

The Freedom Train in Iowa

News of the coming of the Freedom Train was received with delight by Iowans. Since towns in forty-eight states were to be visited it was generally recognized that only a few Iowa communities could hope to see the train in 1948. Months before a decision had been made the American Heritage Foundation received invitations from various Iowa towns. The final selection naturally depended on the tracks over which the Freedom Train was routed. When the news was flashed that Des Moines, Sioux City, Davenport, Cedar Rapids, Burlington, and Iowa City had been chosen, there was general rejoicing in those communities over their good fortune.

Sioux City was the first town to welcome the Freedom Train. For days preceding Rededication Week citizens of the metropolis of northwestern Iowa read articles and editorials on the American heritage and were fairly bombarded with slogans, pictures, and cartoons emphasizing the Freedom Train in local advertising in the *Sioux City Journal*. For example, the editor of the *Hour Glass*, after pointing out that Wendell Willkie had defined freedom as an "indivisible" word that must

be extended to all, if it was to be properly enjoyed, wisely concluded: "Let us rededicate ourselves, this week, to the practical application of freedom so that it may in truth guarantee the unbounded benefits which our forefathers meant it to. And may each and everyone of us be pledged to champion liberty for all peoples."

The five-day Rededication Week began on Sunday, May 9th, with churches holding services emphasizing American freedom. President Earl A. Roadman of Morningside College was the principal speaker at a special union service which featured a concert by Monahan Post Legion Band and selections by the Central High School Choir.

The women's organizations of Sioux City staged a dramatic program on Monday evening at Central High auditorium featuring talks, music, a pageant stressing the American heritage, and the presentation of the Monahan Post awards to the winner of the essay and poster contests on "Freedom is Everybody's Job." A total of 458 had entered the essay contest while 75 young artists competed for the best poster award. But the "most impressive" item on the program, according to one reporter, was the appearance of the Sons of the Legion musical corps.

"This group of youngsters, sons of the men who actually fought on the battlefields to maintain

the freedom which the train and its documents represent, ranging in size from husky 6-footers to lads barely 4 feet tall, filled the large auditorium with a roll of drums and a blare of brass instruments which left few members of the audience dry-eyed.

"They didn't play sensational numbers — just Stars and Stripes Forever, A Long Long Trail, America and a few other homely, old fashioned favorites, but when they had finished they had added something to the meaning of the program and the visit of the Freedom Train."

The third day of Rededication Week in Sioux City featured a patriotic parade staged by labor, service men, and veterans and viewed by out-of-town dignitaries from all branches of the armed services. A reporter on the *Sioux City Journal* said it looked like the whole town had turned out to see the "electric parade" which featured two giant searchlights playing over the line of march from opposite ends of Fourth Street and catching the two C-47 transport planes flying back and forth overhead. Floats depicting the various American freedoms proved, the *Journal* concluded, that America "has freedom, appreciates that freedom and is ready, if necessary, to defend that freedom."

The fourth day of Rededication Week stressed

the youth of Sioux City. Students had decorated their school floats to represent a "Parade of the Documents" emphasizing such historic events as "Columbus Discovers America," "The Mayflower Compact," "The Declaration of Independence," "The Bill of Rights," "The Gettysburg Address," and "The United Nations." Since schools were closed in other Iowa cities when the Freedom Train visited them, this important feature was lost to parents and children alike.

On Thursday, May 18th, at 4:40 a. m., the Freedom Train glided into Sioux City "like a graceful swan" over the Great Northern tracks from Sioux Falls. Two Le Mars boys, Edgar and Bruce Bedell, were on hand to greet the "shining white train," having taken their place at the head of the line at 3:30 a. m. Mayor Dan J. Conley welcomed the Freedom Train to Sioux City and Walter H. S. O'Brien, civilian director of the Train, replied in behalf of the American Heritage Foundation. Governor Robert D. Blue declared that "human liberty has come to us only because of the struggle of men through countless centuries." The Freedom Train, he said, contains the evidence of much of that struggle.

These ceremonies over, Governor Blue, as the first citizen of Iowa, together with members of the local committee, was escorted through the Train



