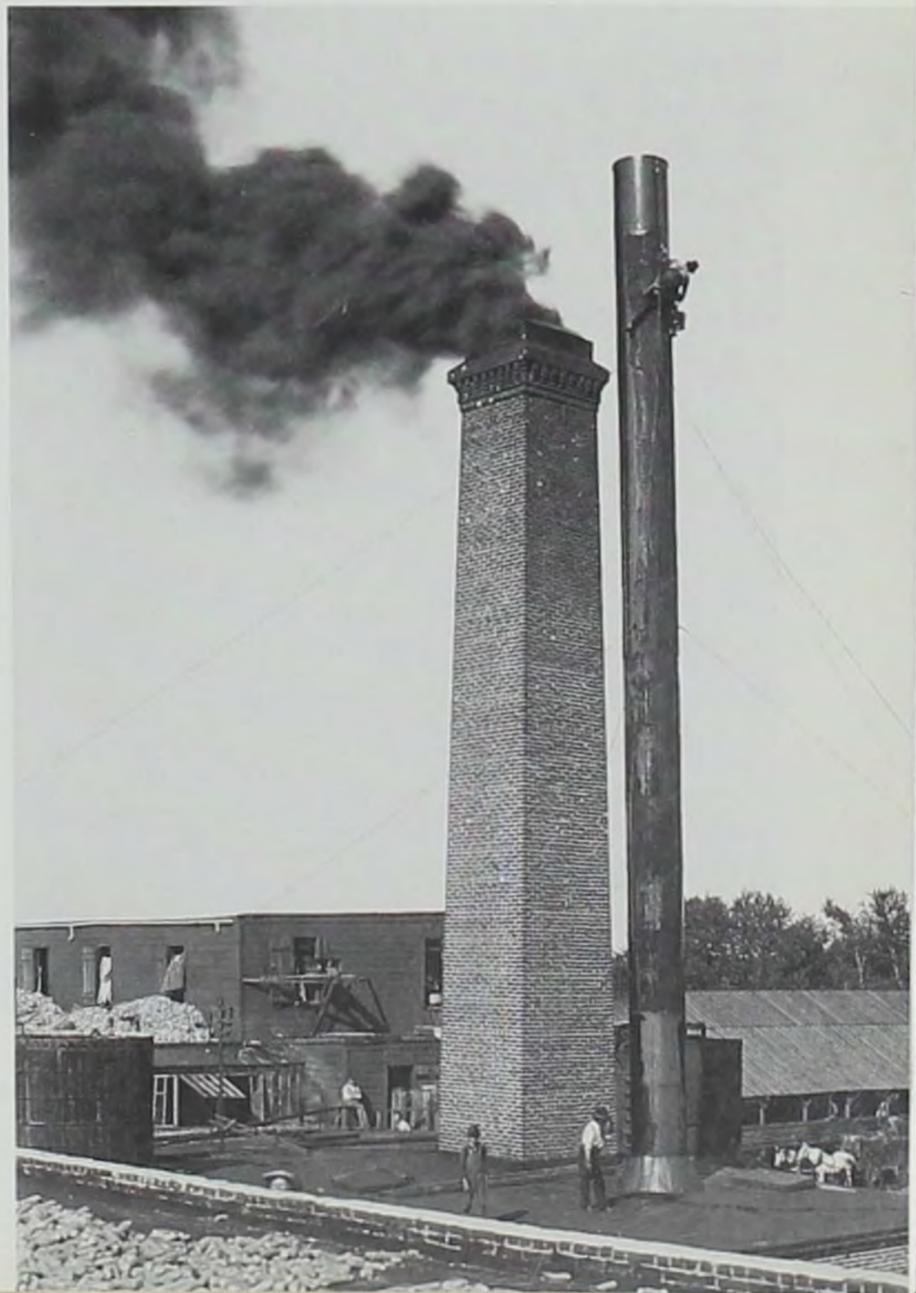
the number of stairways, fire escapes, and elevators. They also checked that ventilation in workrooms was adequate; that dust blowers were provided; that there were "water closets, earth or flush," and separate accommodations for women; and that the machinery was

in good condition and safe to operate. Inspectors also kept track of the number of accidents that had occurred over the previous year and how often the boilers were inspected. In 1903, the Atlantic factory passed muster, but the owners were asked to provide guard railings for the elevator and to improve safety devices on the machinery.

The factory, as several photographs reveal, employed a significant number of men and women; some appear to be in their teens. For local women, factory employment was a boon because there were very few job opportunities for them in Atlantic.

The canning factory had a significant impact on the town and its economy. In 1900, according to an authority at the State Farmers' Institute, "The factory brings in more

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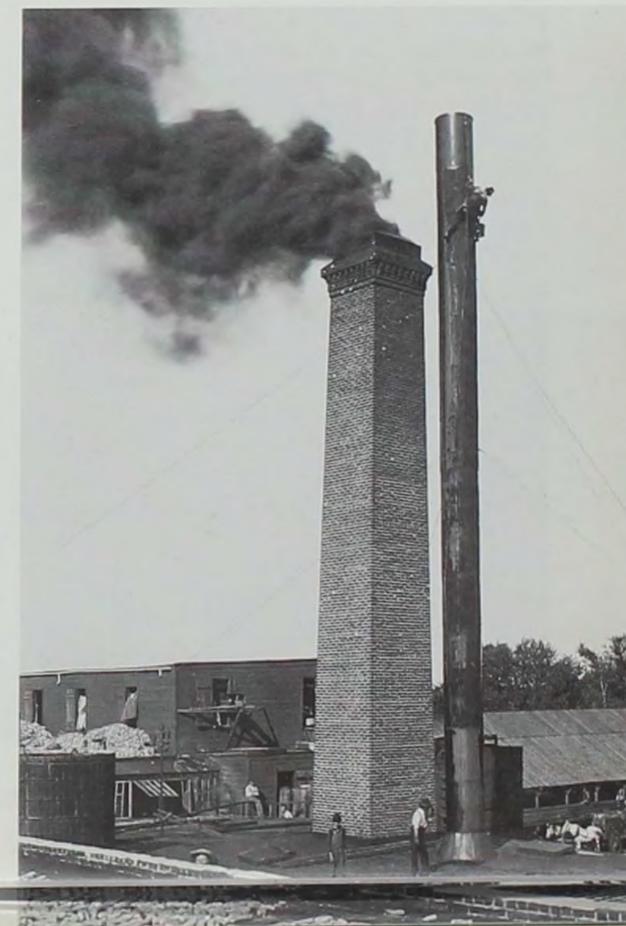
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money than any other three institutions in Atlantic." In September of 1904, two years after these photographs were taken, the factory employed 454 people and had a weekly payroll of between \$2,500 and \$3,000.

Cuykendall also commissioned the same photographer to take pictures of his house, certainly a source of great pride for the local entrepreneur. The town of Atlantic is set among rolling hills. The canning factory was located at the foot of one hill, in the northwest end of town. The house, purchased in February of 1901 shortly after Cuykendall became half owner of the factory, was located atop another hill at 14th and Chestnut Streets in the southwest end. The house had been built by Edward Shaw in 1890; either he or the new owner had named the house "Lyndhurst."

Lyndhurst was an impressive structure on a three-quarter-acre lot. It was built in the then-fashionable Queen Anne style. Asymmetrical bays, gables, porches, balconies, and dormers projected out from the main rectangle of the house. Many houses of this style and period had several trim colors, but if we judge from the black-and-white photographs, this house appears to have been painted in one basic color with a lighter trim. On the roof, lighter bands of scalloped shingles contrasted with darker shingles, and each roof ridge was adorned with half-circle cresting. The fish-scale shingle pattern was repeated under the eaves. Decorative detailing also graced rails, screening, porches, and the porte cochere (or carriage porch). A circular drive connected the porte cochere, the front entrance, and Chestnut Street. Cuykendall's granddaughter, Jeanette Emmert Lee, remembers that the drive was lined with concrete planters of flowers.

J. W. and his wife, Sarah, were also obviously proud of their fine carriage and horses, which appear in three of the photographs in the entire collection. In one photo (see next page), an unidentified driver sits with reins in hand, while, presumably, Sarah Cuykendall and her daughter, Virginia, ride inside. The

(text continues on page 121)





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Light spills through colored panes down the open stairwell and into the fashionably furnished hall, where a variety of Victorian patterns—in rugs, wallpaper, wood, and tile—meets the visitor to Cuykendalls' elegant home.

carriage house, a small building visible behind the house to the southwest, served first as storage for the carriage, horses, and perhaps a cow—and later for automobiles. There was an apartment for the caretaker and his family on the second floor of the carriage house, with a vegetable garden next to the building.

The exterior and interior photographs offer evidence of the home's Victorian elegance and many modern features. A utility pole with glass transformers suggests electricity. The year 1902 was still early for complete transformation to electricity; indeed, the chandeliers in all rooms but the parlor were transitional and had both gasolier globes and down-facing bowls for incandescent lights.

The house also had central heating; radiator pipes appear in several rooms. Although the fireplace in the hall was apparently still operational, stove insets in the fireplaces in the dining room and one parlor indicate that auxiliary heating was used.

