

The **P**ALIMPSEST

OCTOBER 1922

CONTENTS

The Sioux City Corn Palaces 313

JOHN ELY BRIGGS

The Blue Grass Palace 327

BRUCE E. MAHAN

The Ottumwa Coal Palace 336

CARL B. KREINER

Comment 343

THE EDITOR

PUBLISHED MONTHLY AT IOWA CITY BY
THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER JULY 28 1920 AT THE POST OFFICE AT IOWA CITY IOWA
UNDER THE ACT OF AUGUST 24 1912

THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

The PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

Superintendent

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials 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 records 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.

PRICE—10c per copy: \$1 per year: free to members of Society

ADDRESS—The State Historical Society Iowa City Iowa

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

VOL. III

ISSUED IN OCTOBER 1922

No. 10

COPYRIGHT 1922 BY THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

The Sioux City Corn Palaces

While nearly the entire country suffered from drouth in the summer of 1887 propitious showers saved the crops in the middle portion of the Missouri Valley. The corn fields of northwest Iowa yielded amazingly, and the concomitant hogs grew fat. In the midst of this fortunate region lay Sioux City, the prodigy of the West. From a bustling town of about seven thousand inhabitants in 1880 it had grown into a thriving city of approximately thirty thousand population—the third most important meat packing center in America. Within the year property values had increased enormously, extensive improvements were under construction, and thousands of people had come there to live. The future seemed assured.

Grateful for this extraordinary prosperity and in recognition of the decisive importance of the agricultural interests of the surrounding territory, sev-

eral of the prominent business men of Sioux City met on the evening of August 20th to devise a means of public expression of thanksgiving for the bounteous crops of the Northwest and the remarkable growth of the city. Various plans were considered. One man suggested a jubilee with heaps of corn along the streets as continual reminders of the cause of the festival. Another proposed to decorate the courthouse with cornstalks and make it a center for public speaking, music, and entertainment. Then came a brilliant idea. Why not build a palace of corn! Let the design be unique and appropriate, let the edifice be adorned with all the products of the field—though chiefly with corn—and within let there be music and dancing and artistic exhibits of produce.

It was an inspiration of the moment. The burst of enthusiasm that greeted the idea of a corn palace festival grew apace. The whole city caught the spirit of the occasion and the people of the surrounding territory became intensely interested. A town meeting was held the following week, an organization was formed with Mayor J. M. Clelland as president, committees were appointed, and work on the project began.

Meanwhile everyone was experimenting with grain as a medium of artistic expression. Corn seemed to be particularly well adapted to such a use. Indeed, for the time being, corn was apparently the most important article in the life of the com-

munity. The slogan, "Corn is King", appeared to be a veritable reality. Never was a monarch held in more reverential esteem by his subjects. Odes to corn flowed from the pens of numerous rhymesters: Longfellow's tribute to Mondamin, the god of corn, was quoted until everyone must have known it by heart: the newspapers were filled with articles explaining the origin of harvest festivals and discussing the function of Ceres, the goddess of grain. Corn parties were quite the vogue in social circles: the ladies came adorned with strings of corn beads while the gentlemen wore corn husk cravats. One facetious reporter declared that cornstarch had become a favorite food for the babies.

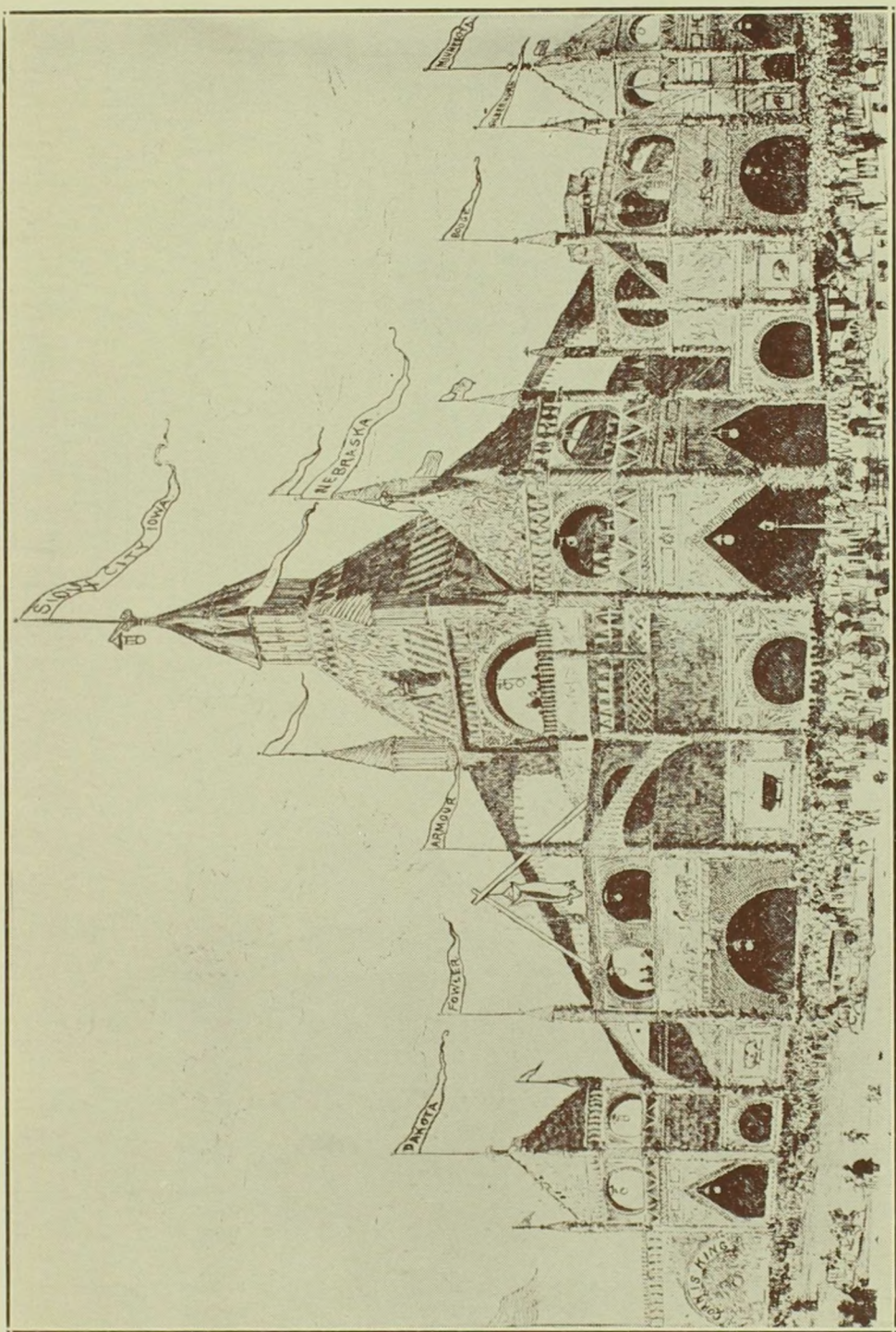
As the concept of a corn palace developed, the original plans were outgrown. At first it was estimated that five thousand dollars would be needed for the festival but later the sponsors of the exposition decided to raise as much as twenty-five thousand dollars if necessary. By the end of September the whole project had assumed so much importance and promised to be so successful that the Sioux City Corn Palace Exposition Company was organized and incorporated with a capital stock of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. The corn palace itself, as originally designed by E. W. Loft, was to occupy a space one hundred feet square on the northwest corner of Jackson and Fifth streets, but two weeks before the opening it was decided to double the size of the building by extending it westward to