PHOTO BY SIOUX CITY JOURNAL

LE MARS BOYS WERE FIRST AT SIOUX CITY



PHOTO BY BURLINGTON HAWKEYE-GAZETTE

TWO MILLIONTH VISITOR HONORED AT BURLINGTON

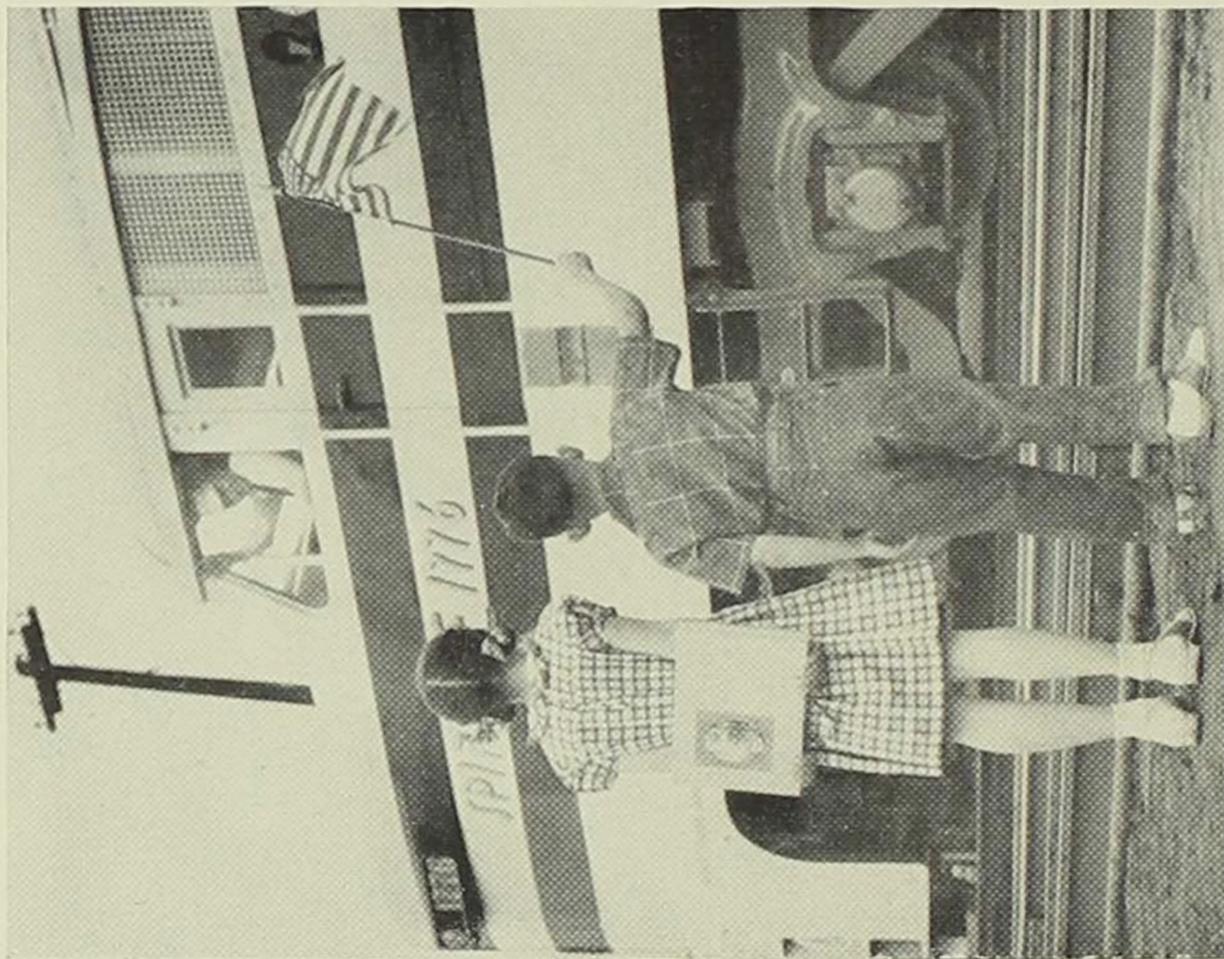


PHOTO BY CEDAR RAPIDS GAZETTE
 CEDAR RAPIDS GREET'S FREEDOM TRAIN



PHOTO BY BURLINGTON HAWKEYE-GAZETTE
 SCOUTS POST COLORS AT BURLINGTON

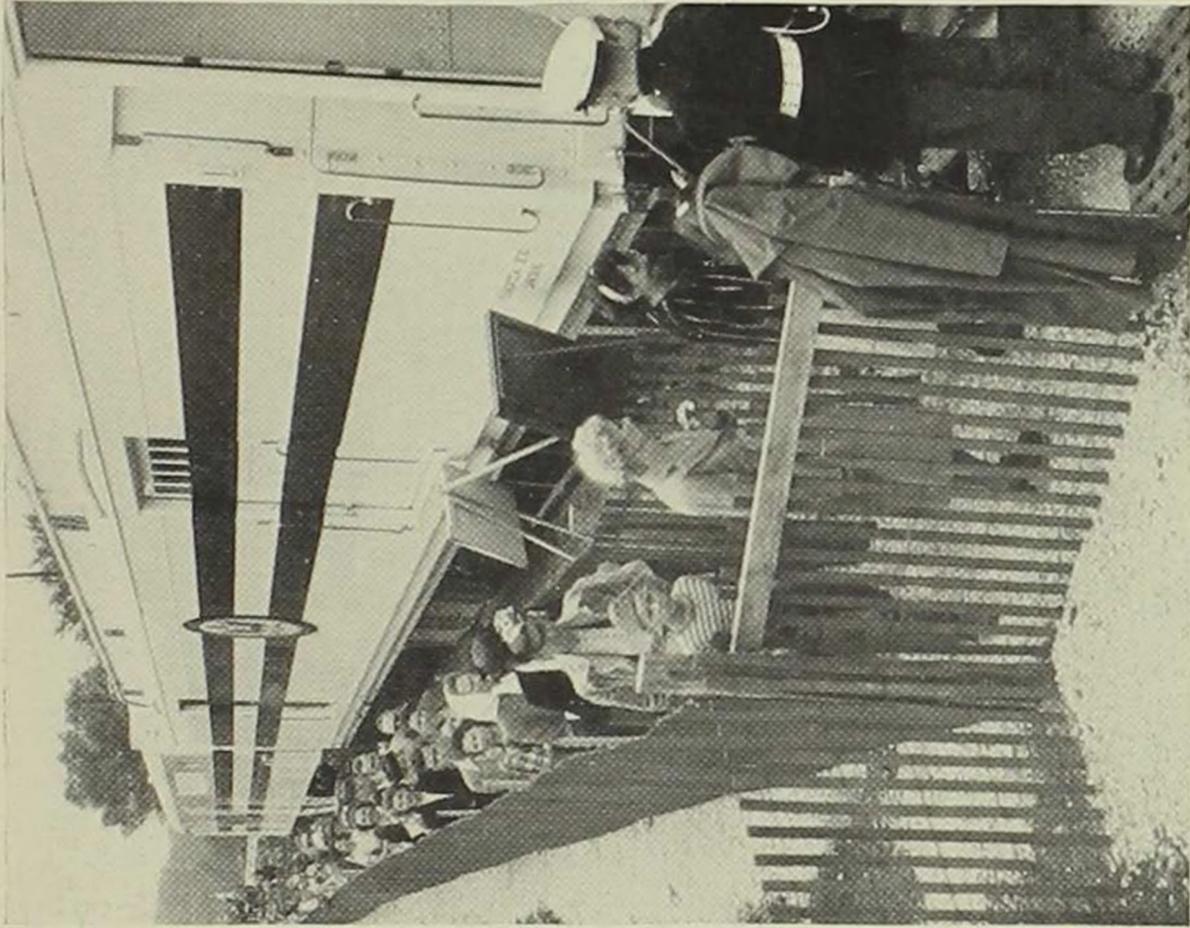


PHOTO BY DAILY IOWAN
BOARDING THE TRAIN AT IOWA CITY

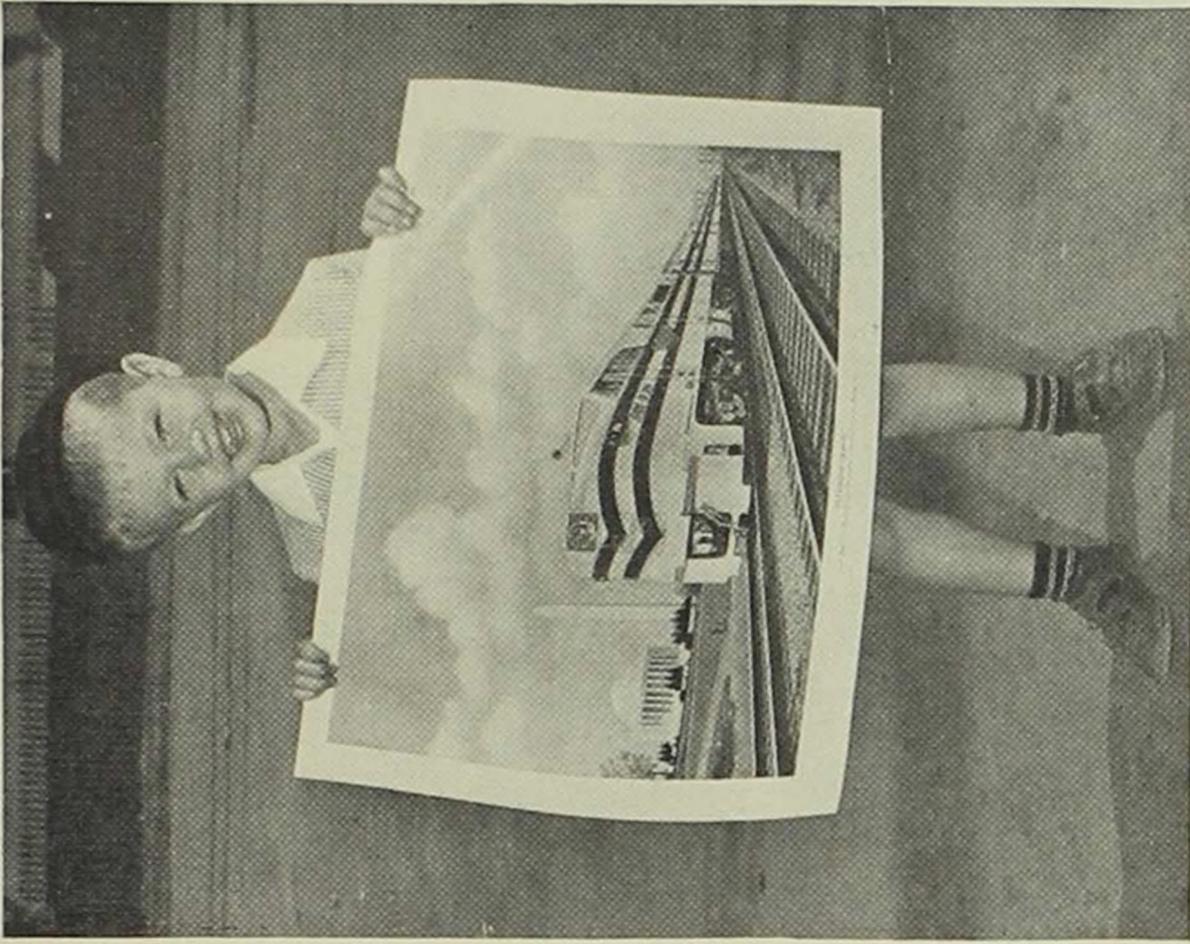


PHOTO BY IOWA CITY PRESS-CITIZEN
SOUVENIRS OF THE FREEDOM TRAIN

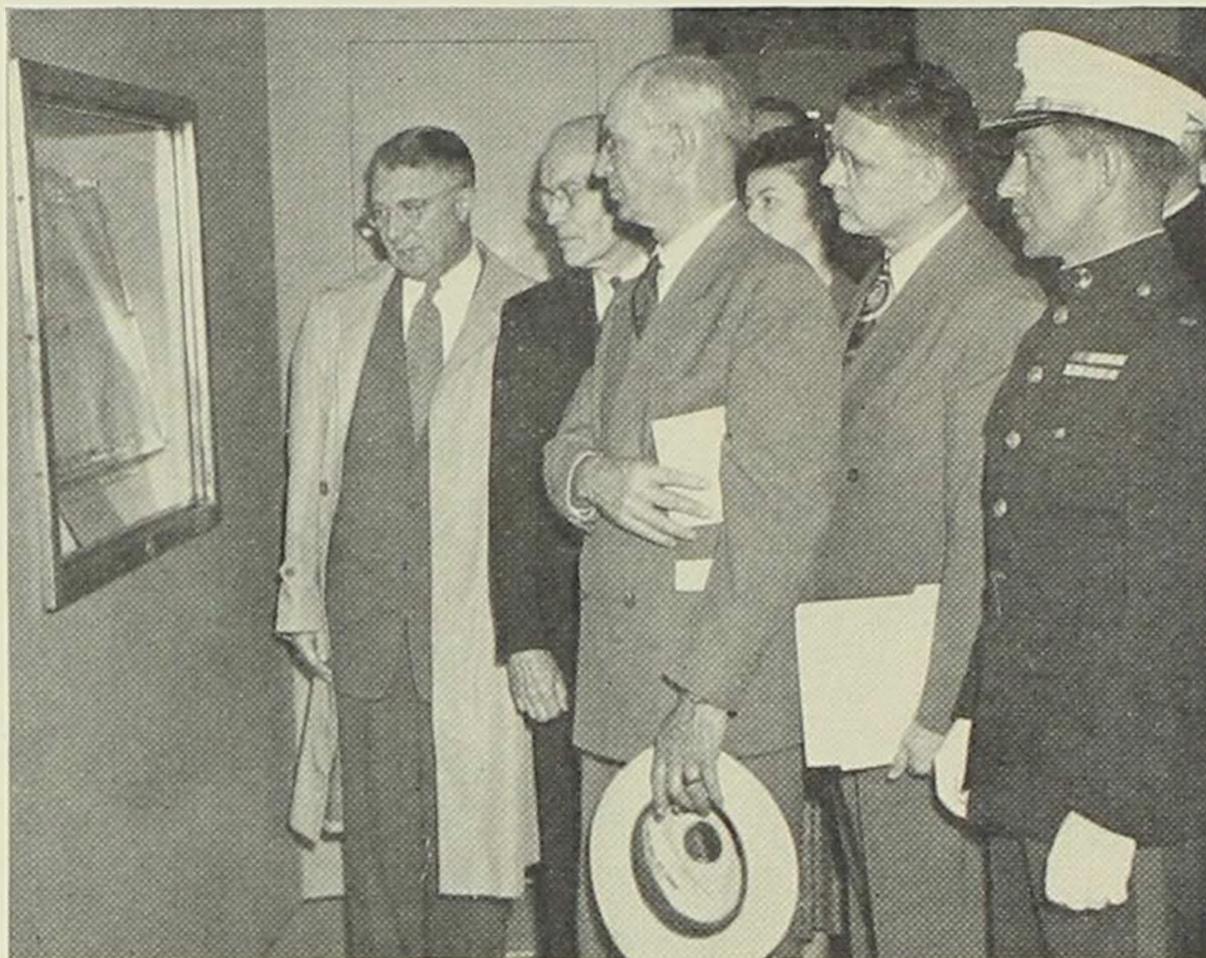


PHOTO BY IOWA CITY PRESS-CITIZEN

STUDYING AN IMMORTAL DOCUMENT

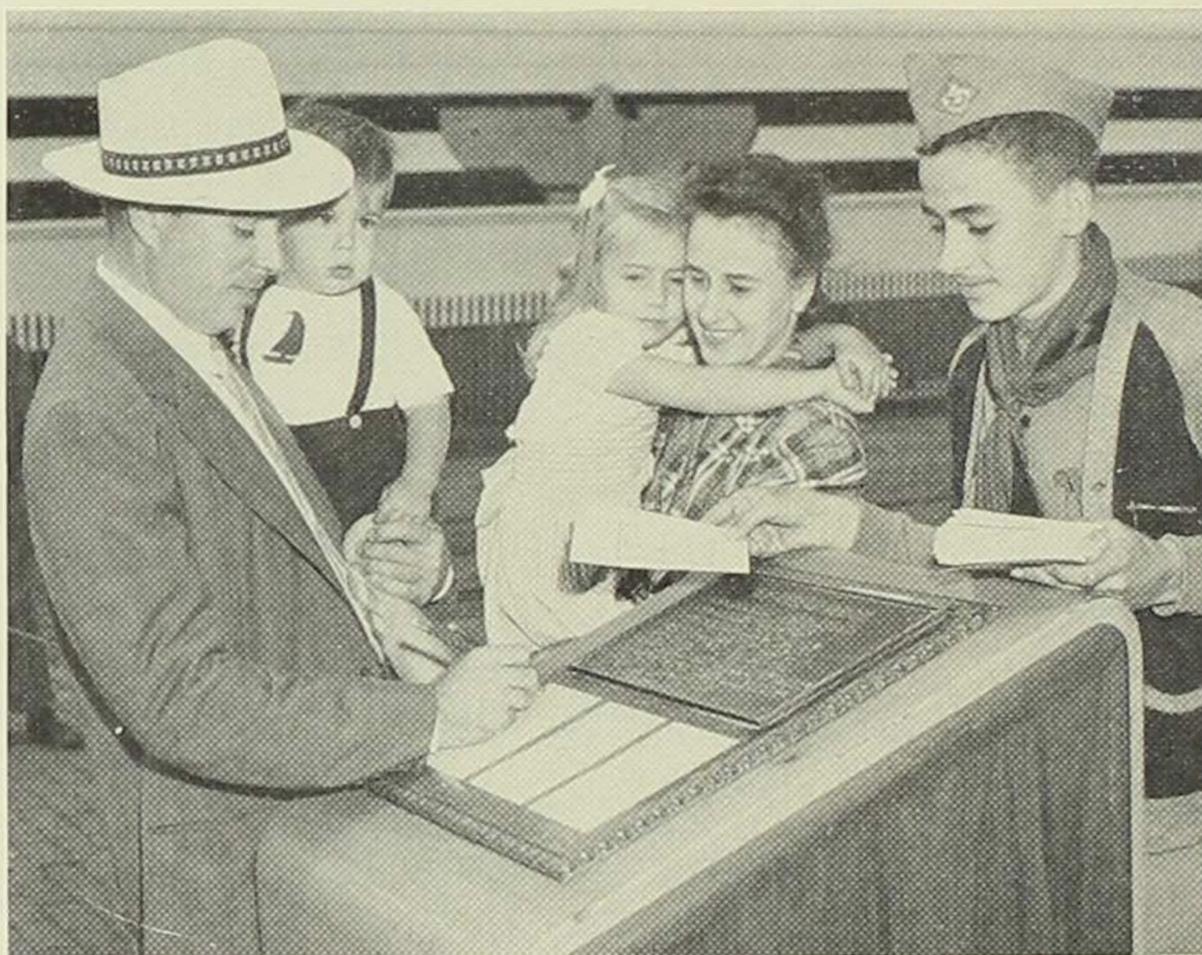


PHOTO BY IOWA CITY PRESS-CITIZEN

SIGNING THE FREEDOM TRAIN SCROLL