Guests who entered the Cuykendalls' home would have encountered a hall fashionably furnished. To mark the summer season, the plants most common to Victorian homes, the fern and the palm, were placed in front of the fireplace. On the mantel, a French plaster bust of a young woman and a porcelain ewer flanked an elaborate clock adorned with a graceful classical figure, perhaps representing the Greek goddess Ceres with sheaves of grain and a basket of fruit.

A little nook—or "Turkish corner"—was created out of fancy pillows on the first landing of the stairway. Behind it, light poured through two large windows of stained glass, most likely matching colors and patterns repeated in the front door and in other first-floor windows.

The open stairwell was made to appear separate from the entrance by a pair of tall newel posts affixed with transitional lighting fixtures and a spindle screen hung from the ceiling. As on the house exterior, the millwork is extensive, especially in the handsome entrance hall and its staircase of airy



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In the parlor, ornate rockers are silhouetted against lace curtains, framed pictures line the walls above the piano and radiator, and porcelain is displayed on several surfaces. Behind the portieres on the left is a second parlor.



spindles alternating with solid wood rectangles. At the time the house was built, customizing woodwork was simplified by the availability of a variety of ready-made units from nearby mills and factories or through catalogues.

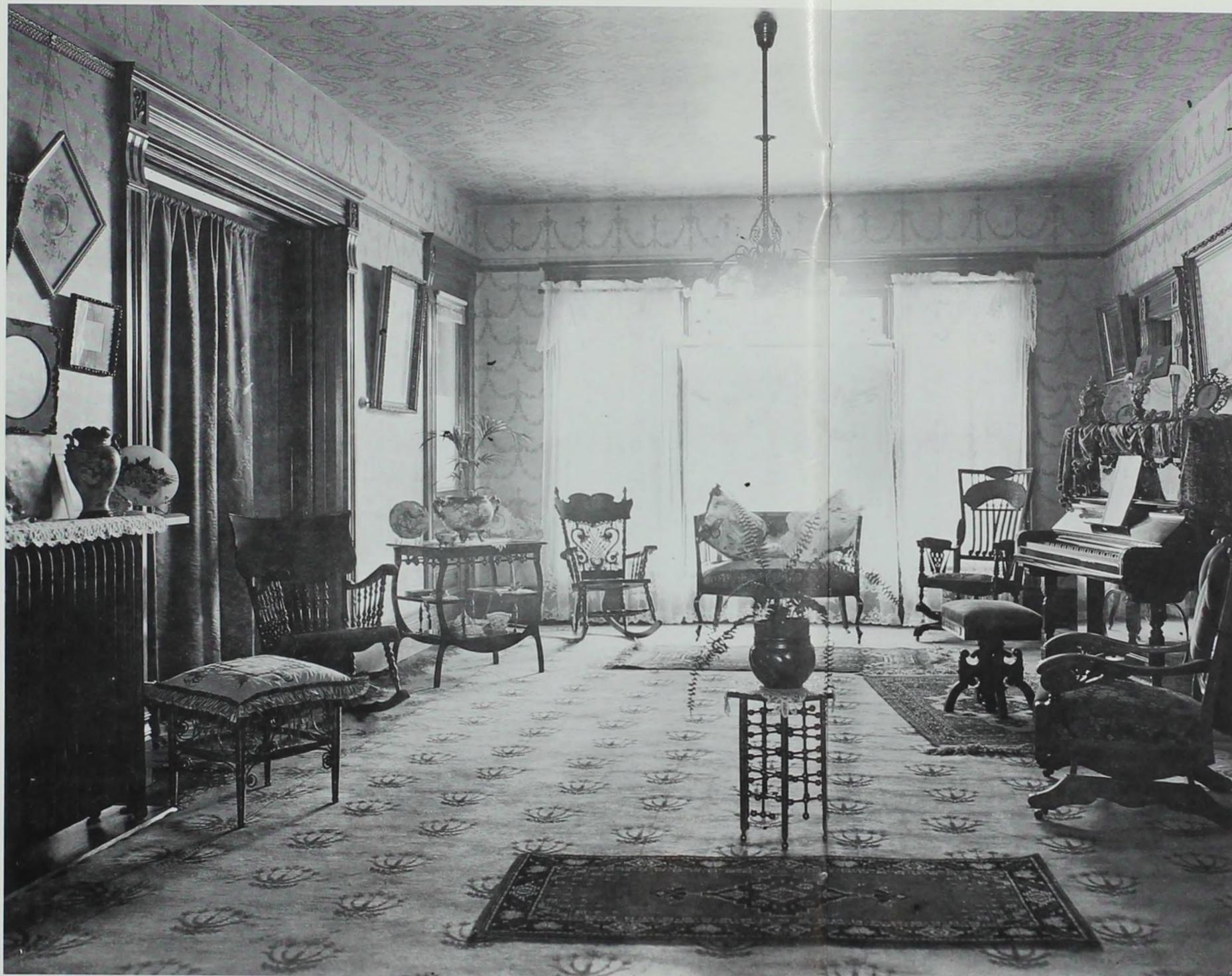
The Cuykendall house had two parlors, one with a piano (see left). Except for the small rugs, the center of this room seems bare for what we would expect of a Victorian room. Did it appear that way to the photographer, and was the little hexagonal plant stand borrowed from the hall to fill up the foreground? Then again, the room may have been arranged this way for a formal reception for many guests, or perhaps it reflects the advice of turn-of-the-century taste-makers who urged sparseness.

While this dictum seemed easy to follow with regard to the amount of furniture placed in the room, Sarah Cuykendall did not heed this advice for empty horizontal surfaces. The top of the piano, artfully draped with a ball-fringed fabric, was also adorned with a clock, porcelain plates, and photographs. Even the radiator (left foreground) had been turned into a shelf for displaying art objects, and another collection of porcelain was placed on the three-tiered table in the back.

All the rooms in the photographs were carpeted. In most of the rooms, a picture molding ran along the walls a foot or so beneath the ceiling. Large pictures were hung from this strip of wood by cords, thus giving a characteristic forward tilt to the frames. As in most of the rooms, the pattern of the wallpaper frieze here differed from the patterns on the ceiling and walls. Drifts of white lacy curtains at the large window softened the light. If Sarah Cuykendall's purpose was to make the room light and airy for Iowa's hot summer days, she was successful.

The large doorway to the left was hung with heavy portieres, or curtains, as a substitute for sliding doors. These not only provided privacy, they also may have kept heat from dissipating into unused spaces in the winter.

Behind these heavy draperies was a second parlor. One of the parlors may have been the



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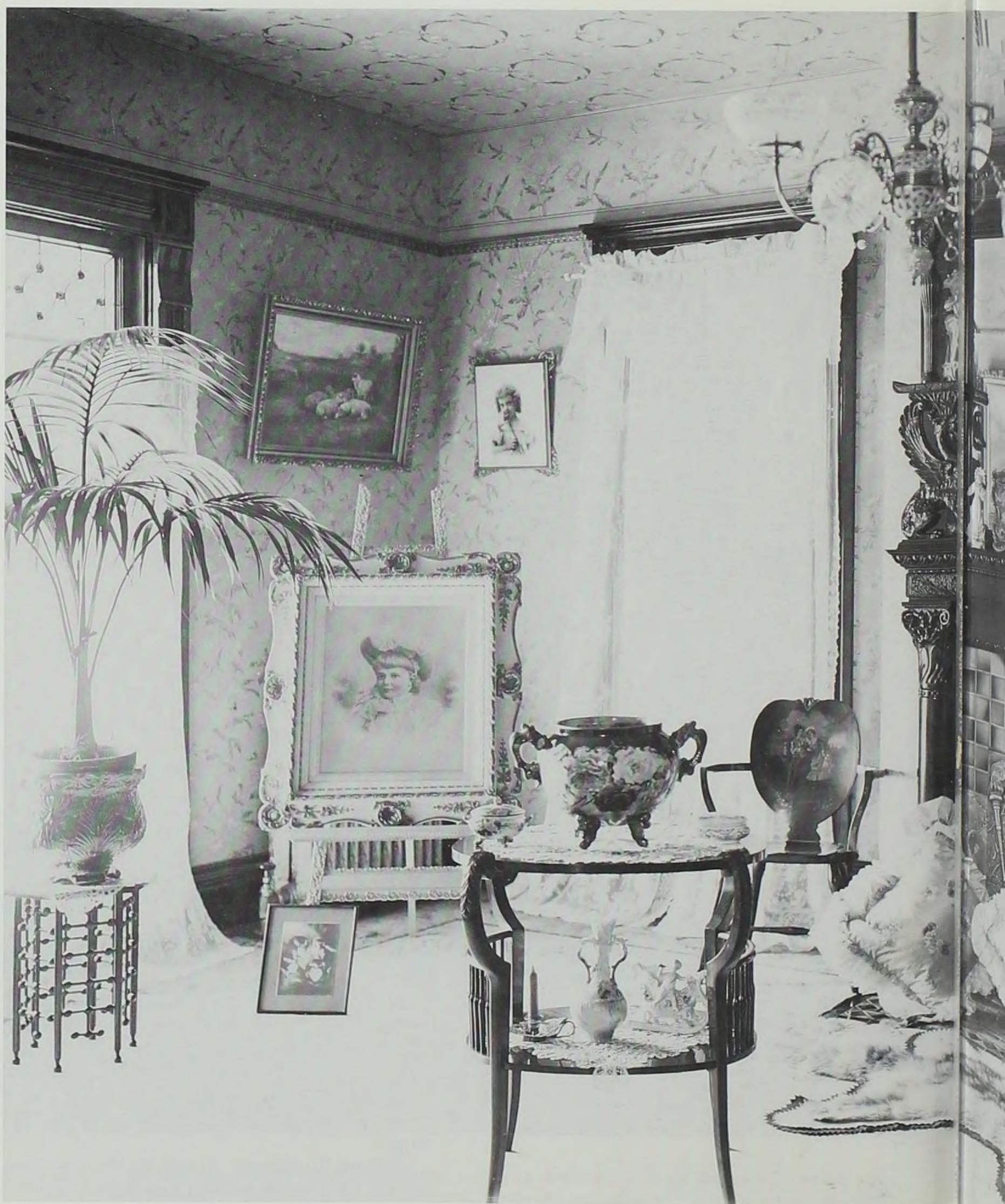
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family's private sitting room, reserved for more intimate gatherings of family and very close friends. Like the first parlor, this room (left) was sparsely furnished but well decorated with objects. The one chair shown was either borrowed from the entrance hall or was its duplicate. Perhaps the Cuykendalls, who had just moved in the previous year, had not had time to finish furnishing the house but wanted to make it appear so for the photographs.

