

The PALIMPSEST

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MARCH/APRIL 1986

A COLLEGE COURSE
for TWENTY-FIVE CENTS



RADIO CORRESPONDENCE COURSES



State Historical Society of Iowa
The Palimpsest

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The PALIMPSEST

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Mary K. Fredericksen, Editor

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Cover: (front) In its brochure announcing the fall 1926 schedule of radio correspondence courses, the University of Iowa's Extension Division urged all WSUI listeners to participate: "Here is an excellent opportunity to take college work even though you may be unable to come to the University in person. Even if you do not care to work for college credit, you may follow the lectures and do the reading with immense benefit to yourself." (back) Looking across the Iowa River towards Old Capitol and the eastern portion of the University of Iowa campus, c. 1930. Station WSUI's 125-foot broadcasting towers are visible atop the Engineering Building in the far right portion of the photograph. (SHSI)



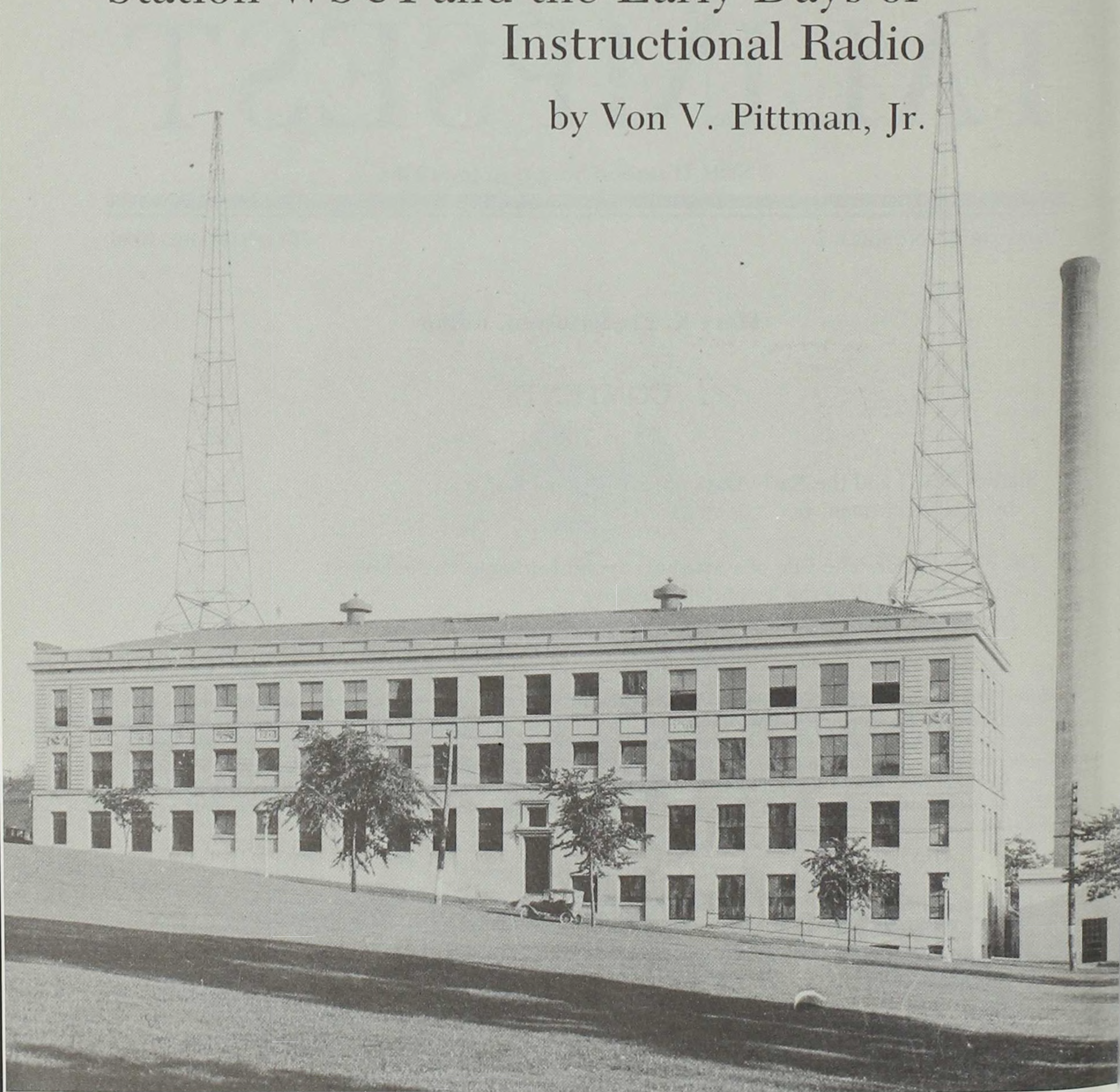
The Meaning of the Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest 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.

Station WSUI and the Early Days of Instructional Radio

by Von V. Pittman, Jr.



The twin broadcasting towers for radio station WHAA [WSUI] were designed and built on top of the Engineering Building during the 1923-24 academic year. (courtesy University Archives, University of Iowa Libraries)

In the period between the world wars, the federal government issued radio broadcasting licenses to 202 colleges, universities, school boards, and proprietary schools. To many educators, it looked as if educational stations would permanently dominate open-broadcast radio. Naturally, opinions as to what "educational radio" meant varied a great deal. At some colleges and universities the term meant only providing the public with cultural and informational programming. Other institutions envisaged using radio to extend their faculties, to make a college education accessible to distant — that is, off-campus — students. They would go beyond informational and entertaining "educational radio," to create "instructional radio," with formal classes offered to nonresident, enrolled students. Some educators believed that instructional radio would radically transform American higher education.

The State University of Iowa's involvement in radio derived from experimentation in its College of Applied Science (Engineering), as was the case at many universities. The Department of Electrical Engineering began broadcasting via "wireless" code in 1911. By 1917 it was broadcasting programs of news, weather reports, sports, and even a seventy-five-lesson course in radio telegraphy, all in code. Carl Menzer, who would become S.U.I.'s first announcer and spend more than fifty years in its broadcasting programs, was one of the participating instructors. After a brief wartime moratorium, the university resumed broadcasting, using a homemade voice and music transmitter. In 1919, the S.U.I. received an experimental license and the call letters 9YA. On June 26, 1922, the university was granted a standard broadcast license and was assigned the call letters WHAA. The Federal Radio Commission had to turn down the university's request for the call letters WSUI because a

shipborne station had already claimed them. In 1925, when the ship was decommissioned, the university was allowed to switch to WSUI.

In 1923 an *ad hoc* committee consisting of the dean of engineering, William Raymond, the university editor, L.H. Weller, and three professors had met to discuss the future of radio at the university. This group recommended to President Walter A. Jessup that the university establish its own station, using equipment that would be "second to none in the state." Further, its transmitting power should at least equal that of the Davenport station owned by the Palmer College of Chiropractic, WOC (World of Chiropractic), then the most powerful station in the state. Years later, in a legal brief, the university administration praised Dean Raymond for his early vision of radio's potential. "He among the first in the world sensed the place of radio as an instrument in education and it was on that basis that the money for the construction of our station was obtained." Later in 1923, the College of Applied Science received an appropriation of \$22,000 to purchase and install the university's first commercially-built transmitter, a 500-watt unit from Western Electric, bearing serial number 102. The first such unit, number 101, is now housed at the Smithsonian Institution. The WHAA transmitter was installed in the attic of the Engineering Building.

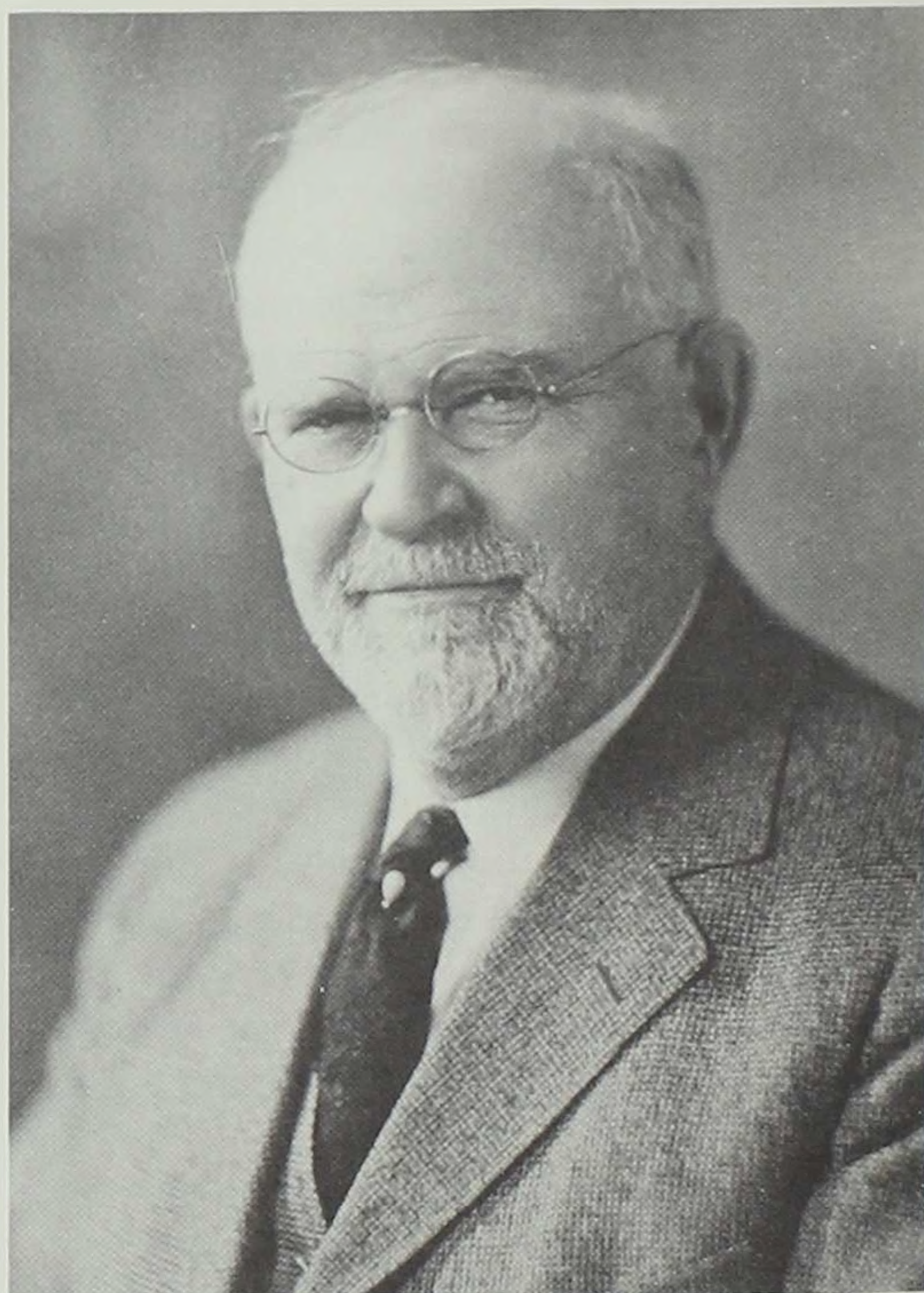
From the very early days of WHAA, the university's administration, and many of its faculty, considered radio an important educational medium. One specific use would be the broadcasting of credit courses. In the inaugural program from WHAA's new facilities, which drew alumni responses from as far away as New Mexico and Connecticut, President Jessup declared, "it is but the logical outcome in the field of applied science that radio, [*sic*] broad-casting service will make available new fields of educational activities." According to Jessup, the university intended to:

institute a direct educational service of an extra mural character, for those who are interested, and thus make it possible for the citizens of our state to share with us such educational opportunities as it is possible for us to provide.

