



Iowa Women in the Workplace

by Mary Allison Farley

These photographs, taken by an unknown photographer in Dubuque, Iowa, in 1912, are part of an extraordinary collection housed at the Research Center for Dubuque Area History, Loras College. Grouped together as the William J. Klauer Collection, the more than four hundred photographs serve as an exceptional record of workers in a variety of settings shortly after the turn of the century. The all-inclusive camera angle captured men and women as part of their total work environment, while the photographer's large view camera produced sharp and detail-filled images. Much valuable information can be gleaned from the photographs about daily work patterns and working conditions.

The twenty-four photographs selected for this presentation document some of the employment opportunities available to women in urban or small-town communities. The images of Dubuque women ironing in laundries, sitting at typewriters in small business offices, and serving customers in millinery shops represent typical work settings that could have been photographed equally well in other parts of Iowa and the Midwest. The employment opportunities for women in industrial settings varied with the nature of the industries that thrived in particular communities, but in general, women worked in light industry. Thus, in Dubuque, women worked

at the mattress factory, the candy factories, the paper box factory, and the garment factories. In Muscatine, women made up a large proportion of the labor force at the button factory. Des Moines women found employment at a hosiery mill. Sioux City women were employed by a biscuit company.

The women wage earners in these photographs were part of the growing number of women who worked outside their homes at the turn of the century. Nationally, the number of women workers increased dramatically in the twenty years between 1890 and 1910. One million women had been counted as part of the labor force in 1890, but by 1910 eight million wage-earning women were included in the work force count. More and more women — and particularly young, single women — began to work for wages away from their homes. They followed traditional, domestic jobs like baking and sewing from their homes into new industrial settings. Further, increasing numbers of women graduated from high school during the 1890 to 1910 period (25,182 in 1890 and 92,753 in 1910) and filled newly-created office positions in business and industry. Some women acquired additional job skills through business school training.

Men and women shared considerable ambivalence about the increased movement of women from the home into the wage-earning work force. Almost everyone agreed that the home roles of wife and mother should be the most important roles for a woman. They believed, further, that if a woman had to work

Clerking in a grocery store attached to her home allowed a woman to tend both to the customers and to her children. In 1912, a woman generally gave up her wage-earning activities when she married unless she helped run the family store or took boarders into her home.

for wages before marriage she should select a job that would prepare her for her future domestic responsibilities. Jobs thought appropriate for women, therefore, were those that emphasized cleanliness, neatness, gentility, and the skills of the homemaker. Yet many women had to take jobs that did not meet these standards. And employers were quick to recruit women into a variety of workplaces because women cost less to employ than men

and women were less likely to organize into unions.

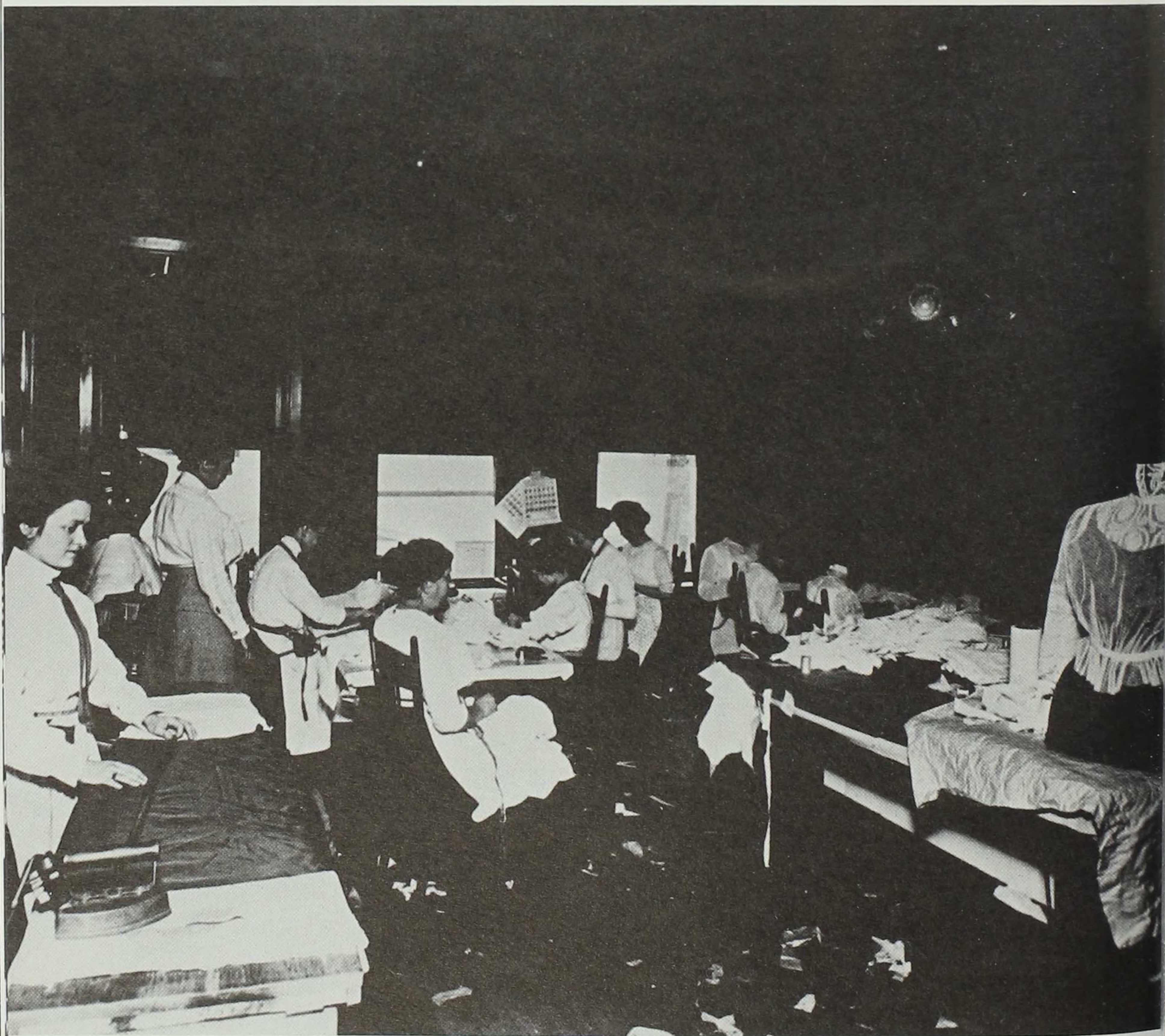
Editor's note: All but one of the photographs in this article have been drawn from the William J. Klauer Collection, Research Center for Dubuque Area History, Loras College. It is with the center's kind permission and cooperation that the photographs have been reproduced in this issue of the Palimpsest.