The fireplace dominated this room. Its elaborate mantelpiece extended all the way to the picture molding; a large mirror framed by carved griffins occupied the upper half. Each griffin balanced on its head a small shelf bearing a porcelain figurine. Framed photographs and more porcelain lined the mantel. The fireplace itself had a handsome inset iron stove, with fiery torches flanking the sun's rays in relief. Propped up against the stove (undoubtedly because it was summer and the stove would not have been in use) were ruffled pillows. On the floor in front of these was a rug of animal fur. An 1878 issue of the magazine *House Beautiful* had advocated using fur rugs in this manner, and the style remained popular past the turn of the century.

The radiator pipes in the corner were partially hidden by a large easel, a fashionable way of displaying a picture. The picture here is an image of a child, perhaps daughter Virginia at an earlier age. At the foot of the easel is a print of Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Heads of Angels, Miss Frances Isabella Gordon (1787)*. It was possible at this time to purchase prints of famous paintings by catalogue. The Reynolds and other art prints displayed in the house were likely obtained in this way.

As in the other parlor, the curtains were sheer and appropriate for summer. They were cut long enough to "puddle" on the floor, a mid-nineteenth-century style evidently still admired by Sarah Cuykendall (although out of fashion according to professional home decorators at the turn of the century). The curtain rods in both parlors

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The library, in contrast to the two parlors, had heavier, more masculine furniture: a tufted leather chair, an ornate armchair, and a leather chaise longue backed into one corner. Ruffled pillows on the chaise longue invited relaxation. (Incongruously perhaps, the scene on one of the ruffled pillows depicted Red Riding Hood meeting the Wolf in the forest.)

This was the master's room. On the center table sat a humidor and a tray with three graduated cups, the largest holding cigars; a cuspidor was tucked beneath. (One employee recalls J. W. Cuykendall smoking his big cigars as he made his periodic checks of factory operations.)

As in the other rooms, there are suggestions of a temporary arrangement for the benefit of the photograph: the Reynolds print from the second parlor leaned against the leg of the library table; and the potted palm in the fluted vase, presumably on loan from the entrance hall, sat on the secretary near the window. On this side of the room there are a number of framed prints, possibly ordered from a catalogue, and a small, oval object with a pouch decorated with flowers. This is a wall pocket, which held letters and notes, sort of a Victorian file basket.

Perhaps in this room, Cuykendall met with other Atlantic leaders to discuss business interests—of which he apparently had many. According to a 1906 county history, he was vice-president of the Iowa Trust & Savings Bank and the Cedar Rapids Life Insurance Company, and president of the Democrat Publishing Company.

Heavier, more masculine furniture characterizes the library in the Cuykendall house. An ornately framed portrait of J. W. Cuykendall sits on the top of the secretary, which holds several sets of bound books including the multi-volume *History of the World*. More books are stacked casually on the highly polished table.



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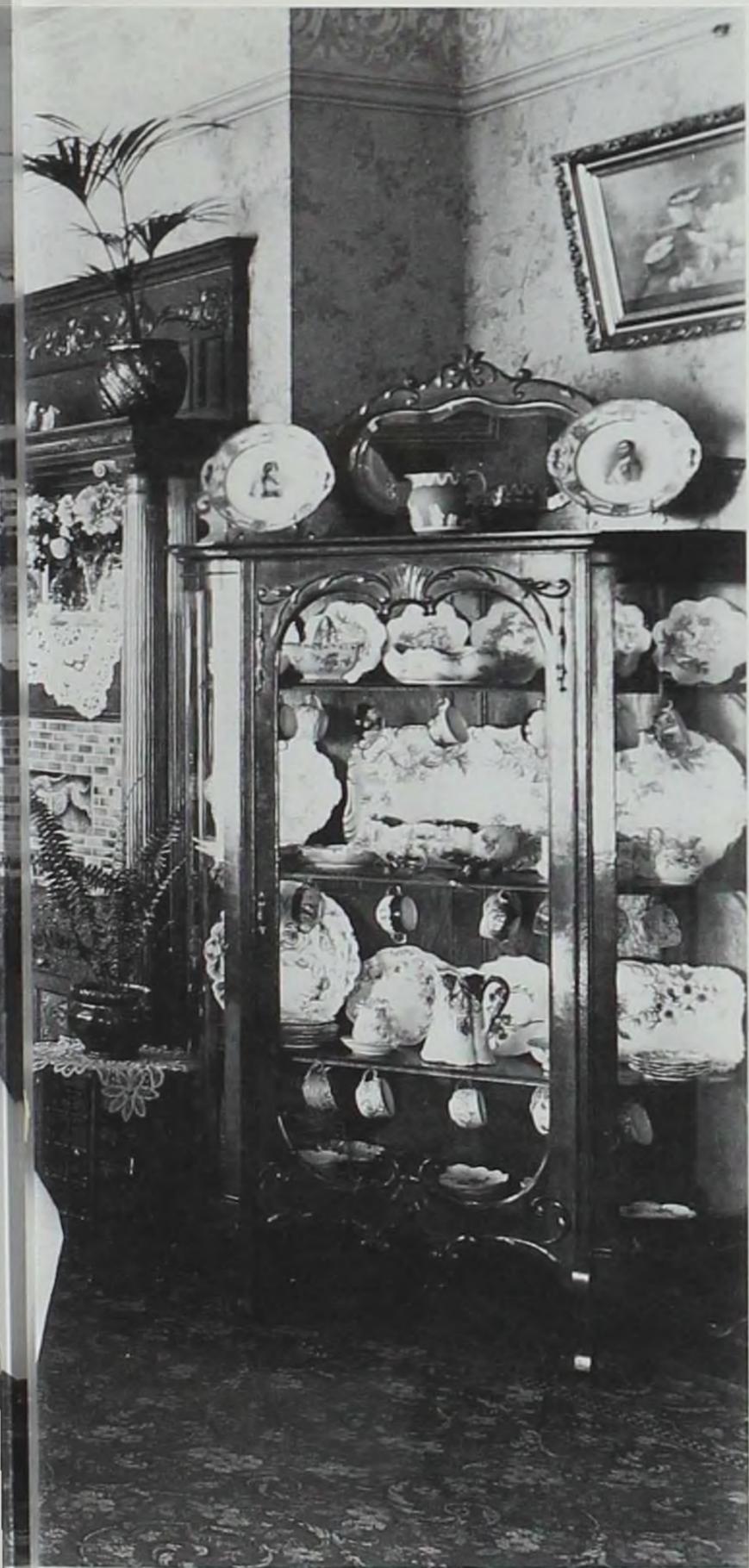
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It was customary to display china in the dining room (above), and manufacturers created furniture just for this purpose. Two glass cabinets, a large sideboard, and additional shelves filled the spacious room. Even the top of the radiator pipes was transformed into a shelf with a lace-edged "scarf" under a

bowl, a covered dish, and a vase of flowers. In keeping with the dining function of the room, the artwork on the wall depicted cascades of fruit and an idyllic scene of cows.

The two chairs, which match the armchair of the library, have been pushed back for the photograph so that the table arrangement



would not be obstructed. On the freshly ironed cloth is a variety of pitchers, creamers, cups, and saucers. The Cuykendalls' granddaughter remembers a buzzer on the floor beneath the table that could be used discreetly by the hostess to summon a servant. The Cuykendalls were considered "among

Dining room furnishings offered Sarah Cuykendall more opportunities for displaying her china.

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The fireplace, with extraordinarily tall Ionic columns, has a facing of decorative tile, as does the parlor fireplace. Both have an iron stove inset, rather than an open hearth. It was fashionable to cover the front of the fire-retardant brick surrounding the stove with tile. And tile had its practical side, since it was easier to clean than brick. By this time, it was no longer necessary to import fancy tile designs as American manufacturers were creating their own.