include the armory and adding two more pavilions.

The first corn palace exposition opened on Monday evening, October 3, 1887. The whole city was in gala array for the jubilee. Illuminated arches spanned the intersections of the streets in the business district. Stores and houses were appropriately decorated. There was corn, corn everywhere, and in the midst of this festive display stood the corn palace — the pride of Sioux City and the marvel of all who beheld it.

Fantastically Moorish in general appearance, the first corn palace nevertheless possessed an individuality of architectural design peculiarly adapted to the purpose for which it was intended. At each front corner was a square tower representing Dakota, Nebraska, and Minnesota. Great arched entrances opened upon both Jackson and Fifth streets through smaller towers. Above each doorway was a panel in which agricultural scenes were portrayed in bas-relief, wrought with colored corn and other grains, while upon a platform at the top of each entrance tower was depicted an allegorical scene in figures.

The towers were connected by the battlemented walls of the edifice, above which rose graceful pinnacles, and beyond in the background was the corn-thatched roof — a solid mass of green. From the center of the roof towered the cupola, its arches and panels fashioned like those below and its spire rising to the height of a hundred feet. The long fly-



AN ARTIST'S SKETCH OF THE FIRST CORN PALACE—REPRODUCED FROM HARPER'S WEEKLY

ing buttresses which swept gracefully down from the four turrets of the cupola to the corner towers constituted the most conspicuous feature of the palace and, together with numerous openings and arches, they contributed an appearance of airiness and whimsicality quite in keeping with the ornate exterior. To the west the armory was decorated in the same manner as the corn palace proper, while beyond were two pavilions in towers corresponding to those of the principal building.

The entire outer surface was covered with corn and other grains. The fantastic lines of the superstructure were modified by a maze of detail and color. From spire to foundation every portion was covered with some decoration to please the eye and catch the imagination. Along the upper line of the front ran a shiny border of oats interspersed with the dark seed of the sorghum plant and flaming red corn. The numerous pinnacles were garbed in the rich colors of native grasses and crowned with tufts of millet and streaming banners. Born of the inspiration of a new idea, unique in design, and novel in material, the first corn palace in every line and detail seemed vocal with the significance of the great Northwest.

The space inside the palace beneath the cupola constituted a large auditorium the walls of which formed "one grand panorama of delightful imagery", rich with the beauty of nature's own painting. The bright colors of grain and grass and straw were

massed and blended in surprising brilliance and harmony. Yonder was a map of the United States made of seeds, each State of a different color; there a huge carrot spider was poised in a web of corn fibers; and most marvelous of all was the tableau of the golden stairs — a beautiful wax figure of Ceres, clad in a robe of satin husks and bearing a cornstalk scepter, stood upon a stairway of yellow corn.

After a week of street parades, fireworks, Indian war-dancing, speeches by notable people, band concerts, and competitive military drill the first corn palace was formally closed on Saturday, October the eighth. On the following Monday evening, however, as the climax of the jubilee, a big corn dance was held in the armory. The next day came a party of eastern capitalists, including Cornelius Vanderbilt and Chauncey Depew, to view the "eighth wonder of the world". Mr. Depew, who was prevailed upon to make a speech, declared that he had seen nearly all of the natural and unnatural wonders of the world, but never a corn palace before. "Any city so enterprising and so prolific in beautiful designs, and enthusiastic in all public enterprises must of necessity be the metropolis of the northwest", he said.

Early the next morning President Cleveland, who was on a tour of the country, arrived from St. Paul in his special train. At six o'clock the streets were crowded with people eager to catch a glimpse of the chief executive and his beautiful wife as they passed along to see the corn palace. Except for this spon-

taneous tribute there was no special demonstration and no formal reception. Within the corn palace the band played just as it had during the festival, while the presidential party inspected the displays of agricultural products and admired the unique decorations. Marveling at the prodigal resources of the Northwest, President Cleveland returned to his private car with a large ear of corn sticking out of his pocket and a new vision of its significance lingering in his mind. The corn palace, he remarked, was the first new thing he had seen on his trip.

Early in the summer of 1888 plans were begun for the second corn palace festival. During the weeks of preparation the local newspapers followed developments with exalted enthusiasm, the railroads were induced to announce half-fare rates to Sioux City, souvenirs were on sale by the first of September, arrangements were made for an elaborate program of entertainment, and long before the opening day on September 24th free passes were sent to Congressmen and other prominent people.

While the architecture of the second corn palace was of a composite order, it was less fantastic than the first had been. The building was square, covering a quarter of a block on the northeast corner of Pierce and Sixth streets. At the corners and midway along the sides facing the streets were towers projecting from the line of the wall and rising to a height of fifty feet.

Like the first corn palace the exterior of the sec-

ond was entirely covered with corn and other grains. It was estimated that thirty thousand bushels of corn were used — all that a section of land in northwest Iowa would normally produce. Ears of every color, sawed lengthwise into halves and transversely into sections, were nailed to the walls in intricate patterns and geometrical figures. Along the top of the wall ran a border of wheat sheaves, the upper portions of the towers were elaborately embellished, and the battlements were tufted with millet and sorghum seed. From the northwest to the southeast corners the color scheme of decoration was graduated to suggest the succession of seasons — the somber, neutral shades of winter gradually increasing in brightness, variety, and richness of combination until the full splendor of the autumnal tints appeared.

The whole interior of the palace was a wilderness of color. The booths around the walls in which produce was displayed were the units of decoration. One represented a Grecian temple and another a barnyard scene. A grotto presenting an illusion of ice and snow was “marvelously effective”.