Women sought out millinery shops for employment because of the attractive working environment. (Ruprecht Brothers Company)

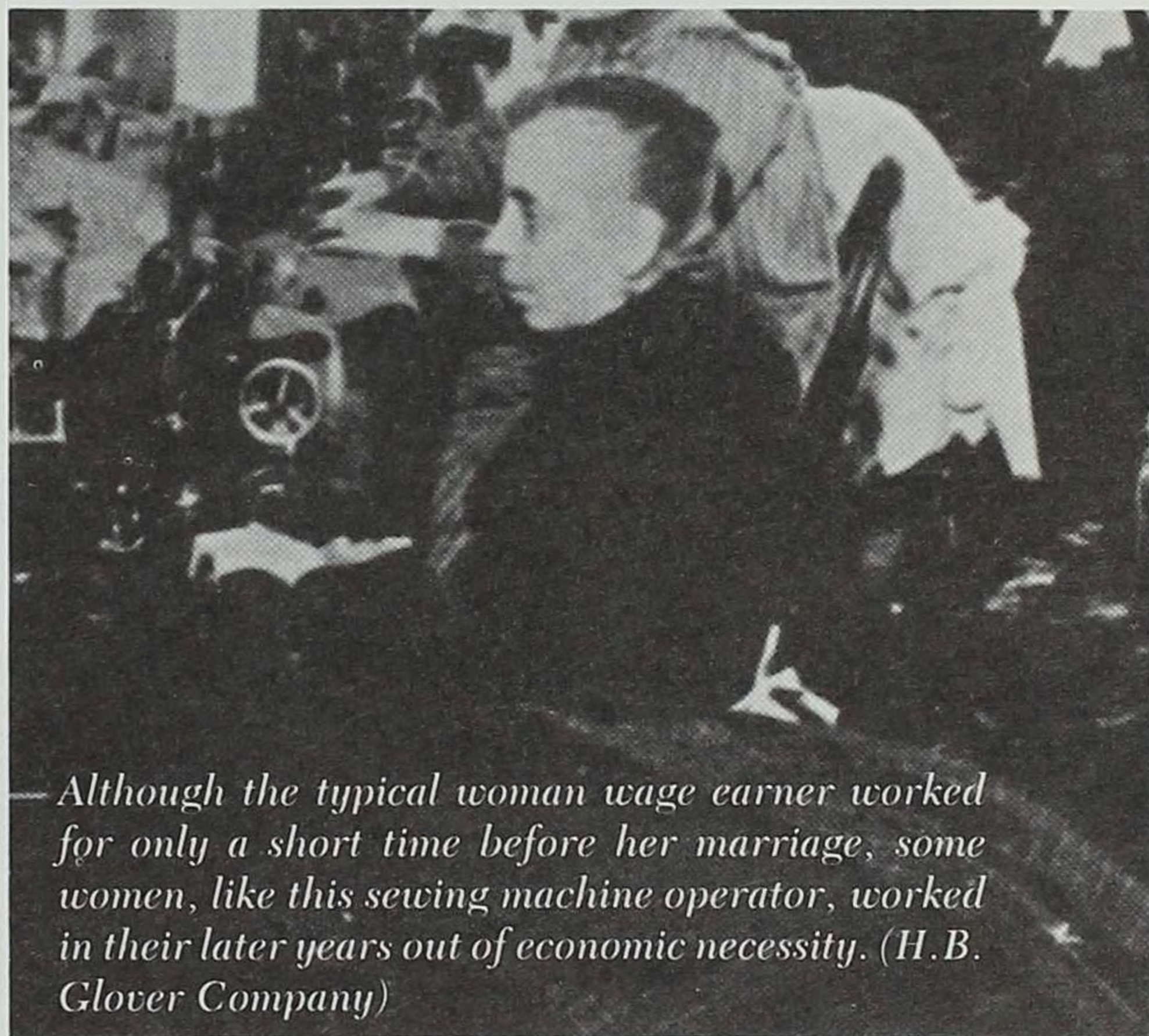
Women controlled the intimate world of the beauty shop. They might occasionally allow a man to enter this clean and orderly environment if he needed a toupee. (O'Donnell Sisters)