In a 1927 request to the Federal Radio Commission, asking for greater authorized broadcast power, the university's application stated:

This is no place to indulge in idle fancies but it is no imaginary dream to picture the school of tomorrow as an entirely different institution from that of today, because of the use of radio in teaching.

The management of station WHAA, or WSUI, as it finally evolved, represented a compromise between the central administration, the College of Applied Science, the Extension Division, and representatives of the faculty. Dean Raymond had, of course, been involved from the beginning. The Extension Division became involved, among other reasons, because the radio project required a sustained, reliable source of funds. In 1922, in order to enable WHAA to broadcast performances from the School of Music, a classroom had to be converted into a studio by tacking burlap onto the walls to deaden echoes. The director of Extension, O.E. Klingaman, offered to pay for this conversion, and to engage a permanent operator-announcer at the rate of fifty dollars a month. President Jessup quickly accepted the offer. Initially, operational control of the station remained in Dean Raymond's hands. This annoyed Extension's Klingaman, who resented paying the bills, yet having no voice in programming decisions. Later that year, Raymond was surprised to learn that the University Senate had created a committee to deal with radio. He complained that he "couldn't understand what the functions of this Senate committee should be."



William G. Raymond, dean of the College of Applied Science (Engineering), "sensed the place of radio as an instrument in education" and pushed to find the money and means to build station WHAA. (courtesy University Archives, University of Iowa Libraries)

Apparently there had been a lapse in communications, because President Jessup soon named Raymond chairman of this Senate Committee on Radio. During this time, the Extension Division continued to pay a major share of the radio station's expenses, which were running about \$300 a month. In 1923, Edward Lauer, who replaced Klingaman as director of Extension, told Raymond that he did not know if Extension would be able to continue to bear the expenses. But Lauer found the money, because:

It seemed to me to be fundamental that the administration of that station should be in

the Extension Division. So I managed to find enough money to run the station for one year from my appropriation, so that, although the actual administration is in the hands of a committee of which the Dean of the College of Engineering is chairman, I do feel that I have retained control of the station, not merely for what the Extension Division wanted to do but for all of its activities in the university.

Lauer's description of the manner in which the station was managed was correct. Operations were in the hands of the Senate Radio Board, with Raymond as chairman. The Department of Electrical Engineering received funds for technical support and Extension assumed responsibility for programming, announcing, and providing office support, in conjunction with the radio board, with funds provided by

the university, beginning in the 1924-25 academic year. After the death of Raymond, Lauer became board chairman, thus bringing all administrative matters under the control of the director of Extension, where they still remain, although Extension's name has been changed to the Division of Continuing Education and the director has been upgraded to a dean.

The university's commitment to add instructional programming to WSUI's schedule dates from its early days of open broadcasting, as evidenced by Jessup's 1924 inaugural address. Shortly after his address, however, Jessup began receiving complaints about WHAA's boring, lackluster programming. University Editor Weller told Jessup that the station could not hope to compete with the commercial stations by presenting cultural programming, no matter how great its value. Jazz, unfortunately, was more appealing than Professor Edwin



Carl Menzer, director and announcer of the university's radio station for over fifty years, caught in a characteristic pose at the station controls. (courtesy University Archives, University of Iowa Libraries)

Ford Piper reading his poems. Weller opined that the university should use radio to do what it did best — to teach. “To that end radio courses could be arranged, I think.” For now, he said, “we’re just a poor act in a highly competitive vaudeville show.” A letter from the university’s news editor, Frank Hicks, echoed the same complaints. He suggested building up a “radio correspondence school,” with certificates of completion. This use of broadcasting could become a “feeder,” enticing students to come to Iowa City to complete their education.

The academic wheels began turning in the spring of 1924. Dean Raymond, Extension Director Lauer, and the Senate Radio Board met to consider developing credit course programming. All supported the idea, with the stipulation that radio courses would not be used to justify cutting back any existing instructional programs. The Senate’s Committee on Course of Study appointed a subcommittee to make specific recommendations. This group built on the cooperative model that Extension, Applied Science, and the radio board had already established. Radio lectures would be used as adjuncts to correspondence courses to be offered by the Bureau of Correspondence Study, a unit of University Extension. Course content and development would be supervised by the various academic departments and by the director of Extension. The university’s standards would have to be maintained at all times, the subcommittee warned. It also recommended that sixteen written lessons and a proctored, written final examination be required for a two-credit course. Apparently course development was already well underway, because the subcommittee recommended approval of “all radio and correspondence credit so far arranged” by Extension. This is essentially the way course development would work throughout the first radio course experiment. Lauer and Helen Williams, director of the Bureau of Correspondence Study,



O.E. Klingaman, director of the Extension Division during WHAA's early and experimental period. (courtesy University Archives, University of Iowa Libraries)

worked with academic departments in the development of course outlines and study materials. The Course of Study Committee — thirteen liberal arts professors — had to approve each course before it could be offered.

Naturally, there were some snags. At least one professor who started working on a radio course in September 1924 did not have it completed in time for the first semester, spring 1925. In addition, several instructors preparing to give courses wanted their weekly lectures to last up to twenty-five minutes, rather than the twelve minutes allowed them. Helen Williams relayed this complaint to Dean Raymond, who defended the restricted lecture time because, he said, twenty-five minutes exceeded the attention span of radio listeners;



Edward H. Lauer served as Extension Division Director between 1923 and 1929, a period highlighted by the development of instructional programs for radio. (1925 Hawkeye)

twelve minutes provided sufficient time for a good, well organized speaker. Besides, lengthy lectures could not be fitted into the broadcast schedule. For their trouble in preparing course materials the instructors received twelve dollars, plus fifty cents for correcting each student assignment during the semester.

By December 1924 the Bureau of Correspondence Study and station WHAA personnel were prepared to announce the course schedule for the spring semester of 1925. Correspondence Study mailed out several thousand Extension bulletins, distributed five thousand announcement cards to other university departments for distribution with their usual form letters, and displayed posters at libraries and YMCAs. Even before beginning

to advertise, the Bureau of Correspondence Study received a number of inquiries. Once the direct mail advertising began, Williams reported a gratifying response.

On February 4, 1925, the first five radio courses got underway. They included "The Psychology of Learning," "Modern English," "Current Social and Economic Problems," "Appreciation of Literature," and "The American Constitutional System." But before the classes had been underway for two weeks, the broadcast schedule had to be changed. At the time, WHAA was dividing time on its assigned frequency with the Palmer family's station WOC, in Davenport. Dean Raymond acquiesced to schedule changes that necessitated shifting all of the class times. But in so doing, he ensured that WHAA could broadcast courses during evening hours, to meet the needs of working people, and in particular schoolteachers, for whom some of the courses were specifically designed. Eighty students enrolled that semester, sixty-four of whom would complete their course work and receive credit. Helen Williams believed that there would have been larger enrollments had the bulletins been sent out earlier. Even so, there was so much paper work involved in administering the courses that work on the conventional correspondence courses had to be postponed. Further, she reported that sales of course syllabi to persons who wanted to follow the lectures without registering for credit were also going well. A complete syllabus cost an interested listener only twenty-five cents, and the proceeds went to the course instructor.

At the end of the semester, both Williams and Lauer pronounced the experiment a success. Williams was particularly pleased about the program's technical success. She had received very few reports of static, and only one complaint about interference from another radio station. The student at the greatest distance — Stillwater, Oklahoma — regularly

sent in detailed notes of the lectures to prove that he was receiving the broadcasts clearly. Williams mailed a questionnaire to all students. Unfortunately neither the survey instrument nor the results survived. But she reported a general sense of satisfaction on the students' part. Many, she said, had already inquired about the fall course schedule. Lauer also believed that the enrollment figures for the first semester, although low, were satisfactory for a first attempt.

The Correspondence Study Department went all out in an attempt to build enrollments for the fall semester of 1925, scheduling seven courses. They mailed seventy-five hundred bulletins and ten thousand flyers, asked for lists of radio dealers, and then asked the dealers for the names of customers who had purchased receivers. Eventually they built a mailing list of about four thousand radio owners.

Eighty-seven students enrolled for the fall

semester, an increase of almost nine percent over the preceding semester, results Williams considered "not at all spectacular." She could not know, however, that radio course enrollments would reach their peak that semester and that thereafter they would decline. Technically, all went well. Student complaints about lecturers reading too quickly were greatly reduced from the previous semester. Most students lived in Iowa, but a few lived at great distances. An S.U.I. alumnus living in Earl Grey, Saskatchewan, enrolled and reported that he had little trouble in receiving the lectures.

Despite continued intense promotional efforts and extremely hard work on the part of Correspondence Study personnel in the subsequent four semesters, the number of students and later the number of courses began to decline, slowly at first, then quickly. In the fall of 1927 only fourteen students enrolled in two



William G. Raymond standing before a WSUI microphone, with Carl Menzer seated to the right, in the radio station's Old Gold Studio, c. 1925. (courtesy University Archives, University of Iowa Libraries)

courses. A third course attracted no students. With the end of the fall 1927 semester, true radio courses — with direct, paced instruction over the airwaves — ended. Helen Williams was unable to put together a schedule for the fall 1928 semester. Over the next several years, the Extension Division and Correspondence Study made several attempts to tie radio lectures into correspondence courses and to use them to pace and assist distant students, a method that had already been tested during the spring semester of 1927. That session, WSUI had broadcast lectures in elementary French and Spanish, although no radio courses were developed around them. Anyone who wanted to take either course had to register for the regular correspondence course. The lectures were only supplementary to the course; the course neither required their use nor was paced by them. The major beneficiaries of these broadcasts were Iowa high schools. Many foreign language classes tuned in, using these programs as supplementary material.

