The PALIMPSEST

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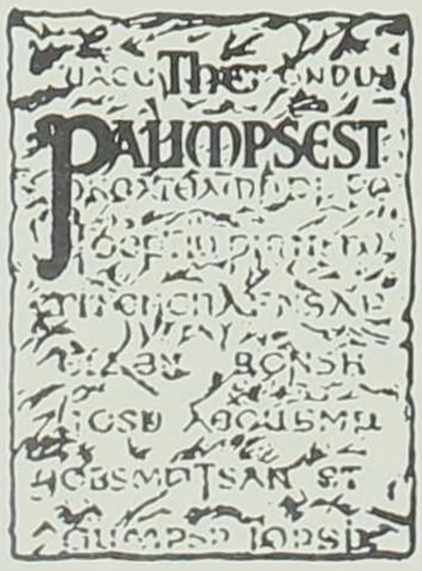
Inside —

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, SHSI (DES MOINES)/J. W. BALDWIN, PHOTOGRAPHER

World War II intrudes upon home life in September 1942, as reflected in this Des Moines store window. For a closer look at how the war touched a smaller town — Sheldon, Iowa — turn to an account by Clarence Andrews (page 146).



The Meaning of the Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest (*păl′/ĭmp/sĕst*) 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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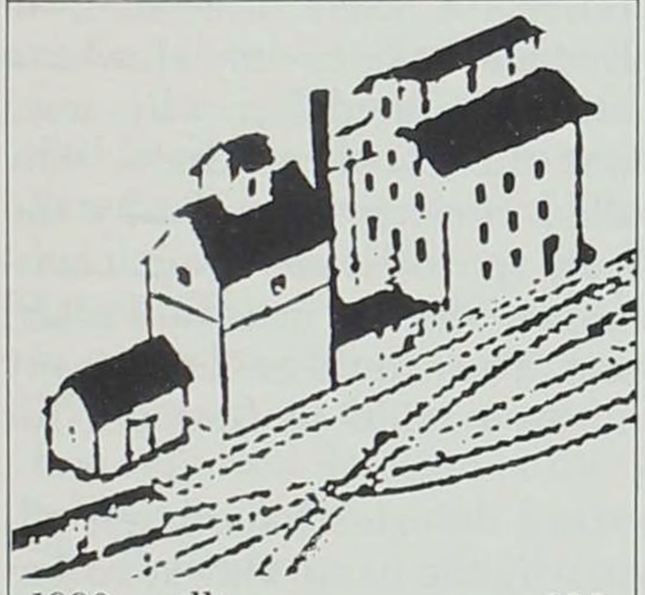
COURTESY CLARENCE ANDREWS

Clarence Andrews in Sheldon 146



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COVER: Black Hawk, painted by George Catlin. Author Richard Acton examines one aspect of the Sauk warrior's legacy to Iowans. Back cover: Postcard view of Manchester, Iowa (courtesy of Tim Tutton, Manchester). For more on Manchester, see "The Growing-Up Years."

The

PALIMPSEST

IOWA'S POPULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE

Ginalie Swaim, Editor

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"Hawkeye"

What's in a name?

by Richard Acton

WHEN I CAME to Iowa from England to marry my Hawkeye bride, I asked her why Iowa was the Hawkeye State, why Iowans were called Hawkeyes, and why the University of Iowa sports teams were christened the same name. She had no idea. I asked other Iowans I met. They could not answer my question either. So I tried to find out for myself.

Various diverting theories have been advanced to explain why the name Hawkeye was given. A writer in the 1870s stated: "The hawk came in for notoriety in all localities, on account of his constant vigilance and keenness of sight. . . . In these early days of Iowa, the people had to be as vigilant as hawks, in watching government officers, Indians, and intruders . . . [and so] gradually grew the appellation or application of the name of Hawk-Eyes."

In another account, a Civil War veteran named Alfred Yarrow claimed in 1922 that he had originated the name. Returning from the California gold rush in 1855, Yarrow had

crossed Iowa and the Mississippi. He had asked the inhabitants of the Illinois town in which he found himself: "Let's see, what do they call that land across the river?" According to his account, the villagers didn't know. Having shot a hawk in Iowa the previous day, Yarrow decided the land should be called "Hawkeye" because the name pleased him.

The evidence reveals, and historians generally agree, that it was actually the brilliant pioneer lawyer David Rorer who suggested applying the name Hawkeye to the people of the future Territory of Iowa in early 1838. Born and educated in Virginia, Rorer rode on horseback to Little Rock, Arkansas, in the fall of 1826 and established a law practice. In 1835 he freed his slaves and, with his wife and four young children, set out for a new life on the Iowa frontier, settling the following year in the hamlet of Flint Hills — the Burlington of the future. There he practiced law and built the first brick house in what was to be Iowa. In 1839 he would win a unanimous verdict in the first reported decision of the Territory of Iowa Supreme Court — the landmark slavery case "In the matter of Ralph (a colored man) on Habeas Corpus." Rorer appeared in innumerable important cases and, late in life, wrote three weighty legal tomes. A *Chicago Tribune* obituary in July 1884 described him as one of the ablest lawyers and most learned law writers at the American bar.

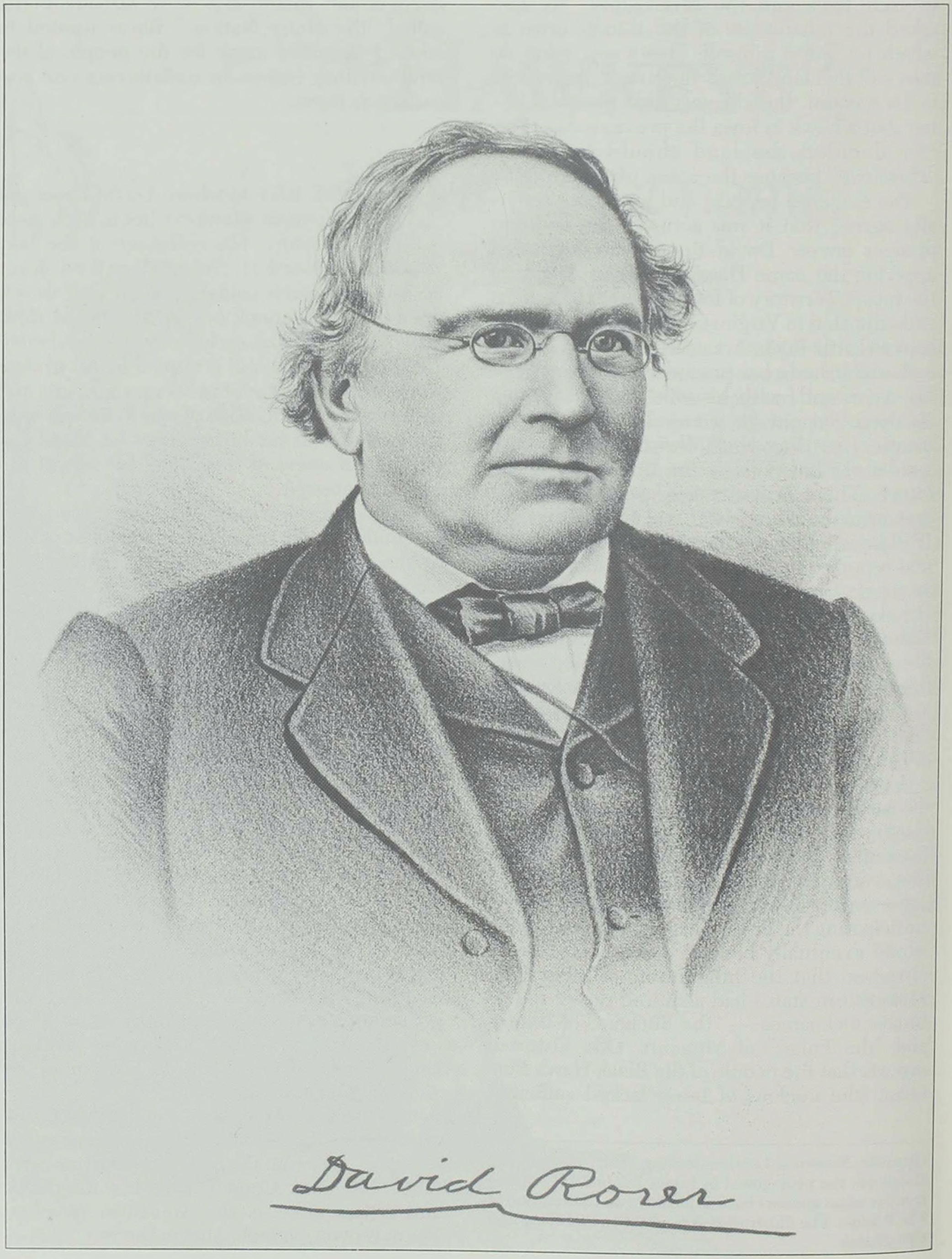
A genius in legal matters, Rorer was active in the early push for territorial status. At the Burlington Territorial Convention of November 1837, Rorer chaired the committee that drafted the petition to Congress to create a separate territorial government for "Iowa." Anticipating the birth of a new territory, which would eventually become a new state, Rorer observed that the inhabitants of other new Midwestern states had acquired rather unfortunate nicknames — "the Suckers" of Illinois and "the Pukes" of Missouri. One historian reports that the people of the Black Hawk Purchase (the nucleus of Iowa) lacked sufficient barbers and razors and were already being called "the Hairy Nation." Rorer wanted to adopt a dignified name for the people of the new territory before an unflattering one was cast upon them.

Opposite: Known as Leatherstocking, Natty Bumppo, or Hawkeye, the protagonist in James Fenimore Cooper's frontier sagas appears here as he did in an 1832 edition of *The Prairie*. The illustration is credited to Pickering and Greatbatch.

THE KEY to where David Rorer got the name Hawkeye lies in his leisure pursuits. His colleague at the bar, Edward H. Stiles, described Rorer as "an omnivorous reader" with a "well-developed taste for general literature." It was similarly reported in an early biographical sketch: "All [Rorer's] time not occupied by his professional duties was spent in literary pursuits and historical research, both of which he was very fond of, and in his library may be found the writings of many of the ablest authors of the past and present."

Rorer, like thousands of his contemporaries, had undoubtedly read the most popular author of the period — James Fenimore Cooper. Cooper's best known works were *The Pioneers*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, and *The Deerslayer*. His novels were phenomenal best sellers. Edition after edition was published. *The Last of the Mohicans*, which first appeared in 1826, sold out so fast that the publisher decided it should be stereotyped for more printings. He had plates made of all Cooper's novels "which," he wrote, "has not happened to any living author of works of fancy." In the 1820s, only nine books had the distinction of having a total sale exceeding one percent of the population of the United States in the decade in which they were published. Five of these were by James Fenimore Cooper, and the easy leader was *The Last of the Mohicans*. *The North American Review* of July 1826 joined in the general acclaim: "Mr. Cooper . . . has the almost singular merit of writing American novels which everybody reads. . . . the public voice has long since confirmed to him the appellation of the American novelist."

It is inconceivable that David Rorer, the omnivorous reader with a taste for general literature, was not thoroughly familiar with James Fenimore Cooper, hailed by the public and critics alike as *the* American novelist. There is even evidence that in the year 1838 —



David Rorer

the year Rorer suggested the name Hawkeye — Cooper and *The Last of the Mohicans* were still popular in Rorer's hometown of Burlington. In June 1838 the only American novels reported missing from the Wisconsin Territorial Library, established at Burlington the previous year, were both volumes of Cooper's works. Later that year, T.S. Parvin, the Territorial Governor's private secretary in Burlington, was sent *The Last of the Mohicans* for Christmas by a lady friend in Ohio.

The overwhelming popularity of Cooper's writings helps to explain what inspired Rorer to choose the name Hawkeye for the future Territory of Iowa. Cooper's greatest creation in these books is the hero of the frontier known to his Indian friends as "Hawkeye." The character Hawkeye (also known as Leatherstocking and other names) appeared first in *The Pioneers* (1823), then in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), and later in *The Deerslayer* (1841). Hawkeye became a national institution among the reading public.

Uncas, the Indian hero of *The Last of the Mohicans*, gives a glimpse of Hawkeye's qualities in the following dialogue:

> Uncas took the scout by the hand, and led him to the feet of the patriarch.
>
> "Father," he said, "look, at this paleface; a just man, and the friend of the Delawares."
>
> "Is he a son of Miquon?"
>
> "Not so; a warrior known to the Yengeese, and feared by the Maquas."
>
> "What name has he gained by his deeds?"
>
> "We call him Hawkeye," Uncas replied, using the Delaware phrase, "for his sight never fails."

In Cooper's earlier book *The Pioneers* (set later in time), Uncas's father, the old chief Chingachgook, said of his friend: "Hawkeye smoked at that council, for we loved him."

So when David Rorer suggested the name Hawkeye for the people of the forthcoming Iowa Territory, he was undoubtedly giving them the heroic name of Cooper's Hawkeye. The name was widely known as that of the leading fictional hero of the day — a part of contemporary culture. And it was especially suitable for the people of a new territory. All of the Black Hawk Purchase was then the frontier — Hawkeye was *the* frontier hero. All Iowans were then pioneers — *The Pioneers* was the very title of the book in which Hawkeye first appeared. The land had been Indian land until the settlers arrived in 1833 — *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Pioneers* were all about settlers and Indians. The name of Hawkeye — a just, courageous, admired hero — was ideal for the people of the new territory.

YET THE NAME also had an echo of another contemporary hero — this one a real, rather than literary, figure. Black Hawk, the Sauk war chief, had long resisted the advance of the pioneers. In 1813 his siege of Fort Madison had forced the troops to burn the fort and evacuate. In 1832 he had fought and lost the Black Hawk War in Illinois and Wisconsin. The ensuing treaty compelled the Sauk and Mesquakie to cede the nucleus of Iowa, and the settlers poured in from 1833. The area became known as the Black Hawk Purchase.

Black Hawk himself was taken as a prisoner to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, thence to Washington to meet President Jackson, and ultimately held at Fortress Monroe. His subsequent tour of Eastern cities and the publication of his autobiography made him a national figure. By 1838 he was living out his old age near Fort Madison.

The ring of the name Black Hawk in "Hawkeye" evidently appealed to David Rorer and his colleagues who helped launch the nickname. He suggested "Hawkeye" to one of these colleagues — James Gardiner Edwards.

Edwards was a newspaperman, and in 1838 was about to start the *Fort Madison Patriot* after several unsuccessful newspaper enterprises in Illinois. On March 24, 1838, he published the first number of the *Patriot*, and on page 2 he wrote of the congressional bill to separate "the proposed Iowa Territory or Black Hawk Purchase" from Wisconsin Territory. He then printed a paragraph suggesting the name: "If a division of the Territory is effected, we

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Opposite: David Rorer, a genius in legal matters — and in promotional matters for the new Iowa Territory.


G. Catlin Pt.
J. Harris Sc.

propose that the Iowans take the cognomen of Hawkeyes. Our etymology can then be more definitely traced than can that of the Wolverines, Suckers, Gophers, &c., and we shall rescue from oblivion a memento, at least, of the name of the old chief. Who seconds the motion?" On the same page there were no less than four stories about Black Hawk, referred to in some as "the old chief." Among them was an account of Black Hawk's recent visit to the newspaper, and a report that Black Hawk had attended a Fort Madison ball in "full court dress."

Black Hawk was a unique figure to the early settlers. On July 4, 1838, he appeared at a Fort Madison celebration of the Declaration of American Independence and the birth of the Territory of Iowa. The lawyer Philip Viele (whose sister David Rorer, by then a widower, married the next year) delivered the oration. There followed a dinner on the bank of the Mississippi. After many other toasts, James Edwards toasted Black Hawk: "[To] Our Illustrious Guest Black Hawk. — May his declining years be as calm and serene as his life has been boisterous and full of warlike incidents." Black Hawk's response speaks quietly of an accepted transference: "It has pleased the Great Spirit that I am here today — I have eaten with my white friends. . . . I liked my towns, my cornfields and the home of my people. I fought for it. It is now yours — keep it as we did — it will produce you good crops." It was his last public appearance. He died on October 3.

THE NAME HAWKEYE had now been suggested in a newspaper, and one evening in the autumn Edwards put it to a group of prominent men at the Burlington House hotel. Among them were Territorial Governor Robert Lucas and other territorial officers. Everybody present liked the name. That winter Rorer, Edwards, and Rorer's eloquent law partner Henry W. Starr decided that a means must be found to gain public acceptance and popularize the nickname. Edwards, who had moved to Burlington in September, suggested a bald announcement in his new newspaper. But David Rorer thought that the best way of promoting the name Hawkeye would be to get people to take it for granted. The way to achieve that was to write a series of letters to the *Iowa News* in Dubuque, thus planting the nickname in the readers' minds. Rorer composed four lengthy letters anonymously signed "A Wolverine Among the Hawkeyes." Fellow lawyer Shepherd Leffler copied them so Rorer's handwriting would not be recognized, and they were sent off to Iowa newspapers in early 1839.

The four letters, given huge prominence in the Dubuque and Davenport newspapers, were purportedly written by a traveler from Michigan visiting Iowa. The term "Hawkeye" was used frequently and favorably, as in "that charming lustre of the eye and healthful glow of cheek peculiar to the Hawkeye people" and "the enterprise and industry of the Hawkeye farmers." The chief Black Hawk appears often. In the first letter the "Wolverine" quoted a rather belligerent fellow boasting in a pub that he was a Hawkeye almost "next a' kin . . . to the great Black Hawk himself." In the second letter the Wolverine described a pilgrimage to Chief Black Hawk's former residence and headquarters.

The letters are written in a literary, educated style, with romantic detail of Iowa's beauty and fertility, but they are mercilessly critical of certain aspects of the territorial scene. The anonymous Wolverine narrator was incredibly rude about Governor Lucas, *The Burlington Gazette*, and the town of Bloomington (now Muscatine), which resulted in letters to the newspaper and editorial comment. Interest was aroused by the anonymity of the author. The Wolverine letters manifestly created a stir, and historians date popular acceptance of the name Hawkeye to their publication. Indeed, shortly after the second "Wolverine Among the Hawkeyes" letter, Parvin, the governor's secretary, used the nickname in a diary entry: "Mother confined with a daughter — a young Hawkeye."

By autumn Edwards was confident of the

Opposite: "Muck-a-tah-mish-o-kah-kaik, The Black Hawk, A Sac Chief." This image of Black Hawk, by George Catlin, appeared in *Dr. Prichard's Natural History of Man.*

general popularity of the nickname. Acting on the suggestion of his wife, he changed the name of his Burlington newspaper on September 5 to the *The Hawk-Eye and Iowa Patriot*. Under the headline "The Hawk-Eye," he wrote: "The present number of our paper comes out under an additional and we hope an acceptable name. . . . Every state and territory has its peculiar cognomen. Universal consent has confirmed the one by which Iowa is distinguished. It may not be generally known by what means this name was given her." And he reprinted his *Fort Madison Patriot* editorial of March 24, 1838, that had explained the need for a favorable nickname and the proposal to commemorate Black Hawk. Having at last founded a successful newspaper, Edwards proved himself an outstanding journalist and eventually became known as "Old Hawk."