Images reveal photographer's eye for people, composition, light

Although the profusion of objects in the interior shots of the Cuykendall home is ample evidence of family life, human figures are conspicuously absent, except for one photograph of little Virginia in her bedroom. Maintaining the owners' privacy may well have been a consideration of the photographer.

These pictures of the Cuykendall home are a striking contrast with those of the factory. There, the photographer's good sense of composition, and the naturally strong elements of design in the machinery are paired in every case with the presence of workers. Notice the dramatic line-up of retorts separating two more casual lines of men (page 104), the stacks of cans in the wareroom upon which workmen are artfully posed (pages 108-9), or the large doors in the furnace room that frame the stokers (pages 134-35).

Although light was sometimes a problem, as evidenced by intrusive bursts of the sun's glare off of glass surfaces, the photographer sometimes exploited its poetic effects. On the front cover, note how light falls both on the furnace's metal relief of a bird poised for flight and on the stoker who, posed diagonally like the bird, prepares to shovel coal into the white-hot fire.

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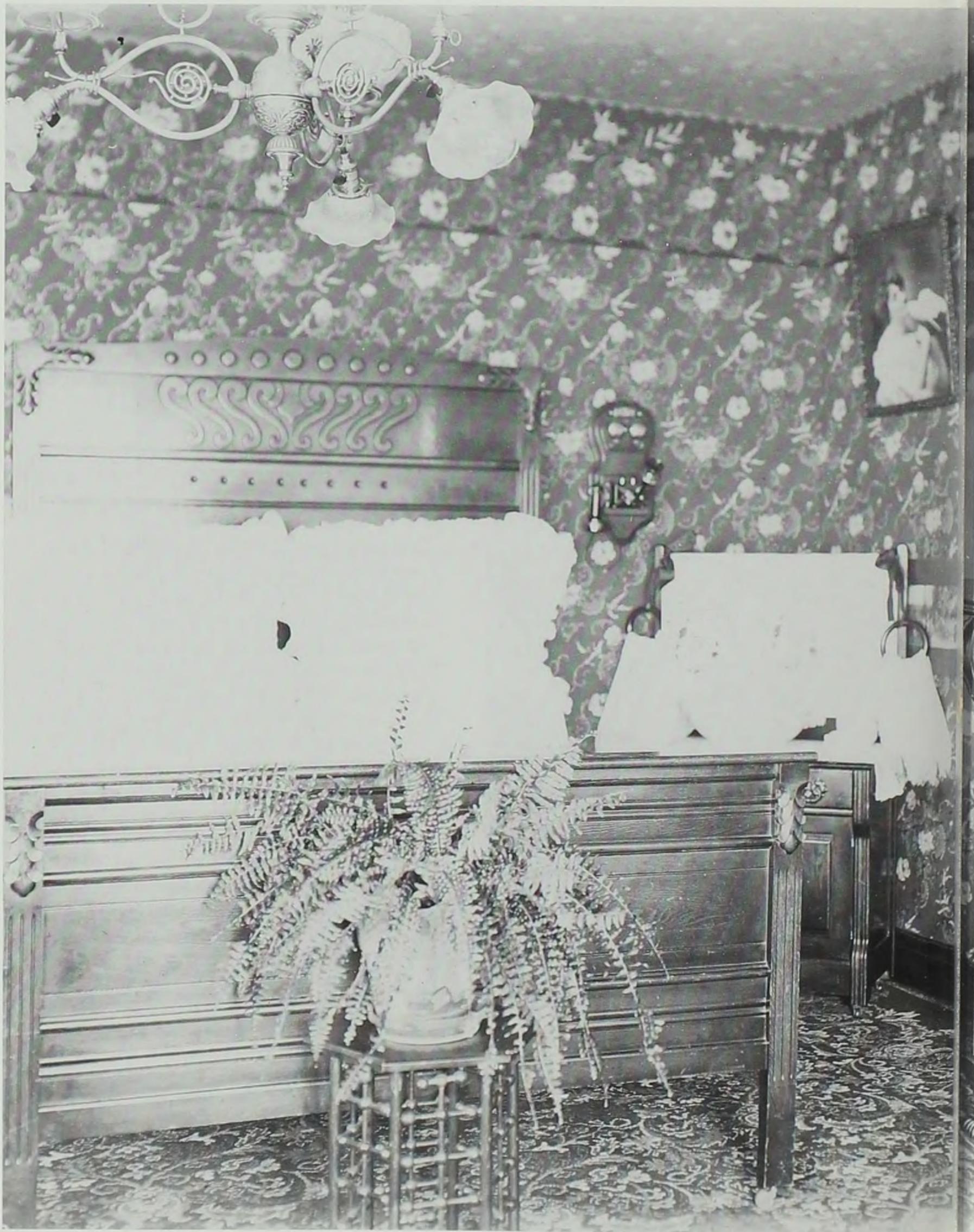
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The bedrooms—there were five—were on the second floor. The heavy wooden bedstead (left) suggests that this room was where J. W. Cuykendall slept.

On the wall to the right of the wooden bed was an unusual object, perhaps an early telephone. It appears similar to the "Pony Magneto Call Telephone," sold by Sears Roebuck in their 1908 catalogue and designed to be used with short lines of fifty feet to five miles. Equipped with a transmitter, receiver, three-magnet generator, two telephones, and four batteries, the Pony Magneto Call Telephone sold for \$9.50. The phone would have been adequate for requesting the horse and carriage from the caretaker or for receiving an emergency call from the canning factory.

The heavy wooden bed contrasted with the graceful brass bed covered with a light embroidered spread in another bedroom (see below). The ubiquitous hexagonal plant stand and a fern appeared in both bedrooms.

Bedrooms appear relatively infrequently in historical photographs, making richly detailed images such as these two all the more important sources of information about the domestic lives of people in the past. In the photograph on the left, what appears to be an early telephone hangs on the wall between the bed and the washstand.





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Little Turkish slippers with pompons appear first (above) on the young girl's feet and then (right) at the foot of the bed, in another view of the bedroom. The girl is probably Virginia Cuykendall, twelve years old in 1902.



Virginia Cuykendall was twelve in 1902, the year the photographs were taken. In this photograph (left), we see a serious young girl, book in hand, in a small rocking chair. She wore Turkish slippers with pompons and turned-up toes. In the photo below, which shows another angle of the same bedroom, the photographer suggested the girl's presence by placing her slippers at the foot of the ornate bed. (In this smaller photo, the same dresser—with the same pictures tucked in the mirror—had been moved to an opposite corner of the room.)

The room contains a beautiful brass bed, and a dressing table and dresser. Above the corner washstand, towels were hung from a round hanger suspended from a ribbon. On a draped wall shelf, mementos include a framed oval photograph of her father (compare with his portrait on page 101.) The objects dangling from the chandelier appear to be decorated eggs, perhaps a holiday custom.

At the back of the second floor were the maid's or cook's room, the sewing and ironing room, and the back stairs to the kitchen. We can only speculate about what these spaces of the house, as well as the kitchen, pantry, bathrooms, attic, cellar, and carriage house, may have looked like. These areas were apparently not considered appropriate



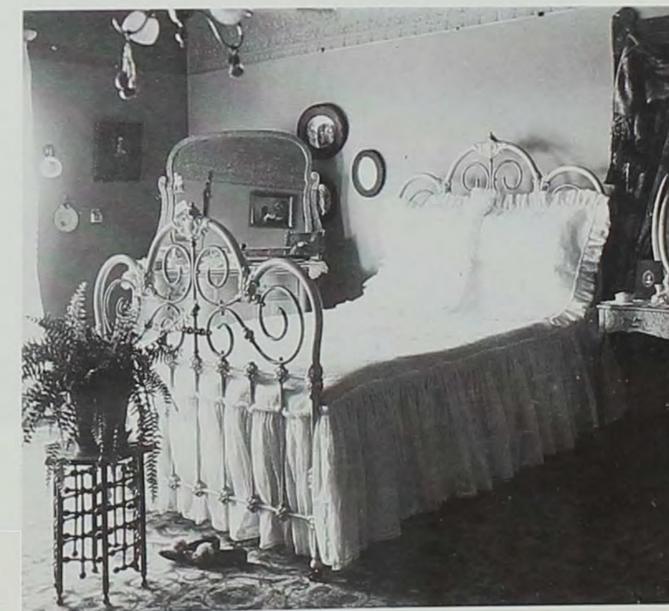


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or necessary for photographing. No doubt, the family would not have understood our interest today in domestic work spaces of the past.

Today the carriage house, converted into a modern home, is the only part of Cuykendall's Lyndhurst still standing. The main house was demolished in 1938. Two other houses were built on the lot. Fortunately, thanks to a photographer in 1902, the house in all its turn-of-the-century glory was documented thoroughly through these images.

More importantly, the photographer also documented Cuykendall's factory in detail. Interior photographs of this period of Iowa factories are rare, and it is only recently that industrial history has been recognized for its importance. And although the Atlantic Canning Company continued for decades after the photos were taken in 1902, the physical structures depicted here would change.