In the summer term of 1929, WSUI and Correspondence Study experimented with an arrangement they labeled *in absentia*. Professor Frank Luther Mott offered a course entitled, "The Short Story," which was broadcast live from a specially-equipped classroom, during daytime hours, before an audience of resident students. *In absentia* students were required to submit written work, as set forth in a syllabus, turn in their notes (in some cases), and pass a proctored final examination. Only two students enrolled *in absentia* that summer. In spite of this poor response, Correspondence Study offered two more courses on this basis the following fall, and five more in the spring of 1930. Except for the summer term, no records of *in absentia* student enrollments appear to have been kept. Instead, they were included with the other correspondence course enrollments. At any rate, it seems that very few students ever enrolled *in absentia*. As Williams

RADIO CORRESPONDENCE COURSES

Application for Credit Enrollment

Name

Mailing address

Permanent address

Age..... Date of application

Present occupation

Elementary grades: where and when.....

.....

High school: where and when

..... Graduate?.....

Colleges and universities attended with dates of attendance and degrees received

.....

.....

Have you ever been enrolled as a correspondence student with us?

Courses desired (department, course number and title)

.....

.....

State definitely what work you have done in the general subjects in which above courses fall:

.....

.....

.....

Amount enclosed (draft or postal order)

Shall we send your texts C. O. D.?

Do you wish to enroll unclassified?

Remarks:

.....

.....

.....

Each brochure describing the radio correspondence course offerings contained a pair of handy forms: an application for credit enrollment and an application for course syllabi. (courtesy the author)

noted, most of the people who wanted to take radio courses were schoolteachers, who could not listen to daytime broadcasts. However, university officials tended to exaggerate the success of these courses whenever they had to

defend their radio station frequency and power assignments. They used the existence of these courses as justification and proof of WSUI's educational mission.

Actually, gaining off-campus enrollments was not the only reason for broadcasting courses from the classroom. These broadcasts provided a very cheap source of educational programming. As Bruce Mahan, who replaced Lauer as director of Continuing Education in 1929, explained, these broadcast courses "have made a distinct contribution to adult education in the State and have brought listeners generally into closer contact with the University." As with the language courses, many high schools tuned in to some of the broadcasts, using them to supplement their own courses.

From remaining records it is impossible to determine when the practice of allowing *in absentia* enrollments ceased. As noted above, Correspondence Study kept no figures. There is no mention whatever of such enrollments in Correspondence Study's monthly reports after late 1929. The last surviving promotional materials for radio courses were produced in the fall of 1930. In a March 1932 edition of the

university's *Extension Bulletin*, devoted entirely to explaining Extension's mission and composition, there was absolutely no mention of the *in absentia* practice, although both WSUI and Correspondence Study were amply described. So it seems likely that this practice had died by then. Broadcasting from the classroom continued for decades thereafter, but as educational/informational programming, not as a means of earning college credit. From all indications, many Iowans enjoyed listening to such programming.

It also seems clear that the university administration and Extension's personnel did not expect that the absence of radio courses would be permanent. In 1927 the university argued to the Federal Radio Commission that WSUI, more than any other educational station in the United States, was ideally suited to serve the United States as an experimental station for both educational and instructional radio. The S.U.I. administration enumerated all of WSUI's and the university's unique features, including "a ready and eager faculty."

In 1932, Carl Seashore, dean of the Graduate School and a professor of psychology,

President Walter A. Jessup's Dedication of Broadcasting Station WHAA During Its Opening Program, February 12, 1924

IN THE NAME OF THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA I wish to extend greetings to former students, the alumni and citizens of this Commonwealth.

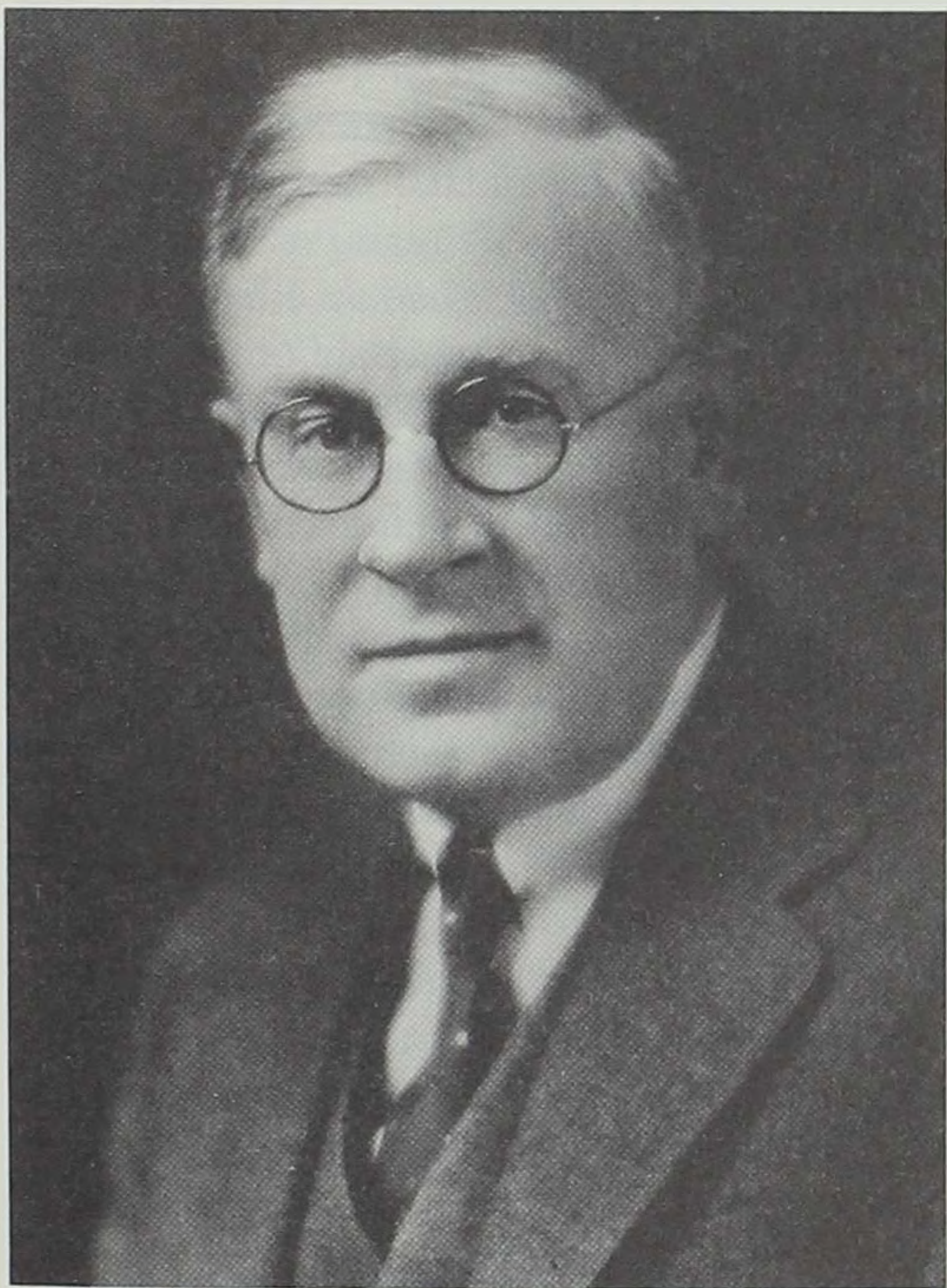
You have already heard something of the plans and purposes of this radio broad-casting station. In this connection, a bit of background may be of interest.

Students of history have traced with great detail the development of means of communication in the building of America. Many of the problems and complexities of the colonists centered around the difficulties of communication, difficulties of disseminating information, difficulties of transmitting important news. The

development of the Northwest Territory, the Louisiana Purchase, and indeed, the whole western part of America, actually paralleled the improvement in means of communication.

How rapidly these changes have come about! There are many persons tonight "listening in" to this Formal Opening who have lived through the entire period of the transition from the pony express to that of the aerial mail service; who have watched the transition from the courier to the use of the telegraph instrument, the telephone and now, the radio.

These changes have come about with unbelievable rapidity and have paralleled other dra-



Walter A. Jessup, university president between 1916 and 1934. (courtesy the University of Iowa AVC Photo Service)

advertised a psychology course that would itself serve as an experiment to learn how radio could best be utilized in collegiate instruction. He hoped that the use of lectures recorded on phonograph records would not only make it easier for WSUI to broadcast courses, but would enable the university to extend its range by having the records broadcast over several other stations. While it is clear that psychology instructors around the state participated in the experiment, there is no record of anyone having received credit for the course.

In 1933 station WSUI presented the audio portion of the world's first educational television programs, as seen on experimental station W9XX. At that time WSUI and the College of Engineering planned to offer "sight-sound" broadcasts of university courses. Two years later, Bruce Mahan told an inquiring Civilian Conservation Corps official that the university was considering developing a "Junior College of the Air," obviously modeled after an Ohio State University program of the same name. Neither of these plans ever progressed beyond the planning stage.

Since 1935 there have been at least three

matic inventions which have affected our lives. The "Covered Wagon" and the Indian pony gave way to the railway and the telegraph. The change thus effected is of special interest to the older members of our society. The joy and enthusiasm, and the riotous celebrations upon the arrival of the first railway train, mark high spots in the emotional life of the early days of Iowa. These celebrations that were noted by feasting, stirring addresses and joyous revelry, belonged to a period that is gone. And yet, we never can forget that this extension of the means of communication made possible the development of this great mid-land country.

Many of you who are listening tonight can recall your first ride in an automobile. It is hard to realize, however, that less than three decades

ago, magnificent prizes were offered to persons who would negotiate short distances with the horseless carriage. What curiosities they were? Can you not remember the thrill of your first ride in an automobile at a break-neck speed of from five to fifteen miles an hour? And now, they tell us that manufacturers propose to sell four million cars during the current year, and that in our own state we have enough automobiles to enable every one in the state to ride at the same time.

These developments have brought not only problems of individual expenditure but they have brought new state problems — public taxation for roads, new problems of social intercourse, and have changed the lives of all of us.

What a thrill there was at the first sight of an

documented attempts to revive instructional radio at the University of Iowa. None has been on the scale of the attempt in the 1920s, and none was particularly successful.

Given the magnitude of the University of Iowa's early effort and its pioneering in this type of course delivery, why then did radio courses not succeed? Years afterward, Helen Williams stated succinctly:

As time went on and neighboring stations increased their power, it became difficult for any but those in this section of the state to "get" our station. Then, too, the novelty had worn off, and the instructors objected to the extra work for so little pay.

While Williams spoke in very general terms, she was correct about the major reasons for the failure of the university's pioneering effort. Technical restrictions, the lack of a well-defined population of potential students, and the failure to create an adequate reward system — which led to faculty resentment — were indeed the major reasons.

The constantly changing — and usually more restrictive — power and frequency authorizations bear out Helen Williams' first point. In 1925 students from Oklahoma and Saskatchewan were able to enroll in and complete radio courses. By 1931 WSUI had an effective range of only one hundred miles, about equal to its range today. Between 1925 and 1929, WSUI had to change its frequency and broadcast power six times, and to share scheduling time with three different stations. The resulting confusion was beneficial to neither the university nor its prospective students.