by Mr. O'Brien, who pointed out salient facts about the 127 documents and six historic flags. Emerging from the Train, Governor Blue declared: "It's wonderful. It's a great privilege for me and for the people of America to see the priceless documents of the United States." Mayor Conley was equally enthusiastic. "As you leave the train, you can't help hoping that everyone in American can see it, too."

A selected group of 350 representative school children from Woodbury and surrounding counties followed close on the heels of Governor Blue. At ten o'clock, with nearly four thousand persons on hand, the Train was officially opened. Throughout the day a steady stream filed through the Train. Among the interested visitors was a group of Winnebago Indians who had come from their reservation at Winnebago, Nebraska. When the last sightseer had stepped off the rear ramp a total of 9,501 had caught a fleeting glimpse of the most inspiring and priceless documents ever brought to the Hawkeye State.

Prior to its arrival in Sioux City the Freedom Train had been seen by more than 1,750,000 people in 184 cities located in 38 states. It left Sioux City almost at once, heading for Omaha, Nebraska, whence it swung westward to Lincoln, Grand Island and Alliance in Nebraska, Cheyenne, Den-

ver and other Rocky Mountain points, returning to Iowa by way of Hannibal and Quincy, making Burlington its second Iowa stop — on June 17th.

Burlington was the 211th stop of the Freedom Train. All social, economic, civic, religious, and patriotic resources had been pooled in Burlington in a co-operative movement to emphasize the stop of the Freedom Train. On Wednesday, for example, William Riley, vice-president of the Iowa Bar Association and a former Burlingtonian, spoke to the Des Moines County Bar Association, stressing the duty of lawyers to make all citizens understand that the court stood alone as the citizen's last bulwark of independence. "The powers of an independent judiciary," Riley pointed out, "are the common citizen's defense against the concentration camp."

Although less elaborate, the ceremonies at Burlington followed the Sioux City pattern. Four Boy Scouts — a Catholic, a Protestant, a Negro, and a Jew — posted the colors at the welcoming ceremony. The stop at Burlington was noteworthy in that Mrs. Edythe Blanchard of Fort Madison became the 2,000,000th person to view the precious documents aboard the Freedom Train.