Skilled seamstresses made women's clothing in a variety of settings. Many of them continued to work out of their homes but some set up their own businesses. Workers in some of these shops faced cramped, hazardous working conditions, typical of the sweatshops of the time. (Mrs. Tomlinson's custom dress shop)

The overalls factory paid women sewing machine operators by the piece. Experienced seamstresses could make a good wage of \$10 to \$15 per week as long as orders had to be filled. Yet no orders for the factory meant no income for sewing machine operators. (H.B. Glover Company; Bissell Collection, Research Center for Dubuque Area History, Loras College)



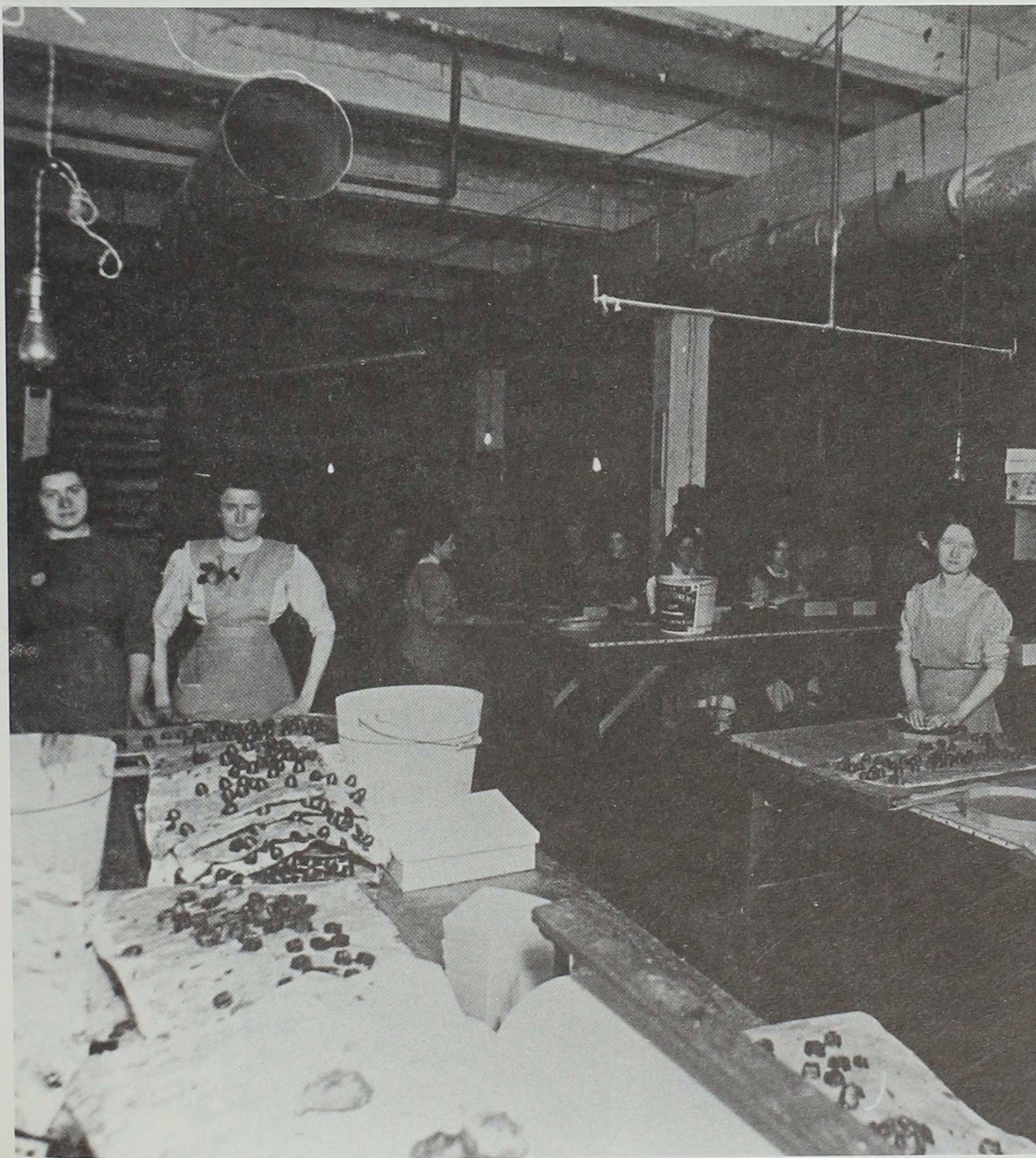
Although the typical woman wage earner worked for only a short time before her marriage, some women, like this sewing machine operator, worked in their later years out of economic necessity. (H.B. Glover Company)