By 1841 the name had appeared in political speeches at the highest level. Iowa's new Whig governor, John Chambers, responded to a formal speech of welcome in May with these words: "Let us . . . be citizens of Iowa — 'Hawkeyes,' if you please, in spirit and in truth. I will be a 'Hawkeye' and in the discharge of my official duties will endeavor to do impartial justice to all."

IN 1977 State Representative James D. Wells of Cedar Rapids proposed that the nickname of Iowa be enshrined in law. In an editorial entitled "We're the Hawkeyes," the *Des Moines Register* commented that official sanction was not needed: "We like the name Hawkeyes, and we imagine that most Iowans do. For well over a hundred years — without benefit of legislative exertion — the people who came here have been heirs to a nickname that wasn't embarrassing to them."

One hundred and fifty years ago Rorer and his cohorts, Edwards and Starr, established a nickname that should certainly have made Iowans feel proud. James Fenimore Cooper's fictional creation was a popular frontier hero familiar to the reading public of the early nineteenth century. The Sauk chief Black Hawk played a pivotal role in Iowa's history; in Starr's words: "The great chief . . . seems to form a connection-link between two races, and, more than any other, to symbolize the great transition from the dominion of the Indian to that of the white man." As a twentieth-century traveler in this state, not unlike the Wolverine, I am delighted that my wife and her fellow Iowans should be known by the name of Hawkeye — a just and brave hero of fiction, with the added echo of Black Hawk, a remarkable man in Iowa's history. □

NOTE ON SOURCES

The "hawk" theories are in Wm. L. Toole, "Arwin's Sattlement" [sic], *Annals of Iowa* 9 (1871); and *Des Moines Evening Tribune*, 15 Sept. 1922. Biographical sketches of Rorer are in Edward H. Stiles, "David Rorer," *Annals of Iowa* (July 1907); *Portrait and Biographical Album of Des Moines County, Iowa* (Chicago, 1888), p. 649; George Frazee, "An Iowa Fugitive Slave Case 1850 — Biographical Note on David Rorer," *Annals of Iowa* (April 1903) pp. 29-30 n.; John Ely Briggs, "An Eloquent Plea," and "A Rare Man," and J. A. Swisher, "Eminence at the Bar," all in *Palimpsest* (Sept. 1945); and "The Territorial Convention of 1837," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* (July 1911), pp. 396-97. Iowa being dubbed "the hairy nation" is reported by Rev. Charles E. Snyder, "Statesmen and Politicians," *Annals of Iowa* (July 1945) p. 23. The popularity and reviews of Cooper's novels are in James D. Hart, *The Popular Book: A History of America's Literary Taste* (New York, 1950), p. 81; Frank Luther Mott, *Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States* (New York, 1947), pp. 74-75, 303, 305-6; and W. H. Gardiner, "Cooper's Novels," *North American Review* (July 1826), p. 150. The list of books missing from the Wisconsin territorial library appears in *House Journal: Wisconsin Territory Special Session June 1838*, Appendix (Document F), pp. 96-97. T. S. Parvin's diary is in the Masonic Library, Cedar Rapids. Biographical information about Black Hawk is from Donald Jackson, ed., *Black Hawk: An Autobiography* (Urbana, 1955). Rorer's own account of the campaign is briefly reported in the *Burlington Hawkeye*, 24 Nov. 1878; his daughter Delia Rorer's account is especially useful and is in her (undated) letter to historian John Fiske, David Rorer Papers, Special Collections, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City. Details of the Burlington House episode are in T. S. Parvin, "Glimpses of Early Iowa, or Recollections of Territorial Times," *Pioneer Law-Makers Association of Iowa Reunion of 1892* (Des Moines, 1893), p. 21. Biogaphical details of Edwards are from Philip D. Jordan, "The Life and Works of James Gardiner Edwards," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* (Oct. 1930). For his editorials and reports of Black Hawk and Governor Chamber's speeches, see *Fort Madison Patriot*, 24 March 1838, p. 2, 11 July 1838, p. 2; and *Hawk-Eye and Iowa Patriot*, 5 Sept. 1839, p. 2, 20 May 1841, p. 2. Mrs. Edwards's suggestion to incorporate the name "Hawk-Eye" into the newspaper, and Starr's speech about Black Hawk, are in Augustus M. Antrobus, *History of Des Moines County Iowa and its People*, vol. 1 (Chicago, 1915), pp. 435, 140. The *Des Moines Register* editorial quoted is from 26 March 1977. Most important of all are the "Wolverine" letters and contemporary editorial remarks, etc., collected in *Annals of Iowa* (Oct. 1924). The individual letters were originally published in *Dubuque Iowa News*, 23 Feb. 1839, p. 1, 30 March 1839, p. 1, and other 1839 newspapers.

A Wolverine Among the Hawkeyes

Excerpts from the Rorer Letters

Editor's note: Intended to establish "Hawkeye" as the nickname of the new Iowa Territory, David Rorer's Wolverine letters serve as an entertaining frontier travelogue, thick with poetic grace and acerbic wit. The lawyer's letters appeared anonymously in a few 1839 territorial newspapers (see previous article) and are reprinted in the October 1924 *Annals of Iowa.* Some spelling and punctuation have been changed.

'TWAS ON THE EVENING of the day that ushered in the New Year, (1839,) that, with no ordinary sensations, I hove in sight of the Father of Waters, opposite the thrifty town of Du Buque, in the justly famed Territory of Iowa. I hastily crossed over, and spent the night and succeeding day, among the hospitable Hawkeyes of that leaden region.

This interesting place, which, with its numerous advantages, must soon attain to a state of City-Hood, is situated on the west bank of the great Mississippi. . . .

I was forcibly struck with the mixed mass of Germans, French, English, Irish Americans, etc., intermingling with each other, in that cheerful manner, which is the true indication of happy hearts and smiling prospects. Theirs is a happy life of romance and excitement. . . .

The day-laboring miner of yesterday by a sudden discovery, becomes the owner of a rich lead himself to-day, and is transformed from a humble digger to a wealthy proprietor, before he has time to change his clothes.

This emporium of the lead trade is handsomely laid out on a slight eminence girt around on the north, south, and west by lofty and romantic hills, (better known here as mineral knobs,) graciously designed by Providence as well for enriching the place with their mineral treasure as for the protection of the young Hawkeyes, from the withering blasts of winter's bleak winds. . . .

. . . Having resumed my journey, I had a pleasant day's ride to the village of Bellview [Bellevue]. The intervening country bears a striking resemblance to the Scottish highlands — a succession of lofty hills and deep ravines, little timber, and now and then an isolated cabin, with turf chimney and lowly roof, overlaid with soil to keep out the cold. . . .

The village of Bellview is a promising young town, beautifully situated in a spacious valley, between two parallel mountains, extending back at right angles from the Mississippi, and is said to be quite a money making place. Here is a quarry of choice building stone, an excellent saw mill, and two hotels, whose smoking doings and comfortable fixings are not to be grinned at by a Wolverine on a fasting stomach. In truth, this place, like the villages of the early French voyageurs, is famous for good eating, drinking, hilarity, and the social dance. . . .

The next place of importance below is the town of Davenport, seat of justice for Scott county. . . . It is perhaps the most lovely place in the west. Here is a population principally from the Keystone state enlightened, enterprising, and interesting and distinguished for their hospitality and courteous attention to strangers — a chapel of brick, and many private dwellings and business houses, have gone up here the past year. . . .

We find [Rockingham] four miles from Davenport, and opposite the mouth of Rock River, on a pleasant site, in a pretty little prairie. With its commercial advantages, it will at some time, become an important addition to the city of Davenport, for they are certainly destined to be one — both together are but the germ of a mighty city that is ere long to be; and

while they are disputing about their local bickerings, they will come together by the mutual advances of enterprise, if not by an advance of mutual good feeling.

Their only real cause of disputation, is as to which of the two shall perpetuate its name at this family Union. They should cultivate reciprocal good feelings and advise their people to intermarry, and in a short time these young Hawkeyes would be found billing & cooing like young doves in the spring of the year. . . .

From Pine River, I made my way in due speed to the much talked of Town of Bloomington [Muscatine], (better known in real life, I am told, as the Town of Pinch 'em Silly) situated at the western extreme of the great bend of the Mississippi. . . .

This famous town of Pinch 'em Silly is tastefully gotten up on a gentle acclivity bound in by lofty projections from the south, and a stagnant pool and inundated swamp on the north, and encompassed upon the west by some tilable lands of a genial soil, but for the most part consisting of broken fragments of hills and precipices, that look as if formed for pasturage and shaken to pieces by a fit of the ague before it got dry. . . .

After being seated a short time [in a tavern], by a rusty old stove, well besmeared with the juice of the weed, completely laden in front with the half smoked remains of long nines and Kentucky cock tails, I was graciously saluted with a "how do you navigate, stranger?" from behind me, by a sour looking, ill featured fellow, with a blue streak in the form of an inverted crescent under one eye, and the other pushed out of place by gouging, so as to diverge from his nose at an angle of about forty five degrees. "Thank you sir, very well," I replied, as he advanced to the bar with a twist of pig tail in one hand and an empty bottle in the other, and demanded to have it filled with old rye.

"Come stranger," said he, "let's take a little of the water of life while it runs freely;" I thanked him again, and begging to be excused, told him I was a member of the Temperance Society, and seldom drank. "Sorry for that, stranger," he proceeded, "I took you to be a sorter down-right clever fellow at first sight, no two ways about it, cepting them ar fineries of yours, — I go for that ar society in particular, if it wasn't for our kind of folks, stranger, Temperance preachers would have but little to do. I temper my liquor with water, and my water with good liquor, and so you see I manage to keep steam up, pretty gingerly, to about two hundred pounds to the square inch.

"Now I say that is pretty fair travelling, stranger, and if and if any man dare dispute it, I am a Hawkeye-singer kinder next a'kin, as the lawyers call it to the great Black Hawk himself. I lived in this neck of timber when there warn't a civilized critter in it tamer than a wild cat, and followed watching the way side and catching young suckers for a livin' — and so I say agin, stranger if any man dare dispute it, be he Buckeye, Hoosier, Puke, Wolverine, or Sucker, I'll knock him so far into futurity, that it will take him a life time to look back."

The aged are for the most part left behind, and the young have exchanged the scenes of their childhood for this border paradise.

To attempt an enumeration of the improvements of the Bloomingtonians, would be rather an idle business, — therefore, as I dislike idleness, I will tell you, *not* what they *have*, but what they have *not* — They have no *Church*, no Prison, no Court-House. . . . The absence of the first is justified on the ground of *no religion* — the latter on that of *no law*, which, in all these *sun-down* countries, means *no will to enforce it*. They have no printing establishment — no school house, or seminary — and no manufactories, save one for converting brick-dust and molasses into "Sappington's pills," an improvement invaluable in all ague countries. — So far are they superior to the genuine *Sappingtonians*, that it is seriously asserted, they may be used with impunity, and will not injure the patient more than ninety-nine times out of an hundred. . . .

I called at the office of a Hawkeye Lawyer, and found him domiciled in a four-square log house — the interstices between the logs filled with mud, which had frozen and thawed with

the changes of the weather, until it had nearly all fallen out, — clapboards nailed over the windows instead of glass, and an enormous wooden chimney, with a fire-place, like the jaws of Moloch, in which whole rails were used [as] fuel. . . . The poetical bump of the inmate, was strongly developed by the following inscription, and other similar ones, in pencil on the door,

"As early as I saw this town, I take it,
That even then I had the sense to hate it."

From Black Hawk [Toolesboro], crossing the Iowa on the ice, I proceed to Florence, on the north bank of that River, at the spot occupied by *Black Hawk*, as a residence, and head quarters during the late war with Sacs and Foxes. The *Wigwam* of the departed chief is still standing — it is a huge fabric of posts, poles, and bark — the roof is also of bark, so constructed that the top course, or layer, bends over the comb each way. Passing down the Iowa, a few miles from this place, I fell into the intended route of the Burlington and Iowa River Turnpike, and followed the source, finding it well adapted to turnpiking, and bordered by a lovely country, to the flourishing young city of Burlington, the present seat of government of the *Hawkeyes*, at which place I arrived on the evening of the memorable eighth of January, just in time to witness its celebration by a ball at the Hotel where I stopped.

There were present some forty or fifty couple of gentlemen and ladies, besides a number, who, like myself, participated only as lookers on. You do not here, as in the old settled countries down toward sun-rise, find the young and the aged treading time to the same cotillon, and mingling together in the mazy intricacies of the giddy dance, for the aged are for the most part, left behind, and the young, the gay, the enterprising, and romantic, have exchanged the scenes of their childhood for this border paradise, and them alone you find figuring in the pulpit, the forum, the bar, the ball-room, the parlor, and in almost every relation of life. . . . The enjoyments of the evening were closed in a manner calculated to awaken all the nobler feelings of our nature — the national banner, which, during the dance, had waved incessantly at one end of the long hall, was hastily snatched from its place, by a gentleman, who bearing this glorious trophy on one arm and his fair partner on the other, marched off with quick and joyful steps, to the soft tones of the violins and clarionet, as they struck up in an animated strata, "*Hail Columbia, happy land*" — instantly couple after couple formed in the rear of the happy procession, until the whole assembly were included in the prominade, when the inebriating sounds of the music suddenly ceased to fall upon the ear, the beloved insignia of liberty, which, in addition to the usual device, bore the impress "*Iowa Farmers*," in large characters, was then carefully disposed of, and the parting salutations of the evening being reciprocated, the assembly dispersed in harmony, order and good feeling; and I retired from the scene confirmed in the belief, that refinement and taste are not confined to *place*, but may be found, as well upon our frontier borders. . . .

The growing prospects of Burlington, are unparalleled, in the history of frontier towns — though scarcely more than four years old, she already numbers some fifteen hundred inhabitants. . . . A large and commodious two-story brick church, for the Methodist denomination, has been erected — a market-house, of brick, begun, and more than one hundred private buildings and business houses completed — and a substantial wharf is now being made — Here are two printing establishments, a

"Where is Johnson county, sir?
A trackless wild, beyond the
setting sun."

number of professional gentlemen, some of whom have extensive libraries, amounting to several hundred volumes — and the whole place is literally alive with workshops of every description. . . .

By an act of the Assembly, this place is to remain the seat of government, for three years, at the end of which time it is to go to "Iowa City," Johnson county. I witnessed the debates in the assembly on the bill establishing the seat of the government, & was greatly amused by

the ebullitions of a certain *Payne*ful speaker in the Council, who opposed it with great warmth: — "Mr. President," said he, "where is Johnson county, sir? the friends of the bill may answer the question, for I can't, sir. There is no such county known to our laws, sir. What are its boundaries, sir? It has none, sir. Shall we place the great Sanhedrim of the Territory, and his Excellency, and the bevy of boys who pay court to his greatness, in the midst of savages and wild beasts? I tell you sir, they would as soon think of creeping into a live hornet's nest, sir? Johnson county! a trackless wild, *beyond the setting sun*. — Yes, sir, *beyond the setting sun*. . . .

Lucas assumed such attitudes towards them as would never be tolerated in the Satrap of a despotic State.

There is a great hubbub kicked up here between their Buckeye Governor [Robert Lucas], and the representives of the Hawkeye people — as soon as the old hero of Toledo found there were a majority of democrats in the assembly, he forthwith commenced ruling with an iron rod, supposing no doubt, that they would sustain him through political feelings, right or wrong — he assumed such attitudes towards them as would never be tolerated in the Governor General of a British Province, or the Satrap of a despotic State — vainly insisting that independent of him they had no power — that all bills should be submitted to his Excellency by a committee, before introduced into the assembly. — and various other positions, as tyrannical as ridiculous, and as ridiculous as revolting to the feelings of a people free as air, and who cherish the maxim that "*the world is governed too much.*" . . .

In looking over their proceedings, I discover that the late assembly passed at least *some* very important acts — *one* regulating proceedings in criminal cases, which provides, that if you fail to prove the defendant guilty of the charge alleged, you may alter (or amend, as they call it,) the indictment to *fit* the *proof*, and convict and punish him without previous notice, for whatever offence you may happen to prove against him. . . . They also passed, or attempted to pass, an act to improve the *blood* of *unblooded horses* — which is about on a par with the old act of the Legislature of the Keystone State, spoken of by my learned Judge Breckinridge, which makes it *penal* to *alter* the *mark* of an *unmarked* hog. . . .

The evening before my departure from Burlington I attended a temperance meeting at the Methodist church, the use of which was generously tendered by the society. There were present an immense throng — not a seat remained unoccupied, and every avenue and aisle were crowded — a lecture was delivered by a transient gentleman from the *Buckeye* State. I had truly hoped from the deep interest shewn in the cause, that much good would have resulted from the delivery of an able and truthful address, but the orator misjudged either the character of his audience or his own abilities, and when he boldly declared, *on the authority too* of Dr. Rush, that thirty years since there was not a female of sobriety in the whole city *of Brotherly-Love*, not even excepting the *broad-brim* descendants of its venerable founder, the *good* William Penn. The crowd gave evident signs of disapprobation, and some of them done him the justice to abruptly leave the house. . . .

The hotel where I took comfort stands within the limits of the old Fort. The burnt remains of the picketing around it are yet plainly perceptible.

. . . I have already told you that in [Burlington?] there are two printing establishments. The one engaged in *job work*, and the other in the *filthy job* of publishing a *weakly* thing, called by way of courtesy a newspaper. The one is suspected, unjustly I hope, of fanaticism — the other is not suspected for *any thing* in *particular*, but *any thing* to *suit* the *occasion*, or *nothing* as *interest* and the "*occasion* may *require*" — retires to rest and rises — dresses and undresses, walks to food and returns at the tap of the bell, as any other animal would, always taking especial care to be

seated at meal time in the most approved attitude of the place, and at just *such* distance from the Executive as strictly accords with the established order of *Hawkeye* precedence at the COURT of his *Buckeye Excellency*. . . .

At [Mount Pleasant] I obtained a late Burlington Gazette containing a stricture on my two first numbers, under the signature of a "Citizen of Musquitine County," whom, from the language as well as other circumstances, I soon recognised as a certain member of the Hawkeye Assembly. . . . I had the *honor* of a slight acquaintance with him during last winter's session, and we recently met again at the boat landing, on his return from Cincinnati, at which time he took special care to *intimate* to me in plain language, his unalterable determination to totally use up "A Wolverine among the Hawk-eyes," little thinking that he was then so near being *swallowed* by the *beast himself* — I had a mind, Ben, to *roll him up* and take him for *Puke*. . . .

The hotel [in Fort Madison] where I [next] took comfort, stands within the limits of the old Fort. The burnt remains of the picketing around it, are yet plainly perceptible. The identical well, constructed by the American troops, is now in use, and supplies the hotel with a most excellent and wholesome beverage, which many of the inhabitants adulterate by a strange practice of mixing whiskey and other deleterious drinks with it previous to its use. In this respect some of them are not surpassed even by the worthy topers of the renouned "*Pinch 'em Slyly*" — cards and liquor are the engrossing topics of the hotel circle. Their nocturnal revellings are at times carried to such an extent that sleep is utterly out of the question.