Iowa City was the third stop of the Freedom Train in Iowa. At the welcoming ceremony, Train Director Walter H. S. O'Brien declared: "Many

countries that have had freedom have lost it through negligence. We must not be negligent. We must be very vigilant. Participate in voting, in P. T. A. groups, church and civic groups, union groups, chambers of commerce and other little jobs that might appear insignificant among themselves. If all people in the United States would participate in all we have to offer," Mr. O'Brien concluded, "we would have no need to fear any of the 'isms'."

Virgil M. Hancher, president of the State University of Iowa, was equally concerned over the apathy of many Americans. "We have had freedom for so long that it requires a train to remind us of that freedom. We want a free society where every individual is free to develop himself without barriers of race, color, religion and class. We want a society without ignorance, superstition and fear. What we crave in this country is a FREE society. No society can be free until every man has an honorable place in it."

A total of 7,763 persons passed through the Freedom Train at Iowa City. Each underwent the soul-satisfying experience of communing with the great men and women who had helped discover, develop and shape the great nation Americans live in today — Columbus, Roger Williams, Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine, James Madison and James Monroe, Franklin, Washington, Lincoln,

Wilson, the Roosevelts, and a score of others. Upon emerging from the Train, Mayor Preston Koser exclaimed: "Only once in a lifetime do you get to see something like this." Leslie G. Moeller, Director of the School of Journalism at the University, was impressed by the "continuing pattern that shows up among these documents to stress the importance of the individual human being."

Leaving Iowa City, the Freedom Train proceeded to Cedar Rapids, where ten-year-old Eddie Burgess, bent on seeing the Declaration of Independence with his own eyes, had taken up his vigil at 6:30 a. m. At the welcoming ceremony, President Virgil M. Hancher declared that the "risk of indifference is a greater danger than our invasion by a foreign country."

The afternoon crowd in Cedar Rapids learned a lesson on the blessings of liberty from a man who had once lost his freedom. "Freedom is like help," Professor Eric Kollman of Cornell College explained. "You appreciate it most after you've lost it. You know what freedom means once you have been in prison." Having endured the brutality of Hitler's storm troopers in his native Austria, Professor Kollman could well describe his feelings and those of his refugee companions when they caught their first glimpse of America. "We knelt down, we prayed, we cried, the tears came from

our eyes. Freedom — that's what those of us who come to these shores from oppressed countries appreciate most." In conclusion, Professor Kollman declared: "Freedom is liberty plus groceries . . . when the stomach gets hungry our sense of liberty and freedom sometimes gets lost." Kollman urged his Cedar Rapids audience to see that hungry nations get enough to eat "so they won't sell their freedom for food and so that liberty everywhere won't be endangered."

One Cedar Rapids resident was destined to appreciate the blessings of liberty and the memory of Freedom Train Day — Saturday, June 19th! He was Preben Hysing, a young Norwegian, who had come to America on a student visa to study art in New York. Later Hysing came to Iowa to visit friends in Decorah. Learning that the Ambro Advertising Agency in Cedar Rapids needed a commercial artist, he secured the position and had been working for Ambro about a year on extended visas when word came that no further extensions would be granted. Despite the best efforts of Senator Bourke B. Hickenlooper and Representative Henry O. Talle, Hysing was ordered out of the country. His tickets were purchased, the Ambro company had planned a farewell party for him on Sunday, June 20th, and poor Preben Hysing was prepared to leave for Norway on Tuesday.

Shortly after noon on Saturday, word came that an amendment to the displaced persons bill had been passed, granting 15,000 aliens then in the United States the right to remain as prospective citizens. The employers of Hysing started looking for the unhappy Norwegian to tell him of the good news. They could not find him anywhere. Finally, Preben Hysing, alien, was discovered standing in line, waiting to see the Freedom Train!

The "irresistible lure" of the documents of liberty had impelled 1,771 persons to pass through the Train by noon. "Still people came — Negro and white, a blind woman, young mothers pushing go-carts, a party of eighty that left Guttenberg at dawn, two legless veterans of World War I in wheel chairs." When the doors swung shut at 10 o'clock in Cedar Rapids, 7,332 had shuffled through the Freedom Train.

The Cedar Rapids *Gazette* caught the spirit of the Freedom Train in an editorial entitled "Tribute to a Government of Laws Rather than Men." Contrasting the huge masses that cheered Hitler and Mussolini to the tremendous crowds in Greene Square to see America's immortal documents, the editor concluded:

"Here are thousands of free people paying homage not to the personal prowess of men but to a hard-won structure of abstract laws and prin-