Williams was also correct about the novelty wearing off. Several of the earlier students seemed to have had no real interest in earning college credit toward a degree. One of the first students was a practicing medical doctor, for example. In 1926, near the height of radio course enrollments, Extension Director Lauer found that the average age of radio students was over fifty. Also, several shut-ins had enrolled. These groups could have included very few people with realistic ambitions of earning a degree, especially in that day and age. Further, there was no way to earn a

aeroplane, with its roar and its speed! Just a few years ago, scientists proved, to their own satisfaction at least, that flying was scientifically impossible, and yet the news dispatches tell us that last week, with the storm which swept this midwestern country the aeroplane service was the least disturbed of all the means of transportation of the mails.

And now we have the radio which, just a little while ago, was a laboratory plaything. Tonight millions are "listening in" to programs of every variety, ranging from the light and airy music to the heaviest and most serious addresses about the affairs of the Nation. The coming of the radio has meant the opening up of whole new areas of educational service. Those of us who have watched the absolute changes that have come

about in economic and social relationships as a result of improved communication by railway, automobile, aeroplane, telegraph, and telephone, are expecting equally marked adjustments to this new means of communication.

Of what interest are all these changes to the University, you may ask. The answer is this, — the educational institutions have been forced to make adjustments to each and every one of these changes. They have been forced to recognize all of these developments in the fields of applied science, in the laboratory, — to the end that we have been training engineers and managers who were able to assume leadership in the problems of engineering incident to the development of the railway, the automobile, the aeroplane, telephone, telegraph, and now, with the

degree through this medium. As Bruce Mahan explained: "There never were enough courses broadcast, and the rules of the institution would have prevented it." However, there was one bright exception to this generalization.

Clifford S. Lideen, of Burlington, had been only a few credit hours short of a degree from the university when the United States declared war on Germany and he had enlisted in the army. He returned from Europe severely disabled, crippled by arthritis and quickly going blind. He managed to take enough radio courses in the spring of 1925 to complete the requirements for a bachelor of arts. President Jessup conferred Lideen's degree over WSUI during its broadcast coverage of commencement.

Surprisingly, none of the Iowa personnel involved seemed to have given much thought to identifying an audience for radio courses. There was never any mention of establishing an external degree or certificate program, for example. Except for schoolteachers, who could better their salaries by taking random courses, few people needed these courses. When radio courses were shifted from the evening to

daytime classroom broadcasts, they lost even the schoolteachers. The attitude of Extension and WSUI personnel appeared to have been that people should and would enroll in the radio courses simply as a means of self-improvement. And, no doubt, a few did. However, the bulk of listeners had no reason to register for course credit, even if they liked and appreciated the broadcasts. Thus, Lauer explained what he perceived as low course enrollment figures only in the broadest terms: "The public very generally has not come to look upon the radio as an instrument for serious educational work." It apparently did not occur to him and the others involved that few members of the public had any concrete need — according to their own perceptions — for formal educational work.

Another factor contributing to the demise of instructional radio at the University of Iowa was that the faculty had no desire to participate. Professors gained no relief from their regular teaching and research loads by teaching radio courses. Neither did such teaching have any bearing on promotion or tenure decisions in the normal academic reward system.

radio, the educational institutions are faced with the necessity of training men in the field of radio development, broad-casting, receiving, manufacturing, distributing, et cetera.

The Twentieth Century training in applied arts and professions involve the necessity of providing practical working facilities for the student, on a scale comparable to that found outside; for example, the training of dentists at the University made possible the development of a great dental infirmary where it has been possible to have persons from outside receive the services of these clinicians. Likewise, the training of physicians has made it possible to develop great hospitals where the public is served and students trained. Consequently it is but the logical outcome in the field of applied science that

radio, broad-casting service will make available new fields of educational activities.

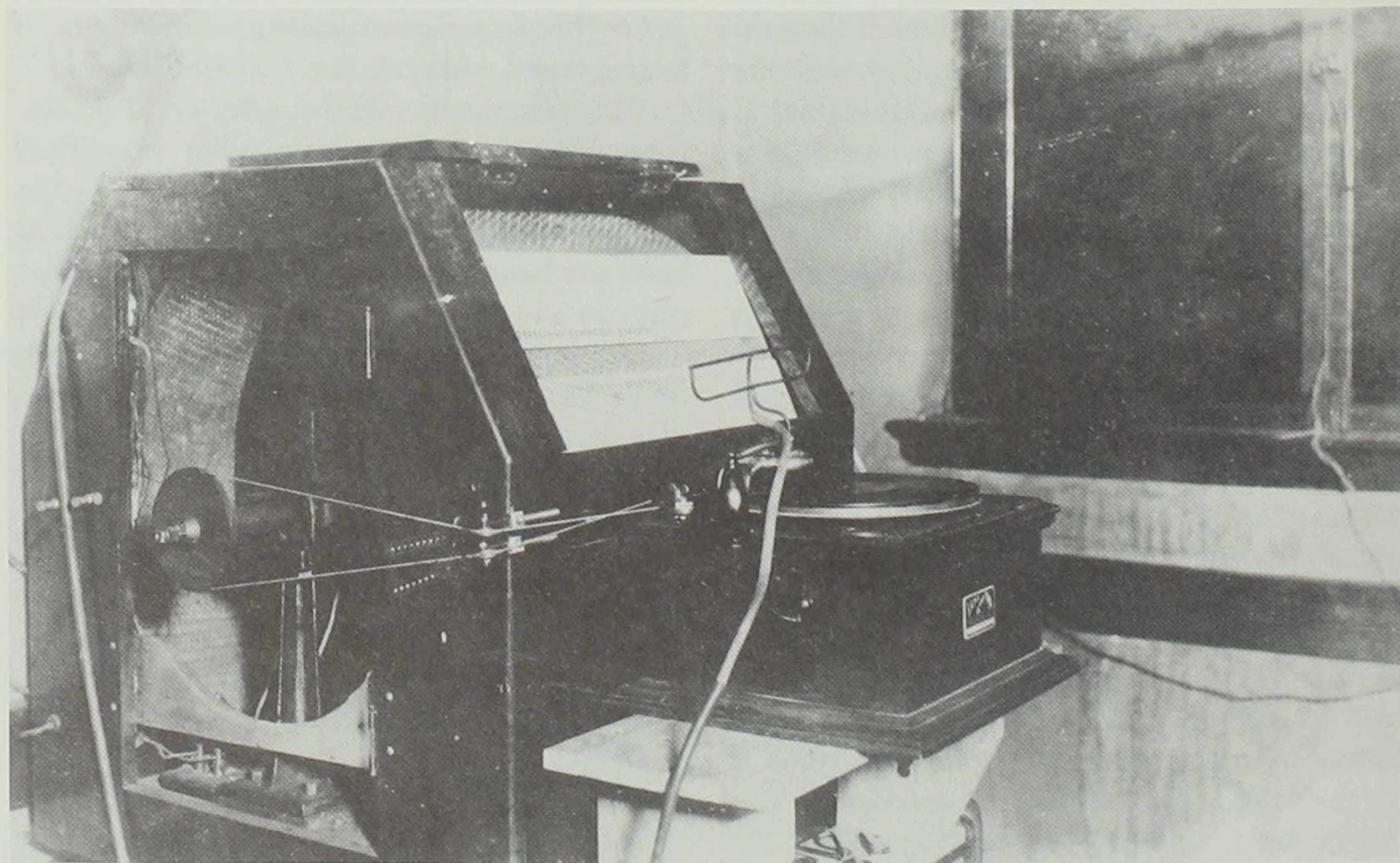
It is a purpose of the University to broad-cast all our Vesper services for the students, special musical numbers, important lectures, and indeed, to institute a direct educational service of an extra mural character, for those who are interested, and thus make it possible for the citizens of our state to share with us such educational opportunities as it is possible for us to provide.

In the name of the University I now dedicate Broadcasting Station WHAA of the University of Iowa, to the field of larger social service, richer educational opportunity, [and a] higher type of cultivated appreciation of the best things in the field of arts, sciences and state craft.

The fifty cents per lesson graded and twenty-five cents per syllabus sold could hardly have made radio teaching financially enticing. Without some commitment from the faculty it was impossible to offer stable instructional programs. If the university could have kept the radio course program operational for several years, it might have been possible to develop coherent offerings of real use to specific audiences. However, the lack of incentive — and thus commitment — helped make the radio course program a short one. On the surface this argument would not seem valid, for some of the university's most distinguished professors participated. The renowned historian Louis Pelzer, the famous biologist Bohumil Shimek, Pulitzer Prize winner Frank Luther Mott, and George Gallup, who would

achieve great fame for his development of public opinion polls, provide four examples.

At the 1926 National University Extension Association conference, while radio courses were still going well, even gaining enrollments, Lauer attested to the commitment of the faculty, all of whom, he said, believed in the validity of radio as an instructional medium. Because of this, he was sure that the university's administration would remain committed. But whatever the faculty's degree of faith in radio's utility, in the abstract, it did not ensure their willingness to develop and teach particular courses. And, on a working level, several of the participating professors exhibited only cursory interest in their radio courses. Bohumil Shimek, for example, had to be nagged repeatedly to correct and return



Carl Seashore, dean of the Graduate School and professor of psychology, experimented with ways to broaden the appeal of the university's radio courses in the early 1930s. Although the machine pictured above was an invention by Seashore for making musical tests, it is suggestive of his innovative step in recording a series of lectures on phonograph records. The lectures could then be distributed to stations beyond WSUI's range, and rebroadcast, thus allowing the university to extend its audience. (Stach Collection, SHSI)

RADIO CORRESPONDENCE COURSES GIVEN BY THE EXTENSION DIVISION
OF THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA, 1925-1927