As production moved from the home to the factory, employers hired women to inspect, label, package, and tend machines. Even in light industry, women often faced poor working conditions. One worker in a paper box factory remembered "the awful noise and confusion, the terrific heat, the foul smell of the glue, and the agony of . . . blistered hands." (paper box factory)

Candymaking operations employed women only to dip the candies in chocolate and to package them. The highly-paid men who mixed up the batches of candy worked on a separate floor. The long, regular hours of candy factory employees grew even longer during holiday seasons. (William Lawther Company)



The elegant image of calendar ladies clashed with the day-to-day reality of work in a print shop and a creamery. (bottom: Beatrice Creamery Company)

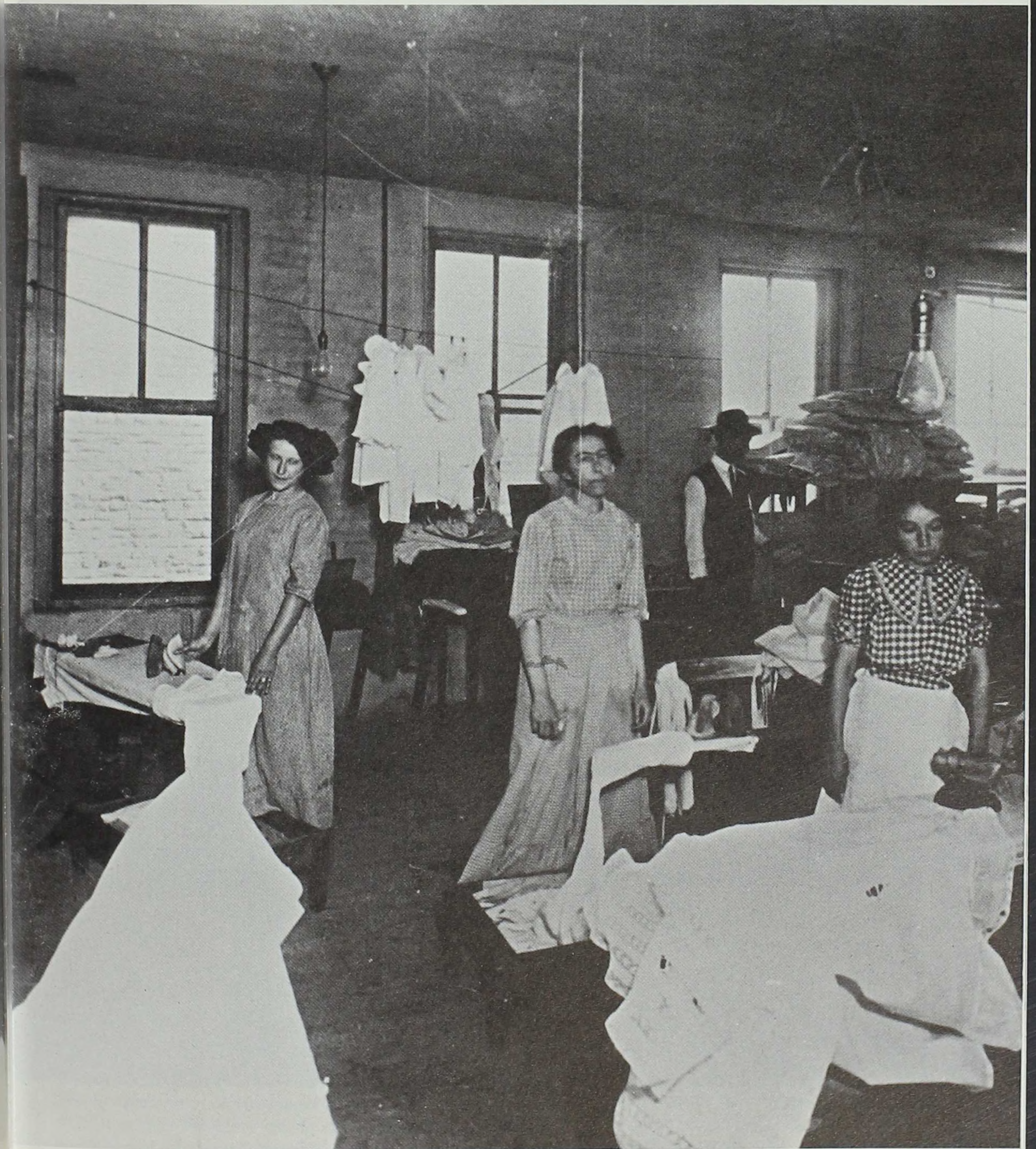




For the most part, women worked at jobs with other women. Although men and women might work in the same shipping room, they held different jobs and received different wages. Wage surveys confirmed that "a woman wasn't worth as much as a man." In 1913, for example, the great majority of women in Iowa industry earned less than \$10 a week while the earnings of only 10% of the male wage earners dropped below that figure. This sex typing of occupations and wages stemmed from perceptions about the proper roles for men and women in society. (shipping room)