Soon after Cuykendall became sole owner of the Atlantic Canning Company, he replaced most of the 1902 factory buildings. The factory was rebuilt in brick except for the wooden husking sheds (see pages 112-13) and the warehouse. Ironically, when a disastrous fire struck in November 1913, only these two buildings and the brick boiler room (perhaps the building shown here) and smokestacks were spared.

The factory was rebuilt by August 15, 1915, just in time for the corn crop. The new machinery was both more compact and more efficient. It was, as Cuykendall described it in the November 1915 *Iowa Factories*, "the last word in canning factory construction and equipment."

Cuykendall continued, "The machinery on the main floor, where the corn is put in the cans, is compact and occupies a space not any larger than a lady's parlor, where more cans of corn can be turned out than could be turned out with the old machinery which spread itself all over the first floor. The modern canning machinery does away with many of the old steps in the old process." Cans were



closed and sealed not by a crew of men and women, but by a single machine. A steam crane, rather than men, hoisted the cans into the retorts. And the huskers (busy on pages 112-13) were replaced by husking machines.



"The new factory makes necessary only about a fourth of the help formerly employed by Mr. Cuykendall," *Iowa Factories* exalted, "as with the modern equipment one man, boy or girl in many instances can do the work for-

Images such as this one are important to historians because they document workday clothing.

merly done by several."

The interior of the factory was white enam-

or necessary for photographing. No doubt, the family would not have understood our interest today in domestic work spaces of the past.

Today the carriage house, converted into a modern home, is the only part of Cuykendall's Lyndhurst still standing. The main house was demolished in 1938. Two other houses were built on the lot. Fortunately, thanks to a photographer in 1902, the house in all its turn-of-the-century glory was documented thoroughly through these images.

More importantly, the photographer also documented Cuykendall's factory in detail. Interior photographs of this period of Iowa factories are rare, and it is only recently that industrial history has been recognized for its importance. And although the Atlantic Canning Company continued for decades after the photos were taken in 1902, the physical structures depicted here would change.

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The interior of the factory was white enam-

el, and those employees who had direct contact with food wore white uniforms. "This not only insures perfect sanitation," *Iowa Factories* commented, "but is a very pleasing and satisfactory sight for visitors."

Cuykendall thought the corn pack would be smaller in 1915, allowing for time to break in the new facilities. But "he intimated that next year would be a big one," *Iowa Factories* noted, "and that some of those seven million can records which were made in the past, might be equaled or even surpassed then."

The factory's productivity continued. F. D. Simpson, who worked in the factory about 1920, recalled that on Saturdays, "the entire supply [of produce to be canned] had to be cleaned up to keep it from spoiling, so working past midnight was not uncommon. One Saturday afternoon we counted 54 wagons waiting to unload . . . the shucking sheds were already so full." Not much had changed for the farmers—the wait seems to have been just as long in 1920 as it was in 1902.

In 1913, the premier issue of the National Canners Association's *Bulletin* had featured an article on factory safety, indicating that worker injury continued to be a problem even with the new machinery. At the Atlantic canning factory, for instance, eighteen-year-old Albert Huss lost one finger and part of another in a shucking machine in 1928. The operators wore gloves, but there were no guards on the rolls that fed the machine. The rolls caught Huss's glove and pulled in his hand. A week later another man lost a finger in a similar accident.

Huss remembers in great detail his work at the canning factory. He was making thirty-five cents an hour, working long days especially during the corn-canning season of 1928. He lost his fingers his first year. Compensation insurance paid his doctor and hospital bills and allotted him \$6 a week for fifty-five weeks. He was also assigned to lighter and less dangerous work while recovering from his injury. Huss commented recently, "I have been asked many times if my fingers went into the canned corn. Definitely not. They went with the shucks."

After Cuykendall died in 1935, the factory changed hands several times. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, as operations became even more automated, more women than men were hired. For the Paulsen family, the seasonal canning job meant being able to afford school clothes for their nine children and coal for their stove. In the late 1930s, Florence Paulsen operated a husking machine, and Harry Paulsen worked with the retort crew (the rest of the year he worked in quarries near Lewis). Their daughter, Norma Madsen, remembers the women canners, grown quite giddy, sticking corn silk "moustaches" under their noses. She also recalls neighborhood children pilfering fresh corn.

In 1949 the factory was purchased by a group of local men anxious to keep it operating. Green beans, yellow beans, and corn were canned, the beans harvested by Mexican labor. This, however, was to be its last season. The canning industry was struggling with competition from the new technology of frozen foods.

In 1951, the buildings were leased and later purchased by Walnut Grove Products, a manufacturer of livestock and poultry minerals. The new owners sold the old factory machinery to Esidor Chinitz, the co-authors' father, with the proviso that it all should be removed without damage to the buildings. Newlyweds Ben and Goldie Chinitz, Esidor's son and daughter-in-law, got most of the unlabeled canned food from the sale (suppers were something of a surprise for the couple that year). Some of the equipment was sold to other Midwest canning companies. Up until a few years ago, a local farmer, Vallie Pellett, was still using some of the conveyor system in his cattle feeding operation. A smoke stack, similar to the one pictured on page 115, was bought by a farmer from Exira who used the sections as culverts. But most of the equipment was dismantled, cut up with blow torches, and sold for scrap. Over the course of the next decade, the buildings themselves were demolished; the last wall was knocked down in 1969.

The Atlantic Canning Company, which had once claimed to be the largest cannery in the country, had canned beans, peas, to-

matoes, pumpkin, and corn. The products were widely distributed. During World War II, the brother of Dorothy Hughes of nearby Lewis was stationed in Germany. One day on KP duty he found corn canned by the Atlantic Canning Company on the menu. Nicholas Appert's method of food preservation, devised for Napoleon's troops nearly 150 years earlier, was feeding yet another army.



Little remains today to remind us of the Atlantic Canning Company and of the Cuykendall house. Some

citizens of Cass County remember working at the cannery; a few remember the Cuykendalls. Now and then a can of Atlantic vegetables surfaces. A clock from the home was purchased by our parents at a house sale after J. W. Cuykendall died. Its chime signaled every half hour. Eventually, it became a cherished showpiece in co-author Phillip Chinitz's home.



The 1902 photographs, twenty-nine of them published for the first time here, remain the most compelling evidence of the Atlantic Canning Company's productivity and its role in the local economy. The photographs also give us glimpses of the Victorian surroundings in

ALL PHOTOS THIS PAGE BY FISCHER PHOTOGRAPHY, ATLANTIC



As this clock graced the hall mantel of the Cuykendall house, these cans bearing colorful Atlantic labels graced shelves in grocery stores or home pantries.

which the Cuykendall family lived.

In the early 1980s, Lowell Clausen, a retired high school science teacher, gave some boxes of glass plate negatives, labeled "1902," to co-author Phillip Chinitz. The negatives sat on a shelf for some time before he examined them and realized they were of Cuykendall's factory and house. Could that beautiful clock our parents had purchased be in one of the images of the house? Indeed, eventually it was spied on the mantel in the photograph of the hall (see page 120).

Because of the historical importance of the images to Iowa history, Phillip Chinitz donated the collection to the State Historical Society of Iowa in 1993; it is housed in the Society's archives in Des Moines. The photographs are an eloquent step back in time, illustrating not only how one family in Atlantic lived, but also how many other Atlantic and Cass County citizens earned their living. □

NOTE ON SOURCES

Sources used for information on the canning factory include histories of Atlantic and Cass County, Iowa; articles in the *Atlantic News-Telegraph* and the *Messenger*; annual reports of the Iowa Bureau of Labor Statistics and Department of Agriculture; research bulletins of the National Cannery Association; "Atlantic Canning Company," *Iowa Factories* (Nov. 1915). On the development of the industry nationally and internationally, see A. W. Bitting, *Appertizing: or the Art of Canning; its History and Development* (San Francisco: Trade Pressroom, 1937); Earl Chapin Mays, *The Canning Clan* (New York: MacMillan, 1938); and S. A. Goldblith, "A Con-

cise History of the Science and History of Thermal Processing," *Food Technology* (Dec. 1971, Jan. 1972). Among sources on American Victorian interiors, these were especially helpful: William Seale, *The Tasteful Interlude: American Interiors through the Camera's Eye, 1860-1917* (New York: Praeger, 1975); and Harold Peterson, *Americans at Home* (New York: Scribner, 1971). The authors are grateful to Alice M. Goold, Dorothy E. Hughes, Al Huss, and Norma Madsen for writing to the authors about their memories of the Atlantic Canning Company, and to Jeanette Emmert Lee for information about her grandparents' home.

Kate Shelley and the Chicago & North Western Railway

by H. Roger Grant

The literature of American transportation overflows with colorful and episodic tales. Stories of bravery, usually of the most dramatic sort, have become a staple of railroad folklore. The legend of John Luther "Casey" Jones, the dedicated locomotive engineer of the Illinois Central Railroad, is surely the best representation of the genre. The saga of a fifteen-year-old Iowa girl, Kate C. Shelley, has also long captured the imagination of writers, and for understandable reasons. During a stormy night in July 1881, Shelley saved victims of one train wreck and single-handedly sought to prevent another accident on the Overland Route of the Chicago & North Western Railway.