. . . Salem is also an inland place, and a Quaker village — is situated in Henry county, near the junction of Cedar creek and Skunk river, and about four miles south of the latter. It contains some dozen of homely buildings and a sober sort of people, who fear the Lord and eschew the Devil, as all good Christians should. Here may be seen romping groups of smiling cherry-cheeked Hawk-eye Quakeresses, with their tidy little aprons as white as a Norwegian snow-bank, eyes as soft as their own native wild-flowers of the prairies, looks as placid and lovely as a rainbow in a southern sky, and voices as sweet as the mellifluent whisperings of zephyrs from a fairy land. . . .

On my route hither I fell in at the court of a Hawk-eye Squire, surrounded with all the parade and consequence of a Court-Baron, — that ancient and important personage the constable, and a half dozen of suitors, and twice as many more adherents, favorers, and champions of the respective *parties-litigant*, with voices like a Stentor's and fists like the club of Hercules. I expected to witness a tilt, a tournament, or a trial by battle, but all passed off peaceably. They were sitting in judgment on an alleged *interloper* for *jumping* a settler's claim; he was found guilty and ousted, or in the Hawk-eye language, "*whipped and cleared*," as a matter of course, according to previous determination, as all *supposed claim jumpers* are, by a jury of claim holders and speculators who sit not so much to inquire into *facts*, as to give their action the *color of law*. . . .

The claim jumper was found guilty by a jury of claim holders and speculators who sit not so much to inquire into facts, as to give their action the color of law.

His honor, the Squire, is about thirty years of age, yellow haired and white eyed, carries himself with an affected air of importance, wears an old pair of iron spectacles, with green glasses, a red blanket coat, (*slide runner cut*,) and a coonskin cap, and is spoken of favorably by the friends of his Excellency here, as a candidate at the coming election for a seat in the lower House of the Hawk-eye Assembly. I met with the same *non*-descript being here the other day, it being court week. He was walking down one of the principal streets, in earnest conversation with the *Payne*-full gentleman spoken of in one of my last, with a *quarter section of Hoosier bread* under his arm, and a *sanctimonious scowl* on his countenance, huzzaing for the Governor and heaping *pious maledictions* on

A WOLVERINE AMONG THE HAWK-EYES.

A NEW YORK VENTURE in NORTHWEST IOWA

The Iselins Build a Mill

by Lowell J. Soike and John P. Zeller

A FEATURE of development in northwestern Iowa during the post-Civil War decades is that New York money lay behind many railroad and other Western ventures. Less well known though is that wealthy New Yorkers themselves sometimes took an active and direct part in their projects, living in the community of their investment while maintaining their vital connections back home. We find such a story in the lives of Henry and John Iselin, young and ambitious sons of a prominent New York family, whose enterprises shaped development in early Sheldon, Iowa.

Founded in 1872, the O'Brien County town of Sheldon had over one thousand residents by 1879 and had become the largest and most important town in the northwest corner of Iowa comprising O'Brien, Osceola, Lyon, and Sioux counties, which at that time contained vast tracts of unimproved virgin lands. In the great race for material advantage, Primghar, Sanborn, and other nearby rival towns were all vying for county-seat status as they kept a weather eye out for live railroad, commercial, or industrial prospects. Situated at the junction of the east-west Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway and the northwesterly-running Sioux City & St. Paul Railway, Sheldon held an edge over its rivals.

Among the railroad and large-scale speculators who owned large amounts of unsettled land near Sheldon were the town's namesake, Israel Sheldon, and George I. Seney. Israel Sheldon was a New York City stockholder in the Sioux City & St. Paul Railway. Seney was president of the Metropolitan Bank in New York. He owned a 1,280-acre "trustee farm" just south of Sheldon and invested heavily in the Omaha railroad and in real estate in northwest Iowa and southwest Minnesota.

Although absentee ownership of large tracts of land actually tended to retard population growth, the town of Sheldon nevertheless grew because of the capital improvements made by Eastern investors. With "almost magical

COURTESY SHELDON HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM

Harry Iselin (front row, far left) poses with other members of the "Sheldon Ten," a young men's social club. Back row: Fred Piper (editor Frank Piper's brother), Hank Phileo, Frank Zander, Milt Allen, Homer Conant. Front row: Iselin, Sam Ladd, Harry Waite, George Spaulding, Frank Babcock.

effect," according to a local editor, the investors' efforts to improve their large holdings brought money into the town and prompted "more determined efforts" by others to build Sheldon's economy.

One of the most determined efforts was made by members of the prominent Iselin family. Adrian G. Iselin, the head of a banking family and part of an exclusive circle of New York society, purchased various pieces of land a few miles north of Sheldon between 1877 and 1883. Some of it he apparently bought as trustee for his sister-in-law, Margaret Tomes Iselin. Within a few days after the purchase of about 1,200 acres in August 1877, her eighteen-year-old son, Henry S. Iselin, arrived in Sheldon to develop the property as a large stock farm.

Delighted to see the arrival of a new resident of obvious means, Frank Piper, the editor of the *Sheldon Mail*, lauded Henry Iselin's "intention to erect several buildings this fall, among which will be one of the finest residences in the entire Northwest. . . . Mr. Iselin is a valuable acquisition to the interests of this part of the northwest and particularly Sheldon." Thereafter, editor Piper hardly let a chance go by to report the goings-on of Henry Iselin.

YOUNG, confident, ambitious, and determined to make a success of himself in the West, Henry S. Iselin — or Harry, as he was more often called — busied himself building a "mammoth" stock farm while watching for other opportunities. With thirty head of horses, 130 head of cattle (he shipped the butter back to New York for sale), and plenty of hogs and poultry, Harry's operation quickly reached respectable proportions. The first several months the command of investment money came from family members. With his mother's death in June 1878, however, Harry's resulting share of the family

fortune gave him a more direct say in shaping his own prospects.

Within weeks of returning from the funeral in New York, he decided to erect a large Halliday feed mill and to add more farm machinery and manufacturing implements to his operation. The wind-powered feed mill gave him experience in the milling business. Although it had been erected for use on his own farm, the mill soon was reported to be "doing custom work for this whole section of country." Meanwhile, no doubt, Harry read and heard editor Piper's persuasive arguments that "Sheldon wants a steam grist mill, and wants it badly."

As in other country towns that had secured railroad connections, a craving had set in to lure a manufacturing plant to Sheldon. The town had one individual who made sure its prospects as a future trading center outshone those of its rivals. Singing the song of future development, editor Frank Piper aggressively promoted Sheldon's economic expansion. He pleaded for "some first class miller" to seize the obvious opportunity. Sheldon "would soon be on the high road to greatness if she had a flouring mill," Piper argued. "With two railroads, a town of 700 inhabitants, one of the finest farming countries under the sun and not a mill within 30 miles the only wonder to us is that some man with mind and money had not before discovered the opening."

By early 1879 Harry Iselin was taking steps in just that direction. Journeying to New York in April, Harry returned with his oldest brother, thirty-year-old John H. Iselin, who operated a New York City import-export commission business. Ostensibly, John had come "to take a peek at Harry's farm and see what he has done," but quickly it became clear that more was involved. If Harry had failed to convince John about the mill investment in New York, he evidently succeeded in Sheldon. During John's visit came the announcement that a steam grist mill "is to be built by H. S. Iselin, Esq. a gentleman of ample means, late of New York."

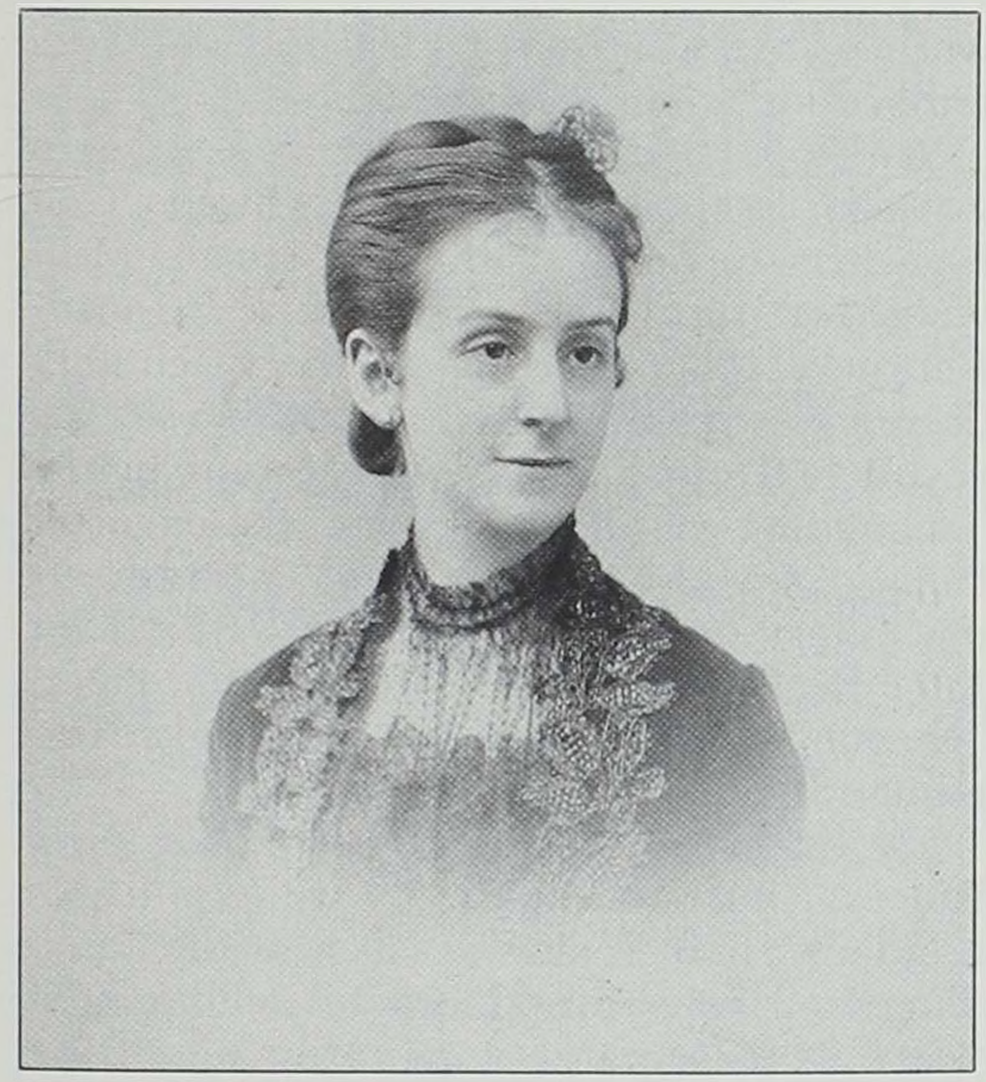
While John Iselin initially continued to look after New York interests, Harry Iselin took the lead in organizing the venture to build the mill. Amateurs they might be at milling — as were entrepreneurs Pillsbury and Washburn when they first erected their great Minneapolis mills — the Iselins were nevertheless confident they had the money and sense to employ the best equipment and workers available in order to build and run a substantial Iowa operation. With the brothers' considerable experience as commission merchants, the flour and grain products not sold locally would find a market through their branch houses in Chicago and New York or by consignment.

Shortly thereafter, Harry was traveling to Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Milwaukee — the region's leading milling and mill-provisioning centers — to line up the necessary mill builders and outfitters. He called upon the most reputable firms and individuals in the business, especially those associated with the Washburn mill enterprise. In fact, Harry thought he had hired the boss miller at the famed Washburn mills for $1,500 a year, but the negotiation failed. For the design of the building and the arrangement of machinery, Harry opened discussions with the prominent mill-furnishing firm of O. A. Pray and Company. (Otis Pray had erected the huge Washburn B mill in 1866 and built the Cataract and Palisade mills in Minneapolis.) Harry contracted with Pray to design and furnish a five-run steam-operated flour mill. The Iselins would hire masons and carpenters to build the foundation for the engine and boiler and frame the mill according to Pray's drawings.

By the third week of June, Harry had chosen to lease a site on the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul road at the southwest corner of town. By early July the cellar had been excavated and well diggers were "progressing nicely." Pray's and Iselin's goal was to have the mill ready to run by October 1.

Meanwhile, the Iselins were thinking even more grandly. Harry purchased seven acres just south of the mill, laid out lots, and commenced building six houses for employees, each to cost $750. The tract would come to be known as Iselinville.

THE BUILDING SCHEDULE for the mill, however, soon fell apart. "What day can you have the mill house up and floors — stairs and etc. finished for us?" O. A. Pray & Co. wrote in mid-July 1879.



PHOTOS COURTESY WARBURTON G. ISELIN; SHSI (DES MOINES)

Mary and John Iselin's East Coast life-style enchanted the editor of the Sheldon newspaper, who frequently reported details of their travels and acquisitions.

"We have one car loaded with lumber and it must go forward," they urged. "We are very full of machinery and will ship a car Monday and you can store it in the depot there until your house is completed." In early August Harry Iselin answered that he needed at least a month to finish framing. By mid-September his carpenters were still studding the structure. The well-diggers had exceeded one hundred feet with no water in sight; the crew was doubled and worked day and night. Quite obviously, Pray's October 1 deadline for installing the machinery would not be met.

By September 22 the mill was enclosed and floors laid. Hoping to make up for lost time, Harry wrote Pray to "let me know at once when you will send the millwrights." Within a week the millwrights arrived, as did the head miller, W. W. Place, and his two assistants.

A terrible blunder then became apparent. The height of the basement story was a foot too low for the machinery. Back in Minneapolis, head miller Place and Pray considered the options of altering the machinery or further excavating the basement. Place wired Iselin: "Raise the mill one foot." Jack screws arrived at express while millwrights dug installation points in the foundation. Within four days Harry Iselin could report success: "I have raised the mill to the desired height without accident; the roof is almost all on."

The fright marked a pivotal event in the mill enterprise. Evidently worried about the floundering project, John H. Iselin and his wife arrived within a few days from New York with plans to stay until the mill was in running order. Within three weeks, John was handling all correspondence with O. A. Pray & Company, including renewed pleas for more millwrights.

As the eldest surviving family member, thirty-one-year-old John Iselin was trustee of various family estates on his father's side and had inherited substantial wealth from his mother. Most of his New York business dealings were in importing and wholesaling silk. Through his marriage to Mary Philipse Gouverneur, John was "intimately allied" to wealthy families on the Hudson whose landholdings dated to colonial times. After John and Mary's grand wedding, they had settled at her estate, Eagle's Nest, described in New York papers as "the most conspicuous residence in the Highlands of the Hudson,

perched on the brow of a mountain" across the river from West Point.

When John and Mary Iselin arrived at Sheldon, however, townspeople knew little of John Iselin's background other than that he was a monied New Yorker. But what they saw of his character, they liked. John Iselin, the editor said, "is a genial, whole-souled, frank sort of man, and one who will make and keep friends wherever he goes."

Sheldon citizens apparently were enamored with the Iselins, judging from the newspaper coverage they received. Residents opened up their paper on any given week to read about the Iselins' comings and goings. Piper sprinkled his pages with such news as "Mr. John H. Iselin . . . has crossed the Atlantic 40 times." Sheldon's proud attentiveness to the Iselins did not go unnoticed, as the snide remark of a neighboring town paper testified: "The Sheldon papers don't let John H. Iselin & Co. go out the back door without personal mention. That's independence of the press."

DESPITE CONSTRUCTION delays, John and Harry Iselin apparently had no second thoughts about their endeavor. During John's month-long stay, they hired architect and builder C. J. Skuse to construct the houses, cooper shop, store, and barns in their milltown, Iselinville. Well-diggers had found a vein of water at 172 feet, but it flowed too slowly, and they dug on. Another contractor was feverishly digging thirteen wells for Iselinville. And the Iselins bought the Sleeper & Logan grain warehouse in Sheldon. (Scant information exists about the Sleeper family, who operated a private bank in Sheldon during this period. Yet their name would figure frequently in Iselin business dealings — as eventually would the name of Scott Logan.)

John Iselin returned in mid-January of 1880 from a holiday in New York to see his new Iselinville store nearly completed and another contractor's work well under way on four of the dozen houses. The brothers scoured the countryside for enough wheat to keep the mill running steadily once it started up. By the end of the month they had over 10,000 bushels of wheat on hand, and over 60,000 bushels of corn cribbed in various locations.

With plenty of grain but still insufficient water for the boiler, the brothers hired a Chicago firm to finish drilling by steam. Millwrights completed their work by mid-February 1880. Starting up the machinery drew a crowd of townspeople eager to see the result of Iselins' heavy investment in the "upbuilding" of Sheldon. When the engineer turned up the steam, the "ponderous machinery began to move." "HURRAH for John H. Iselin & Co.!" wrote editor Piper, "Hurrah for the Sheldon Flouring Mills! Hurrah for Sheldon! In fact, 'rah for 'rah!"

The Sheldon mill was a state-of-the-art "New Process" burrstone mill. By using multiple grindings, bran removers (such as the "middlings purifier," introduced to milling eight years before), and a panoply of sifting machines, greater amounts of high-quality flour could be obtained from spring wheat. (Although the more effective rollers were beginning to replace burrstones in American flour mills, the change was costly and still somewhat experimental, within the scope of only the largest commercial mills.)

In terms of productivity, the Iselin mill's daily capacity of 1,000 barrels placed the mill well above all competitors in northwestern Iowa. Sheldon's citizens had reason to be proud; even Sioux City would not have a mill that could equal two-thirds that of Iselins' daily capacity. The mill's nearest rivals stood about twenty miles down the railroad line in Le Mars. There two mills operated, each capable of producing only half the daily capacity of the Sheldon Flouring Mill.

The smoke and steam rising from the mill operation served notice for miles around that the Iselins were now in business, and the brothers soon hired a grain buyer and advertised for "five competent coopers to make flour barrels." The Iselins' store and mill stood crowded with customers. Three times a day the shriek of the steam whistle reminded all that the long-awaited mill was at last grinding.

The Iselins now turned their energies to other ventures. During the spring of 1880, they traded a cottage in Iselinville for a farm south of Sheldon on which to raise 2,000 young

The Iselins' New York Store, which adjoined the mill, promised the lowest grocery prices in northwest Iowa.

hogs (for Eastern markets); they installed a telephone line between their store and the meat market on Ninth Street to speed customers' orders; they drew plans for a three-story brick wholesale establishment; and they doubled the size of their office, erected a substantial barn in Iselinville for thoroughbred horses, and built a large blacksmith shop and an addition to the cooper shop. Their investments in Sheldon did not go unnoticed — or unpraised. Reporting that the brothers were planting handsome trees throughout Iselinville, the *Sheldon Mail* acknowledged the Iselins as "men of enterprise, intelligence and uprightness."