Based on her investigation of laundries in 1915, Iowa's woman factory inspector reported that the constant standing and continual use of the arm, combined with the heat and steam, made hand ironing one of the heavy jobs of laundry work. In one Dubuque laundry, however, the female ironers earned only half as much as the male drivers who brought home \$12 per week. (bottom: Lorenz Laundry)







At the mattress factory, women cut and sewed the mattress ticking under the watchful eyes of the male owner. The women earned from \$4 to \$6 per week. In a separate part of the factory, men filled the mattresses and stitched them together, and earned from \$6 to \$15 per week. (Dubuque Mattress Factory)

At the time when people had started to realize that more women needed to earn wages to support themselves, the "family wage concept" hindered women's efforts to secure a living wage. Many people believed that only men needed to earn a living wage since men were responsible for the support of their families. People assumed that women were economically dependent on fathers or husbands

and did not require a full wage. However, in reality, the unemployment, injuries, and low wages that plagued male wage earners often caused them to depend on the economic contributions of women in their families. The increasing number of women who headed their own households also contradicted the assumptions behind the family wage concept.



The breakdown of clerical work into routine, specialized jobs accompanied the movement of women and machines into the office. Male clericals left the offices as these changes occurred, leaving behind the problems of job segregation and low pay.



At one time most clerical workers were men. In 1870, men filled almost 98% of the clerical jobs available. As recently as 1910 men still held 66% of these jobs though women were steadily moving into the clerical labor force. Today people generally think of clerical work as women's work since women dominate the field (women today hold 82% of the clerical jobs available).

A number of events combined to redefine the makeup of the clerical work force. When business expanded tremendously in the late nineteenth century, increasing numbers of young women were graduating from high school. Employers actively recruited these educated women into their newly-created office jobs, knowing that they could pay the women less than they would have to pay male office workers. (wholesale grocer)



Office of the State Historical Society

REMEMBER, THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA'S ANNUAL BANQUET WILL BE HELD IN IOWA CITY ON SATURDAY, JUNE 28. IF YOU HAVE NOT RECEIVED INFORMATION ABOUT THE BANQUET, PLEASE CONTACT US.

"It's A Woman's War Too" is Available for Purchase or Loan

The Iowa State Historical Department would like to announce the completion of a one-hour video program, "It's A Woman's War Too: Iowa in the Second World War." This video program documents the home front experiences of four Iowa women during World War II. The four women tell how the war changed family and community life. A group of World War II posters, newspaper headlines, and still photographs augment the interviews. The program focuses on the stories of Elizabeth Cloyed (Glenwood, Iowa), Dorothy Moeller (Waverly, Iowa), Ida Belle Sands (Terril, Iowa), and Iona Dinsmore (Hillsboro, Iowa). Videotapes of the program are available for purchase or through interlibrary loan. If you would like to purchase a copy of "It's A Woman's War Too," please complete the order form below and send it to: Home Front Project, Iowa State Historical Department, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.

ORDER FORM

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Please make your check payable to: Iowa State Historical Department

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The Farm Crisis Addressed

The Future of the North American Granary: Politics, Economics, and Resource Constraints in North American Agriculture, just published by the Iowa State University Press, addresses the future of the grain sector of North America — the great breadbasket of the world. Drawing on the essays of experts from a variety of backgrounds, this volume appraises farm instability due to the rapid growth of international markets, the loss of American export competitiveness, the impact of climate change, and the underlying soil and water resources of the North American granary.

C. Ford Runge edits this volume of political, economic, and ecological perspectives on the farm crisis and the changes needed to guarantee the survival of the farm sector. Trends affecting agriculture for the next several decades include the broadening impacts of fiscal, monetary, and trade policies; chronic surpluses causing trade frictions with other exporters; the prospects for drought and soil and water conservation; and the higher demands on farm managers as they deal with biotechnology, computerized information systems, and increasingly sophisticated financial management.

For more information about *The Future of the North American Granary*, contact: Iowa State University Press, 2121 South State Avenue, Ames, Iowa 50010.