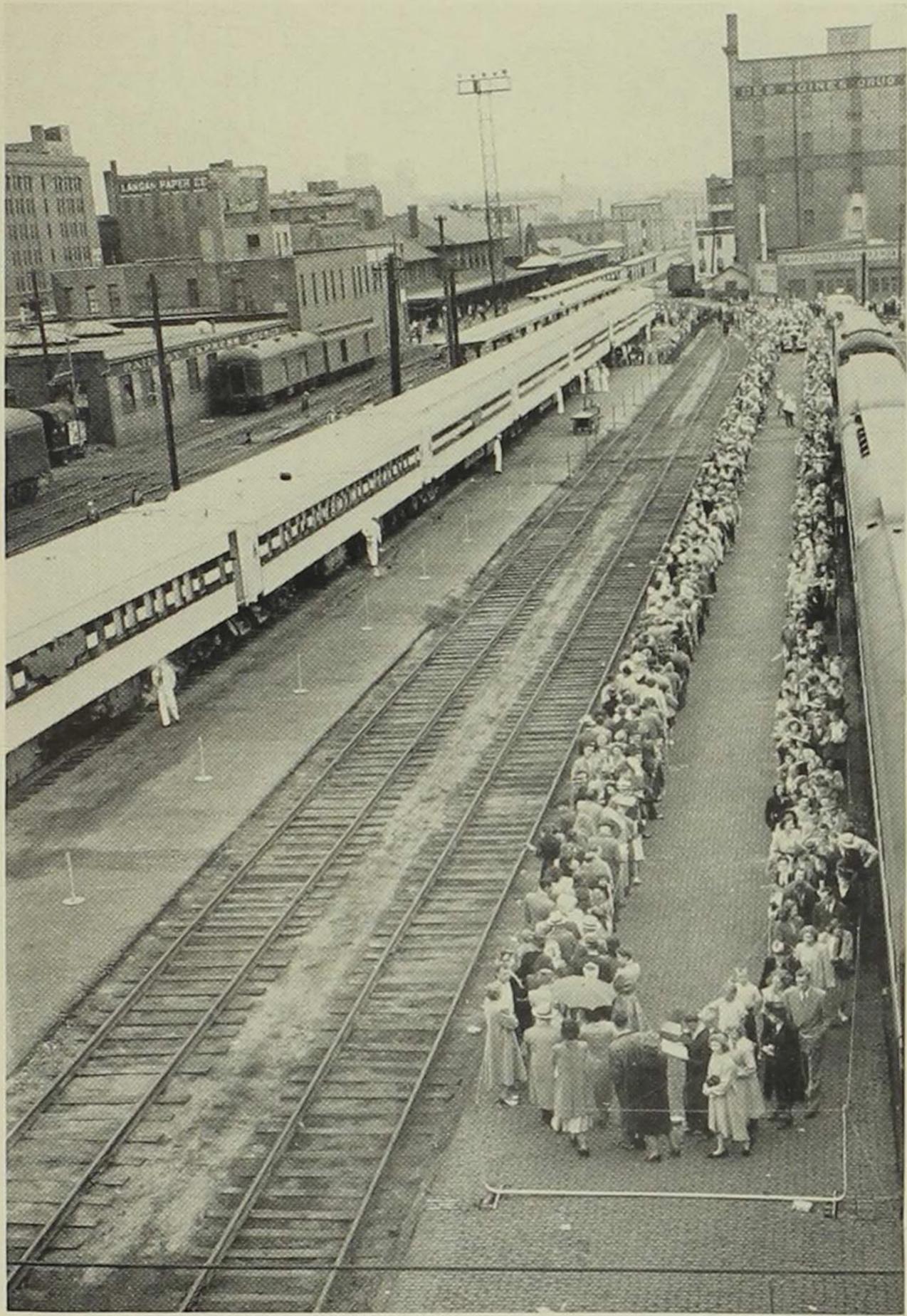


PHOTO BY DES MOINES REGISTER

FREEDOM TRAIN AT DES MOINES

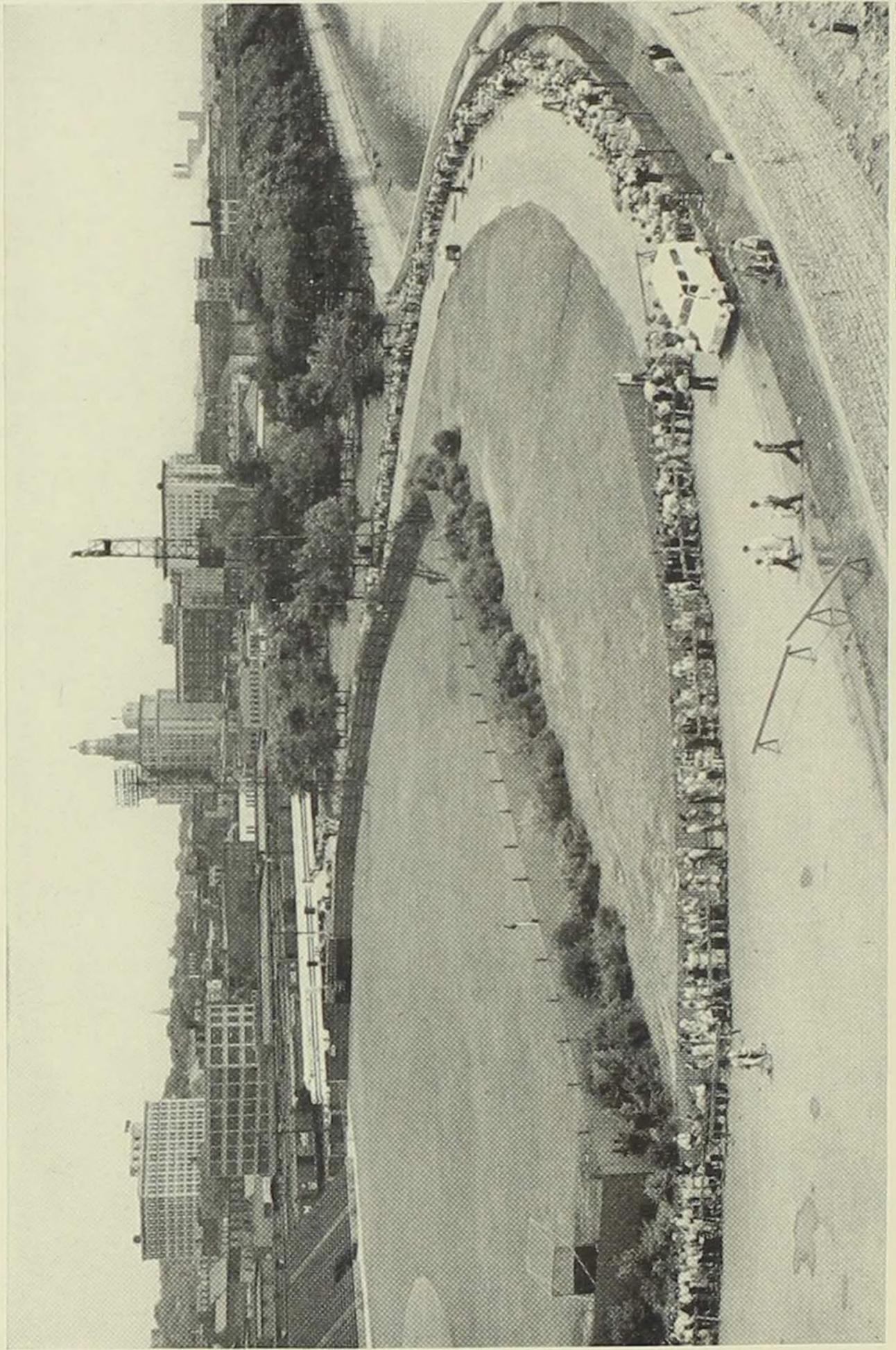


PHOTO BY DAVENPORT TIMES

FREEDOM TRAIN AT DAVENPORT

ciples that offer them opportunity and justice on which they can count. That is the prime essence of our American heritage, and obviously the people sense its importance."

The fifth stop of the Freedom Train in Iowa was Des Moines. It was cold and rainy on June 20th, but that did not deter four young boys from rising at 5 o'clock to lead the thousands prepared to enter the Train at ten o'clock. For the Freedom Train had been widely heralded in the local press; the first three pages of the rotogravure section of the *Sunday Register* for June 13th contained fifteen pictures and documents (three in color) ranging from the Mayflower Compact to some of the most priceless documents of World War II. Little wonder that people came to Des Moines from Promise City and Humboldt, from Fort Dodge and Scranton, from Oskaloosa and distant Clarksville, and from many other Iowa towns to see the documents which "define a way of life for all free peoples."

The general reactions in Des Moines were similar to other Iowa towns. In an article entitled "Symbols of Freedom," the *Des Moines Register* said:

"Documents are symbols . . . Just as the train itself is a symbol of American courage, American history, American Freedom . . . Just as Wash-

ington, Lincoln and the boys who crashed the beaches at Normandy and Saipan are symbols of freedom.

"And when you board the Freedom Train you'll believe again in all the great men who set us free. You'll believe in the reality of your American freedom. You'll realize all over again the need to live and work and think, courageously and valiantly, to perpetuate the American legend for which we've struggled through so many years, through so many famous men."