Viewed from the promenade that encircled the vast amphitheater the maze of ornamental detail seemed unified by a band of golden-rod and millet separating the lower booths from the gallery. The supporting pillars, transformed with white corn into graceful columns of marble, carried the eye upward from the vividness and life below to a belt of invert-

ed wheat sheaves at the base of the dome-like roof. From there the glance was swept across the surface of the dome by the majestic grain-covered arches to the point where they met at the center. Unity and diversity, harmony and contrast concentrated their potencies in the vision. The mellow radiance of illumination added a glamour that accentuated the atmosphere of sentiment and romance which pervaded the place. "It suggests to me scenes of what fancy paints fairy land to be", declared Governor Larrabee.

The third corn palace was opened on Monday evening, September 23rd, with an address by J. M. Thurston, the "most gifted of western orators". During the first week a bicycle tournament was held and later several conventions met in Sioux City. Hundreds of Indians from the reservations attended the festival in their primitive garb, and entered wholeheartedly into the spirit of the jubilee. They were very conspicuous in the old settlers' parade, imparting the color of by-gone days to that pageant of progress. Not content with such a showing, however, they paraded daily by themselves. Another special attraction was a talking machine. Phonograph records were made and reproduced at the corn palace — to the anguish of the musicians.

Probably none of the corn palace festivals attracted more excursion parties than the one in 1889. During the first week a large delegation representing the Blue Grass League came in a special train

festooned with blue grass. From Omaha came another large excursion, and a "very quiet party" of deaf mutes from the School for the Deaf spent a day in Sioux City. But the most portentous event of the festival was the visit of a hundred New England capitalists who came on a special train all of the way from Boston. It is alleged that all expenses were paid by A. S. Garretson and that the capitalists were continually reminded that Sioux City was abundantly blessed with brains and possibilities but much in need of money.

The most distinctive feature of the third corn palace was a grand tower over one hundred and eighty feet high. It was built in four courses, each smaller than the one below, thus affording space for balconies from which the whole city could be seen. Flanking the main tower and connected with it by bridges were two smaller towers. The west end of the palace extended across Pierce Street in a great archway through which the traffic passed.

The corn palace of 1890 was described as a "Mohammedan mosque with Iowa trimming". The dome, built in the form of a huge globe, was decorated with corn to represent the world, with Iowa and Sioux City conspicuously indicated in front. On top of the world was a great table supporting an upper dome — a sort of Moslem turret two stories high. Three towers similarly crowned graced each of the two front sides.

As the visitor passed through the main entrance

at the corner of Pierce and Sixth streets the most striking feature of the interior met his gaze. Above the annex on the other side of the auditorium was a miniature valley of a great river — perhaps the Missouri. From far-distant mountains clothed in pine trees came a stream of water, leaping over rocks, hemmed in between high hills, winding across a prairie, and finally falling over a ledge into a lake below where the palmettos were growing.

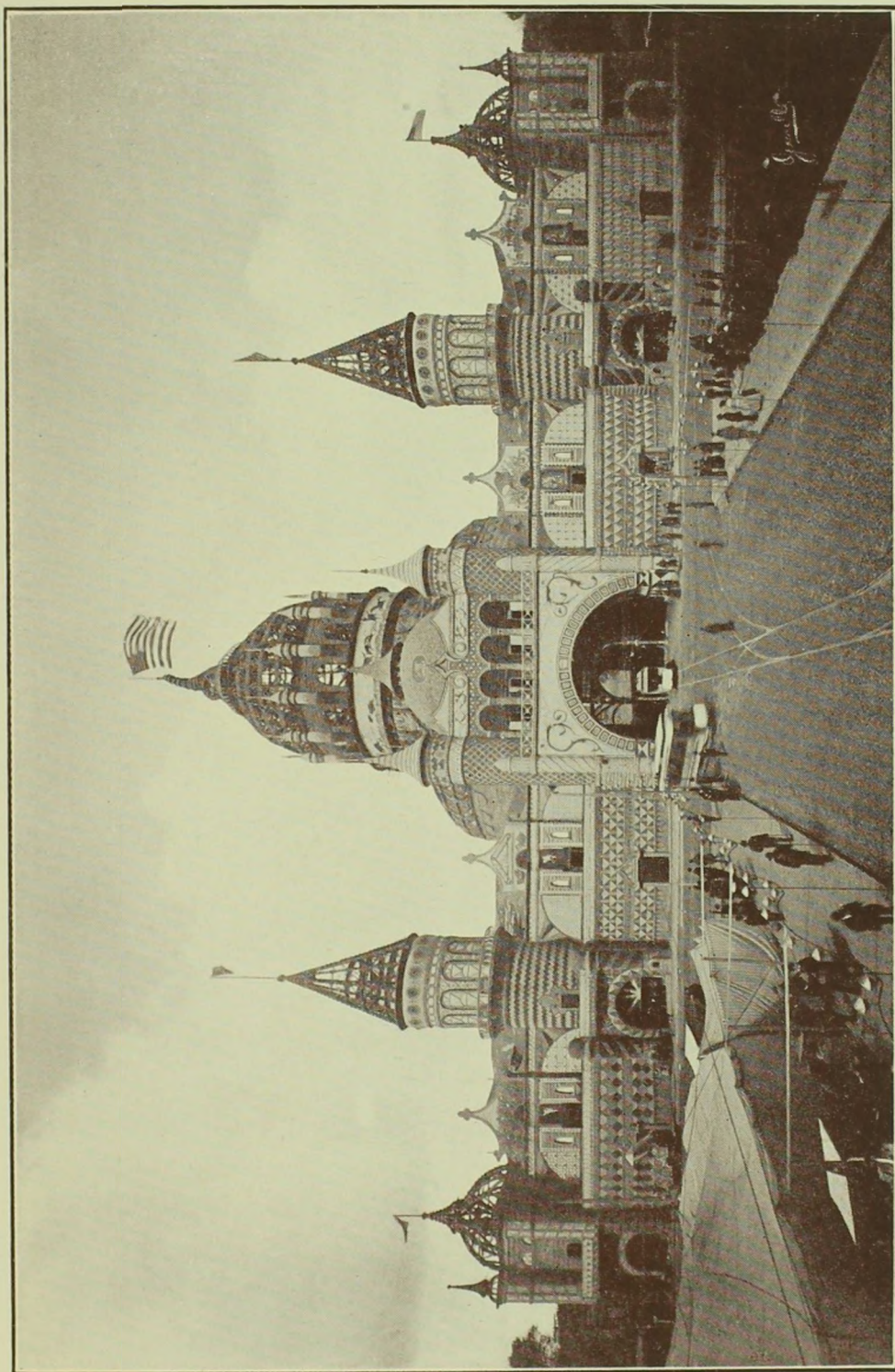
Three times during the festival, which lasted from September 25th to October 11th, King Corn came forth in the costume of a knight of old, followed by a retinue of glittering attendants. The allegorical history of corn, the monarch of peace, was depicted by beautiful floats on which patriotic citizens, arrayed in the trappings of the sixth century, formed numerous tableaux. King Corn upon his throne and surrounded by ladies and pages dispensed princely favors as he passed along. Before the throne was a bronze urn filled with fruit and guarded by two gilded lions, on either side of the throne stood an antlered deer, while at the rear was a column upon which a cherub perched with a cornucopia filled with fruit and flowers.