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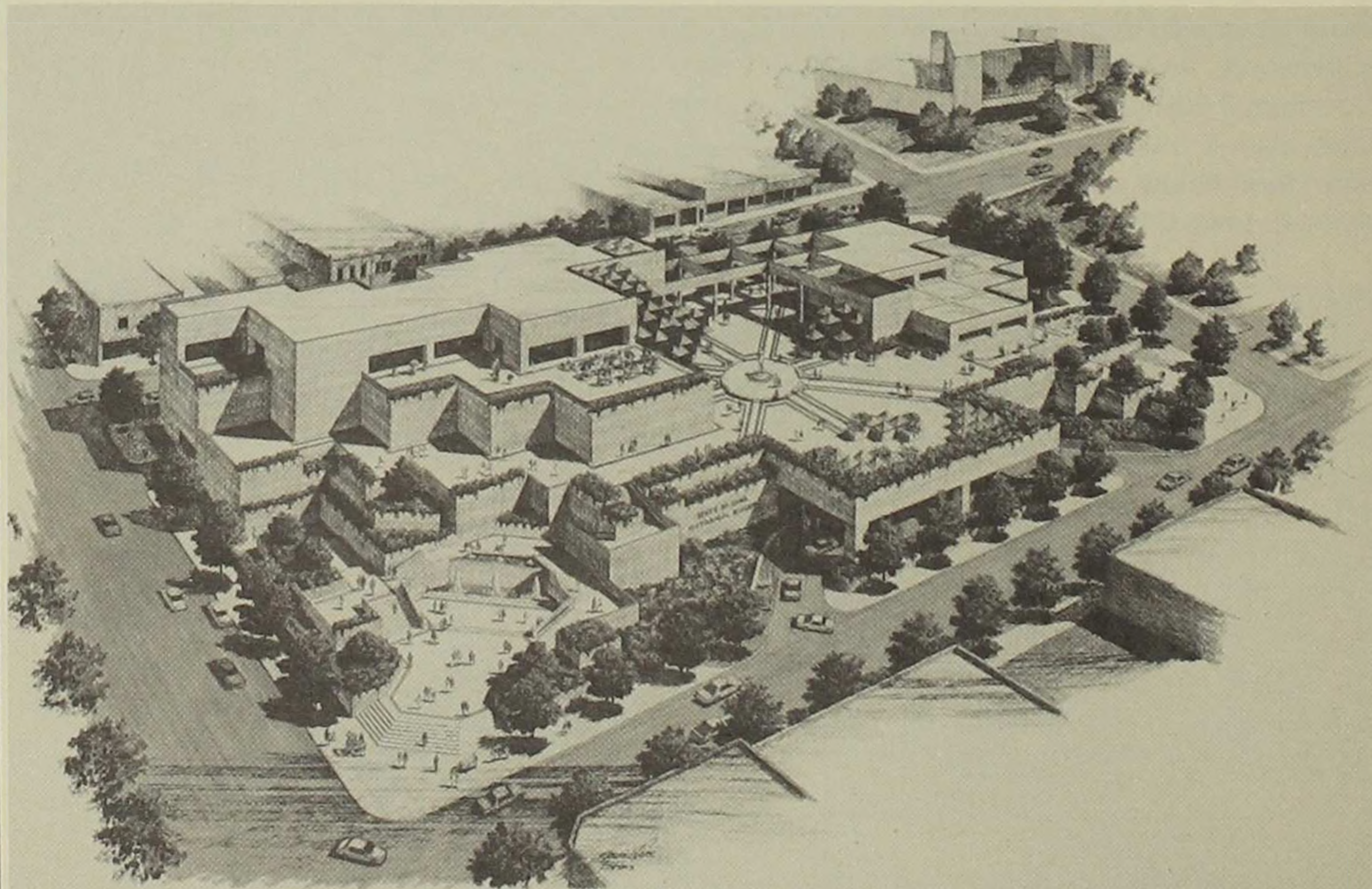
Tenth "Golden Age of Radio" Reunion, June 27-29

The National Radio Heritage Association, an organization founded for the perpetuation and preservation of "live" radio broadcasting, will sponsor its tenth annual "Golden Age of Radio" reunion at Shenandoah, Iowa, June 27-29, 1986. The three-day tribute to radio's heydays features stars of "live" broadcasting who will present continuous music programs throughout the weekend. Included are singing cowboys and gals, the big band sound, radio personalities of comedy, announcing, and homemaking, and more. Tours will be given of Radio KMA and places of interest in Shenandoah. For more information, contact: Nadine Dreager, 8 Gayland Drive, Council Bluffs, Iowa 51501. Or call (712)366-1983.

Salem State College to Offer Local History Institute

The Department of History and the Division of Graduate and Continuing Education, Salem State College, will offer a three-day "Institute on the Study of Local History," August 4 to August 6, 1986. The institute is open to educators, museum personnel, librarians, and all others who are working in the field of local/community history, serving as a volunteer, or who have an interest in the field. For more information, contact: Professor John J. Fox, Director, Institute on the Study of Local History, Department of History, Salem State College, Salem, Massachusetts 01970. Or call (617)745-0556, extension 2369.

The Iowa Historical Museum Foundation Needs Your Support — Today



HISTORICAL MUSEUM/LIBRARY FOR THE STATE OF IOWA

The architect's rendering of the new Iowa State Historical Building as it will look upon completion.