This enthusiasm was echoed by others. Emmett W. James, a retired navy chief radioman who arrived at 6:55 a. m. from Oskaloosa, declared: "I waited in line $22\frac{1}{2}$ years in the navy, so I guess it didn't hurt me again. I wanted to see those treasures in there." A 77-year-old Scranton visitor, Lea Bolton, declared: "It was certainly worth waiting $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours to see. People ought to see it many times."

Leaving Des Moines the Freedom Train sped eastward to Davenport for its sixth and last showing in Iowa. The crew rested on Monday, June 21st — a fortunate thing since it rained that day. Early Tuesday morning photographers found thousands forming a long line around the Davenport stadium. According to the Davenport *Democrat* "there were rich men, poor men, beggarmen

and probably even a thief or two. There were bankers, laborers, clerks and educators. Men, women and children came from all walks of life." Some stood in line three hours before they entered the Train. But it was worth it — all agreed, including 79-year-old James Wason, who moved slowly through the three coaches, peering carefully at all documents, only to collapse as he was preparing to leave the Train. After being revived by city police, Wason was rushed home in a city ambulance. He apparently suffered no ill effects and expressed warm appreciation for the chance to see the precious cargo of American liberties.

Before the Freedom Train left Davenport for Rockford, Illinois, a total of 8,142 had passed in "thrilled silence" the documents "penned by men who were ready and willing to stake their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor to give them validity." These Davenporters, together with the forty thousand Iowans who had seen the inspiring parade of documents, charters and flags in five other Iowa cities, could agree with editor Hugh Harrison that every Iowan should have an opportunity to "visit the Freedom Train, stand humbly in the presence of documents charged with personalities of great and heroic men, and thank God for America!"

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN