The PALIMPSEST

IOWA'S POPULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE

VOLUME 67 NUMBER 6 NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1986

State Historical Society of Iowa
The Palimpsest

PRICE — Free to members. Single issue — $2.50.
MEMBERSHIP — By application. INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP — $12.50.
FAMILY MEMBERSHIP — $17.50. BENEFITING MEMBERSHIP — $22.50.
SUSTAINING MEMBERSHIP — $100. DONOR — $500. PATRON — $1,000.
ADDRESS INQUIRIES TO: State Historical Society, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, IA 52240

USISSN 0031 — 0360

THE PALIMPSEST is published bimonthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City. It is printed in Des Moines and distributed free to Society members and exchanges. This is the November/December 1986 issue and is Number 6 of Volume 67. Second class postage paid at Iowa City, Iowa.

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Ginalie Swaim, Editor

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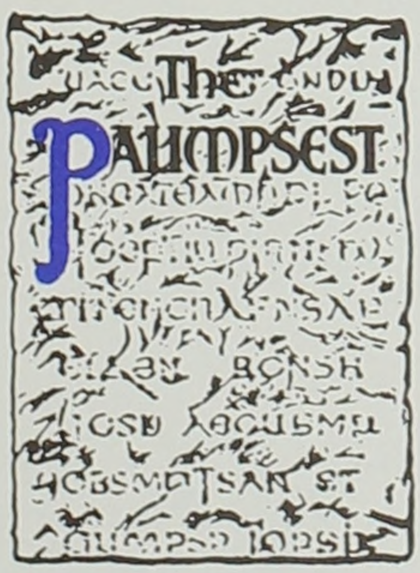
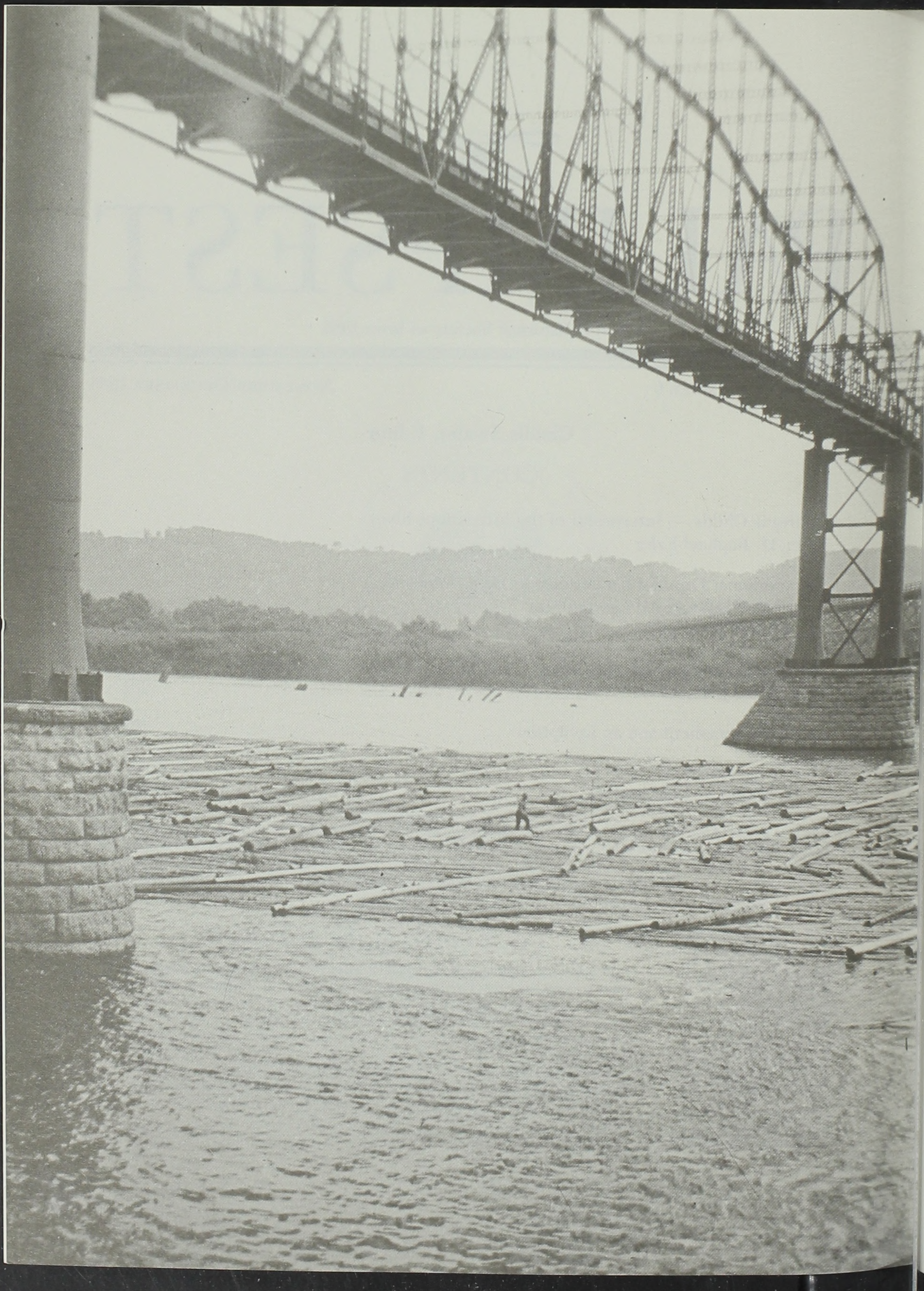
Cover: *The world of the Mississippi is explored in this* Palimpsest, *in a study of the river's history, commerce, and romance. Beginning on the next page, author H. Raphael Erler focuses on the Mississippi and its interpretation by Iowa native Marquis W. Childs. Front cover: With supreme balance, raftsmen hitch a raft of logs to the bow of a steamboat. Back cover: The steamer* Capitol *churns through Crooked Slough in northeastern Iowa early in this century. (SHSI; Beall Collection, 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.