Raising funds for the state's new historical museum has been a long and sometimes frustrating process, but in early January 1986, Jay E. Tone, Jr., chairman of the Iowa Historical Museum Foundation, proudly declared, "We are on our way to our \$12 million goal." Tone's comments accompanied the announcement that December 1985 was one of the best fund-raising months in the history of the Iowa Historical Museum Foundation. Tone was especially pleased with the variety of contributors to the museum fund: "Individuals, corporations, foundations, schoolchildren — from central Iowa, all around Iowa, and outside of Iowa — contributions came from all those people and locations."

Through its vigorous fund-raising campaign, the Iowa Historical Museum Foundation has raised \$8,700,000 of its \$12,000,000 campaign goal, which is the public's share of the new \$27,000,000 cost of the new Iowa State Historical Building. It has sponsored a variety of activities since 1984 to boost the public's awareness of Iowa history and the urgent need for a new historical building. And the

Foundation has worked to attract financial support from individuals, foundations, and corporations — inside and outside of Iowa — that recognize the importance of preserving Iowa's human heritage.

The new four-level, 220,000-square-foot historical building will provide not only increased museum exhibit space but will also house the State Archives, provide public meeting rooms (and a 250-seat auditorium), create facilities for the construction and conservation of historical materials, and allow for a more effective overall operation of the Iowa State Historical Department.

The Iowa State Historical Museum Foundation still needs your support. As Foundation Chairman Jay E. Tone, Jr., recently put it, "We have had generous support from many individuals and groups . . . Yet there are many corporations, foundations, and individuals who have not yet had the opportunity to support the IHMF." For those people who might be interested in contributing to this most worthy cause, we are printing below the Foundation's enrollment form for their Trustees for Tomorrow.



Taken in late 1985, the above photograph shows the progress being made on the new Iowa State Historical Building (the photograph also shows the new building's location relative to state capitol and the current museum building — the domed structure to the left of the capitol). The new museum will be completed in the summer of 1987.



Iowa Historical Museum Foundation

300 East Maple Des Moines, Iowa 50309

Phone 515-244-4939

Commitment . . . Showcase for Iowa History . . . Trustee for Tomorrow

I want to enroll as a Trustee for Tomorrow, to assist the Iowa Historical Museum Foundation in its commitment to the new Iowa State Historical Building.

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Credit Card Users: ☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard

Card Number _____

Expiration Date _____

Signature _____

Make checks payable to the Iowa Historical Museum Foundation. All gifts are deductible for tax purposes.

Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Centennial Series

The History Committee of the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Centennial Commission and the University of Illinois Press announce a new series in immigrant and ethnic history. Manuscripts treating any aspect of the American immigration experience will be eligible, including the history of immigration to and immigrant and ethnic groups in the United States, comparative studies of immigration as an international phenomenon, the nature of American pluralism, the legislative and administrative history of immigration and its regulation, and works dealing specifically with the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island.

Two manuscripts will be selected for publication in each year of the Centennial celebration, 1986-1992. Submitted works will be evaluated by appropriate scholars and the final selections will be made by a board of editors appointed by the History Committee, the initial members of which are Roger Daniels of the University of Cincinnati (chair), Jay P. Dolan of the University of Notre Dame, and Rudolph J. Vecoli of the University of Minnesota. For more information, contact: Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Centennial Series, University of Illinois Press, 54 E. Gregory Drive, Champaign, Illinois 61820.

Recent Donations to the ISHD's Photograph Collection

World War I. 9 original photos of unidentified World War I soldier and family, removed from 1913 Hawkeye yearbook at University of Iowa Archives. Also 1 pamphlet, "Information regarding Christmas parcels for Men with the AEF," 1918. Donor: Earl Rogers, University Archives.

Iowa views. 6 original postcards including 1 view of high school, Riceville, Iowa, c. 1910; 1 view of Coe college, Cedar Rapids, 1912; 1 view of Grundy Center, Iowa, business street, c. 1910; and 3 views of Denison, Iowa, including railroad depot, houses, and bird's eye view, 1910-1912. Donor: Mrs. Wesley Heckt.

Iowa views. 12 items transferred from Nebraska State Historical Society, including 11 photos or postcards and one booklet, *Our Sons at Camp Dodge*. Includes photos relating to Sioux City, Woodbine, Hawarden, Des Moines, Cedar Falls, Waterloo, and LeMars. Donor: John E. Carter, Curator of Photographs, Nebraska State Historical Society.

Winfield, Iowa. 2 exterior views of Methodist Church, Winfield, Iowa, one view shows church under construction, c. 1907. Donor: Frederick Crane.

Iowa City, Iowa. 24 original photographs of Iowa City business streets, Old Capitol, and University of Iowa, taken by donor as part of journalism class project. Donor: Anne Schlatter.

Selected New Manuscript Acquisitions

Modern Mixers Club. Minutes, 1953-1983. Iowa City, Iowa. 4 vols. holograph. Minutes of meetings of a women's club formed from among the women employed as cooks in the University of Iowa fraternities and sororities. At times the membership also included a few women who were cooks in dormitories and other campus locations. Donor: Wilma Brown.