<i>Course Number and Title</i>	<i>Instructor</i>	<i>Day and Hour of Lecture</i>	<i>Number Enrolled</i>	<i>Number Receiving Credit</i>
SPRING SEMESTER, 1925				
RC 9 — American Constitutional System	Prof. Frank Horack	Monday, 7:30 p.m.	10	7
RC 87 — Appreciation of Literature	Prof. Luther Mott	Monday, 7:50 p.m.	16	10
RC 195 — Current Social and Economic Problems	Mr. Dale Yoder	Monday, 8:10 p.m.	8	7
RC 131 — Psychology of Learning	Prof. F.B. Knight	Wednesday, 7:30 p.m.	18	15
RC 72 — Modern English	Mr. Thomas A. Knott	Wednesday, 7:50 p.m.	28	25
FALL SEMESTER, 1925				
RC 193 — Early Iowa History	Prof. Bruce Mahan	Monday, 7:30 p.m.	23	22
RC 111 — American Literature	Prof. Luther Mott	Monday, 7:50 p.m.	14	10
RC 140 — Iowa Flora	Prof. Bohumil Shimek	Monday, 8:10 p.m.	6	3
RC 172 — Problems of Population	Prof. Edward Reuter	Monday, 8:30 p.m.	9	6
RC 123 — Teaching of English	Prof. M.F. Carpenter	Wednesday, 7:45 p.m.	11	9
RC 103 — Political Parties of the United States	Prof. Kirk H. Porter	Wednesday, 8:05 p.m.	10	7
RC 1 — Elementary Psychology	Dr. Christian Ruckmick	Wednesday, 8:25 p.m.	14	9
SPRING SEMESTER, 1926				
RC 194 — Iowa History Since 1857	Prof. Bruce Mahan	Monday, 7:30 p.m.	16	14
RC 107 — Iowa Birds	Prof. Dayton Stoner	Monday, 7:50 p.m.	10	9
RC 145 — Importance of the Written Examination	Dr. Christian Ruckmick	Monday, 8:10 p.m.	23	20
RC 102 — English Novel	Prof. Nellie Aurner	Wednesday, 7:30 p.m.	16	11
RC 117 — Community Weekly	Prof. F.J. Lazell	Wednesday, 7:50 p.m.	7	3
RC 195 — Current Social and Economic Problems	Mr. Dale Yoder	Wednesday, 8:10 p.m.	11	11
RC 181 — Topics in Recent United States History	Prof. Louis Pelzer	Wednesday, 8:30 p.m.	4	3
FALL SEMESTER, 1926				
RC 35 — Social Psychology	Asso. Prof. N.C. Meier	Monday, 7:30 p.m.	11	5
RC 118 — Community Weekly	Prof. F.J. Lazell	Monday, 7:50 p.m.	4	3
RC 6 — Economic Resources of North America	Mr. Harold McCarty	Monday, 8:10 p.m.	13	10
RC 19 — School Hygiene	Dr. Don M. Griswold	Monday, 8:30 p.m.	14	13
RC 114 — Modern Norwegian Literature	Prof. Henning Larsen	Wednesday, 7:30 p.m.	5	4
RC 103 — Man and His Plants	Prof. Bohumil Shimek	Wednesday, 7:50 p.m.	5	3
RC 37 — Practical Social Ethics	Prof. C.F. Taeusch	Wednesday, 8:10 p.m.	7	2
RC 151 — English Prose and Prose Writers	Prof. John Scott	Wednesday, 8:30 p.m.	3	2
SPRING SEMESTER, 1927				
RC 104 — Magazine Writing	Prof. George Gallup	Monday, 7:30 p.m.	13	6
RC 172 — Problems of Population	Prof. Edward Reuter	Monday, 8:10 p.m.	9	5
RC 116 — Life Insurance	Prof. Clarence Wassam	Wednesday, 7:30 p.m.	8	1
RC 123 — Teaching of English	Prof. M.F. Carpenter	Wednesday, 8:10 p.m.	6	4
RC 73 — Introduction to Educational Psychology	Prof. F.B. Knight	Wednesday, 8:30 p.m.	6	4
FALL SEMESTER, 1927				
RC 103 — Political Parties in the United States	Prof. Kirk H. Porter	Monday, 7:00 p.m.	0	0
RC 193 — Early Iowa History	Prof. Bruce Mahan	Tuesday, 7:00 p.m.	4	2
RC 78 — Appreciation of Literature	Prof. Luther Mott	Thursday, 7:00 p.m.	10	7
Totals for the six semesters			372	272

(Source: Station WSUI History folder, WSUI Papers, University Archives)

assignments, to the point that the president's office had to intercede.

From the very beginning, Extension — in particular Correspondence Study — had had a great deal of difficulty in recruiting professors. Helen Williams complained that getting professors to agree to develop courses was her greatest problem. This worsened as the program progressed. By the end of the fall semester of 1927, recruitment had become impossible. She worked well into January 1928 but was unable to enlist anyone. The dean of the College of Education even refused to return her numerous calls. Thus no radio courses were delivered in the spring semester of 1928. Broadcasts of courses resumed only when professors could deliver them in the daytime, from their classrooms, which required a great deal less of their time and energy.

Even when professors agreed to deliver courses they often created problems. In the fall semester of 1926, for example, Williams complained that she had been unable to get her bulletin out on time because of "the impossibility of getting certain data from the instructors." She attributed the drop in enrollments that semester — from eighty-seven down to sixty-two — to the tardy bulletin, because it went out to potential students only two weeks before the classes began.

A lack of planning, of needs assessment, and of faculty and audience identification caused the State University of Iowa's initial venture in educational telecommunications to fail. In addition, the decreasing range of WSUI broadcasts was a contributing factor. In spite of its shortcomings, however, the Iowa effort was the most sophisticated and comprehensive experiment of the 1920s. Administrative support, while not absolute, exceeded that of most institutions. Other educators of the day recognized and praised the S.U.I.'s innovative and well-organized effort. It should be noted, also,

that no college or university succeeded in maintaining credit courses by radio in the years between the wars. By 1940, there were absolutely no enrollments in such courses. All of the college course programs of that era had collapsed.

The S.U.I. venture does, in fact, stand as a landmark in the development of educational telecommunications. The university enthusiastically promoted and delivered its radio course program. It used state-of-the-art equipment and fought for access to the airwaves. In contrast to some of the half-hearted "certificates" of some institutions, it offered university credit, something only twelve other colleges in the United States were willing to try. And the effort was not entirely futile. The use of radio for instruction at S.U.I. was an important factor in the development of educational television, evidenced by experiments in Iowa City in the 1930s. While WSUI and the Extension Division did not succeed in their first venture into educational telecommunications, they became pioneers in the development of long-distance education. □

Note on Sources

This article grew out of research for a paper on instructional radio written for presentation at the First International Conference on the History of Adult Education, at Oxford University, in July 1986.

The University Archives holds two collections that are essential to any study of the early days of radio at the University of Iowa. The President's Correspondence is well indexed, with folders on radio station WSUI and the Extension Division. There are also two very useful boxes of unindexed WSUI papers. Curator Earl Rogers and the staff of the Archives provide invaluable help to scholars interested in the university's history. The Center for Credit Programs, in the Division of Continuing Education, holds a set of monthly reports of the Bureau of Correspondence Study written by Helen Williams in her thirty-year tenure as director. These papers provide a concise, informative narrative of correspondence study at the University; they will be turned over to the Archives in about a year.

Two books on the early history of educational radio proved particularly useful: Carroll Atkinson, *Radio Extension Courses Broadcast for Credit* (Boston: Meador Publishing Company, 1941); and S. E. Frost, *Education's Own Stations: The History of Broadcast Licenses Issued to Educational Institutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937). The *Proceedings* of the National University Extension Association from the 1920s and 1930s also provided a great deal of material on the use of radio for instruction.

Die Frau Pastor

The Life of a Missouri Synod Lutheran Pastor's Wife in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

by Lenore Salvaneschi

Could the exhortations of the author of *Proverbs* and the talents of Gilbert and Sullivan have been combined, what a delightfully wicked parody might have been made about the "very modern model of a Lutheran preacher's wife" in the setting of a Missouri Synod Lutheran parsonage in the first half of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, such a production could never have played in the communities where these paragons of virtue existed, for the realities of life in a parsonage were too serious to be laughed at.

Such thoughts came to mind recently during the visit of a former student who had the courage and the advantage of being a far different, but no less admirable, *Frau Pastor* in the second half of the twentieth century. As Doris Bruch Strieter, the Midwest Director of Amnesty International-USA, and I lingered over our breakfast coffee, marveling at the contrast between her role and that of my mother's, I realized that even though I had spent a fair number of my own years as surrogate mistress of a parsonage, I had never fully assessed the almost complete abnegation of self that such a position must have demanded of the pastor's wife.

Reading the diary which my mother and father kept jointly during the first year of their marriage, one is struck at once by her first entry, June 26, 1917, "The long looked for day

arrived, a day I shall never forget. It was my wedding day. I was married at about 4:30 to the Rev. G. Rickels at the home of my sister Emma Meyer." Father's entry was every bit as Victorian, but more eloquent and emotional: "Now I saw my girl upon her wedding day. She was lovely in my sight, beautiful, sweet, fresh . . . I felt the responsibility fully as Gusta reached me her hand. Gladly my heart formed a firm resolution to stand by the girl who was surrendering all to me. I loved her beauty, 'tis true, but more still did I love her heart and ways. I was happy in gaining such a lovely and good woman."

The two statements reveal a commitment which continued throughout their life together, but the words also reveal the respective characteristics of that commitment. Mother looked up to "the Rev. G. Rickels." She never seemed to feel quite natural calling him John, the name used by the rest of his family in place of the burdensome Gerdjanssen by which he had been christened. As soon as her children were born, "the Rev." and "John" became "Papa," and remained so comfortably for the rest of her life. While Father retained the name "Gusta" or "Gusti" in referring to her in the diaries, she soon became "Mamma" in the home. Throughout the years he never changed his opinion of her as a "lovely and good woman"; as illness and periods of depression altered her beauty and her spirit, he continued, almost obsessively, to cherish and to



protect her.

That the *Frau Pastor* should look up to her husband as "the Rev. G. Rickels" was for Mother not a matter of pride in her position. Some pastors' wives may have considered it necessary to refer to their husbands as "the Pastor" or "*Der Herr Pastor*," for in the tightly knit and parochial German Lutheran communities of the time the pastor was looked up to as the head of the community. [This honored position did not necessarily preclude his serving not only as pastor, but in some places also as parochial schoolteacher and even as janitor for church and school too poor or parsimonious to pay for separate positions.] Mother's deference was more likely based on the fact that she had been a parishioner of my father's during the days of his first marriage and the early death of his first wife. She had known and respected the first *Frau Pastor*, and she felt keenly the responsibility not only of succeeding her, but also of becoming a stepmother to the one little daughter, Ruth. Also, she had already lived in this parsonage during one year of her girlhood, as she prepared for confirmation under her future husband's predecessor and helped that pastor's wife with her household duties. Mother knew the workings of a parsonage, but to enter the same house as mistress of the place and wife of the pastor must have presented a variety of uncertainties and anxieties.

Augusta Amalia Anna Schnell, born of pioneer German immigrant farmers near Rockwell City, Iowa, on February 2, 1886, was married to the Reverend G. Rickels of Immanuel Lutheran Church, Rockwell City, Iowa, June 26, 1917. She served as Die Frau Pastor in this parish and in that of St. Stephen's Lutheran Church, Atkins, Iowa, until her husband's death in 1948. Thereafter, until her death in 1958, she lived with her son, Robert Rickels, who was at that time a parochial schoolteacher in St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Melrose Park, Illinois.

The standards set for the pastor's wife in a small Iowa community, whether in Rockwell City or in Atkins, were high. Like Caesar's wife, the *Frau Pastor* had to be above suspicion, of upright character, a *lady*, dignified but gracious, and friendly to all. For Mother the friendliness came easily, for she genuinely liked all the parishioners, no matter what their character. While she might deplore certain misbehavior, it was beyond her to "hate" any person for his faults; she was more likely to "feel sorry" for the miscreant. On one occasion my father, exasperated by her attitude, exclaimed, "Why don't you feel sorry for me too! I have to deal with these faults!" To this she replied, "But I do, Papa, I do." The reprimand was not repeated.