Notwithstanding the Iselin investments, or Sheldon's adoration, design flaws brought mill shutdowns that spring. "Owing to serious defects in the construction of the Sheldon Flour Mill," reported one editor, "its product has been of a quality not only unsatisfactory to the proprietors but unsalable to the local trade." The Iselins undertook costly alterations.

By May the mill was running again at "full blast," shipping out carloads of flour, feed, bran, and oats. By late July, enough wheat had been purchased to keep the Iselin mill running for a year. Meanwhile plans advanced to build a 47-foot elevator to hold 30,000 bushels.

More Iselin family members now resided in Sheldon. In "excellent spirits" and with plans to stay "at least six months," John returned in early May with his wife and three children. Mary was eight months pregnant and soon gave birth to a daughter at Harry's farm northwest of Sheldon. Harry returned from the East with another brother, George, an attorney, who also gave serious thought to locating in Sheldon.

ALL SEEMED to be going exceedingly well as the young millowners entered the fall season. As a large force of workers finished the "mammoth elevator," the mill ran day and night to fill advance orders for 100,000 pounds of flour.

The Iselins hired a Chicago man by the name of Knapp to take charge of general business operations, and John Iselin found time to attend to other matters. He planned and helped finance the construction of a new Episcopalian church in Iselinville. He traveled to Spirit and Okoboji lakes for a week in October. At the same time, it was reported that the Iselins would "build a large addition to the Sleeper residence," where evidently John and his family were living.

The Iselins' generosity showed itself during the Christmas season. After a shopping trip in St. Paul, John and Mary gave each of their seventeen married employees a hundred pounds of their fancy patent flour and, to each of their fourteen unmarried men, a box of choice cigars. Within the family, perhaps the finest gift was Harry Iselin's present of a handsome Chickering piano to his sister-in-law, Mary.

Outward appearances pointed to buoyant prospects. Editor Piper lauded his town as "SHELDON THE HUB." The mill had had a good year. It had employed 35, ground 650,000 bushels, "shipped over 600 cars and received 300 and did a business of nearly $600,000." It

would soon be enlarged from 10-run-of-stone to 13-run.

With the close of the holidays, Mary and Harry Iselin traveled to New York, he on business and she to visit family. Upon her return, reported John in mid-January 1881, the two of them would travel south for a few weeks of rest and recreation.

Then, abruptly, John Iselin changed his vacation plans. In mid-February John and an employee were "off on an important business trip to New York," but no details were disclosed. The March 3 *Sheldon Mail* reported that John H. Iselin is very ill in N.Y." One month later the paper stated that "John H. and Harry Iselin are absent from the city [Sheldon], but are expected to return the later part of the week."

Finally on April 7, readers of the *Sheldon Mail* opened their paper and saw the following item: "John H. Iselin and Co. are experiencing financial embarrassment. On Tuesday Sheriff Shea and Deputy O'Donnell levied upon their mill elevator, and all residence property, to satisfy claims in the hands of A. W. Sleeper and Bro. aggregating between $20 and 25,000. The Messrs. Iselin are away from home and it is thought they will return in condition to rally and continue business again. We hope they may."

WITH THIS ANNOUNCEMENT, the story of the Iselins' accumulating troubles began to unfold before the public, layer by layer. The first disclosure dated back to the previous summer of 1880, when the mill had been running only five months. Financially strained by past construction delays, yet confident of eventual profits from expanded investments, the Iselins had needed to borrow money. They had called on the private banking house of A. W. Sleeper & Bro. in Sheldon and the First National Bank of St. Paul. In July they obtained a loan of $2,500 from Sleeper. They also borrowed $17,323 from the First National Bank of St. Paul, with Sleeper as their trustee, and put up the Sheldon Flour Mills and property as collateral. Of the larger loan, $5,000 was in the form of a promissory note to satisfy certain immediate claims against their company and due within sixty days. The remaining $12,323 owed to the St. Paul bank was to be paid back within four months at the Sleepers' banking house. The promissory note of $2,500 to the Sleepers also would come due on November 15. But signs of prosperity had suggested no problem with meeting these loan deadlines. After a brief shutdown when wheat ran short, the mill resumed full operation. By September workers replaced an existing warehouse with a 30,000-bushel elevator.

One additional shadow cast on the Iselins' sunny prospects was an impending court case by mill builder O. A. Pray & Co. over a contract disagreement. As construction delays had mounted in 1879, O. A. Pray and the Iselins had become ever more at odds over who bore responsibility for mistakes and additional expenses. After an exchange of accusatory letters, Pray had written the Iselins in early February 1880 that "it seems to us at this time that we should meet you at the mill, and there and

then fully adjust and settle all these little differences. You must not forget the delays caused us by not getting your building finished at the time you agreed and set our work back and we were compelled to do it all in cold weather and short days." Pray specifically asked "to have the young man [Harry Iselin], with whom we had the most of our talk, there when we go out." Despite reconciliation efforts, the parties could not work out their differences. Pray filed a mechanic's lien for $2,580 against the Iselins in late March 1880. In December the county district court judge supported the lien and ordered the sale of mill property sufficient to pay the claim. Coming up with $2,580 seemed of no particular consequence to the Iselins. Business was good that month. Mill workers were busily filling a Minneapolis order for fifty carloads of ground feed, and the *Sheldon Mail* informed its readers that "the Sheldon Flour Mills have all the orders on hand they can fill for six months." But despite another order for fifty carloads of ground feed from Niobrara, Nebraska, the Iselins evidently showed no inclination to erase their indebtedness to O. A. Pray — or to pay off the two bank loans.

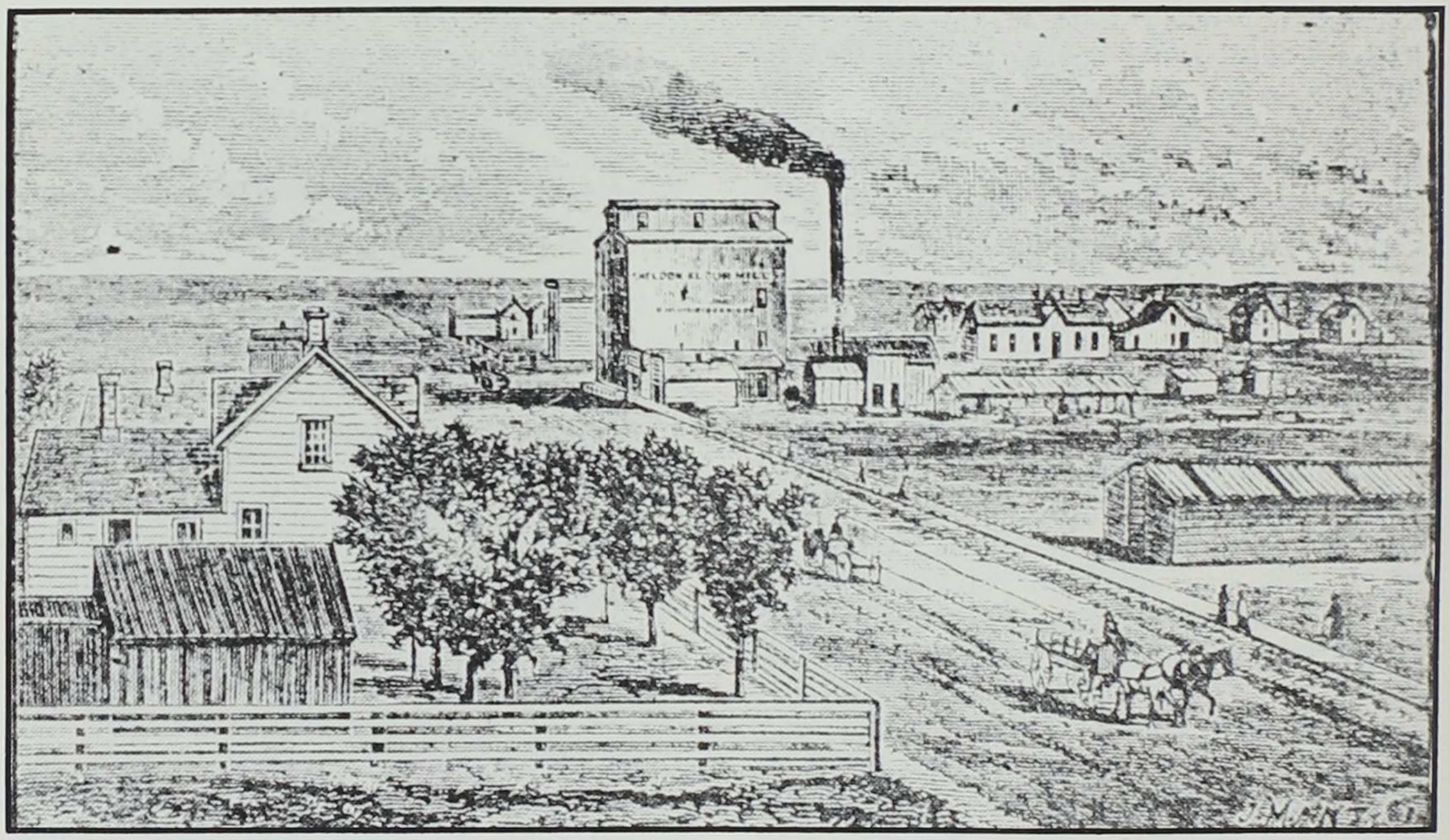
By April of 1881, with the bulk of their debt overdue and the Sleepers now pressing the matter, word was getting around to others waiting payment. Seven rushed to file liens and suits in circuit court. After an anxious week of awaiting the Iselins' return from back East, Sheldon townspeople learned the bad news: John and Harry were dissolving their partnership. "The business will hereafter be conducted by Harry S. Iselin, who succeeds the old firm," the paper reported, "and he will settle all outstanding liabilities of John H. Iselin & Co. and collect all debts due said firm."

John Iselin had returned to Sheldon but remained "indisposed" and "confined to his home most of the time," perhaps feeling the strain of their financial plight or still recovering from his severe illness suffered in New York.

Harry Iselin, who had initiated the mill investment, took charge of getting the business back in operation. Perhaps feeling responsible for the way things had gone, or sensing John's unwillingness to put any more into the operation, Harry undertook, in editor Piper's sympathetic words, to "continue alone at the helm hereafter, but it is understood that he is not at present in a position to stay the onslaught of creditors."

Before dissolving the partnership, Harry and John had struck a deal with the Sleepers. For a one-year promissory note for $14,000, the brothers conveyed to A. W. Sleeper a deed of trust on their mill property, town lots, and improvements in Iselinville, all of which Harry might redeem upon payment of the debt. The Iselins made three more promissory notes totalling $6,000 — all due within three months — and Sleeper received title via chattel mortgage to various personal property, including two fine teams of horses, other mares and colts, rigging for the wagons, buggy, bobsleighs, the office and office furniture, all the grain in the new elevator, the flour and grain products manufactured by the mill, and all the barrels. Thus, the Iselins paid $6,000 to their creditors and regained control of their mill property.

"THE MILL goes on. Good enough!" declared the editor of the *Sheldon Mail*. The rival editor of the *Sheldon News* shared in the town's relief and worry: "To have them



Clouds of steam from the Iselins' mill marked the Sheldon skyline as the burrstones ground flour and meal.

shut down would be one of the greatest misfortunes that could befall this place." Ambivalence marked the community as it sorted out this turn of events. "We but reflect on the sentiments of the community at large," wrote Piper of the *Mail*, "when we say that profound sympathy is felt for the present difficulties for the Messrs. Iselin . . . , realizing as all must, that the Iselins have done a grand, good work for the upbuilding of the town and the development of the surrounding country."

If the Iselins suffered personal financial stringency, it was not immediately apparent in their life-style. At the public sale in early May of Iselins' chattel property — horses, colts, buggies, sleighs, and a large quantity of cigars — the family bought much of it back, even though the prices generally equalled their value. They also continued their pattern of extensive travel back and forth to the East. Furthermore, on May 12 the *Mail* reported that "the appearance of the Iselin residence is being very much improved by the addition, to the east side, of a long and tasty veranda."

Throughout most of May the mill operated at "full blast" but by June it was idle again. The exasperated editor of the *Sheldon Mail* lost all patience: "The mill don't grind and probably won't very soon under the present administration. John H. Iselin & Co. may as well resign."

Now the private banking house of A. W. Sleeper and Bro. stepped in, both to protect its interests and, if possible, to arrange things to come out ahead on the matter. On June 1, Sleeper took possession of the Iselins' mortgaged personal property, including notes owed to John H. Iselin & Co. and their accounts. On June 20 he took possession of the mill, the mill property, the elevator, and other improvements (consisting of sixteen dwellings, a blacksmith shop, a store building, three barns, and a cooper shop). In this foreclosure action, the Iselins might have expected Sleeper to protect his interests, but their opinions soon began to change about his designs, intentions, and sense of ethics as a businessman.

The critical moment occurred on June 24 when Iselin property went on sheriff's sale to satisfy the O. A. Pray judgment from the previous December. To the Iselins' undoubtable dismay, W. H. Sleeper (brother and partner of

A. W. Sleeper) and W. B. Bowne (an investor from Mt. Holly, New Jersey) bought up the mill property for $3,050. Then, to their utter disbelief and consternation, the Iselin brothers watched as Sheriff Shea issued to Sleeper and Bowne a certificate of purchase. The certificate was not subject to the Iselins being able to redeem it within one year — as provided by statute — but executed as a deed absolute. Immediately recording the deed at the Primghar courthouse, Sleeper and Bowne then claimed to be the absolute owners of the property.

For a few weeks rumors persisted that the Close Brothers (English land speculators who owned 75,000 acres in northwestern Iowa and southwestern Minnesota) were negotiating with the Sleepers for the mill. But the Sleepers cleaned and fixed the Iselin mill, bought a supply of wheat, and leased it temporarily to E.N. Toucey, a former head miller under the Iselins.

The Iselins meanwhile, stung by the prospect of losing their entire investment, readied a counterattack to stop the Sleepers from selling or devaluing their remaining interest. They filed a motion for the county circuit court to appoint a receiver to "hold and dispose" the disputed property. Harry also filed a "cross bill" alleging that the value of their properties far exceeded the indebtedness, and that the excess received in the sale of their mortgaged chattel property should have been credited to their debt. These bankers, Harry declared, were fraudulently "depriving" the Iselins "of all means of extricating themselves from their financial embarrassment." He charged that Sleeper and Bowne had "conspired and confederated" to obtain everything for "a mere nominal sum, and leave the defendants still indebted to them and others." Harry also alleged that A. W. Sleeper was refusing to account for the rents and profits from the properties or applying these to the debt, and that the conspirators had intentionally obtained the Iselins' property at the sheriff's sale for the Pray judgment so as to cloud the title to ownership.

The Sleepers and Bowne denied all charges, stating that neither the mill nor the improvements were worth what the Iselins claimed. At a hearing in late November, Judge Zuber affirmed the Iselins' right to redeem their property, and appointed I. S. Struble of Le Mars to act as receiver of the estate. The Sleepers and Bowne appealed the decision to the Iowa Supreme Court.

WITH PROSPECTS improving, John and Harry moved forward. Editor Piper reported with pleasure that in the next month the Iselins would pay $3,000 and "redeem their property from sheriff's sale." This would remove the "clouded title" issue thrown up by Sleeper and Bowne's claim to absolute title. But the Iselins had more in mind. "It is rumored," continued Piper, "that by the time the remainder of their matters get into shape, they will redeem still further, even to the amount to all they owe. It is to be hoped they will, for they have already suffered heavier losses and experienced more painful embarrassments, than men of their enterprising character should."

In fact, their sense of enterprise led to a new venture, announced in late January in the *News*: "Mr. Henry Iselin is now snugly located in the rooms formerly occupied by the *News*, and is prepared to do any amount of business in the real estate line." The younger brother "has business in him," said the editor, and would soon publish a real estate guide. He hung out two "new and tasty land signs" and soon the papers were reporting his energetic real estate activities and how his agent, Pomp McCormack, a "cunning man of words," was persuading buyers that the lands thereabout were "a veritable blooming Eden."

All was not so well for the Sleepers, who still held title to the mill. With wheat prices high and flour prices low, head miller Toucey had quit the mill and had opened his own flour and feed store. Under the new head miller, the mill ran half the time while Sleeper and Bowne worked hard to secure sufficient grain.

Fortunes then took another turn. For some unknown reason the Iselin brothers' "redemption scheme" fell apart, and in April the court-appointed receiver resigned because his private interests kept him too busy.

Nevertheless, the Iselins pushed ahead. Their well-received monthly real estate journal, *The Big Four*, focused exclusively on the

four northwest counties of Lyon, O'Brien, Sioux, and Osceola. Each month or so, five thousand copies were distributed locally; it was hailed as the "finest real estate journal ever issued in the Northwest." Attempting to reach foreign investors, the Iselins wrote, "We especially solicit correspondence from our English readers, being satisfied that we have it in our power to open up to them opportunities for investment, on either a large or small scale." In fact, by June the Iselins announced plans to open offices in London and in New York "to accommodate our European and Eastern friends." The highest praise came from an editor in nearby Sanborn who was relieved that land sales were now being "conducted by respectable and prominent men" like the Iselins. Decrying earlier "land sharks," the editor believed that the Iselins rightfully deserved the term "dealers in real estate."

Through these turbulent months, John Iselin assumed a low profile. Harry's name appears regularly as an escort of this or that excursion of land seekers, but John seems to have been a silent partner. Only his domestic activities drew notice in the papers — the fever suffered by John's youngest child, or the conveniently arranged barn he owned, which the groom kept in perfect order.

If John hoped to regain their investment through court action, he would suffer disappointment. In June 1882 the Iowa Supreme Court heard Sleeper and Bowne's appeal. Judge Adams reversed the district court's order, concluding that the Iselins had not been entitled to a receiver.