Pearson, Richard. Abstracts of land, 1876. Clayton County, Iowa. Three abstracts for land in Clayton County, Iowa, which were first entered by Richard Pearson in 1847 and 1852. One of the abstracts is dated 1 February 1876 but the dates that the other two were prepared are not given. Donor: Prof. Ralph D. Gray.

University Club of Iowa City. Records, 1975-1985. Addition to collection. Five issues of the University Club's newsletter, *The Clarion*, 1984-1985, two copies of the Club's *Yearbook*, 1983-84, and c. 114 newspaper clippings compiled in a scrapbook concerning the Club's activities, 1974-1984. Donor: Mrs. Jackie Stokes.

Grace Evangelical and Reformed Church, Lone Tree, Iowa. Scrapbook, c. 1966. 100p. holograph, printed, mimeographed, and photographs. Scrapbook compiled by Mrs. Art Schuessler of Lone Tree traces the history of Grace Evangelical and Reformed Church from its beginnings in 1864 to about 1966 and includes photographs of the ministers and the achievements of the church during the period of each minister's tenure, newspaper clippings about the church and its ministers, also photographs of church leaders and members, and copies of church bulletins, programs, and annual reports. Donor: Iowa City Genealogical Society.

Beckman, Richard R. Memoir, 1943-1984. 159p. photocopy of typescript. Memoir entitled "Accounting of Time" recounts the World War II experiences of Richard R. Beckman, a native of Burlington, Iowa. Trained as a lawyer, Beckman served in the Army's Criminal Investigation Division and took part in the invasion of Normandy. He was among the early Allied soldiers to enter Paris and later was with the first American soldiers to enter Germany and Berlin. He attended the Potsdam Conference as one of the security officers assigned to President Truman and was allowed to photograph Truman, Atlee, and Stalin at the meeting. Account also includes descriptions of London, Paris, Versailles, and Potsdam and the English, French, and German countrysides. Also photographs and newspaper clippings concerning Beckman's army service. Donor: Richard R. Beckman



Women moved into the male world of the business office as clerical work was broken down into routine, specialized tasks. Women were considered perfect office workers. They had nimble fingers to work typewriters and other office machines, yet they were docile enough to be content with boring tasks and to accept the low-wage jobs. In this new workplace for women, a strict formality between men and women was often maintained, especially since they were required to work in proximity to each other.



Women entered the office in numbers at the same time that new technology was introduced. The Remington Company advertised its typewriters with a "Miss Remington" rather than a "Mr. Remington" in order to help recruit women into the office. The typewriter, the dictating machine, the adding machine, and the mimeograph machine required trained workers to operate them. Generally, office workers had received some business training in high school or had gone on to business school after high school.



Although the pay was usually less, women often chose sales jobs over factory jobs. They selected the cleaner work environment of the store and the greater independence that clerking offered them. Because customers were present in stores, employees and managers maintained a sense of decorum rarely found in factories. In this more formal setting, salesclerks dressed up. "You always looked nice," remembered one former clerk. Above all, the salesclerks took pride in developing their selling skills. (5 and 10¢ store)



Clerks wanted seats behind the counters so that they could get off their feet occasionally. Before they convinced the store management to provide seats for the clerks, a cashier remembered that "women were quitting because it was so hard." A law passed in Iowa required that employers provide seats for salesclerks whenever possible, but it allowed employers to decide where the seats would be provided and when they could be used. Typically, employers located the seats behind the counters but did not allow the clerks to use them. (Becker-Hazelton Company)



Women with few other employment options filled the service jobs at soda fountains and restaurants. (Adam Zillig's Drug Store)



(ice cream parlor)



In family-owned businesses, the boundary between the kinds of work that men and women could do was less distinct. The protective structure of the family gave women the opportunity to work at jobs usually associated with men and to expand popular ideas about what constituted appropriate work for women. (Buechle's Meat Market)

Note on Sources

The author's research for her master's thesis, "Wage-Earning Women in Dubuque, Iowa, 1910-1917: Their Position in the Labor Force and How They Remember That Experience" (University of Iowa, 1985), provided a great amount of valuable information for this article. A copy of this thesis has been added to the Iowa State Historical Department's Iowa City library collection. As part of her thesis research, Farley interviewed twenty-four women who had been wage earners in Dubuque in the 1910-1917 period. Their accounts of work situations added to an understanding and appreciation of the Klauer Collection photographs. Iowa State Bureau of Labor reports provided the specific wage information cited in this article. These reports included the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth *Reports of the Bureau of Labor Statistics for the State of Iowa* for 1908-1909, 1910-1911, 1912-1913, and 1914-1915. Margaret W. Davies' *Women's Place is at the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers, 1870-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982) contained valuable information about the changing makeup of the clerical work force. The photographs included in this article and some others have been made into a traveling photograph exhibit, generously funded by the Iowa Humanities Board and the National Endowment for the Humanities. If you are interested in exhibiting *Iowa Women in the Workplace* please contact the Research Center for Dubuque Area History, Wahlert Library, Loras College, Dubuque, Iowa 52001. Or call (319) 588-7100.