The courage of Kate Shelley rightfully deserves to be remembered. Published commentaries focus almost exclusively on Shelley's gallant actions, but the story involves more than the excite-

ment of that tempestuous summer evening. The ensuing relationship between Shelley and the North Western is also significant. Most of all, the connection illustrates the pervasive nature of railroad paternalism and the carrier's desire to use the tale to enhance its public image.

Neither Kate Shelley nor her family expected July 6, 1881, to be anything special. Yet that Wednesday varied sharply from the typical dog days of an Iowa summer when at supper time a cloudburst struck the vicinity of her home near Moingona, a coal mining settlement five miles west of Boone, in the central part of the state. The Shelleys watched the storm, which raged for hours, from their modest cottage near Honey Creek, a stream that paralleled the main line of the North Western railroad for several miles before emptying into the Des Moines River.

The unusually heavy rains



Kate Shelley, three months after the night of the flood. Photographer J. Paul Martin sold copies of the photo for a quarter, cashing in on her fame.

made the Shelleys anxious. The year had been extremely wet, and streams were already at or near bank-full. By late evening the rapid runoff posed an immediate threat to the area, especially to the nearby railroad. The Shelleys probably felt vulnerable. The soon-to-be heroine, the oldest of four surviving children, lived with her widowed mother on a small, hard-scrabble farm that generated a meager cash income from the sale of eggs and milk. The father, Michael Shelley, a former North Western section foreman, had died three years earlier. The family had spent heavily on worthless medical remedies to combat the senior Shelley's lengthy affliction; the land, which Michael Shelley had acquired to supplement his railroad income, was mostly all

that remained.

The Shelleys had reason to worry about the rains. About 11:30 p.m. the family heard a "horrible crash" as a locomotive, whose crew was checking for washouts, plunged into the swollen Honey Creek. "Oh, Mother . . . It is [engine] No. 11. They have gone . . . [off] Honey Creek Bridge," recounted Shelley in a sketch of that memorable night. "The storm and all else was forgotten and I said that I must go to the help of the men, and to stop the passenger [eastbound *Atlantic Express*] that would soon be due at Moingona." If that train were not halted, Shelley believed, an awful accident at Honey Creek, east of the Des Moines River, would surely occur.

Kate Shelley possessed imagination and determination. Before embarking on her mission of mercy, she improvised the needed illumination; she placed a miner's cap lamp in the frame of a battered farm lantern. "I filled the little lamp, and for a wick cut a strip from an old felt skirt," she recalled. Then Shelley left the safety of her home. "[I] started out into the night and the storm, to do what I could, and what I thought was my duty, knowing that Mother and the children were praying to God to keep me from every harm."

After an arduous trip through nearby woods to the tracks, Shelley reached the wreck site. Two of the four railroaders had drowned (Amos Olmstead, the fireman, and Patrick Donahue,

the section foreman), but Edward Wood, the engineer, clung to a tree and Adam Agar, the brakeman, likewise managed to fight the waters by holding onto tree roots. Flashes of lightning revealed Wood to the teenager. "He called to me again and again," related Shelley, "but neither one of us could understand what the other said, for the raging of the elements, and I turned towards Moingona lying across and west of the great [Des Moines River] bridge."

Shelley began the most perilous portion of her trek. Crossing the Des Moines River bridge, even in ideal conditions, was dangerous. The North Western had studded the ties along this 673-foot-long span with twisted, rusty spikes to discourage trespassers. And the ties themselves were spaced a full pace apart. "I got down upon my hands and knees, . . . and guiding myself by the stretch of rail, I began the weary passage of the bridge," explained Shelley. "I do not know how long I was in crossing, but it seemed an age. Halfway over, a piercing flash of lightning showed me the angry flood more closely than ever, and swept along upon it a great tree, the earth still hanging to its roots, was racing for the bridge, and it seemed for the very spot I stood upon." Added Shelley, "Fear brought me up right on my knees, and I clasped my hands in terror, and in prayer, I hope, lest the shock should carry out the bridge. But the monster darted un-

der the bridge with a sweeping rush and his branches scattered foam and water over me as he passed."

The resolute teenager finally reached the west end of the bridge and proceeded to the Moingona depot. Finding that the North Western had already halted its trains at the perimeter of the storm and no impending disaster existed, she turned her efforts to saving the survivors at Honey Creek. Kate climbed aboard a relief locomotive and guided a hurriedly assembled party of rescuers to the marooned survivors. Both trainmen escaped a watery grave. However, only one of the bodies of the two who had died was ever recovered.

The events of the horrific night of July 6-7, 1881, were much discussed in the Moingona community, and were soon related to a larger audience by the local press. The heroism of Kate Shelley was immediately recognized. A reporter for the *Boone County Democrat*, in the issue of July 13, told in detail Shelley's remarkable evening: "From the house [of the Shelleys] the Democrat reporter followed the route taken by the intrepid girl to the bridge. This was on Saturday and the ground was yet soaked and the way difficult, but nothing in comparison with what it must have been when dense midnight clothed the woods in darkness, and a rushing flood swept down the hill sides and through the gullies, weighing the thick underbrush to the ground."

The writer continued:

“Once she was lost in the woods, but the moment she found the path she knew which way to go. Ed Wood says he was well nigh overjoyed when he saw the light approaching the clearing near the end of the bridge, and that he will never forget the sight of Kate Shelley making her way out over the twisted and broken trestle work to the last tie yet hanging over the wreck in the boiling flood below.”

The *Ogden Reporter* of July 14 observed that Shelley had to cross the Des Moines River bridge “with nothing but the ties and rails [with] the wind blowing a gale, and the foaming, seething waters beneath. Not one man in five hundred [would] have [gone] over at any price, or under any circumstance. But this brave, noble girl, with the nerve of a giant, gathered about her, her flowing skirts, and on hands and knees she crawled over the long weary bridge.”

In the Victorian Age, with melodramas much in vogue, the uncommon bravery of the “Maiden of Moingona” proved electrifying. Chicago newspapers, which grabbed the story and added their own embellishments, did much to make Kate Shelley one of the most famous teenagers of the period. Her fame spread nationwide. Poets wrote verse, photographers hawked portraits, and platform speakers related the tale, likely in a garbled form.

The extensive publicity had a positive impact on the household of Kate Shelley. The public sought to reward this remarkable act of concern and courage. By late October approximately \$500 had been donated to the Shelleys, including \$104 raised by the *Chicago Times*, the newspaper which had done much to introduce the heroine to the public outside of Iowa. The North Western also contributed \$100, which

in itself surely must have constituted a sizable part of the annual income of the Shelley household.

Observers felt that the North Western should recognize the good deeds of Kate Shelley. The *Ogden Reporter* editorialized shortly after the event: “We believe the officials of the Northwestern [sic] cannot be unmindful of the duty they owe this brave girl.” Indeed, the company would do much in the months and years to come.

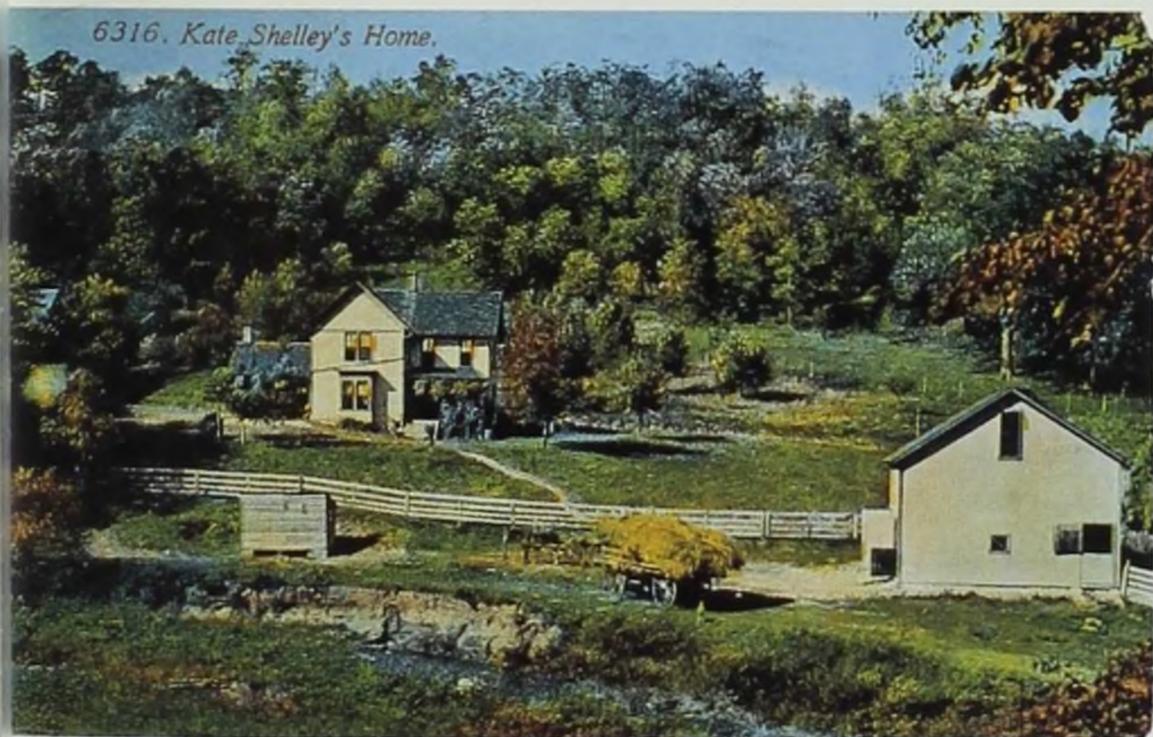
Kate Shelley fortuitously aided a public-spirited railroad. The Chicago & North Western enjoyed remarkably good relations with both the public and its employees. Illustrations abound. For example, when the Granger movement swept the upper Mississippi River valley during the early 1870s, this combative coalition of merchants, commercial groups, and farmers demanded rate relief, concentrating on an end to long-haul and short-haul discrimination. Yet these reformers largely ignored the North Western. In Iowa, the Patrons of Husbandry, the core farmer body, revealed that the North Western’s short-haul charges were next to the lowest of the five trunk lines serving the state and that its long-haul rates to Chicago were the least expensive. The Iowa Grange, furthermore, made no complaints about the quality of service or the physical condition of the road. A few years later, in 1877, when the nation experienced enormous labor unrest, what historian Robert

SHSI (IOWA CITY)



Shelley stands outside her family homestead by Honey Creek.