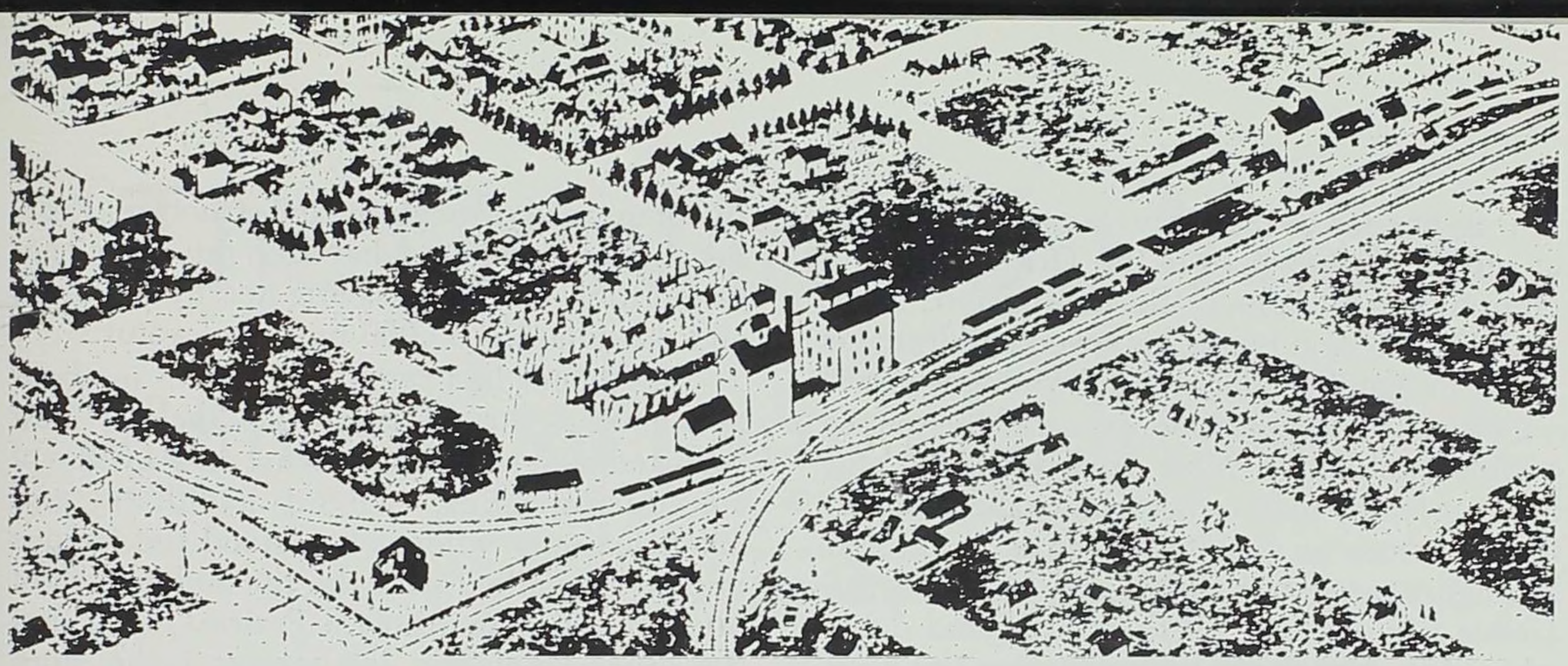
In December 1882 the Iselins found themselves in a courtroom again. Henrietta C. Tomes — John and Harry's aunt — had claimed earlier that she owned a portion of the real estate described in the Iselin trust deed to Sleeper in July 1880. Supported by her nephews, she argued that her property should not be seized and applied to her nephews' debt. John Iselin testified in district court that in late 1879 when investment prospects had seemed so bright, he had indeed encouraged his aunt to sell certain New York stocks and bonds and reinvest the money in Sheldon property. "My opinion," John had written his aunt, "is that property will increase largely here within the next few years, and I can give you no better proof of my confidence than that I am investing in it largely myself." She had followed his advice and had invested $5000 in Iselinville.

The Sleepers, as expected, contended that Henrietta Tomes was not entitled to these lots because John and Mary Iselin had misrepresented the properties as being "clear and free from encumbrance." The district court found in favor of the Iselins' aunt, stating that she not only owned the lots, but was entitled to all past rents and profits.

Interestingly enough, the plans of the Sleepers' banking house — whether in taking over and running the mill or in putting together their numerous trading deals — never found praise in the Sheldon press. Their activities mainly drew nonjudgmental comment, a hint to the contrary being when the *Sheldon News* reported that "A. W. Sleeper is on another of his mysterious visits to St. Paul."

During the fall of 1882, while the parties fought their various cases through the courts, the Sleepers and Bowne leased the mill for two years to an Illinois firm described as "old hands in the milling business" with "ample capital to make things boom" in Sheldon. Within five months, however, the mill was back in the hands of Sleeper and Bowne. Watching their mill become outdated as rival flour mills installed the new roller process, they decided to invest another ten to twelve thousand dollars in modernizing and starting up the mill. They attempted to put together a stock company, but too few subscribers materialized. In January 1884 they finally sold out to G. Y. Bonus of Dubuque. Sheldon townspeople contributed an extra two thousand dollars cash to prevent millers in Le Mars from removing and reconstructing the mill in their town. Bonus installed additional machinery and commenced operating in November 1884 as the Prairie Queen Roller Mills.

FROM THE DECEMBER 1882 trial of their aunt's case to the spring of 1883, the Iselins continued their land business. Relying on earlier experience in shipping produce, they advertised 100,000



The milltown of Iselinville lay south of the flour mill.

white ash and box elder trees for sale at $3.50 per thousand. Their 29-year-old brother, George Adrian Iselin, a lawyer, now served as editor of their *Big Four Journal*, between trips visiting friends and hunting in Minnesota. Harry also traveled extensively.

Then, a split evidently occurred between Harry and John. In late April John "embarked in the land business individually" and moved into another office while Harry set about building a new land office on Third Avenue. This situation lasted only a few months. At summer's end, citizens of Sheldon read a single, short sentence marking the passing of a five-year era: "John H. Iselin and family have gone back to New York to live."

Harry now extended his real estate operations into Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas by being appointed land and emigrant agent for two railroad companies. To handle the expanded business, he joined with T. B. Springfield in partnership. Whether putting up flaming posters of forthcoming excursions, escorting land-seekers on sales tours, or printing substantial press runs of the *Land Journal*, Harry Iselin set a vigorous pace in his quest to somehow succeed in the West. After a time, however, he began to show less devotion to his quest for success in Sheldon. He sojourned to the East from May until September of 1884. Upon his return, he proposed to "push the land business harder than ever this fall," but by December he sold his business interests to his partner and returned to New York. "We are not informed what business he will engage," wrote the editor of the *News*, "but wish him well in his new field."

The Iselins' venture in Iowa marked a turning point in their lives. After John returned to New York, he turned away from the business world. He devoted his days to developing Eagle's Nest, living the life of the country gentleman and raising blooded stock on the Hudson River estate. Yet his personal life grew increasingly troubled. Within five years John began drinking to excess, and he soon began to worry family members by his "prodigious liberality." "No man," reported a fellow New Yorker, "ever went to Mr. Iselin with any sort of a story asking for money that he didn't get it."

When some of the family's Hudson Valley landholdings ultimately had to be sold because of this generosity, John agreed to relinquish administrative control over certain estate matters. But as he continued to mismanage funds, his brother Isaac and sister Emily Iselin MacDonald took action. They petitioned the court to appoint a commissioner to look into John's alleged habitual drunkenness. Although at first determined to contest his family's attempt to deprive him of his traditional business responsibilities, John — ill at his home — ultimately presented no defense. Four days after the jury judged him incompetent, John H. Iselin died in his forty-seventh year, his wife at his bedside.

Harry Iselin's subsequent years also proved quite unlike those he had spent in Sheldon. A year before John's death, Harry departed for Paris. There he married, raised seven children, worked as an international banker, and restored a large manor home in Normandy. After suffering a stroke and an ensuing long

illness, he died in 1932 at his home in Versailles at age 72. Somewhere in the Dragey Manche churchyard in France, he lies buried, along with his wife and two of his seven children, far from the familiar places of his younger years.

Perhaps one would have expected the sons of a well-established New York business and banking family to have been more successful in their venture on the Iowa prairie. Profit and loss figures are not available as clues to why the Iselins failed to pay off their loans and debts when due. Nor do we know whether the huge orders for flour and meal so enthusiastically reported by editor Piper were enough to turn a profit. Perhaps they had misjudged their suppliers and competitors, as wheat production shifted from Iowa into Minnesota and the Dakotas in the 1880s and the Minneapolis mills dominated the midwestern market.

On the one hand, the Iselin brothers appear to have been too trusting and naive in terms of Sleepers' actions. On the other, they were evidently shrewd enough to not pour all their personal fortune into the venture. Rather, after an initial infusion of their own money they relied on the investment capital of others. Then, when the mill enterprise soured, it was the Sleepers who became saddled with the mill while John and Harry Iselin went back East.

What cannot be denied is that through their boldness and ambition, they acquired the title of "townbuilders." They brought money into Sheldon, created new jobs, and built a mill that would become a fixture of Sheldon's economy for four decades. Under new owner G. Y. Bonus, the burrstone mill was converted to a roller mill in 1884. Additional financially sound improvements were made after Scott Logan bought the mill in 1890. Under Logan and subsequent owners, Prairie Queen Mills operated until the late 1920s.

THE IMPRINT left by the Iselins on Sheldon is today largely indistinct. On a late Wednesday afternoon in April 1932 the fire alarm rang at the mill (which had been closed down a few years earlier). The flames — helped by a brisk northwesterly wind and dried timbers — quickly swept upward through the tall structure. Fearing their spread, Sheldon firefighters concentrated their efforts on saving nearby buildings and the adjacent 60,000-bushel elevator.

"The flames had spent themselves in about two hours," the editor of the *Sheldon Mail* reported with sadness, "leaving only a waste of smoldering ashes, twisted machinery and fallen masonry where once stood the famous mill so long allied with the life and growth of Sheldon. The passing of the Prairie Queen, and the other landmark, the former Iselin store building, tears one of the first chapters from the early history of this city."

The location of the residences of Harry Iselin or John and Mary Iselin are unknown, as are any indications of Harry's stock farm north of town. The various buildings in Iselinville — the cooperage, blacksmith shop, three barns — either suffered destruction or, as in the case of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, were moved to new sites, only to be later demolished in making way for modern development. What exists is a plat map titled "Iselin's Second Addition to the Town of Sheldon" — and perhaps a few of the fifteen houses they erected. Evidence of the Iselins' short but grand era of townbuilding has nearly vanished, with little left to symbolize the years when Sheldon so closely tied its hopes and fortunes to the energetic investment activities of two young New York entrepreneurs. □

NOTE ON SOURCES

Four major types of reference sources proved especially valuable in preparing this article. First, much was gleaned from newspaper commentary found in the Sheldon *Mail* and the Sheldon *News* for the years 1877–1884, and in the New York *Times* and New York *Herald* during the period May–June 1895. Second, for information on the Iselins' problems relating to mill construction, contracts, and legal actions, we relied on circuit court filings in the case between O. A. Pray versus J. H. Iselin & Co., 1880 (records of which are administered by Clerk of Court, O'Brien County Courthouse), and in the record of filings and appeals contained in published proceedings of the Supreme Court of Iowa (June and September terms, 1882; September and December terms, 1883). Third, valuable Iselin family information was drawn from the correspondence of Susanne J. Walker (daughter of Henry S. Iselin), Warburton G. Iselin (grandson of John H. Iselin), and Peter Iselin. Fourth, we are indebted to Karen Mitchell, Richard E. Bauer, and other members of the Sheldon Historical Society for the willing time and assistance they gave to our research work.

The Growing-Up Years

Memories of Farm and Town Life

by Everett Ludley

IT WAS A BITTER cold day in late February 1911 when my family and I moved to a new farm. I was sure I would freeze my ears off as we rode the ten miles in the slow-moving bobsled. Only the thought of the warm, new home sustained me. This was the year before I was to enter the first grade. My ears were tender in the cold, and my cap with earlappers didn't fit snugly because it was a hand-me-down from my older brother. The snorting horses were eager to move as fast as they could to keep warm, but the sled was heavily loaded with the dining room stove and some furniture.

My parents, three siblings, and I were all excited about this new farm near Manchester, Iowa, because it had better land and a better set of buildings than our farm down by Ryan. The "new" house had been freshly painted the summer before. There was gingerbread trim around the front and back porches, which were screened in. The dining room had a bay window on the south with many pieces of stained glass across the top section. Mother would keep plants in that window in the winter time. Her pride was a Christmas cactus which she had brought from her parents' home in Rockton, Illinois. Her mother's mother had brought it from England.

The house had several features designed for gracious living by early twentieth-century farm standards. (Sister Dorothy referred to it as "the mansion.") One was the gas plant in the cellar, which fueled the gas jets in the four bedrooms and kitchen and the glass chandeliers in the dining room and parlor. The gas could also be used for cooking, thus keeping the kitchen cooler in the summer.

Another modern convenience was the separate bathroom just off the kitchen. It took only a few steps to carry hot water from the kitchen range to the tub for the Saturday night bath. The metal tub was enameled white on the inside and green on the outside. A smooth hardwood rim gave it a touch of elegance. It stood on legs, and the drain was a rubber hose leading through a hole in the floor to the outside. In the winter, however, the bathroom was so cold that we had to resort to the old round washtub in front of the kitchen stove.

My father had bought Mother a Woodrow washer and a roller-wringer, both set up in the woodshed and powered by a Stover gasoline engine. In the winter a small woodstove heated the wash water and the shed. On washday, pairs of long underwear that had frozen on the clothesline outside were carried in like cord wood to stand up in a corner until they dried.

DAD AND MOTHER both loved the land, but farming continued to be a challenge. Dad was partially handicapped by a twisted ankle from a childhood injury. He wore an L-shaped iron brace on his shoe. The long arm of the "L" was strapped to his leg. He walked with a hobble and must have been in pain on many occasions. But he never complained and always kept up with the neighbors in field work. Yet on top of that he suffered from asthma.

During severe attacks he would come to the house to "smoke" asthma powder. He would pour about a teaspoonful of powder into the lid of the red square can it came in, light the powder, and inhale the smoke. Several minutes later he would be ready to go back to work

COURTESY THE AUTHOR

Farmers huddle to keep warm at the Ludley's farm sale.

again. But at the end of a frustrating week during corn husking in 1916, he and Mother decided the work had become too strenuous for him. They decided to rent the farm to a young Swedish couple, sell the machinery, and move into town. So we prepared for the farm sale.

I remember some of the words on our sale bill that winter: "Free Lunch at Noon," set in bold type. This notice often appeared on farm sale bills during the early part of this century, and it was one way of assuring a good attendance, even in near-zero weather. I also remember "Banty" Hopkins, the auctioneer. His red face, gravelly voice, and raunchy humor entertained the crowd and coaxed the top dollar for livestock and machinery.

After an hour or more of chanting, Banty announced that lunch was ready at the house. I had stayed out of school to help hand out the lunch bags to the multitude swarming around the sunny side of the house. The white bags contained a bun filled with a generous slice of ham or pork, home-grown apples, and a doughnut. There was always one man who came to every sale and was the first in line for lunch, and also the last. Several large coffee boilers (two borrowed from the neighbors) were filled to the brim. We served the coffee in tin cups that burned lips unless one waited for the coffee to cool down. That didn't take long on a winter day in Iowa.

WE MOVED to Manchester in time for me to enter the second semester of the sixth grade. It was a frightening experience to transfer from a one-room country school to a graded city system. One pupil across the aisle said to me the first day, "You probably won't pass." That didn't help any.

I was miserable that first day at recess time. It was cold and I hovered near the building, afraid to venture out to join in the games. I heard someone refer to me as a "country kid." That didn't help any either. In those days that expression branded one as odd and subject to snide remarks. Finally a couple of boys came over, asked my name, and invited me to join their group. I declined their invitation, but they had made me feel good. They were a grade ahead of me so I didn't see much of them, but I never forgot them.

Although my homeroom teacher was friendly and helped me adjust and feel more at ease, some of the "itinerant" teachers didn't seem to care. When the music teacher came into the room, I wanted to hide under my desk. We had to do a lot of "tra-la-la's" and "do-re-mi's," which I thought were silly. I didn't mind singing real words in a group because I could be drowned out by the others. The final exam in music was the most painful experience of all. Each student had to stand up and sing one verse of a song. It had something to do with a

linden tree. When my turn came, I stood up beside my desk and just read the words in a sing-song monotone. The red-haired girl in front snickered during my performance. She was laughing so much that she did poorly when it was her turn. I wanted to hate her, but I couldn't because I had a crush on her.

Our new house in Manchester was a disappointment compared to the farmhouse. It was next to the last house on the south side of East Main Street just beyond the water mains and sewers. One redeeming feature was the electric lights in each room. They were single bulbs hanging on a cord from the center of the ceiling. The house had seven rooms and two paths out back. One path led to the outhouse and the other to the well. The house was heated with a stove in the dining room and the range in the kitchen. Oftentimes in the winter, frost would form on the walls of the upstairs bedrooms. A shed for wood and coal was attached to the kitchen. There was a chicken house and a barn on the back of the lot for the chickens and the fresh cow we had brought with us. In the summer her milk would be cooled with one luxury of town life—ice delivered to the door.

Mother soon traded in her upright piano for a new Superba phonograph. It must have broken her heart to part with the piano. It had been in her family since her childhood. But she was the only one who could play it. None of her children showed any evidence of musical ability. Trading in the piano was the only way my folks felt that they could afford to yield to the pleadings of their teen-age children: "Let's get a phonograph. Everybody else has one!" It was a beautiful oak console. Dad did manage to get the dealer to throw in a couple of extra records. Mother selected "Beautiful Ohio" and "Wonderful Words of Life." The teenagers chose dance music by the Ted Lewis Jazz Band. Dad didn't get a choice; he just paid the bill.

COURTESY GERALD G. WILTSE

An unidentified driver waits to taxi traveling salesmen between Manchester's depot and the Clarence House hotel, in background. The author's father ran a dray line, which transported their suitcases and trunks.

SEVERAL PIONEER FEATURES on the streets of Manchester were beginning to disappear or change as the horseless carriage arrived — and tractors soon after. Hennesey's Livery Stable was converted to a car agency. Billie Burk's Blacksmith Shop became a machine shop. In both, the smell of horse manure was replaced by the smell of oil and grease. Some called it "progress."

Dad's job depended on such progress. He had bought out a dray line from a man who wanted to retire. The "equipment" consisted of one horse, one wagon, and one sledwagon, all three items in constant need of repair. They should have been retired too. Much of the draying business had been hauling trunks of samples for traveling salesmen from the depot across town to the show rooms at the Clarence House. But after World War I ended, the dray line served different customers. A restlessness seemed to have set in. Some people were moving to other towns to take new jobs. Some were moving to different houses in the same town. Some farmers were moving into town to let their sons run the family farm, often on a share basis.

This created a lot of moving jobs. To meet the growing need for faster service, Dad first converted our Model T passenger car to a truck. Then he bought a Republic truck — may its flat wheels rest in peace! The wheels were equipped with solid hard rubber tires — "no air inner tubes to go flat," the salesman had said. It wasn't too rough riding at first. But as time went by, and the rubber wore down toward the steel rims, it became like a lumber wagon with an engine up front.

Eventually my folks decided that they were ready to return to the farm. Now at the age of fifteen, I remained in town and boarded with a

private family. By this point in my life, I prided myself on the several jobs I had had. As a farm kid, I had sold religious pictures and bluing papers to the neighbors. (The bluing paper was put in the rinse water on wash day to keep the clothes white; strong laundry soaps tended to give the clothes a sickly yellow color.) In Manchester my first town job was selling *Liberty Magazine* at the railroad station to the traveling salesmen on the five daily passenger trains. I also delivered telegrams, weeded gardens and mowed lawns, cleaned Dr. Davis's dental office, and tended the public library's furnace. At the Hughes Dry Goods Store, I operated the little button-covering machine for women who wanted their buttons to match their dress fabric.

By now, as a senior in high school, I had landed a steady job. I worked as a clerk for W. H. "Bill" Lafferty in his grocery store. "Staple and Fancy Groceries" was painted on the two large windows on either side of the store's entrance. From one of these windows, we clerks could see several blocks down to the side street to where Bill lived. Bill usually arrived at the store about an hour after opening time. The three clerks took turns opening the store at six A.M. in the summer and seven in the winter. We could see when Bill left his house, smoking his morning cigar. He walked with a middle-aged saunter, pausing occasionally to tip his hat to an approaching lady while removing the cigar from his mouth.

Before entering the store he would inspect the bushel baskets of apples, potatoes, and other produce that the opening clerk had carried out. After making a few minor adjustments, he would come inside and walk slowly to his office space behind the racks that held the caddies of cookies and crackers. After carefully removing his suit jacket and hanging it neatly, he would put on his brown cardigan sweater. He always wore a white shirt and a black string tie (except on St. Patrick's Day, when the tie was green).

When he was satisfied that everything was ship-shape and ready for business, he would leave the store for his regular morning shave at Arduser's barbershop, where he had his own personalized shaving mug and brush, with his name in gold letters. (Most prominent citizens

had this status symbol. The barber kept them in a sanitary glass case.)

Fresh from his morning shave, Bill Lafferty cut the figure of a well-built man with only a slight suggestion of a pot belly. With his brown wavy hair, blue eyes and ruddy cheeks, he was a handsome Irishman, and a good man to work for — except on a few occasions.

I remember two such occasions. One winter morning the clerk who was to open the store apparently overslept. Lafferty could see from

COURTESY GERALD G. WILTSE

"A handsome Irishman and a good man to work for," grocer Bill Lafferty (second from right) and his domain, c. 1930.

his house that the store was not open because the big window shade was still down. So he came down before his usual time and opened up himself. The rest of the day he grumbled that he "had been in business thirty years and still had to open his own store." That was *almost* the only time I saw him ruffled.

The other time was in the summer when the town merchants decided to stay open on Wednesday nights for farmers, who couldn't afford to leave their field work in the day. Bill had asked his clerks to work an extra four hours a week without additional pay. I told Bill that I usually had other plans for Wednesday nights. He was an easy-going person and probably remembered that he had been young once. He said that if I had a date or something on a particular Wednesday, I could be excused that night. So I made it a point to have a date for the

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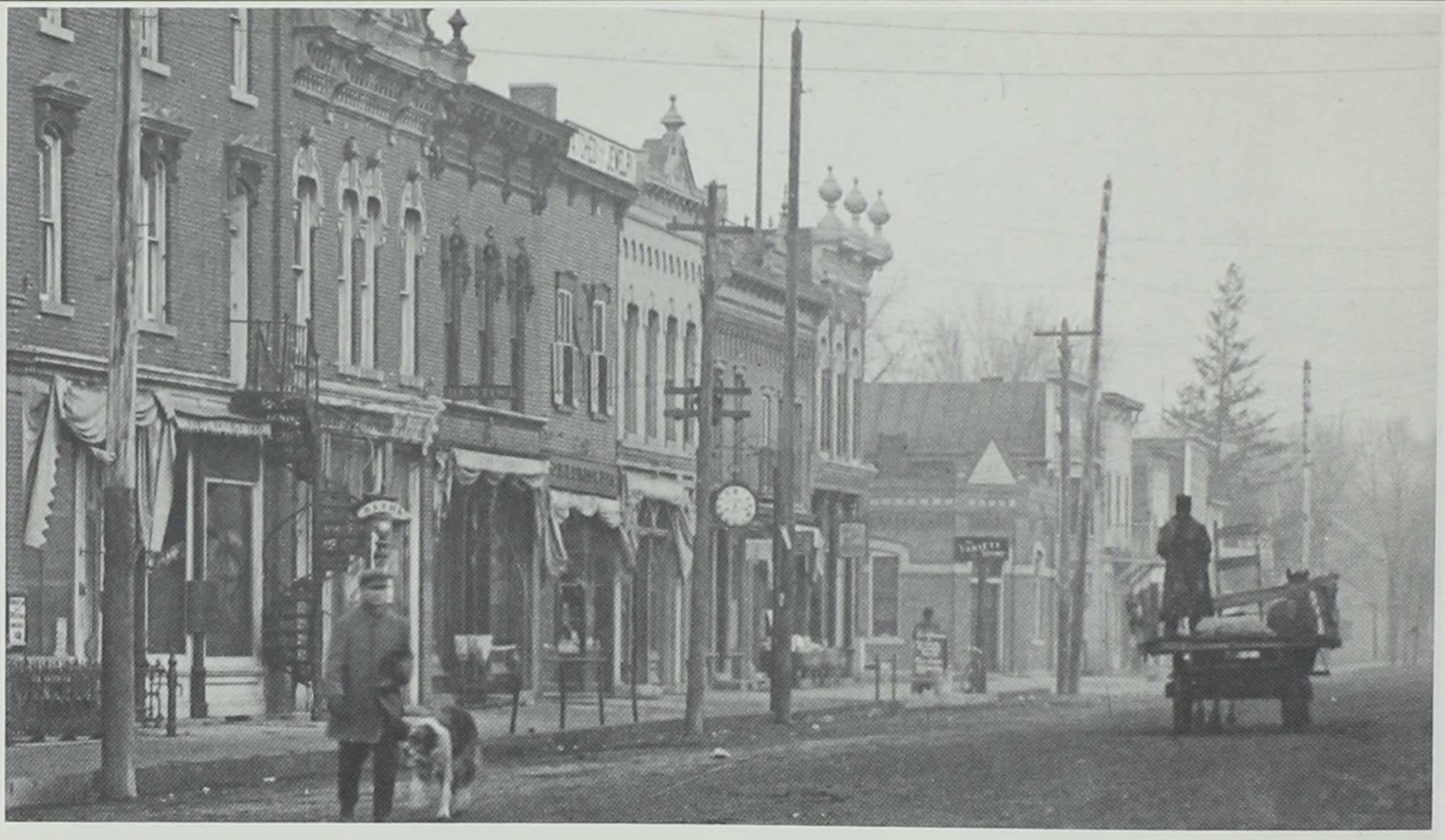

Manchester streets were busier on summer "Farmers' Nights," when rural families came into town.

next two Wednesday nights. When the third Wednesday night approached, he told me — in plain Irish — that I had better show up. I did.

SATURDAY NIGHT was another "farmers' night" in the summer. The sidewalks and stores were packed with people milling around, comparing notes on the crops and neighborhood gossip. At the store the early evening rush lasted until about nine o'clock. Then there was a lull until about eleven o'clock when the second show at the Plaza Theater let out. Then we were rushed again for the next half hour. At first I thought that it was inconsiderate of these late shoppers. Why couldn't they shop before the second show so that we could close earlier? But the answer was simple and reasonable. Most cars at that time were not enclosed and had no trunks. People had no way of locking up their groceries while they were at the show.

Every customer had the individual attention of a clerk. When a customer asked for a particular item, the clerk could find it with lightning speed once the lay-out of the store had been memorized. If a customer wanted just a few things, the clerk would tally the prices on a paper bag. Longer lists or "charges" would be itemized on a carbon pad. For delivery, an extra ten cents was charged.

We sold a lot of 49-pound bags of flour, bushels of apples, and 100-pound sacks of sugar, especially during canning season. Chocolate Cream Coffee was a big seller, although McCarthy's Elite Cafe down the street preferred Chase and Sanborn's. As we used the big red electric grinder, the aroma of freshly ground coffee spread throughout the store. We kept dill pickles, sauerkraut, and lard in barrels. Some customers would bring in gallon pails to be filled with lard. Eggs were sold in paper sacks. Our eggs were farm-fresh, brought in 30-dozen crates to be traded for groceries. Before selling them at a profit of two cents per dozen, the clerks candled them. The "candling machine" consisted of a small electric bulb inside a tin can with two holes the size of a half dollar. By holding the eggs up to the holes, the candler could see if the egg was "all clear." Dark spots would indicate that the farmer's wife had slipped in an oldie — perhaps to get even for the bad apple she found in last week's purchase.

Among our "fancy" items was lutefisk. It was stored during the summer in a dry place. As the holidays approached, the dry slabs were dusted off, and an attempt was made to make them respectable looking. We hung them outside every day in the hopes of attracting the attention of some of the Scandinavians in Man-

chester. Each day as I hung them out I wondered how they could be made edible and what in the world they tasted like. (I waited fifty years for the answer, when some Swedish friends had us over for a holiday supper. Uff da! I could have waited another fifty years.)

The limburger cheese was kept in a space halfway down the elevator behind a piece of loose limestone in the foundation. Bread from the local McKeag and Hall & Turner bakeries sold for eight to ten cents per loaf. On Saturdays we received a large box of whole wheat bread from a Dubuque bakery. I enjoyed inhaling deeply as I unpacked the loaves. They were always sold out by noon. Saturday was also fresh vegetable day, when we opened crates of head lettuce, celery and, once in a while, cauliflower. They came by rail from a wholesale house in Dubuque. People raised their own radishes, onions, peas, and string beans, or bought them directly from neighbors.

MY JOB at Lafferty's gave me opportunities to observe the adult world, which I would soon enter, as I followed the routine of opening and closing the store. We opened early to accommodate farmers (who were waiting for the dew to dry on the hay) and railroad workers. A couple of burly railroad men came by every morning for their daily supplies. One always wanted Horseshoe Chewing Tobacco, and the other wanted Copenhagen Snuff — "snoose" he called it. (Along the windy tracks it was easier to chew than to smoke, if one remembered not to spit into the wind.) One morning a well-dressed stranger came in and bought three bottles of vanilla extract. I watched him as he took them to the alley and drank all three. I looked at the label of a bottle still on the shelf and realized for the first time that vanilla has a strong alcohol content.

At closing time we clerks had to count the receipts in the cash register drawer and turn them in to Bill. We kept out ten dollars in change to start the next day. This change was put into a small bag and hidden on a shelf behind the Clabber Girl baking powder cans. (No self-respecting burglar would think of looking there.) The empty drawers of the cash register were always left open so would-be robbers would not damage them. National Cash Registers were not cheap even then.

Occasionally, about a half hour before closing time, several of Bill's cronies would gather in the backroom for a bit of bootleg. They insisted that Bill join them, and he often did. However, he seldom showed the effects of it. One day something went wrong. The quality of bootleg "alkie" for spiking soft drinks was not always the best. On this occasion one crony got sick, and another, who surely weighed three hundred pounds, passed out. The third friend hauled them down on the freight elevator and out the back door.

Bill was in great misery. He sat at his desk with his head resting in his hands. The head clerk was off that day so I took over. I counted the money from each drawer, made notes, put everything into a bag, and took it to Bill. He was too sick to speak, but I could tell by his Irish blue eyes as he looked at me that he was grateful. He managed to open the safe to put in the bag of money. Then he waved his hand as if to say, "Go home now, Lud, I'll be O.K."

MORE THAN HALF a century later on a hot afternoon, I found myself standing in front of the building where I had done some "growing up." There was nothing on the windows to indicate that this was once the place in which to buy staple and fancy groceries. In fact, the windows were decorated in such a way that I couldn't see in. I decided to have a look inside.

I gazed around at the beautiful mahogany paneling on the walls and ceiling. The invigorating aroma of freshly ground coffee had been replaced by the stale smell of malt. The bartender asked me what I'd have. "Pepsi, please," I answered her.

A bit later I headed south out of town, towards the "home farm," where my brother and sister-in-law live. Driving past familiar landmarks of my boyhood, I considered all the changes I had experienced in those early years — growing up on a farm, moving into town, working at an array of jobs. I was grateful now that I had learned to work hard when I was young. Since then it has seemed to come natural. □

Sheldon, Iowa during World War II

by Clarence Andrews

IN 1941—the year World War II started for the United States — Sheldon, Iowa, in northwest O'Brien County, was a town of about 3,800 people. That summer my wife and I moved to Sheldon, where I took the job of secretary to the Chamber of Commerce. From that position, I had a close-up view of how the war would gradually affect Sheldon, particularly its merchant community.

Before the war, Sheldon merchants, especially those dependent on the farm trade, had kept their businesses open ten or eleven hours a day. On Saturday nights store owners had never thought of closing until eleven o'clock. Farm families would drive into town to see a movie at the Iowa Theater or stand on the sidewalks talking, men in one group, women in another. "Some farmers do more farming in town on Saturday nights than they do all week out on the acres," one wag had said. Then at the last minute they would crowd into the shops to buy necessary supplies. As war-time merchandise shortages developed, Sheldon merchants began to cut back their hours, except for those who repaired automobiles and farm machinery — those people would work longer hours than ever.

As a newcomer in Sheldon, I soon noted that for many businesses there were, as the Rotary charter would have it, "one man and his competitor." There were two drug stores, two variety stores, two barbershops, two men's clothing stores, two jewelry stores, two newspapers, and so on. Often a "Hollander" would own one of these, an Irish Catholic the other

COURTESY SHELDON MAIL-SUN

Sheldon townspeople close their businesses to watch Company I of the Iowa National Guard, inducted into the regular army, march to the depot in February 1941.

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Breaking the pattern, there were three railroad lines, several auto dealers and service stations, three lumberyards, two implement dealers, two grain elevators, one hotel, four or five grocery stores, two restaurants (the Iowana Cafe was a "candy kitchen" owned by a Greek

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family — nearly every small Iowa town had one of these) — and one theater.

Almost all of the merchants and lawyers and other professional people depended directly or indirectly on the 72,500 farmers and townspeople who constituted the population of the "Big Four" counties — Osceola, O'Brien, Lyon, and Sioux. The income from grain, livestock, and farm produce, and the million and a half dollars in checks from federal farm agencies, flowed annually through the farmers' hands into the merchants' cash registers, offsetting the steady flow of dollars from the merchants to their suppliers in the Twin Cities, Omaha, Des Moines, and Chicago.

To compete for these dollars with businesses in four county-seat towns and other nearby towns, the Sheldon Chamber of Commerce staged various events — such as an annual air show. The first air show had been staged in 1932 in a cow pasture. With the help of federal Works Progress Administration funds, the pasture had since been converted into an airport and christened "Roscoe Turner Field" after the nationally known flier, who came to Sheldon for the occasion. (Turner had won several international air races, had appeared in films, and was often photographed either with a movie star or an African lion that flew with him in his two-seater plane.)

When we came to Sheldon in 1941, it was to fill the chamber secretary position vacated by John Chapman, who had left for military service. Just thirteen days before the air show, I met with Mayor L. A. "Hap" Houlihan (who was also the town's funeral director), Chamber of Commerce president Richard F. "Dick" Kehrberg (who owned the Iowa Theater), department store owner Louis Wolf, insurance agent John Walters, and Dr. Kermit Myers. These men were the prime movers behind the air show. With them was Al Vint, owner of one of the barbershops, who was president of the Sheldon Chapter of the National Aeronautic Association (Chapter Number 1), and who had probably logged more flying time than all the other local flying enthusiasts together. Moreover, Vint was a close friend of Roscoe Turner and many American fliers. In the next two weeks, I spent a great many hours in Vint's barbershop, making telephone connections with an assortment of stunt pilots while he trimmed hair and shaved whiskers. Once the connections were made, Vint did the talking.

Sunday, August 17 was the first day of the air show. An unexpected chilly drizzle forced cancellation of the parachute jumps and other events but not the featured attraction, a "wedding in the clouds." Local ministers had decried the wedding as bordering on the sacrilegious (particularly on a Sunday) and refused to take part. So Mayor Hap Houlihan was pressed into service in his official capacity and his black undertaker's suit, even though there was some question about his authority outside — or above — the city limits. Hap, the bride and groom (a local couple), and Al Vint in dual role as pilot and witness, crowded into the small plane and the wedding took place as

COURTESY SHELDON MAIL-SUN

Until the war took hold, the Chamber of Commerce staged attractions such as the air show, officiated here by pilot Roscoe Turner (left) and barber Al Vint.

COURTESY SHELDON MAIL-SUN

Leaving for "war games" in 1941, Company I would later head for Ireland, still closer to the war in Europe.

advertised. Loudspeakers broadcast the ceremony to the audience below. But due to the weather, the admission was only a portion of what we needed to pay our bills. We were fortunate that there was just enough moisture in the rain gauge to satisfy the terms of our insurance policy. The check was enough to leave us with a hundred-dollar balance.

Although we began to talk of next year's show with hopes of better weather, that would be Sheldon's last air show. Already the Sheldon Junior College was conducting pre-flight training for future military pilots at Roscoe Turner Field, and World War II would prevent any more community-sponsored air shows.

DESPITE PRESIDENT Roosevelt's claim that he "hated war," there had been ominous implications for the nation's future. The Nazi invasion of Holland and the European coastal lowlands was a major concern for the sizable number of area Dutch families (and those elsewhere in the state) who had strong family and religious ties to Holland and the Friesland community along the North Sea. Sons of several area families had been drafted for one year of service beginning in October of 1940. On a cold snowy day in February of 1941, the town had virtually closed down as business people, preachers, teachers, schoolchildren, and parents had marched to Sheldon's Union Depot with the members of Company I of the Iowa National Guard, which had been inducted ("federalized") into the regular army. That August, as the townspeople had prepared for the air show, Company I, with a half million other soldiers, had participated in three months of "war games" in eastern Texas and southern Louisiana. Now the soldiers were being told that their one year of service was being extended.

But life in Sheldon, as elsewhere, had to go on. The Farmers Cooperative Elevator was building a new high-rise concrete grain storage bin ("a prairie skyscraper") adjacent to the Omaha tracks. I proposed to the Chamber of Commerce that the town celebrate with a "Farmers' Day." The idea wasn't immediately accepted. Some Sheldon citizens were still bitter over the demise of the Sheldon District Fair

after 1922 (and envious of the subsequent growth of the Clay County Fair forty miles to the east). Some merchants continued the age-old argument that the cooperative concept (represented in Sheldon by the elevator and a cooperative oil company) was against free enterprise and therefore shouldn't be celebrated. The manager of the small Quaker Oats elevator in Sheldon (which was then being sued by the cooperative elevator) also opposed the idea and found many supporters among business people and others. Nevertheless, the Sheldon Farmers' Day was set for Saturday, November 8. The day began with a parade of farm tractors, trucks, and other implements, but just as a free picnic lunch was about to be served along Second Avenue, with the new grain bin looming in the background, the rain came. That night a speaker recited the history of the American cooperative movement to an audience of farmers crowded into the Community Building auditorium, where Company I had drilled nine months earlier.

The Chamber of Commerce and the merchants next geared up for the busiest season of the year—the Christmas season. In the past this had been inaugurated with a Santa Claus handing out candy at the Community Building, but I proposed that the chamber bring in an outfit from Fort Dodge for a parade on Saturday, December 6. The parade included floats, the three Wise Men on camels, shepherds with sheep, Santa Claus and "Mary Christmas." Some merchants argued for only the traditional Santa Claus, but when I pointed out that the parade producer furnished several dozen costumes for local children to wear in the parade, the proposal carried — provided Santa Claus would still hand out candy.

Still there were the doomsayers who knew too well Iowa's unpredictable weather. They looked back to the drizzle and rain for the air show and Farmers' Day, and recalled that just a year before on Armistice Day, one of the worst blizzards in the history of northwest Iowa had trapped pheasant and duck hunters and had caused several deaths. But December 6 was warm and sunny (for northwest Iowa) and the parade went off as planned. Even the doomsayers were all smiles as parents crowded into the stores to begin shopping.

THE NEXT AFTERNOON, my wife and I were sitting in our apartment reading the Sunday Sioux City newspaper when there was a knock on our door. It was our neighbors, Betty and Earl Smith.

"Aren't you listening to the radio?" they asked.

"Why should we?"

"The Japanese have bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii," they said. They looked at each other apprehensively. Betty and Earl had been married only a short time, and he was a grocery wholesaler — not a critical occupation — with a low draft number.

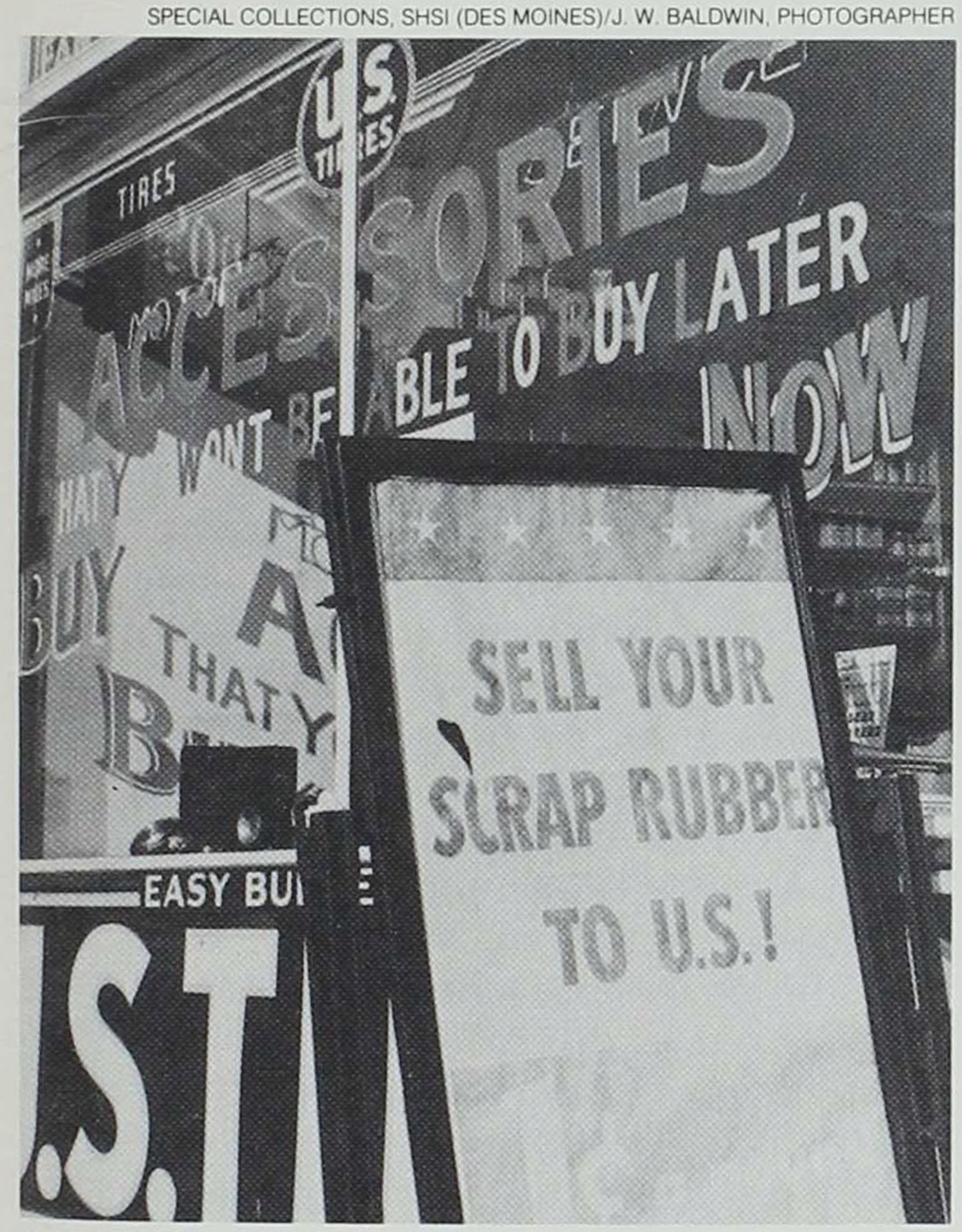
We had barely turned on the radio when the phone rang. It was Dick Kehrberg. "Call the chamber directors for an 8 A.M. meeting Monday morning," he instructed.

The holiday glow from Saturday was gone as we met in the chamber's office the next morning. "We'll be at war with the Japanese *and* the Axis within a day or two," Kehrberg said. "From now on we can forget petty differences — winning the war will be our only concern. There will be shortages and rationing of consumer goods, an increase in the draft, higher taxes, price controls, shortages of manpower."

We all knew that the Christmas furloughs promised to Company I would be cancelled, and we now realized that some of the boys might never see Sheldon or their families again. Soon the Iowa National Guard was in Ireland, and our radios were carrying a popular song, "Johnny Doughboy Found a Rose in Ireland." But the song was not warmly received by Sheldon young women whose boyfriends and fiances were now quartered there.

The Chamber of Commerce began securing merchant participation in the war effort. Through the influence of "Tobe" Diamond (the Northern Iowa Federal District Attorney and almost the only Democrat in town), Sheldon became the headquarters for war bond and defense stamp sales in northwest Iowa. As in many other Iowa communities, the City of Sheldon, the McGlothen-Cowie American Legion Post, and the Chamber of Commerce erected a billboard which would display the name of every resident who would serve in the Armed Forces during World War II. Gold

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, SHSI (DES MOINES)/J. W. BALDWIN, PHOTOGRAPHER



A Des Moines sign for scrap rubber repeats the message all Iowans were hearing: save and salvage for the war.

stars would be placed beside the names of those killed in action.

The Chamber of Commerce also became the center for instituting ration and price controls in several counties. Automobile owners received "A," "B," or "C" coupon books for gasoline, depending on the owners' occupations and the uses to which automobiles were put. "A" books were issued to those who used their automobiles for non-essential purposes, "B" books to those who drove to essential jobs in industry or food preparation, and "C" books to those who contributed significantly to the war effort. Automobile tires could be purchased only with a certificate specifying the need for tires in aiding the war effort.

Colonel H. G. Geiger, who had commanded Company I in World War I, headed the committee handling the details of rationing. At its first meeting he looked around the room. "Before we get to our main problem," he said, "I have one. Last fall I bought a set of new tires for my car, intending to put them on in the spring." He was obviously aware of how it would look for the committee chairperson to sport new tires.

Board members told him to keep the tires. We reminded him that people knew he was an honest man who, moreover, had had a long record of military service.

"But people will still say I used my position on this committee to get the tires," the colonel said. So he returned the tires. Within the week, townspeople knew the name of the man who had purchased the colonel's tires from the dealer — without the necessary certificate and at a good profit for the seller. In small towns, news travels fast.

Controls to prevent inflation of prices for scarce merchandise presented a difficult problem, as I soon found out in discussions with merchants. Regulations required that they price merchandise on the basis of late summer prices. But retailers of women's clothing pointed out that in the late summer they had been having sales of summer styles, and the sales prices should not be applied to new fall merchandise. Moreover, merchants in area towns complained because the new regulations were being explained by the Chamber of Commerce secretary from Sheldon, rather than by representatives of their own communities.

In February, Sheldon became a center for a company of the Iowa State Guard, which replaced the now-absent National Guard. The federal government could not mobilize the State Guard in any way; it would be used only within Iowa as the governor might order — as a police auxiliary in civil disorders, or against Axis sympathizers engaged in acts of sabotage or espionage.

Sheldon became headquarters for the First Battalion (Northern Iowa) of the Iowa State Guard, with Dr. (later colonel) C. N. Struyker in command, and the site of Company B of the Second (Northwest Iowa) Regiment. Company B filled up at once, its roster consisting of older men (such as Hap Houlihan and area farmer Thys Koole, both in their mid-fifties); married men (who at that time did not anticipate federal service); and young men of pre-draft age (who believed that service with the State Guard might make them better soldiers when the time came for federal service). Many of the new soldiers were Sheldon businessmen. As in the case of Company I, a number of members were from Sioux Center,

Orange City, Boyden, Hull, and other area towns.

IN THE SPRING of 1942 the war was brought home to us in an unusual way. Every year a young Japanese-American had come to Sheldon to sort male and female chicks, newly hatched at Skewis Hatchery. But now owner Mason Skewis announced that his chicken sexer would not be able to come to Sheldon; he was in an internment camp in California.

Another war-related event occurred that spring that would ultimately lead to major changes in Iowa's agriculture and also produce Sheldon's biggest business. Everett Scholten, a director of the Farmers Elevator, and I attended a meeting in Mankato, Minnesota, at which federal Department of Agriculture representatives asked those attending to emphasize the importance of growing soybeans on our area farms. A relatively unknown Chinese legume at that time, soybeans were a potential source of protein and oil — the latter badly needed since Japanese successes in the Pacific had ended imports of coconut oil. In the course of the meeting, Scholten and I asked how oil was obtained from soybeans. We were told that mills would have to be built to process the beans, and that one of the byproducts was soybean meal, which could be fed to farm animals.

In Sheldon, officers of the chamber and the Farmers Co-op elevator met at once to discuss the possibility of a soybean mill in Sheldon to be operated by the co-op. At that time the co-op was suing the Quaker Oats Company on the grounds that its Sheldon elevator had been illegally operating in restraint of trade. Now an agreement was reached — Quaker Oats would sell its ancient, small, wooden elevator to the co-op, and the co-op would drop the suit.

The Quaker facility, on the Omaha tracks only a block from the co-op, became the site of the Big Four Co-op Soybean Processing Mill, its name derived from its ownership by farmer-owned cooperatives in the four northwest Iowa counties. This cooperation meant that more than ever, Sheldon would become the focus of farm activity in the four counties. The following spring northwest Iowa farmers began planting soybeans in quantity, and by the fall of 1943, under the management of Charles "Chuck" Hanson, the Big Four Mill would produce its first oil and meal.

AS THE NATION slowly began the enormous effort to fight three well-prepared and experienced adversaries on at least three distant fronts, Sheldon began to seek other means to do its part. With no industry to convert to war production, the area's biggest contributions were obviously food production and men and women for the armed forces.

Dick Kehrberg proposed a symbolic device to focus the townspeople on the war effort. Ten-gallon cream cans with red, white, and blue stripes were attached to electrolier posts in the business district. A poster attached to each can urged passersby to drop in their small change. The money would be given to the federal government to buy arms. Sheldon got state-wide publicity for this idea, but little money.

Then our neighbor, Betty Smith, a former music teacher, composed a pageant, "When Will Sheldon Seek Shelter?" The huge cast outnumbered the audience. As the cast sang, "And Company B's a joy to see/As it parades most manfully . . ." members of the company, in uniform with shotguns on their shoulders, marched in the front doors of the Community Building auditorium and down the aisles to the stage.

In the spring and summer of 1942, volunteers for the war effort took over the chamber office. There was barely room for my desk. One thing became clear to me: the original reasons for my employment no longer existed. At the end of August, the directors and I agreed that I could probably serve the war effort better elsewhere.

Throughout the 1930s I had sold and serviced office machines. In recent months Sheldon business people had already called upon me to service their machines. Repairmen from Sioux City and Sioux Falls would no

Opposite: Dick Kehrberg (Chamber of Commerce president) and Mayor L. A. "Hap" Houlihan check homefront donations in a Penny-a-Day can on a Sheldon street.

COURTESY SHELDON HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM

COURTESY SHELDON HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM

Young people joined in scrap metal drives and other efforts to salvage materials during the war.

longer travel to Sheldon because of gasoline rationing and the difficulty of buying tires and automobile parts. They didn't need Sheldon's business anyway. Because new machines were not available, they had plenty of repair work in their own hometowns.

I rented a vacant room in the basement of the Schneider brothers' Security State Bank and opened "The House of Andrews." Because this business was classified as important to the war effort I was granted a deferment from military service and a "C" coupon book for gasoline. I hired two young men to help me repair office machines. But it was not long before I had the same manpower shortage facing other businesses; one was on his way to the navy and the other on his way to the army.

THE WAR was affecting other businesses and organizations in Sheldon. The junior college closed its doors because of shortages of teachers and male students, and its training program for pilots was taken over by the school district at a new airport northeast of town. Al Vint closed his barbershop and moved to Texas to train pilots for the army, and Gene Turner, who shined shoes in the barbershop, left with him.

Other familiar faces began disappearing from the streets and shops and from Company B as well, as men enlisted or were drafted. Other men, in non-essential civilian jobs but ineligible for the draft, said goodbye to their families and left to take jobs in war industries, mostly in aircraft factories and shipyards on the West Coast. Several businesses closed their doors "for the duration." It became easy for Sheldonites to understand the popular song, "They're either too young or too old," which lamented the scarcity of male companions for young ladies left behind.

Those who stayed were finding their own ways of helping. Housewives donated unusable cooking fats. Citizens brought in rusting farm implements and junk automobiles beyond repair to be melted down with Minnesota iron ore to produce steel for armaments. Automobile owners were asked to turn in floor mats, even though the rubber in them was of limited use, and even though hardware stores continued to sell new floor mats. Schoolchildren were sent out into the country to collect milkweed pods; the floss would be used to fill flotation jackets for air crews forced down over the Pacific or the Atlantic.

A meat-packing plant in Estherville offered good prices for surplus horseflesh. As the horse population dropped, "steak" and "hamburger" from goat meat and horsemeat fed the Armed Forces. Leaders of chow lines at the doors of

army mess halls would whinny back to those behind them, whereupon many of the latter would repair to the Service Club for a hamburger — which often as not was made of goat meat.

The Iowana Cafe closed because the sugar shortage cut off the supply of many of its sweets. On one occasion, a Sheldon grocery wholesaler discovered an Iowa corn-processing plant that would trade sugar for badly needed corn. A salesman for the wholesaler found a nearby farmer with surplus corn in storage. A deal was made and soon Sheldon area grocers had a supply of sugar.

Finally the war struck home in the most severe way. In January 1943, Company I with other Iowa National Guard companies landed at Oran, Algeria, on the Mediterranean coast. In Tunisia in early February they came up against the experienced Afrika Korps of Nazi general Erwin Rommel. On February 20, Private Wallace L. Bunker, trying to rescue wounded companions, was killed. Bunker was the first Sheldon soldier to lose his life in World War II. On the night of April 8, three more died in the battle for Fondouk Pass. Still in Tunisia, in the even bloodier battle for "Hill 609," Staff Sergeant William Stryk, one of four Sheldon brothers in Company I, was killed.

THE 75,000 Italian and German soldiers who surrendered in Tunisia, after Hill 609 and Fondouk Pass, were to have some significance to me. Several hundred of these men were brought to Iowa to help short-handed Iowa farmers produce food. They were housed in prisoner-of-war camps, one of which was at Algona, eighty miles east of Sheldon. When the Algona camp opened, I received a contract to service the camp's office machines. I suggested to the camp quartermaster, a former Sheldon resident, that because of the uncertainties I faced regarding the draft or enlistment, the camp should set up its own repair shop. I would train two or three mechanically minded "Kriegies" to repair and adjust machines.

And so I came into personal contact with several of the men who had faced Sheldon soldiers in combat. My impressions of them, conditioned by several years of journalistic accounts of the fanaticism of Hitler and Mussolini, soon changed. They talked about their wives, their children, their parents, their hometowns. And although they insisted that Hitler would win the war, they longed for it to end so they could return home.

By June of 1944, the Armed Forces were drafting men with children, including many of my Sheldon business associates. So I decided to ask my draft board to cancel my deferred status. On June 7 I made my last trip to the Algona prisoner-of-war camp. There I showed the prisoners that morning's *Des Moines Register* with its story and photos of the Allied landing at Normandy the day before. They refused to believe what they saw. "That's American propaganda," they said. "You'll never be able to invade Hitler's *Festung Europa.*"

I told them that I would soon be in the Armed Forces. One man reached into his pocket, took out a pocket knife, opened it, and placed the point against my throat. "Better I cut your throat than you go into the army," he said.

Another prisoner broke the tension. "If they're taking him," he said to the others, "the American army really is desperate."

On Monday, August 14 — just three years after Sheldon's air show — I stood at attention in Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, raised my right arm, and promised to serve my country faithfully. I was gone for twenty months and served on a B-29 crew in the U.S. Army Air Force. On May 2, 1946, almost ten months after the Japanese surrendered, I returned home to Sheldon on the Omaha railroad. As I waited for the baggage wagon to bring my B-4 bag, "Zip" Hudson, the depot agent, came up beside me. "Why are you still wearing a uniform?" he asked.

For most of Sheldon, the war had already ended. □

NOTE ON SOURCES

Sources consulted for this article include back issues of the *Sheldon Mail* (including the "40 Years Ago" column); the *Sheldon Area Centennial, 1872–1972;* and Richard E. Bauer's *The Spirit of the Guard: The Iowa National Guard in Two Wars* (Lake Mills, Iowa, 1981). Special thanks to Ralph Hollander, Richard Bauer, and the *Sheldon Mail-Sun* for helping to locate photographs.

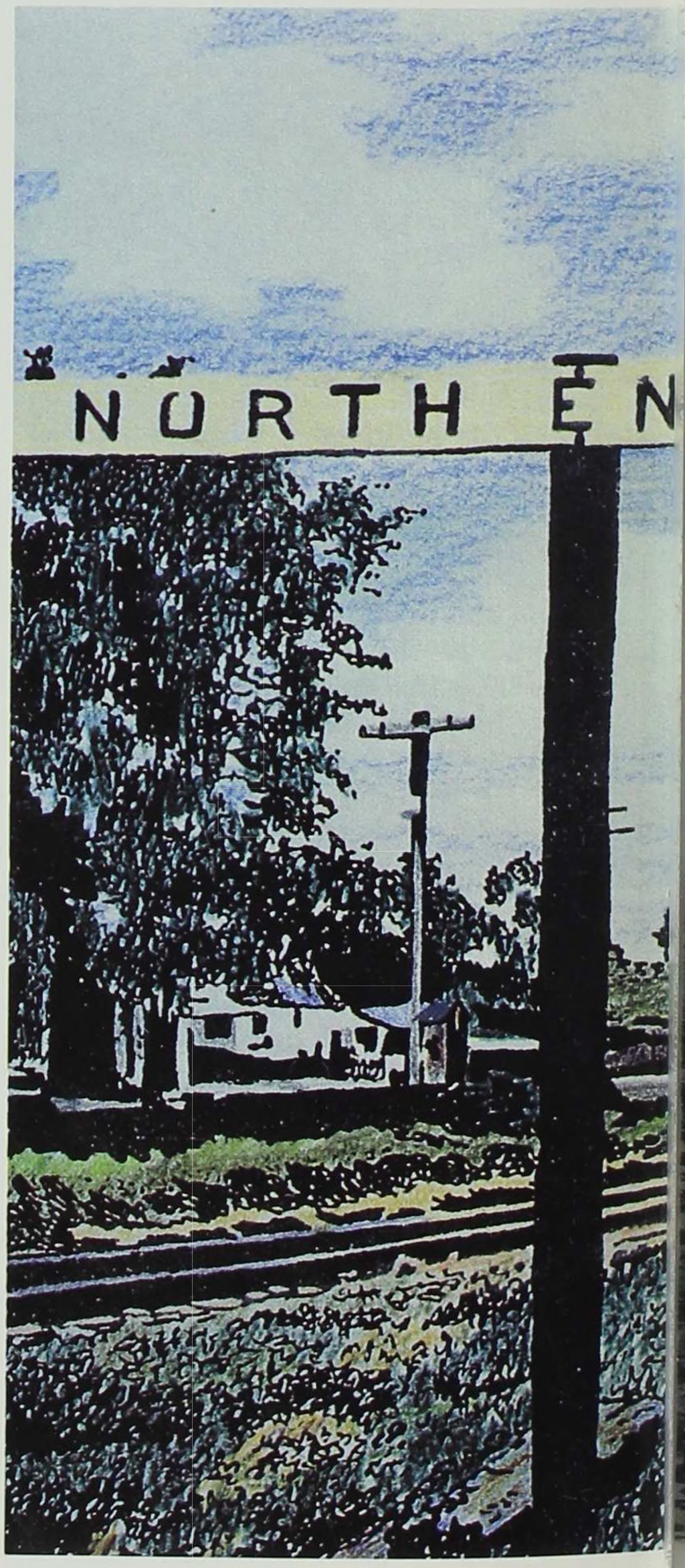
My Milwaukee

by Evan Garrett

THE OCCASION for these musings was the absorption, in January 1986, of the Milwaukee Road into the Soo Line Railroad. The tracks of the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad once criss-crossed eastern Iowa and much of the Midwest and even stretched a long tentacle, the "Pacific Extension," to the shores of Puget Sound. Changes in America's economy and particularly the advent of the automobile and paved roads, however, reduced the need for many of these rail routes. The Milwaukee Road, in common with many other companies, sought survival through abandonment of unprofitable lines and finally merger, which cost the railroad its corporate identity.

Back in the time of my youth, the booming years following the Second World War, the C.M.St.P.&P. played a profound role in nurturing my awareness and love of the world of railroading. My memories took shape in and about the small southeastern Iowa prairie town of North English, on the line from Cedar Rapids to Ottumwa. One hundred years ago this trackage provided the Milwaukee Road's initial link to Kansas City, but the indirect routing — in addition to frequent flooding, because of the many watercourses along which it was built — had long since relegated the line to a secondary status.

My thoughts reach back to summer afternoons at my grandmother's house, atop Cherokee Hill and overlooking the draw in which the railroad yard lay and, beyond that, the rest of the town. The wail of a southbound freight train's whistle would bring me racing breakneck to the foot of a giant elm, from whose vantage I drank in the sight of a venerable Mikado (a steam locomotive designed for freight service) drifting down into town with a mixed score of cars. More often than not, the crew would tie up on the long passing siding in front of the fading gray depot, then walk up the



Garrett drew these scenes from his 1977 photos.

N; L I S H

BOTH ILLUSTRATIONS COURTESY THE AUTHOR

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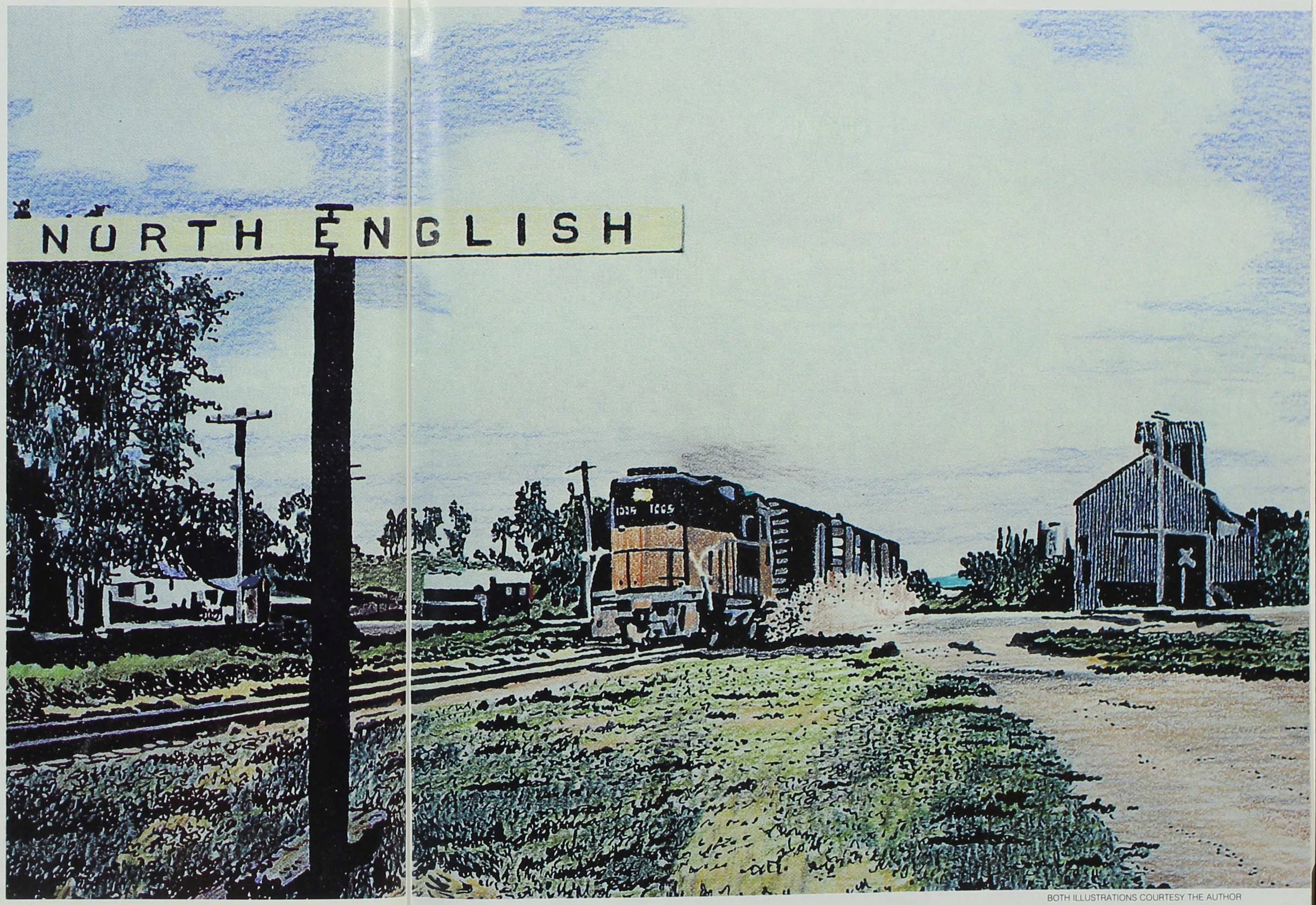

Garrett drew these scenes from his 1977 photos.

BOTH ILLUSTRATIONS COURTESY THE AUTHOR


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hill on Main Street to Coffman's Cafe for "beans." There were on occasion as many as three trains in town at once, a circumstance for which many a lonely railfan today might gladly sacrifice his eye teeth.

My grandfather had begun his career as a section foreman for the Milwaukee at Amana. By the time I made my appearance in his life, he had settled down to a coal dealership in North English (people still bought that commodity by the truckload for home-heating purposes) but he never forgot his connection with the railroad or his pride in the Milwaukee. Colorful calendars from the company graced his office walls, together with some from the Louisville & Nashville, which originated his consignments of Kentucky coal. Through his continued acquaintance with the railroaders on the division, I felt a certain affinity for the gentlemen in their white caps and striped overalls who indulged my hours of watching from the station platform as they shunted box cars and hoppers on the siding and team track.

My own bedroom window faced out over the rolling southern Iowa hills to where the track traversed the English River valley about one and a half miles distant. Many a night I lay with my ear pressed to the screen to hear a northbound train call for the crossing at Cuba, then square its shoulders and gather its breath for the assault on the long grade up out of the valley and over the hill into North English. My father recounted that on the curve at the foot of that grade, back before the First World War, a tank car had exploded and sent half of the tank slicing off into the adjoining woods. Years later, squirrel hunters employed the unrecovered debris as a shelter against bitter winter winds.

From the time that the railroads emerged as this country's first self-conscious "great industry," they left their physical mark upon the land. Even now, as farmers' plows, highway realignments, and the inexorable march of nature strive to eradicate the right-of-way from which the last rails were removed in 1982, there are traces of the Milwaukee's presence. When the road stretched across the rolling loam hills of Iowa and Keokuk counties in the 1880s, the builders found good ballast in short supply. Consequently, the company inaugurated an operation to dig gumbo clay from the English River bottomland at Cuba and fire it into a brick-like consistency. A century later the kilns and cookhouse, station and water tank have all long since vanished, but Cuba may still be identified by three quarter-mile-long "pits." At one time, the property owner pridefully mowed the grassy banks and stocked the collected waters with bullheads and bluegills. Shady cottonwoods no longer overhang the pits, whose waters now are probably too silted and shallow to support fish anymore.

I think I first apprehended the significance of change when, about the time I was expected to forsake grammar school for the challenges of high school, suddenly the familiar, if somewhat mournful moan of Milwaukee steam whistles ceased to echo up out of the valley, displaced by the strident blat of what I knew to be diesels. For the next two weeks, before I caught the opportunity to look over the newcomers, my curiosity and imagination conjured images inspired by my grandfather's calendars, of chrome-accented streamliners leading the Olympian Hiawatha. What disappointment I felt the day I rode down Main Street to spy an orange-and-black hood unit, the first of what would be many of these more prosaic "road-switchers" in my train-watching future!

While I matured and went on to a larger world, the horizons of the railroad began to shrink. The only passenger service I remember, a daily gas-electric "doodle-bug," had been withdrawn before the advent of the diesels. The depot itself disappeared in a 1963 fire from an explosion at a nearby bulk oil plant. Considering the decline in business already evident by that time, the railroad chose not to rebuild but to let the last agent, Carl Zimmerman, conduct his business from the seat of a pickup truck. Service frequency diminished and eventually, with no remaining traffic source to detain a train from passing straight through town, all tracks but the main line were removed. Ranks of cornpickers and fertilizer wagons began to encroach upon the weedy verge, spilling over from trackside agribusiness firms.

In May 1977, I returned to Iowa for a family visit. The "Muscatine-Montezuma" line of the Rock Island (which had performed the rest of

Locomotive 1005 heads under the overpass bridge.

my initiation into trainwatching) had dissolved during my absence, and I wanted to make certain that I saw "my" Milwaukee before it, too, abandoned me. I was fortunate to choose a sunny, warm Thursday morning, the kind of spring day when you can smell the freshness of the grass and the rich aroma of recently plowed soil.

I first caught sight of the train as it leaned into the wide bend at Webster around 10:30 A.M. On the point ran diesel locomotive 1005, a model GP30, long hood forward, with four box cars bound from Ottumwa to Amana and the requisite orange Milwaukee-built caboose. After a curt toot on the airhorns for the sole grade crossing in the small town, this shadow of what I had once known rolled past the Warder & Lee elevators. Iowa's farmlands sometimes produce corn in such quantity that these grain bins will not hold it all; I have seen corn piled in the center of the street, fifteen feet high and a block long. But now the corn leaves Webster in trucks, not Milwaukee box cars or covered hoppers, and 1005 had no reason to slacken her pace.

This might be my last opportunity to follow a train on this line (as it proved to be), so I jumped into my station wagon and the chase was on. State Highway 149 took a tack away from the rail line, rejoining only about a mile from North English, but the train's leisurely progress allowed me to get ahead. Near South English, in line with my bedroom window, I slowed to hear the whistle for Cuba — a moment from my childhood, never to be repeated. Then, I sped on to the "overhead bridge."

There was nothing particularly outstanding about this structure: it was just a two-lane highway bridge of cast concrete that was a bit too narrow and had to be approached on an abominably tight S-curve. But in a land devoted to the monotonous regularity of a road describing each and every section line on the map, such an aberration becomes a local institution. The bridge provided for me a splendid vantage point from which to observe 1005 surmounting the grade up from the river valley. Her black-and-orange livery displayed a liberal dusting of limestone from the occasional application of fresh ballast along the line (no gumbo or cinders in 1977). As a blue haze shot up from the turbo exhaust on the far side of the bridge, my mind sprang back momentarily to a day thirty years ago when my mother drove across the bridge just as a very hard-working and somewhat ill-fired Mikado passed below, engulfing our car in a cloud of black smoke and soot.

The overhead bridge marked the summit of the grade up from the English River; from there, it was downhill for a mile into North English. As the train would not be slowing for the town — let alone stopping — I dared not waste any time getting down to the former station site, now indicated only by a diminutive signboard. The engineer was already blasting for the crossing as I knelt to frame the train beside that post in my camera's viewfinder. The flashing of a shutter can do so much to capture a fragment of history or even to evoke memories of a whole way of life. I stood again and turned to watch as 1005 and her train receded to the east, past the sumac that reclaimed the acre my grandfather has used as a coal yard, and out of sight up the draw.

I was aware at the time of the historical potential of the image I had just recorded. That is the reason I had gone to chase the Milwaukee that morning. But I do not think I will ever be comfortable with the rate at which the changes occur. By 1982 every aspect of the railroad had vanished: the train, the track, the signboard, the crossbucks, even Home Lumber Company's decrepit trackside elevator. A restructuring Milwaukee Road abandoned the trackage south of Amana to Ottumwa in 1980, retired its GP30 diesels, and in 1985, the company itself merged into the Soo Line. In 1987 the Highway Department eliminated the overhead bridge and its S-curve. Like this particular railroad line, there is no reason for them any longer.

On the other hand, our experiences are a part of our reality. My memories of the Milwaukee during my childhood — and of the last brief but fond reacquaintance — will be with me forever. I come from a people who find it perfectly natural to give such directions as: "Go down to the corner and turn right where the seed house used to be." The "seed house" was demolished thirty years ago, but we still know where to turn. □

CONTRIBUTORS

Richard Acton, the fourth Lord Acton, is a barrister and free-lance writer now living between Oxfordshire, England, and Cedar Rapids, Iowa. His article "To Be Free" on the case of Ralph appeared in the Summer *Palimpsest*. He was born in England, raised in Rhodesia, and educated at Oxford University. He has worked in business, banking, and law in England, the United States, and Africa. Most recently he was a senior law officer in the Ministry of Legal and Parliamentary Affairs for the government of Zimbabwe.

Clarence Andrews has three degrees from the University of Iowa. He has published two volumes of literary history and has completed a third. He is also the author of a number of articles on midwestern history.

Evan Garrett was born in South English, Iowa. After studying history at the universities of Iowa and Michigan, he now teaches American and world history at Schoolcraft College in Livonia, Michigan. His concurrent interests in railroads and art have contributed to a book and a number of illustrated articles about railroad history. He serves on the Ann Arbor Railroad Technical and Historical Association and is active in Michigan interests of the Lexington Group in Transportation History.

Everett Ludley worked twenty years in sales and twenty-three years teaching in several Iowa schools and at Elgin Community College in Illinois. He holds a B.A. degree from the University of Northern Iowa and an M.A. degree from the University of Iowa. In retirement he keeps busy with ham radio and in restoring antique radios. His article was excerpted from his book-length autobiographical manuscript.

Lowell J. Soike, a native of Minnesota, moved to Iowa in 1971 to complete a Ph.D. program and has, since 1974, been staff historian with Iowa's historic preservation program.

John P. Zeller received a bachelor's degree in American history from Drake University. He has worked as a period carpenter at Living History Farms in Des Moines and as a historic preservation researcher in the State Historical Society's recent study of Iowa mills.

LETTERS FROM READERS

More on Ralph

Since my article "To Go Free" was published in the Summer *Palimpsest*, fresh light has been shed on the life of Ralph, the subject of Iowa's 1839 test case on slavery. Roger Osborne, curator of the Dubuque County Historical Society, has just unearthed and kindly made available a lengthy obituary in the *Dubuque Daily Times* (July 24, 1870, p. 3).

The obituary states that Ralph died on July 22, 1870. (T. S. Parvin was mistaken in reporting that Ralph lived and died near Muscatine.) A shorter obituary in the July 24th *Dubuque Herald* confirms this date. According to the Sexton's Report on Internment (July 1870) Ralph was buried in Linwood Cemetery in Dubuque. The longer obituary gives more details of Ralph's life. Born a slave in Virginia in about 1795 under the name of Rafe Nelson, he was given in infancy the name of his owner, Ralph Montgomery. During his childhood, master and slave moved to Kentucky where, on "becoming quite a chunk of a field hand," Ralph was sold to his owner's brother, William. As the *Palimpsest* article related, William's son Jordan Montgomery bought Ralph and moved with him to Missouri. We now learn from the obituary that Ralph heard of lead-mining fortunes on the upper Mississippi from one Ellis Schofield.

After the Territorial Supreme Court pronounced him free, Ralph discovered several valuable lead deposits in Dubuque, including the rich McKenzie deposit. He "sold out his claim for a good figure" but "permitted himself to be swindled out of it." Ralph continued mining all his life and in his last years lived at times in the county poor house and at times in lodging. (He is listed in the *Dubuque City Directory*, 1867 and 1870–71).

Undoubtedly very popular in Dubuque, Ralph was described as tall and slim, "one of the old familiar human landmarks, one of the pioneers who was present at the birth and christening" of Dubuque. He was of a friendly disposition and a religious bent. Both these characteristics were underlined by his last action. "Old Rafe" died in the pest house of small pox, "having contracted the disease while nursing a sick patient."

Richard Acton, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

***The Palimpsest* welcomes letters. Published letters may be edited for clarity and brevity. Write: *Palimpsest* Editor, State Historical Society, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.**

SUBMISSIONS

The editor welcomes manuscripts and edited documents on the history of Iowa and the Midwest that may interest a general reading audience. Submissions that focus on visual material (photographs, maps, drawings) or on material culture are also invited. Originality and significance of the topic, as well as the quality of research and writing, will determine acceptance for publication. Manuscripts should be typewritten, double-spaced, and follow *The Chicago Manual of Style* (13th edition). Standard length is within ten to twenty manuscript pages, but shorter or longer submissions will be considered. Include a list of sources used and a brief biographical sketch. Because illustrative material is integral to the *Palimpsest*, the editor encourages authors to include photographs and illustrations (or suggestions). Please send submissions or queries to Ginalie Swaim, Editor, *The Palimpsest*, State Historical Society of Iowa, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.

Above: Franklin Street in turn-of-the-century Manchester, Iowa. In this issue, our authors explore growth and change in small-town Iowa, uncover the story behind our state's nickname, and recall the years when trains criss-crossed Iowa.

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