Not that this *Frau Pastor* was without her own faults. Promptness in "dressing up" for church or any other occasion was one virtue she never learned. Since Father held to the opposite rule of always being ahead of time, the conflicting philosophies sometimes made for tension. Even during the last years of her life, my brother and I still had to locate stray hairpins, fasten a necklace, or place a hat properly on her head at the last minute as she prepared to go out. More serious than this tardiness was her genuine guilelessness. There were occasions when her innocent remarks might better have been left unsaid. More clever and ambitious pastors' wives were not unknown in the Synod; even in the circle of the church, political machinations did occur. Fortunately the merits of Brother Rickels stood on their own, and Father considered himself lucky to have a wife who did not gossip. The importance of that fact can be judged by a statement of a member of the congregation at Atkins who during a particularly unpleasant situation occasioned to a great extent by malevolent gossip remarked, "If everybody were like Mrs. Rickels, there wouldn't be any trouble in this congregation."

Such a statement was probably the highest



A radiant Mrs. G. Rickels on her honeymoon at Scotch Grove, Iowa, in June 1917. (courtesy the author)

accolade my mother ever received, and then she probably didn't feel worthy of it. Actually, she didn't have much chance to get into trouble. Although she loved to sing, Father thought it best that she not join the choir. Although she longed to teach Sunday School, Father thought she should not do so. Although she was proposed for office in the Ladies Aid

Society and in its German equivalent, the *Frauenverein*, Father felt she should not hold any office. All these prohibitions raised the question of why Father was so restrictive. His answer was that he had seen too many pastors' wives cause trouble for their husbands, but given Mother's very submissive and gentle ways, the answer did not seem quite satisfac-

tory. In keeping with her restrictions, Mother never learned to drive a car. I am certain she did vote in at least one national election, but I doubt whether she ever signed a check while Father was alive. Certainly she never bought a piece of household furniture or even a dress or coat without his consent.

Among the qualities most admired in a *Frau Pastor* were the abilities to be a good housekeeper and to "make do," the latter an absolute necessity during the agricultural depression of the 1930s. A fair amount has already been written in these pages about my mother's concern over the semiannual housecleaning and the annual preparation for Mission Festival [see "Mission Festival," May/June 1983

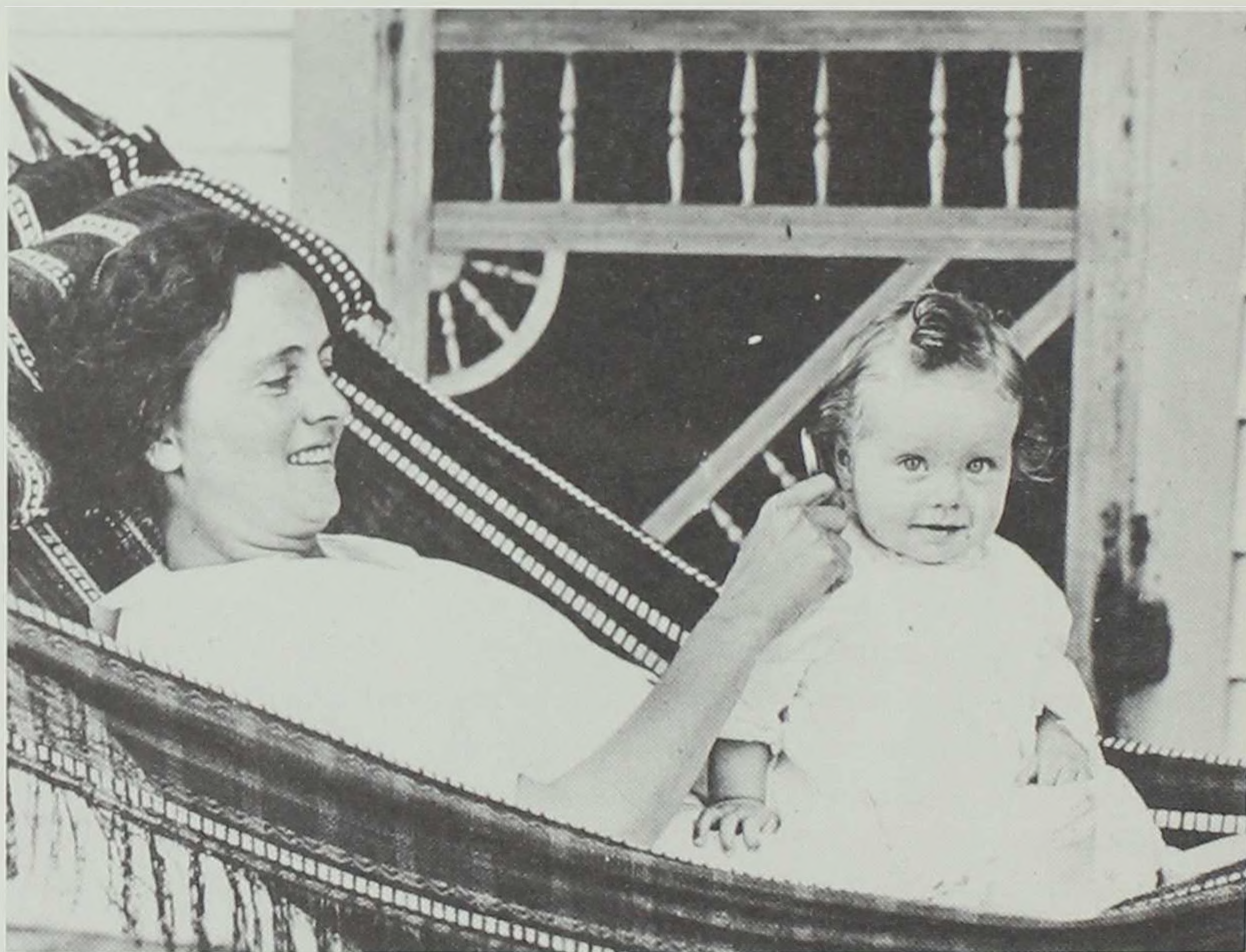


One of the earliest photographs of Mrs. G. Rickels, taken by the Rev. G. Rickels in 1917. (courtesy the author)

Palimpsest]. The anxiety over being a "decent" housewife — the adjective having nothing to do with the morals of the housewife, but everything to do with the amount of dust and disorder in her household — and the concern over hospitality were certainly concomitant parts of my mother's life.

Routine was the order of the week — and year. There was a proper day *and time* for the household tasks. On Sunday evening after supper, the fire was already laid in the laundry stove in the basement, the washboiler was filled, the soap shavings — our "detergent" — were soaking in a little crock, the clothes were sorted into the proper heaps, and the pails of rinse water were carried in from the pump. To this day I cannot understand why it was a matter of such pride for my mother *and father* to get up at five on Monday mornings to have the wash out earlier, whiter, and brighter than any other in the neighborhood. Even on the coldest winter days, when the clothespins had to be heated in the oven, the washing was hung outside on the metal lines [see "Fuel," November/December 1985 *Palimpsest*]. Tuesday had to be ironing day, and I should like to have a record of the many white shirts which were first starched and "sprinkled," then ironed for my father. It was only after we moved to the Atkins parsonage and advanced to electricity in 1921 that my father recorded that "the girls," my mother and sister Ruth, used an electric iron for the first time. Wednesdays and Saturdays were baking days and part of any nostalgia I still have for childhood stems from the remembrance of the perfect loaves of bread, both white and dark, which Mother baked. The dough was always prepared in a large kettle and kneaded the night before. By morning it had risen so that it could be punched down again and then placed in the rows of tins to rise in time for the firing-up of the kitchen range. Cakes and cookies, muffins and corn bread were baked in between times during the week, and Saturday's baking always included two pies

A quiet moment shared by Mrs. G. Rickels and Lenore in early July 1919. (courtesy the author)



for the weekend besides the usual bread and coffee cake or cinnamon rolls. Friday was "upstairs cleaning day." Saturday the downstairs got its polishing and scrubbing, not a mere mopping but a down-on-the-hands-and-knees scrubbing of floors.

Woe to the household in those few weeks when the routine was delayed or unavoidably altered, or in those spring and autumn months when the *real* housecleaning had to be prolonged because of illness or bad weather. So much of this work was futile. In summer the cars speeding to town on Saturday night quickly covered the pristine cleanliness with a coating of greyish dust before we even went to sleep, and in the winter the smoke from the furnace begrimed the curtains and windows. But *never* did one deviate from what was thought to be the God-ordained order.

To keep the house looking not only decent but also presentable for any parishioners who might stop by at any time of day or night — telephones were not used to announce visits except in the worst of emergencies and pastors

were on house call twenty-four hours a day — the Atkins *Frau Pastor* spent much time sewing curtains, crocheting edges on them to make them more dainty, and embroidering huge "fancy" bedspreads, table and dresser covers. Tearing carpet strips from old rags and crocheting and braiding rugs were all part of making-do. Some of these last-named activities took place in the evening while we sat around the kitchen stove for warmth, while Father read aloud from his favorite nineteenth-century poets or novelists. Crocheting, embroidering, and making quilt blocks were continual "leisure" activities of my mother and sister; in the summer these might take place outdoors, but in an angle of the house shielded from passers-by who might see that the preacher's folks were not working!

To brighten up her home in winter, Mother always had a supply of houseplants which she had grown from "slips" of coleus and geranium plants near the front porch in the summer. Her joy was great when a cherished Christmas cactus actually bloomed properly at Christmas time. My own efforts at keeping these plants

alive during Mother's many illnesses were prompted mainly by the fear of one particular member of the congregation who would test the soil with her fingers to see whether the plants were properly watered, one of the criteria in her judgment of me as a potentially good housewife. Flowers from a florist were an unheard of luxury in our home, except on February 2 of each year when my father always tried to brave the almost impassable roads to Cedar Rapids to get six carnations for my mother's birthday. Even as she appreciated the love which prompted this gift, I think her puritanical conscience felt this was an extravagance she could have done without.

One of the greatest problems in keeping the parsonage presentable was the constant fear of asking the congregational trustees for repairs

(let alone improvements) in the house. Before our family had moved into the Atkins parsonage, the structure had been renovated and electricity installed. But these improvements could not hide the poor construction of the house. Mother longed for nice hardwood floors; ours were made of wide painted boards which were covered with linoleum borders disguised to look like wood and by other patterned linoleum "rugs." She never got the longed for floors, but when a repairman broke through the ceiling of the kitchen, and when the oil-cloth-covered ceiling of the bathroom fell several feet, the need for further work was obvious. To have a room papered or painted required hours of discussion on the part of both the pastor and his wife before the former felt that he might ask the trustees for such a conces-



Bundled against the weather in late January 1919, Mrs. G. Rickels washes clothes with Lenore at the Rockwell City parsonage. (courtesy the author)

sion at the next quarterly business meeting of the congregation. Frequently, the painting and papering were done by our family; my sister was an expert at varnishing floors; and one year my brother and I simply surprised our parents, while they were away at the anniversary of another church, by painting the unspeakable linoleum of the kitchen floor and "stipling" it to cheer up the premises.