The festival of 1890 was to have closed in splendor. The Governors and Congressmen from Iowa and neighboring States were invited to visit the corn palace. In the forenoon there was to have been a grand parade and in the afternoon an informal reception of the prominent guests. But nobody

came except Governor A. C. Mellette and Congressman I. S. Struble. It rained all day and the roof of the corn palace leaked. Late at night while the rain poured down in torrents and the lightning flashed on every side the electric lights were turned out and the doors of the fourth corn palace were closed.

The ardor of Sioux City seems not to have been dampened by the dismal end of the fourth corn palace festival. The following year another magnificent palace was built, the noblest of them all. More than a block long and dominated by a majestic dome over two hundred feet high — said to be the largest ever constructed of wood alone — the fifth corn palace was so well proportioned, so graceful in every line that the enormous bulk of the building was unperceived. Except for the two entrance towers the palace resembled the national capitol in general contour. There was the broad expanse of horizontal lines expressive of a vast domain: there was the splendid dome significant of lofty aspiration.

Fronting on Sixth Street, the palace was intersected in the center by an immense archway over Pierce Street. Above the arch was a spacious balcony bounded at each end by stately turrets which were flanked by minarets overlaid with wild sage and white corn, giving the appearance of a chased silver column divided into diamond sections by bars of ivory. The arch façade was covered with red corn in a manner to represent carved rock. Above and beyond the balcony was the open work of the lower



THE LAST CORN PALACE AT SIOUX CITY

reaches of the great central dome, draped in oats and converging below the broad blue frieze at the base of the upright portion of the dome. Upon this belt of blue a triumphal procession of domestic animals was portrayed with dark seeds and grasses. Above the frieze were minarets. Decorated with indigo corn at the base they passed through the shades of purple, red, orange, and yellow to dazzling white at the top. Between these minarets were the outlooks of the observation gallery adorned with lace-like fabric made of ropes of straw. The blue and gold capital of the dome supported a huge yellow cornucopia pouring forth the treasure of the fields.

"To be thoroughly appreciated," wrote a witness, "the Palace should be seen at sunset, when the solid mass of the building is cast in shade. Then each tower and turret and minaret shines in the warm light as if wrought of gold, like some magnificent dream of 'Spanish castles' discerned above the mist which fancy dares not penetrate."

The auditorium occupied the east wing of the palace while the west wing was devoted entirely to agricultural exhibits. In artistic detail and harmony of coloring the fifth corn palace surpassed all previous efforts. About the walls of the auditorium and in the balcony over the archway were numerous paintings and statues artfully constructed of grain. The designs were exceedingly intricate and the booths were the most elaborate that had ever been built in

the corn palace. A miniature library won the first prize. The walls of the library booth were adorned with pictures — a portrait of Dante, a winter scene, and a country maid with an apron of flowers. The floor was covered with a grass rug. Upon a table were quill pens of cane and oat straw, a corn lamp, a gourd inkwell, and several corn husk blotters.

Considerable space on the main floor of the west wing, which was decorated in Spanish moss and brake grass, was occupied by extensive southern exhibits. The exposition of produce from the Northwest was very complete. Several railroad companies vied with each other in displaying the resources of the country and presenting novel attractions.

The fifth and last corn palace was opened at noon of October 1, 1891, and remained on exhibition more than three weeks. Late in the evening of Sunday, October 25th, the final notes of "Farewell" had died away, the last stragglers had been ushered out, and only the long rows of chairs in the auditorium and the litter that strewed the floor told of the crowd that had assembled. The final footfall echoed drearily through the vast building as if the echo itself were oppressed at the thought that such a beautiful creation had been called into existence to be the center of a few days of festivity, only to be cast aside before the moon had waned. Then the doors of the Sioux City corn palace were closed forever.

JOHN ELY BRIGGS

The Blue Grass Palace

The morning of August 21, 1890, dawned cool and cloudy, threatening rain. Hundreds of men and women of Creston, who had toiled for weeks to build and decorate the second blue grass palace, watched the sky anxiously. At about eight o'clock, however, the clouds cleared away, the sun shone forth brightly, and the promoters of the Blue Grass Palace Exposition and District Agricultural Fair rejoiced. The dedication that afternoon by Governor Horace Boies was not to be marred by the weather man.

The Blue Grass League of Southwestern Iowa, organized in the law office of J. B. Harsh at Creston on May 11, 1889, had sponsored the first attempt, during the summer of 'eighty-nine, to build a blue grass palace which would advertise southwestern Iowa as the corn palaces had heralded the advantages of Sioux City. The enterprise had met with flattering success and, encouraged by the results, the league had planned the wonder palace for 1890, where the eighteen counties of the league would exhibit the products of the soil and join in a carnival holiday after the harvest was ended and summer was merging into autumn.

The second blue grass palace, a building three times the size of the first palace, was erected on the Creston fair grounds. Facing the race track on the

east the structure extended north and south almost the length of a city block and was fully half as wide. Its conical shaped central tower reached a height of one hundred and twenty feet, while on both the north and south wings were cupolas ninety feet high. A square, five-story tower forming the central part of the main entrance supported a flagstaff from which a banner bearing the legend, "Creston Blue Grass Palace", floated in the breeze a hundred feet above the ground. From the flagstaffs on the two cupolas, the towering central dome, the four smaller towers, and the two turrets, the Stars and Stripes were unfurled. Multicolored pennons were placed at regular intervals along the upper promenade which encircled both the north and south wings. A broad suspension bridge stretched from the central dome to the cupolas, affording an unobstructed view of Union County farms that swept away to the horizon. The entire surface of the palace was covered with heavy layers of long stemmed blue grass, timothy, clover, and straw arranged in designs and effects highly artistic.