6316. Kate Shelley's Home.



SHS (IOWA CITY)

In the early 1890s, funds were raised to build Shelley, her mother, and brother this new home, where she would live until her death in 1912. That the photo was made into a color postcard suggests her ongoing fame.

Bruce rightly called "The Year of Violence," the North Western avoided conflict with its workers. Two neighboring roads, the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy and the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific, were less fortunate, however. Strikers and their compatriots vented their rage against these carriers over wage reductions and other grievances.

Officials of the North Western had no intention of ignoring either the valor of Shelley or the families of the men who died that stormy night. The \$100 payment to the special subscription for the Shelleys was the most public demonstration of gratitude. The railroad also received attention for its cash bequests to the estates of the flood victims. The company granted \$5,000, a generous award, to the family of section foreman Donahue and \$2,500 to "Widow Olmstead." The explanation for the lesser amount was "because

the body [of fireman Olmstead] was never found [and the railroad] had no proof of his death." The North Western, however, gave \$5,000 to the family of section foreman John O'Neil, another storm victim. O'Neil, too, had been inspecting track on that eventful evening and drowned in Granny's Branch Creek near Ogden, west of Moingona. The North Western was under no legal obligation to assist anyone associated with this "cruel act of God," in the words of an Olmstead descendant, yet the company responded out of its own sense of moral justice.

The North Western did not initially seek to exploit the public relations benefits from the Shelley episode. There appeared no reason to do so. "The company has quietly donated [to Kate Shelley] something to help the family along this winter," commented the *Ogden Reporter* on November 10, 1881.

"We are told that the company has forwarded to her a car of hard coal, two barrels of flour, [a] sack of coffee, [a] chest of tea, potatoes, [and] soap. [A]nd wearing apparel is promised." The railroad also issued Shelley a life-time pass for passenger train travel.

Although the North Western may not have made additional contributions at this time, others did. A variety of individuals and groups assisted the Shelleys. For instance, Frances E. Willard, the prominent temperance leader, convinced Simpson College, a small (and dry) Methodist institution in Indianola, Iowa, to finance Shelley's higher education for the academic year 1883-84, and the Iowa General Assembly awarded Shelley a gold medal and \$200.

Unfortunately, the various acts of kindness bestowed on Kate did not result in a care-free life for the young woman. Shelley's health was fragile and her physical (and perhaps mental) limitations apparently prevented her from achieving steady employment. Still, she taught school, mostly as a substitute teacher in the neighboring townships, and worked briefly as a bill clerk in the state capitol in Des Moines. By 1890 the fortunes of the Shelley family had declined appreciably. A new fund-raising campaign, spearheaded by a Chicago newspaper, raised more than \$900. The Shelleys cleared their farm of debt and modestly enlarged their holdings. Nevertheless,

the family, namely Kate, her brother John, and their mother, were hardly prosperous.

The North Western remained an important part of the life of the Shelley family. Although Kate's two sisters, Maggie and Mayme, entered teaching, John found employment with the railroad as a watchman on the Des Moines River bridge. And Kate herself joined the company in October 1903. Thirty-seven years old and single, Kate entered North Western service as "station mistress" at Moingona. Shelley had apparently rejected previous opportunities to work for the railroad. "Many times before the Northwestern [*sic*] has offered her high salaried positions," reported the *Boone News*, "but each one would necessitate her removal from . . . [her] home . . . where her aged mother, . . . is enjoying the last years of her life, [and] she refused them all."

The appointment proved ideal. While the monthly salary was modest, probably less than \$50, Shelley could remain with her beloved mother. Moreover, the pressures of employment were minimal. There was no need to master the telegraph because the busy main line no longer passed through Moingona. Early in the century the North Western, which spent heavily on betterments to fulfill its commitment to the company credo, the "Best of Everything," had relocated the line between Boone and Ogden. The new high-level, double-track cut-

off now traversed the Des Moines River on a long, steel viaduct about four miles upstream from the original crossing. This construction shortened the length of the main line by three miles and substantially reduced both grades and curvature. The old Boone-to-Ogden trackage remained for local service and as an alternative way to across the river. Thus, the railroad needed someone to handle passenger ticketing and shipments of freight and express at Moingona.

The North Western named Kate Shelley to be its agent at Moingona for a variety of reasons. It was not unusual for a railroad to place women in custodial-type positions. Generally these women had some association with the railroad; nepotism early on became a hallmark of industry hiring practices. Kate's father and brother had both received paychecks from the North Western.

The Moingona assignment could also have been seen as the company's way of further rewarding Kate Shelley for her bravery. That spirit of paternalism from the nineteenth century carried over into the twentieth. Marvin Hughitt, president of the North Western since 1887, fervently believed in treating employees in a fatherly fashion, and this tendency ex-

6317. Kate Shelley at Depot.



When the picture postcard craze swept the nation early in this century, a Boone entrepreneur turned a black-and-white photo of Shelley at the Moingona station into a color card. Likely the coloring occurred in Germany, center for postcard production.

tended into a variety of activities. Either personally or through the company, Hughitt donated money to a plethora of civic-improvement programs: money went to colleges, libraries, and parks, almost exclusively in communities along North Western lines.

Yet records of the North Western reveal still another consideration. By 1903 shrill cries for further railroad reform and for increased taxation of the carriers could be heard in Iowa. The company did not require a special antenna to realize that political trouble lay ahead. While Io-

wans had largely ignored the populist movement of the 1890s, they became heavily involved in that great national housecleaning escapade known as progressivism. Of special concern to the North Western and other roads in the Hawkeye state was Albert B. Cummins, an ambitious Republican lawyer who had cast his lot with anti-railroad elements. The railroads had kept Cummins out of the United States Senate during the 1890s, but the tenacious politician won the governorship in 1902, "resolved to bear down on [railroads] in earnest." Later, in 1908, Cummins would go to Washington as a senator and frame several pivotal pieces of federal railroad legislation.

North Western management believed that Cummins and his allies needed to be watched. Ideally, the company could minimize the mischief caused by the "Cumminsites." A memorandum from an unidentified member of the North Western's legal department to President Hughitt about 1903 contained these comments: "The Company would be wise to do everything in its power in Iowa to increase its popularity with the people. . . . Gov. Cummins is always seeking out ways to embarrass the railroads. . . . He does so solely for his political purposes. I see that it is prudent to convince that Irish gal, Kate Shelley, to take a position with the Company. For the public to know that the Company is taking care of her can only be a good thing.

It can only work to the advantage of the Company."

What value "that Irish gal" had for the North Western in a political way is unknown; probably it was minimal. Nevertheless, the employment in 1903 of this true heroine tangibly demonstrated the kind-heartedness of the company. For some in the Chicago headquarters, there was likely the hope that Kate Shelley might symbolize a railroad that truly considered itself a leading corporate citizen. Actually, the major damage done to the North Western and the railroad industry by Albert Cummins and his fellow progressives took place not in Iowa but later in the halls of Congress. Any kindness to an individual surely meant nothing in the larger scheme of events, but it meant much to a family from rural Moingona, Iowa. Kate would serve the railroad until her resignation shortly before her death from Bright's disease in 1912 at the age of forty-six.

Even after the death of Kate Shelley and the demise of political progressivism, the North Western continued to recognize her act of heroism. The company immortalized Kate when it named the massive Des Moines River

bridge in her honor in 1926. When the railroad introduced a new passenger streamliner in Iowa in October 1955, the name selected for the Chicago-to-Boone train was the *Kate Shelley 400*. This streamliner retained its moniker even after the company cut back the run to Cedar Rapids and later to Clinton, Iowa, before its termination in April 1971.

North Western management recognized the value of Kate Shelley's story well into the twentieth century. "We knew that we had an unusual person associated with the C&NW," remarked the railroad's long-time publicity manager Frank V. Koval in an 1986 interview. "When you have a woman whom everyone admired, why not capitalize on it?" Concluded Koval, "Kate Shelley helped us and we certainly helped her over the years; it's that simple."