In "Harvest Time" [November/December 1984 *Palimpsest*] I have described the year-round work of providing food for the family. This effort was only part of the normal activity of any Iowa country woman during the span of my mother's life, but it was particularly intensified during the time of the Depression. Since there was little or no salary for my father, our family was dependent for fruits and vegetables on what the garden and orchard could supply. The generosity of some of the farmers helped to supply meat. Since the first days of their marriage, my parents had raised chickens. In fact, the diaries record even such mundane facts as

the setting of hens, the cleaning out of the chicken house, and the ever-fluctuating price of eggs. But the work of keeping this food supply preserved and available rested mainly upon the women of the household. In Atkins, Mother at least had an enameled cookstove in the winter and a two-burner kerosene stove in summer, but in Rockwell City the monster in the kitchen was still of the black iron variety which required blacking with stove polish, and Father's dairy tells how Mother would get up at five to blacken the stove before starting the day's regular work.

Another way of making-do, not only during the Depression but during almost the whole of Mother's married life, was the constant sewing of clothing for her family. With the exception of my father's clothes, most of the clothing of the other members of the family was sewn at home. Mother had been trained by a professional seamstress, and her meticulous skill in sewing was appreciated by everyone

Mrs. G. Rickels and Lenore feeding the chickens in June 1921 at the parsonage in Atkins. (courtesy the author)





"Leisure time" in August 1924: (clockwise from left) Mrs. G. Rickels, Grandmother Gesche Rickels, Ruth, Robert, and Lenore Rickels. (courtesy the author)

except the two younger children who had to suffer from made-over, and once again made-over, suits and dresses. A little trimming here and a few bows there, and hats could be suitable again for Easter. Shoes could be dyed with shoe polish, and even curtains could be made new with an infusion of coffee.

It is sad to think that the fear of "Dare we do this?" or "What will people say?" was always present with the *Frau Pastor*. Although she kept us neat and as beautifully dressed as she knew how, her own clothing was very circumspect and understated. Father often expressed the gallant wish to "see my girls well-dressed," but Mother always hesitated to wear a new dress, and after she had sewn one for herself was more likely to wait months or even a year

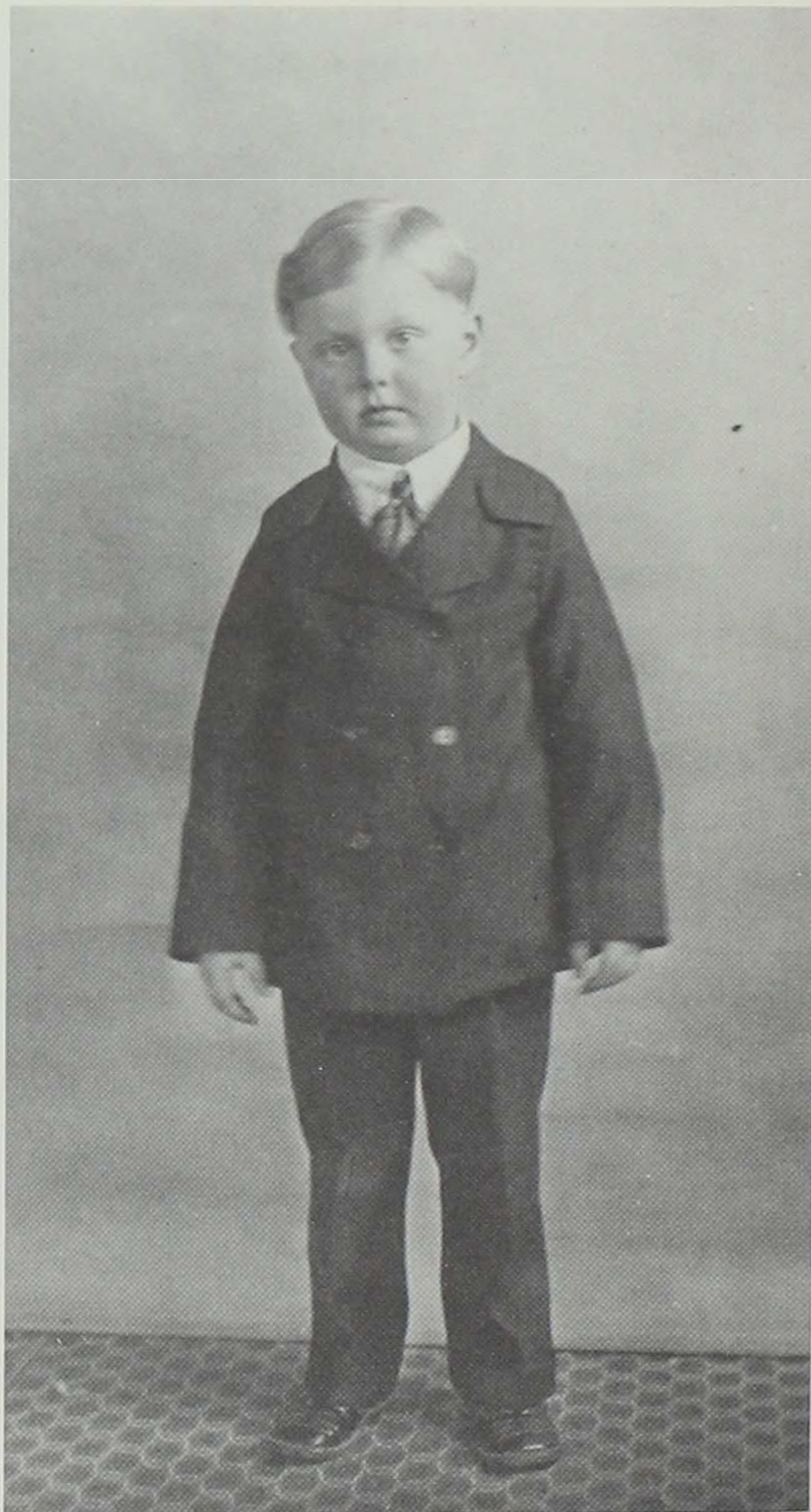
before she would appear in it. Thus she could honestly reply to any comments, "Oh, I've had this for a long time already." It still embarrasses me to remember a serious Sunday afternoon discussion between my mother and the wife of the parochial schoolteacher over whether they dared to wear *white* Sunday shoes in summer. In time they decided they might do so, if enough other women in the congregation wore them first.

As I read the diaries, I marvel at the lack of privacy in the life of a pastor and of his family in a time when a separate study, let alone office, in the church building was hardly thought of. From the very first days of her marriage, Mother could expect to have visitors

in the house, on congregational business or just to visit. And they stayed for dinner, and for supper, and if they were visiting relatives or were preachers passing through with their families, they might stay for the night and sometimes for several nights. As my father described one such invasion, "All the beds and floors are full." I kept wondering where the bedding came from, for this was before the days of sleeping bags, and I never knew our household to have an excess of linens and blankets.

After we moved to Atkins there may have been fewer relatives and preachers' families moving through, although there were two "plaguey" families we soon learned to put up with: one couple that always arrived at dinner-time and never *planned* to stay, and another very large family of children so boisterous that even my grandmother threw up her hands in disbelief. But Mother and my sister knew how to cope: they always managed to stir up another cake quickly while the rest of us found some way of hiding the more breakable pieces of furniture. An invasion which I think all of us disliked occurred when a wedding took place at the church next to the parsonage. Strange as it may seem now, for years the parsonage was the place where the wedding party dressed for the ceremony. Not only was the weekly schedule of cleaning upset, for extra attention had to be paid to see that all of the house was thoroughly dusted and in order, but our family was temporarily displaced since there was really no room in the parsonage that the wedding party did not take over.

Among the important duties of the *Frau Pastor* were her appearance at all church services, of course, and accompanying her husband to all baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and sometimes funeral observances in the homes of the parishioners. I think my mother rather enjoyed these occasions even though the women were usually relegated to the rock-



Robert Rickels models a suit made-over from one of his father's in January 1927. (courtesy the author)

ers in the bedrooms while the men occupied the parlor. For the pastor's wife who dared have no real network of women friends, for fear of offending some at the expense of others, and whose only real neighbor was perforce the wife of the parochial schoolteacher, these invitations gave her a chance to compare notes about mutual domestic activities and to have a few discreet laughs at the follies of life. Moreover, my mother genuinely enjoyed the food prepared for these gatherings. She usually ex-

claimed over the amount of good butter and rich cream which the farm wives used in their cooking and relished the food which was prepared in such abundance. Her one embarrassment on these occasions probably came from having a maverick daughter who inevitably got a sick headache at these "bid-outs" and who much preferred a sandwich of her mother's bread at home to all the trappings of these glorious feasts. Since Father was an abstemious eater, he too preferred to eat at home, but

derived a vicarious, albeit amused enjoyment from Mother's pleasure.

At this point any feminist readers must begin to wonder whether this woman had no time of her own, no pleasures of her own, perhaps no life of her own? Respectively, the honest answers would have to be "Very little," "Very few," and "Hardly." Perhaps these answers may shed some light on the last quarter of my mother's life, much of which was spent as a partial invalid because of heart disease. Had she been more of a free spirit, had she not been so devoted to her duty, to doing what was "right," she might have been spared anxieties which aggravated her suffering.

Yet she was a "jolly" person when she was well, and had a great capacity for fun which was seldom evident after she assumed the duties of a *Frau Pastor*. As a young girl she had had friends with whom she could be silly and "cut up," and for one winter's season she and a sister had stayed on a ranch in Dakota owned by a bachelor brother who later was lost in action in World War I. While on this ranch, the girls had high old times with the friendly neighbors and Mother was able to indulge her love of horses and to ride bareback over the hills. Perhaps her ability to come up with the perfect folk saying for almost any occasion, though usually in the privacy of our own home, was one way of expressing her sense of fun, even though to us children many of these sayings had a didactic and unwelcome purpose at the moment. Some were actually macabre. Her reply when chided for being tardy, "I'll be there in the shake of a dead lamb's tail," was sometimes too graphic for a child's sensibility, and when she said she was running around "like a chicken with its head cut off," we felt sick, for we had seen too many spring friers flapping about with their heads chopped off in preparation for the plucking for the Sunday dinner. Her sharpest exclamation of surprise, "Now wouldn't that frost the cherries on your grandmother's bon-



The Rev. G. Rickels' birthday carnations for his wife in February 1931. (courtesy the author)



The Rev. and Mrs. G. Rickels vacationing in the Maquoketa timber in July 1922. (courtesy the author)

net!" was harmless enough, but to be told chirpingly, when everything seemed wrong, "Cheer up, the worst is yet to come!" seemed at least as insulting as illogical. "Red and yellow, catch a fellow," was enough to make one laugh, particularly since we were warned never to wear these two colors together, and the "Make a rhyme, see your beau before nine," conveyed some optimism. In moments of depression she would shake her head dolefully and intone, "Nothing here can always last," but in a spark of roguishness she could quip, "I'm a poet, and don't know it." Her giggle was infectious, and though I'm sure she was never aware of it, she was attractive to men, who treated her with courtly though reserved respect.