At an early hour on the morning of the opening day the fair ground presented a lively scene. The owners of shows, refreshment booths, lemonade stands, and shooting galleries were setting up for business, fakirs were erecting their tents, and wagon loads of exhibits awaited their turn for unloading. Inside the palace workmen were hastening to complete the huge auditorium for the reception of the

Governor. The stage was carpeted and profusely decorated with flowers and plants. South of the stage stretched a large painting by a local artist which featured a picture of the palace with little angels filling the sky, each equipped with a banner bearing the name of one of the counties of the league. The angel with the Union County banner perched on the center spire of the palace.

The crowd began to arrive shortly after noon and by two-thirty the huge auditorium was packed by an audience of three or four thousand people. Hundreds, unable to squeeze their way into the auditorium, had to be content with wandering along the promenades, visiting the suspension bridge, or inspecting the exhibits. Meanwhile the famous Iowa State Band which had accompanied the Governor from Des Moines entertained the waiting crowd with classical and popular music.

A few minutes after three o'clock the watchers on the suspension bridge saw the procession approaching from town. In the van rode the Governor and his staff followed by the mayor of Creston and the city council. Next came the Creston fire department in uniform while local citizens and visitors in hacks, carriages, and buggies brought up the rear. As the official party entered the auditorium the band blared forth with the stirring march, "Hail to the Chief", and the crowd greeted the first citizen of the State with loud applause and noisy cheering. In his address Governor Boies lauded the members and pro-

moters of the Blue Grass League and expressed his surprise and delight at the beautiful structure which he had the honor to dedicate. He concluded his address with remarks on the political situation, urging that every citizen should know the principles upon which his government is founded and should study carefully the issues of the day. A handshaking reception followed the program of the afternoon, and the first day of the exposition ended with the large crowd very hot but exceedingly happy.

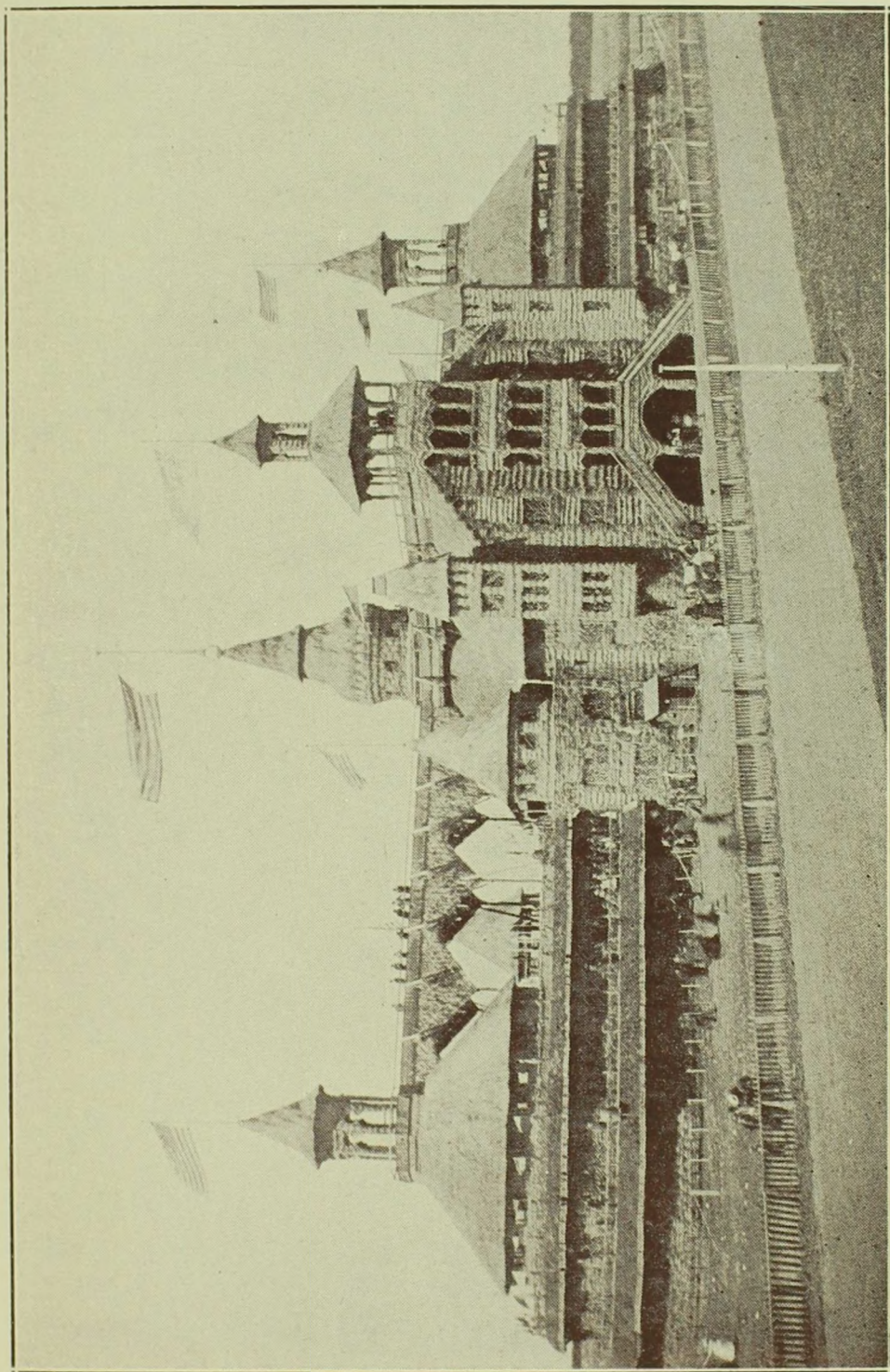
The second day of the exposition, which had been set apart in honor of Taylor and Adair counties, was perhaps of equal interest. Honorable Roger Q. Mills, of Texas, author of the Mills Tariff Bill, had been selected as the orator of the day, and he had arrived in time to attend the dedicatory exercises on the previous afternoon. Early in the morning of August 22nd the roads leading into Creston were black with buggies, carriages, and wagons bringing the country folk from far and near. At nine o'clock two special trains arrived on the north branch, carrying the Fontanelle band and a large crowd from Adair County. Half an hour later two special trains from the south brought the Taylor County delegation accompanied by the New Market band of nine pieces, the Conway band of twelve, the Lenox band of ten, and the Fifth Regimental Band of Bedford — one of the prize musical organizations of the State. At ten o'clock the blue grass palace special from Omaha, elaborately decorated with flags, bunt-

ing, and banners, rolled into the station yard, loaded with visitors and a big band from the Nebraska metropolis. The different delegations formed in line headed by the Nebraska group, and with bands playing martial music, flags flying, and banners waving they marched north to the palace grounds.