Without doubt, the relationship between Kate Shelley and the Chicago &



Construction crews in 1901 build a new viaduct over the Des Moines River four miles upstream. In 1926 the viaduct was named after Kate Shelley.

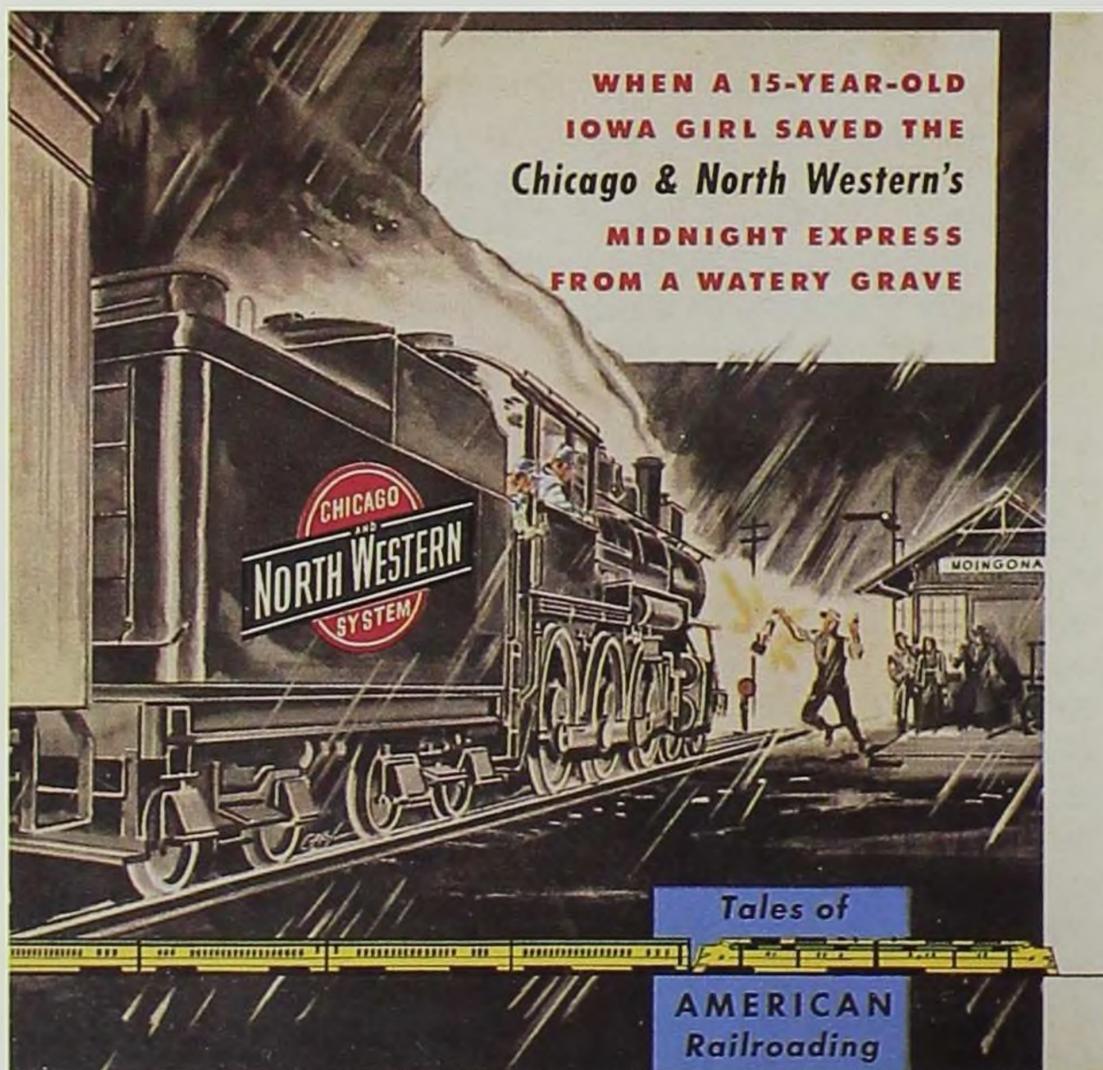


North Western Railway was a good one. What happened that night in July 1881 lasted far longer than the immedi-

ately following days or months. The tie between Kate and the railroad lasted for years. And the railroad

preserved her memory with a viaduct and references in various company-sponsored publications. With the take-over of the North Western into the Union Pacific system in 1995, one wonders if Union Pacific will find the saga of Kate Shelley of value. □

BOTH IMAGES: AUTHOR'S COLLECTION



Both images: In the 1950s, Badger Paper Mills in Wisconsin published a garbled description of the Kate Shelley story, yet it helped to keep the Iowa heroine before the public. The cover depicts what never happened at Moingona, a train speeding toward disaster. Moreover, the artist drew the wrong type of steam locomotive and the wrong style of depot architecture.

NOTE ON SOURCES

A considerable amount of the primary sources, including newspaper accounts of Kate Shelley, came from the collection of the late Edward H. Meyers of Boone, Iowa. Meyers had conducted extensive research for his article, "The True Story of Kate Shelley," which appeared in *Trains* (Oct. 1957). Shelley is discussed in such popular works as Freeman H. Hubbard, *Railroad Avenue: Great Stories and Legends of American Railroading* (New York, 1945) and B. A. Botkin and Alvin F. Harlows, ed., *A Treasury of Railroad Folklore* (New York, 1953). An excellent early account of Shelley, which influenced the Meyers study, appeared in *The Palimpsest* (Feb. 1925), "Kate Shelley," by J. A. Swisher. Materials about the role of the Chicago & North Western Railway came from the company's corporate headquarters in Chicago, now either in possession of the Union Pacific Railroad in Omaha or the Chicago & North Western Historical Society Archive at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb.

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The Palimpsest

State Historical Society of Iowa
402 Iowa Avenue
Iowa City, Iowa 52240-1806

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CONTRIBUTORS

Phillip Chinitz recently retired from being a news writer at the *Atlantic News-Telegraph* for more than forty years. In 1993 he donated the collection of sixty-two glass plate negatives of the Atlantic Canning Company, the Cuykendall home, and other Atlantic scenes to the State Historical Society of Iowa. He conducted local research on the factory and its owner for the *Palimpsest* article co-authored with his sister, Marcia Chinitz Goldberg.

Marcia Chinitz Goldberg was born and grew up in Atlantic, Iowa. An art historian specializing in American nineteenth-century art, she also writes on local history. She is an Affiliate Scholar at Oberlin College.

H. Roger Grant, professor of history at the University of Akron, Ohio, is the author or editor of fifteen books and more than 150 journal articles. Grant's most recent work, "The North Western: A History of the Chicago & North Western Railway System," is scheduled for publication by Northern Illinois University Press in 1996.

Editorial assistance for this issue was provided by student assistants **Stephanie Coon**, **Heather Knight**, and **Jacqueline Smetak**.

SUBMISSIONS

The editor welcomes manuscripts and edited documents on the history of Iowa and the Midwest that will inform and interest a general reading audience. Submissions that focus on visual material (photographs, maps, drawings) or on material culture (artifacts and buildings) are also invited. Originality and significance of the topic, as well as the quality of research and writing, will determine acceptance for publication. Queries are recommended. Manuscripts should be double-spaced and follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Send two copies. Standard length is within ten to twenty pages, but shorter or longer submissions will be considered. Although *The Palimpsest* publishes brief bibliographies rather than footnotes, standard footnotes must appear in the original submission. When using newspaper sources, please cite page as well as date. Illustrative material is integral to *The Palimpsest*; please include photographs and illustrations (or suggestions). Send queries and submissions to Ginalie Swaim, *Palimpsest* editor, State Historical Society of Iowa, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240-1806 (phone 319-335-3932).

LETTERS FROM READERS

Remembering Mr. Beane

It was such a delight to read every word of the crinoid story and the Beane collection [in the Summer 1995 *Palimpsest*]. When Chalmer Roy was geologist at Iowa State, before he became a dean, his Iowa contingent joined paleontologists and students from Wisconsin and Illinois for field trips. A friend invited me along, and we went to the quarry to find our own small samples and then visited Mr. Beane. I remember it all vividly—the house and busy yardful of his specimens. . . . Through the decade of the Sixties I made many trips which passed through Le Grand's Main Street. Since I knew it was there, I slowed down as I approached a white garage which was always open to the street, and I could see the large starfish plaque leaning against the side wall. It had been moved from Beane's house by a relative. I could also see the Beane homestead from the road. He had a large garden out back. . . . Chuck Greiner's photograph in the issue, as usual, was very special and beautiful.

Mary Meixner
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Attention, Early Bird Shoppers! Pondering your holiday gift list?

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BOTH IMAGES: CUYKENDALL COLLECTION, SHSI (DES MOINES)



In 1902 a photographer focused a camera on Atlantic, Iowa. The result was sixty-two glass plate negatives—including these two bird's eye views of Atlantic. Most of the other images are remarkably detailed scenes of the Atlantic Canning Company, which produced millions of cans of vegetables every year. This *Palimpsest* takes you not only into the factory and amidst the workers, but also into the quiet, elegant rooms of the factory owner's Queen Anne home.



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