There was never a time when Mother did not

like to read, but by the end of the day's work she was too sleepy to share Father's enthusiasm for Shakespeare. In Atkins she became a devotee of Professor Sam Sloan's lectures on "The English Novel" over radio station WSUI-Iowa City, and of Ruth Galvin's half-hour reading of popular novels over station WOI-Ames. Listening to these, she could keep on with her work and not feel guilty. The only time she might find for a little reading on her own was on a Sunday afternoon when she didn't have to make calls with her husband. Then her reading matter consisted of church periodicals such as *The Lutheran Witness* and *The Walther League Messenger*, over which she also fell asleep. Frequently the free time of Sunday afternoon was devoted to playing with us children or to target shooting with a .22-caliber

rifle Father had bought for her. The whole family took part in that activity, and it was amazing to see our mild little mother become the best shot of us all, even to the extent of picking pigeons off the roof of the church. She drew the line at "real" hunting however, and so



"Frequently the free time of Sunday afternoon was devoted to . . . target shooting with a .22-caliber rifle Father had bought for her." Here Mrs. G. Rickels shows the first rifle to Ruth in 1917. (courtesy the author)

far as I can remember never shot a rabbit nor a squirrel, the only kind of game available in our county.

The greatest times of laughter which I remember from my childhood occurred when the teacher's and the preacher's families got together to play games. Our four elders actually played cards at the dining-room table — nothing so sophisticated as bridge nor the customary "biddin' euchre" of the community, but something I think they called "pedro." No bets were ever made, no money was ever won, the only refreshments were prized red winesap apples, but the two couples laughed uproariously over their fun. While these games were going on, we children played all sorts of "tricks" in the kitchen, thoroughly upsetting that usually neat place to the point where Mother's enjoyment of the evening was lessened by the necessity of helping us put things to rights again. Yet I rarely remember her scolding us for the damage.

Throughout the years, Mother longed for a real family vacation "at some lake in Minnesota or Wisconsin, Papa," an idea which my father scorned. Vacations for him were a day in the Maquoketa timber in spring and fall, and three times in the forty-nine years of his ministry a longer vacation in the same timber, twice in a tent (into which Mother immediately sewed a canvas floor for fear of rattlesnakes) and once in a roughhewn cabin which became the mecca for Father's relatives and friends from his youth in Scotch Grove and Monticello, Iowa. Mother had no choice but to go along on these vacations and while Father gloried in roughing it, I feel quite certain she was relieved when she was home again in more civilized surroundings. Other trips were few and far between. There were the annual preachers' picnics of the circuit which Mother enjoyed, but Father complained about because he couldn't eat Mother's cooking, and there was one fateful attempt to meet a preacher friend and his family at the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines. The families



"It was amazing to see our mild little mother become the best shot of us all . . ." Mrs. G. Rickels target shooting in October 1929. (courtesy the author)

never did connect in the crowd, and we came home a disgruntled and unhappy group with Father claiming he had been "poisoned" by the food eaten at one of the fair booths.

Of the very intimate aspects and emotions of a woman's life, my mother revealed little. In these matters the *Frau Pastor* was extremely reticent. I know that previous to my own birth, Father had told the doctor that his wife was with child. There were no prenatal visits to the doctor by my mother, and the only advice she might have received would have come from a married sister and from my paternal grandmother, who often stayed with us, and with whom she had a close and loving

relationship. There is one cryptic entry in Mother's handwriting in the diary which says that on a certain communion Sunday "I sit back for the first time." Since the date suggests that she was perhaps halfway through her pregnancy, this may mean that it was the custom of pregnant women to seek the relative obscurity of the back pews of the church. Whether it means that from then until after the child was born the mother no longer received communion, I have no way of knowing. Mother never spoke of the episode. So far as I know the only time Mother saw the doctor was at the time of delivery at home, when an entry in Father's diary stated that this was accomplished with the help of chloroform and forceps and that the

doctor's fee was \$10.

During her second pregnancy, when my wish for a brother was granted, I suspect a similar procedure was followed with the doctor being informed that a child was on its way. This time the doctor and neighboring teacher's wife arrived together, and I was unceremoniously ejected from my parents' bedroom where I was recovering from an attack of measles. Within a few hours the neighbor had come upstairs to ask whether I wanted to see my brother, and by schooltime of that morning some of the parochial schoolchildren were at our door to congratulate our parents. When some years later the teacher's wife had her sixth child, my mother reciprocated by helping the mother and bathing the newborn infant. Not one word had been said in the hearing of us children about the approaching event, and even before my own marriage my mother found herself un-

able to speak of the "facts of life." There was no question that she loved her children dearly; there are many photographs which attest to that fact, as do my father's diaries, and Mother did once say that the happiest time of her life was when we children were small and the family was all together.

As one looks back upon the life of this very hardworking and unassuming woman it is sad to remember that she spent the last twenty years of her life in comparative dependence upon the members of her family. Frequent attacks of the heart disease which had resulted from the rheumatic fever she had experienced in her youth took their toll and engendered several attacks of depression. Above all, this *Frau Pastor* was pained that she could not do her duty as before, and wondered whether God were punishing her for things she had not accomplished. Father's care for her became more and more protective, and the cheerfulness in the family more restrained.

It is even more poignant to recall that after Father's death, in spite of increasing frailties, Mother regained some of her earlier light-heartedness and revealed a spirit of independence which she had not shown before. Living with my brother in a suburb of Chicago, she actually got to see stage performances such as *Oklahoma*, to hear concerts in Orchestra Hall, and to have a vacation at a lake in Wisconsin. She enjoyed new friendships in the parish in which my brother taught, and carried on a very busy and unhampered correspondence with old friends in the parish where she had been the *Frau Pastor*. For the first time in her life she had a real gas stove, and even looked forward each year, without any sense of guilt, to the Mother's Day corsage which she confidently knew my brother would provide. One of her greatest pleasures came from feeling financially "independent." From her widow's pension of \$60 a month she could contribute a little to her church, pay for a part of her medicines,



The last photograph of Mrs. G. Rickels, c. 1956.
(courtesy the author)

and with the rest "adopt" a child in Jerusalem to whom she sent money until her death.

As my brother and I fought our way through a vicious December snowstorm to our mother's funeral in Iowa, the circumstances of her birth came vividly to mind. She had told us that while her father was searching for the midwife's house through a blinding snowstorm,

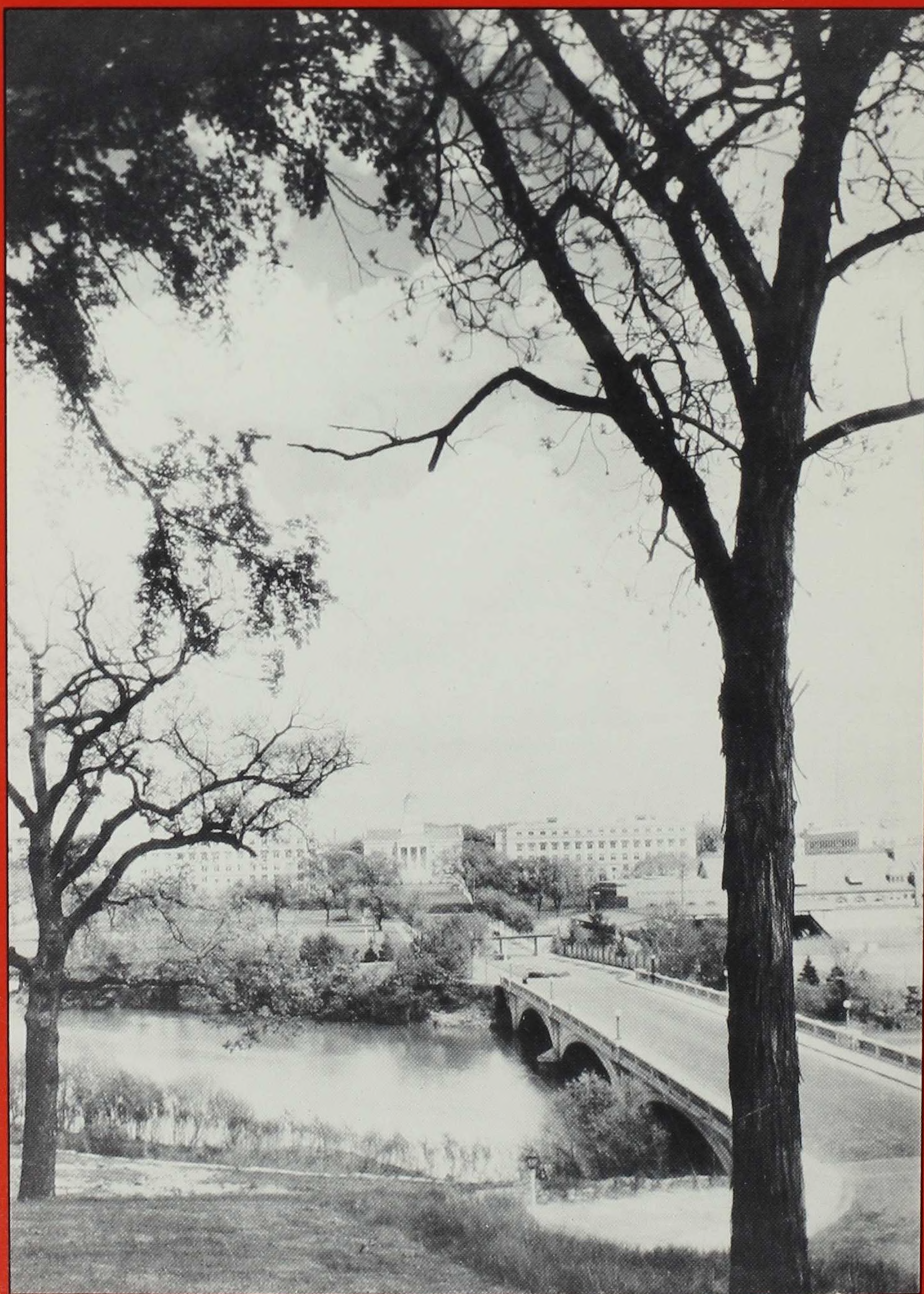
her mother had given birth, alone, in the tiny windswept house on the prairie. For Augusta Amalia Anna the coming and the going were consistent, and on December 4, 1958, the grave of the prairie child who had become the *Frau Pastor* was covered with the same blanket of snow which lay over the grave of "the Rev. G. Rickels" beside her. □

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