The crowd surged back and forth through the palace admiring the artistic decorations and the displays of agricultural products. Interest centered, however, about the apartments occupied by the two counties to which the second day of the exposition had been dedicated. The ceiling and the three walls of the Adair County booth were completely covered with corn, oats, grasses, and wheat arranged in novel patterns. A large, square centerpiece covered with all the varieties of grasses grown in the county served as a base on which a horse and sleigh made of the products of the soil caught the attention of the visitors. A straw man with a mustache of red corn silk sat in the sleigh driving a corn horse with plaited blue grass reins and harness. At one side of the booth a miniature replica of a Fontanelle elevator covered with red shelled corn held a supply of grain and grass seed which poured through little spouts into tiny box cars on the railroad track. A Newfoundland dog and a horse, both life size and constructed of blue grass, and a sheep made of oat and wheat heads occupied prominent places in the display. Samples of brick from a Fontanelle kiln, firkins of rich butter, and cheese, vegetables, grains,

and fruits were arranged in attractive fashion, the whole effect being a worthy tribute to the taste of the committee in charge of the Adair County offering.

The Taylor County display also delighted the thousands who visited the booth. Suspended from the elaborately decorated ceiling a large wooden egg, thirty-three inches long and thirteen inches in diameter, called attention to the poultry business of the county. On the egg sat perched a small bantam hen and below it hung a card with the notice: "Hens laid 532,540 dozen eggs, worth 12c per dozen, or \$63,904.80." The center piece of this booth was a miniature residence of Queen Anne style, set in a lawn of close-cropped blue grass sprayed by numerous fountains. Gravel walks, bordered with flowers, extended around the house and across the lawn. Back of the house lay a lake with its banks embowered with flowers. The sunlight on the fountains, the velvety green of the lawn, the white walks, and the little house perfect in detail made one of the most charming pictures in the palace. The side walls of the booth were completely covered with pictures made of seeds, clover heads, corn husks, and ears of corn. One was a life-size horse constructed entirely of red clover heads, another of seeds and grain represented a Holstein cow, while a third was a sheep made of oats and wheat. Pyramids of fruit and vegetables, tubs of butter, shelves full of glasses of jelly, preserves, and canned apples,



THE SECOND BLUE GRASS PALACE

pears, peaches, plums, and berries completed a display to which the judges awarded second prize at the close of the exposition.

Fremont County captured the first prize of \$100 offered by the Blue Grass League to the county making the best display. It was a center of attention throughout the exposition. Like most of the booths the ceiling was covered with cornstalks, wheat, and oats, and the side walls were hidden completely by a covering of grains and grasses, but the arrangement of the Fremont exhibit was unique and unusually attractive. Long tables in rows down the center of the apartment were covered with white linen and held china plates piled high with apples, plums, peaches, pears, grapes, and berries. Beneath the tables cabbages, potatoes, carrots, beets, pumpkins, cauliflower, squashes, melons, tomatoes, celery, and egg plants were piled in heaps. Around the walls stood sacks with open tops displaying shelled corn, oats, wheat, barley, rye, millet, flax, broom corn, timothy, clover, and blue grass seed, while corn was also shown in the stalk and wheat and oats in bundles. Butter and cheese exhibits occupied a large space. One entire side of the apartment was filled with a fine arts exhibit — paintings and drawings in crayon, oil, water colors, and pastel — all the work of Tabor College students. Another student at that institution had arranged a display of seventy-six varieties of wood, all native of the county. A parlor with rustic furniture, constructed

from the products of the farm, was also a conspicuous feature of the Fremont prize-winning booth.

On Monday the twenty-fifth, the district fair began and with the racing program, the carnival gaiety, and the live stock exhibit it afforded the crowds new thrills and a revival of old delights. The thousands who surged back and forth from grandstand and amphitheater to the blue grass palace, from the quarter-stretch to the live stock barns reflected the Iowan's delight at a country fair. The showing of fat hogs, of fine sleek cattle, and of pedigreed horses taxed the capacity of the barns and sheds. The racing stables were also full. Grooms in old sweaters and dusty clothing discussed the races of the day with diminutive jockeys clad in the gay colors of their calling. The spielers of the side shows found a receptive audience, while the lemonade stands and refreshment booths did a rushing business. Fakirs, too, plied their trade and the carnival spirit reigned.

The fame of the blue grass palace spread. Ottumwa sent a delegation to Creston and Sioux City did likewise. The railroads advertised round-trip excursions for one-way fare and ran special trains daily to accommodate the visitors. Although no automobiles existed it was not uncommon for parties to drive to the fair from a distance of thirty miles or more, and stay two or three days. Creston hotels and restaurants reaped a golden harvest and the hackmen prospered. The unusual and distinctive

features of the displays were described in the newspapers throughout the State. Different counties of the Blue Grass League had charge of the programs on successive days, each striving in friendly rivalry to make the best showing. As a means of broadcasting the natural advantages of the fertile acres of southwestern Iowa, as a test of the ability of the people of this region to coöperate in a big enterprise, as a financial undertaking, and as a method of combining carnival fun with an educational program the Blue Grass Palace Exposition of 1890 was a complete success.

The following year and again in 1892 blue grass palaces advertised southwestern Iowa. Lyman Abbot of New York and W. C. P. Breckenridge of Kentucky were two of the speakers who came to mold opinion on topics of the day. Although of the same size and shape as the palace of 1890 alterations changed the appearance of the entrance in 1891 and made access to the suspension bridge more convenient. Probably the most striking feature of the third palace was a huge movable panorama composed of paintings depicting actual scenes from the blue grass region. In 1892 the outside of the palace building was painted to represent the stone walls of an old castle, the towers were painted to resemble brick, and the roof again was thatched. But the Blue Grass League had passed out of existence, and by this time the novelty of the palace idea had worn off so that the project was abandoned thereafter.

BRUCE E. MAHAN

The Ottumwa Coal Palace

Great things often spring from small beginnings. So it was with the Ottumwa coal palace. Sometime late in the year of 1889 three of Ottumwa's most prominent citizens — Henry Phillips, Calvin Manning, and Peter G. Ballingall — met to consider the advisability of erecting a coal palace to proclaim to the world the rich gifts of nature in southern Iowa. Interest in the project spread and other meetings were held. A company was organized and stock was sold at five dollars a share. As time passed, however, it became more and more difficult to raise sufficient money. People were perfectly willing to have a coal palace built but seemed unprepared to supply the funds for such an expensive venture.

At last the zero hour arrived. The promoters realized that the money must be secured at once or the whole scheme abandoned. A mass meeting was called. Several of the business men of Ottumwa urged the people to double their stock in the company but few responded. The coal palace project seemed to be doomed. Suddenly Mr. Ballingall appeared on the stage. Voicing his enthusiasm in a loud tone accompanied by frantic gestures and increasing his own subscription to seven hundred dollars, he succeeded in reviving the optimism of the

assembly. One man bought two hundred shares in the coal palace, and before the meeting ended over thirty thousand dollars had been promised.

The summer of 1890 was a busy one in Ottumwa. While the coal palace was being erected elaborate plans were made for the exposition. All of the counties in the coal-mining district of Iowa were invited to display their wares in the palace and many prominent men were invited to come to Ottumwa during the festival season.

The morning of the opening day of the palace, September 16, 1890, dawned cool and cloudy, but about nine o'clock the clouds cleared away and when Governor Horace Boies arrived later in the forenoon the sun was shining brightly. At one-thirty a long procession, headed by the Iowa State Band, the Governor, the directors of the coal palace, city officials, and a company of militia, formed on Main Street and marched west to the great black diamond palace near the Burlington passenger station.

There in the Sunken Park, which had once been the bed of the Des Moines River before the railroad had turned the stream from its course, was an imposing structure. Fully two hundred and thirty feet in length, more than half as wide, the central tower rising to the height of two hundred feet, the high battlemented walls, the numerous turrets, and the tall narrow windows — all contributed to an appearance of mediaeval feudalism. The somber aspect of the frowning castle was intensified by the glittering

jet of the coal which veneered the walls. In architectural style the building was a combination of the Gothic and Byzantine orders.

Directly above the main entrance were the words "Coal Palace" formed with coal that glistened in the sunlight and stood out clearly against a silver-gray background. High on the tower above were two pictures, one portraying conditions in the carboniferous age and the other a modern coal mine, while between them stood a miner with his pick raised in the act of striking. Across the front of the building on either side of the entrance tower the first story projected from the line of the upper wall, forming a balcony. Just below the battlements of this balcony ran a broad frieze upon which were designs representing the industries of Ottumwa. The turrets at the four corners of the great central tower were veneered with cubes of coal laid so as to expose three sides and reflect the light from the different faces. In the tower itself, one hundred and fifty feet above the ground, was an observation gallery and dancing pavilion.

Viewed from the outside the coal palace was more imposing than artistic, but within grace and beauty reigned. The pillars, walls, rafters, and ceiling were completely hidden by the exhibits and exquisite decorations. Corn, oats, wheat, rye, barley, millet, blue grass, timothy, clover, and flax were skillfully arranged in brilliant masses of color. Around the walls of the palace were beautiful panels containing

pictures in corn symbolical of agriculture, industry, mechanics, music, art, literature, geography, and commerce.

Directly opposite the main entrance was a cascade so cleverly constructed that the line of demarcation between the banks of the stream and the painted valley could not be discerned. Miniature crags and boulders jutted out of the water, trees were growing in the valley, a suspension bridge spanned the abyss, and calcium lights from behind threw a rainbow into the falls. Immediately in front of the cataract was a spacious platform on which notable men, famous bands, the coal palace chorus, old Powhatan and his dusky braves, or the Mikado with his retinue claimed attention every evening.

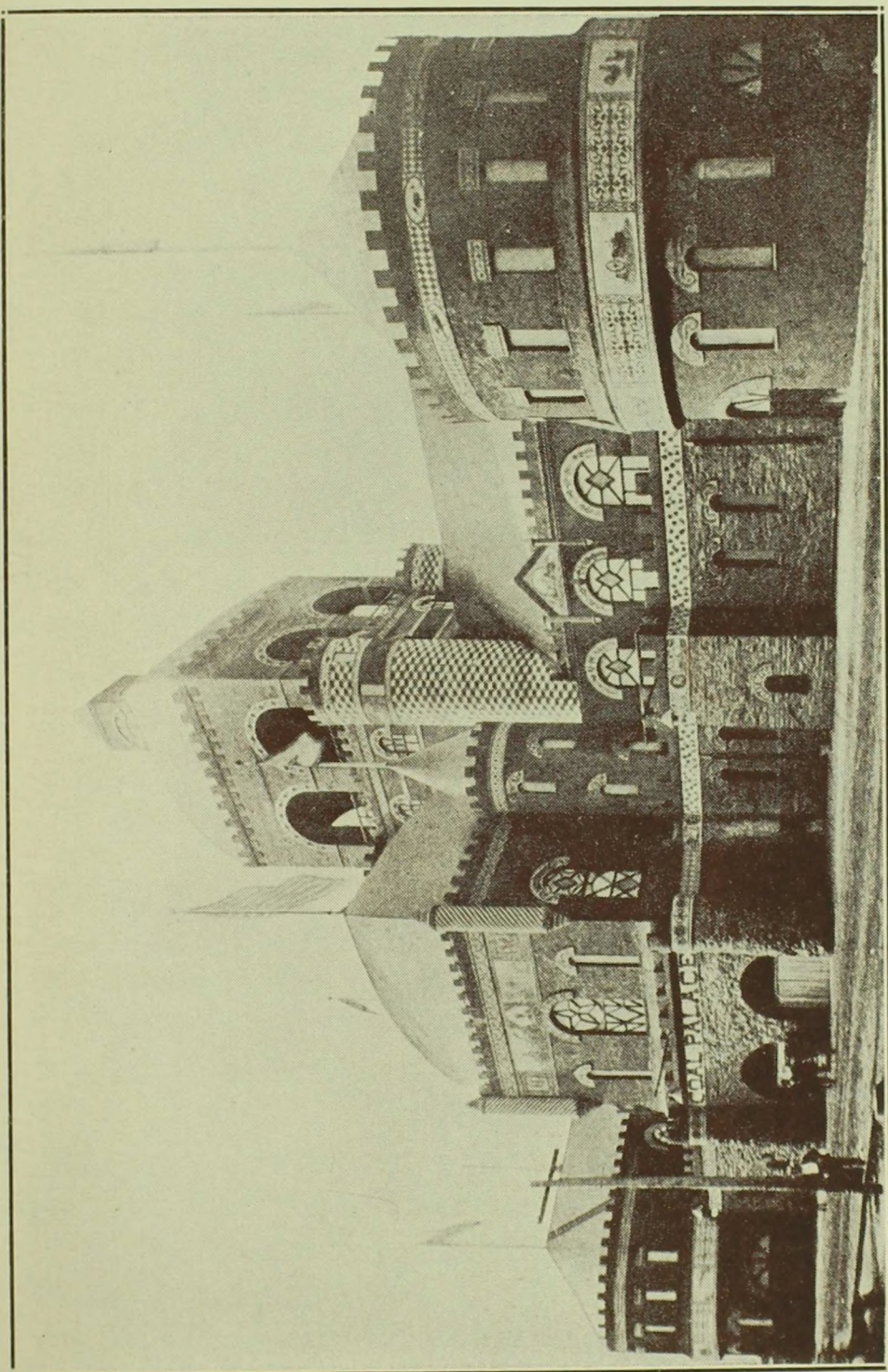
Except for the space occupied by the auditorium the lower floor and the spacious gallery were entirely devoted to the display of agricultural, mineral, and mechanical products. The counties of the coal palace region vied with each other to produce the most pleasing exhibit; the Blue Grass League sent a splendid display; two meat packing plants were represented by booths; and the Northern Pacific Railroad was advertised by the most magnificent showing of all.

No doubt the most unique attraction at the coal palace was the miniature mine. Entering the dark, coal-lined shaft from the gallery the visitor was lowered slowly to the labyrinthine recesses beneath the palace. There a meek and noncommittal mule

hitched to a train of pit cars waited for his load of passengers. The entries, rooms, and tracks were complete in every detail, rich veins of coal were visible, and several miners were at work with pick and drill producing "concentrated heat, light, and power". To the thousands of people who took the "mine route" in the coal palace this demonstration was a revelation.

During the coal palace season, which lasted from September 16th to October 11th, nearly every day was set apart in honor of some organization, county, or State. Governor Boies dedicated the palace on Iowa day. Missouri day was September 26th; the twenty-ninth was Cedar Rapids day; Des Moines day came on the first of October; one day the railroads commanded attention; the traveling men, old soldiers, miners, and ladies each had a day of their own; and every coal-mining county surrounding Ottumwa and the blue grass region of southwestern Iowa took turns at flaunting their merits during the festival.

The climax of attractions was reached on the ninth of October when President Benjamin Harrison spent a day in Ottumwa. It was raining steadily at eight o'clock when the presidential train pulled into the station and few people were present to greet the chief executive. He was met by his brother, John S. Harrison of Kansas City, and taken immediately to the home of his sister, Mrs. D. T. Devin, where breakfast was served. The rain was still falling at



THE OTTUMWA COAL PALACE

ten o'clock when the President went to explore the coal palace, but at noon the clouds dispersed and at one o'clock the presidential party reviewed the grand parade.

That afternoon an enormous crowd jammed into the coal palace to hear Mr. Harrison speak. The President declared that he was particularly interested to see the things of beauty that had been made of familiar materials. "If I should attempt to interpret the lesson of this structure", he said, "I should say that it was an illustration of how much that is artistic and graceful is to be found in the common things of life and if I should make an application of the lesson it would be to suggest that we might profitably carry into all our homes and into all neighborly intercourse the same transforming spirit".

At this juncture the cascade was turned on and the rush of water completely drowned the President's voice. Perfectly at ease when contending with a brass band, he had never before been asked to speak in the roar of Niagara. "I had supposed", he said when the waterfall had been stopped, "that no political suggestion of any sort was to be introduced into this friendly concourse of American citizens", and he felt that he had "good cause for grievance against the prohibitionists for interrupting us with this argument for cold water."

Mr. Harrison dined at the home of W. D. Felton, an old friend and former resident of Indianapolis. In the evening nearly ten thousand people crowded

into the coal palace for the privilege of shaking hands with the President. It was nearly nine o'clock when the reception ended and a few minutes later the special train pulled out for St. Joseph, Missouri.

For more than a year the coal palace stood as a monument to the enterprise of the citizens of Ottumwa. It was readorned and opened again in connection with the festival in 1891 which was not as successful as the first had been. Though the exposition was attractive, the waterfall was improved, and the mine continued to operate, enthusiasm for the project seemed to have subsided. Neither General Russell A. Alger, Governor Horace Boies, nor Representative William McKinley drew the crowds that had visited the first coal palace. The structure was later torn down and the Ottumwa coal palace passed into history.

CARL B. KREINER

Comment by the Editor

THE BEAUTY THAT WAS IOWA

Art is universal. Every people of every land in every age have felt the urge to express themselves in terms of beauty. Emotions, aspirations, ideas, and achievements have been idealized in poetry, music, painting, sculpture, and buildings. The "frozen music" of architecture with its harmony and balance of line, its facilities for ornamentation, its endurance, and its combination of utility and grace is particularly adapted to the portrayal of human character.

What could be more symbolical in Iowa art than the palaces that sprang from the soil? Nor were the corn palaces, the coal palace, and the blue grass palaces the only ones that were built. Mason City had a flax palace; Algona erected a hay palace; and Davenport talked of an onion palace. Perhaps the St. Paul ice palace or the crystal palace of London inspired the idea; but nowhere before had the conception been so completely expressive of purpose, so inherently meaningful. The Iowa palaces served as significant memorials of substantial achievement, erected by a grateful, joyous, and prosperous people who lived in a land of plenty.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH OF APRIL

As the Ides of March was a tragic day in ancient Rome, so the twenty-fifth of April will be long re-

membered in Sioux City. At one o'clock on that fatal day in 1893 D. T. Hedges, the wealthiest man in the city, assigned all his property to his creditors. Ten minutes later the Union Loan and Trust Company failed, and with it the financial foundation of Sioux City crumbled.

For a decade money had poured into the city, big industries had been founded, and the astonishing results had been heralded widely. Then the achievement of years was undone in a flash. Within an hour the owners of the union stock yards, one of the packing plants, two railroads, and the Sioux City terminal were bankrupt. The amazing growth of the "Metropolis of the Northwest", to which the famous corn palaces had contributed much, was a thing of the past, and the roseate hopes of the future were transformed into the substance of dreams.

J. E. B.

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

Established by the Pioneers in 1857
Located at Iowa City Iowa

PUBLICATIONS OF THE SOCIETY

The Quarterly Journal of History
The Palimpsest—A monthly magazine
The Public Archives Series
The Iowa Biographical Series
The Iowa Economic History Series
The Iowa Social History Series
The Iowa Applied History Series
The Iowa Chronicles of the World War
The Miscellaneous Publications
The Bulletins of Information

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the State Historical Society may be secured through election by the Board of Curators. The annual dues are \$3.00. Members may be enrolled as Life Members upon the payment of \$50.00.

Address all Communications to

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Iowa City, Iowa