MARQUIS CHILDS
Interpreter of the Mississippi River

by H. Raphael Erler

Probably no one will ever surpass Mark Twain in portraying the romance and symbolism of the Mississippi River in American culture. Others before Twain wrote about the river, and still others have continued to make it a focal interest of their writing. Yet among those still portraying the river, no one excels Marquis W. Childs, whose little book *Mighty Mississippi: Biography of a River* appeared in 1982.

The book can hardly be called a recent interpretation because much of it was written (though not in book form) more than fifty years ago. Of the seventeen chapters, the first twelve trace the river's history from early exploration until the end of the lumber boom on the upper Mississippi. The last five chapters are written from Childs's personal viewpoint and experience — as a youth growing up in a river town; as a guest in the pilothouse of three modern boats pushing their barges downriver in 1934; and as an observer of government policy-making in Washington (from New Deal plans for levees and flood control to current political debates over user fees of the lock and dam system).

The book is the culmination of Childs's lifelong interest in the river and his broad understanding of its history and influence on all American life. An insightful study of the river's mythical and tangible presence in the national consciousness, the book is one of the most succinct, yet rich, accounts of the river to appear in a long time.

Written for a popular audience and omitting the mechanics of scholarly documentation, the book reflects long study and observation of the river. It has an authenticity that needs no scholarly minutiae. From the opening chapters tracing the history of the river since the sixteenth-century arrival of Europeans, to the closing chapters about the federal government's efforts to harness it into a nine-foot channel, Childs shows an affection for the river and an educated understanding of its role in American life that even Twain could hardly have matched.

Marquis Childs, like Mark Twain, grew up close to the Mississippi and experienced its charm and lure from his youngest days. He was born in 1903 in Clinton, Iowa, or more accurately in the town of Lyons (which was annexed to Clinton in 1895). He spent most of his days there until he went off to the University of Iowa to study medicine at the insistence of his lawyer father. When he realized his lack of commitment to medicine and gave up his studies, his father was so displeased that he refused to subsidize further education. With the help of his grandfather, however, he entered the University of Wisconsin to pursue his journalistic interests. After graduation in 1923, he began his career working with United Press in Chicago but interrupted his work to return to the University of Iowa, where he studied on a fellowship granted by Hardin Craig, the honored head of the English department. By 1925 he had earned his M.A. from Iowa and had found his wife, Lue Prentiss.

Childs came from a family that for genera-

tions had been farmers, but his father had qualified for the legal profession and served it with a sternness equalled only by his rigidity at home. The family had roots in both the Episcopal and Methodist religions, but his father was not the church-going type and Marquis's own exposure to religion in an Episcopal Sunday School apparently had minimal influence on his thought and life. His strongest recollection of early religious experience was the Episcopal church in town; he found it interesting because it had been paid for by a lumber baron who made sure that it was finished in beautiful oak. The more theological elements of his education left a less lasting impression on his young mind. More lasting influences came from his wide reading in the local public library where he read the major Russian novelists (among others) and became convinced that he wanted to be a writer.

The Mississippi attracted him to more than the usual boyhood adventures, and early on he began to observe it locally and along most of its course. In his own words, from the introduction of *Mighty Mississippi*:

> Growing up on the banks of the great river I had explored the history of its turbulent life and had seen at first hand its slow decline. In the river as I had known it there was both promise and threat — floods reaching the level of the streets, storms sweeping the valley with cannonading of thunder and lightning, and the promise of the passionate advocates of a river commerce reborn by way of the federal treasury. . . .
>
> The lore of the Mississippi, the feel of it, was in my bones. Going up and down the river to New Orleans, I was pleased to think that the city held something of the past I was exploring. . . . With a friend I went by canoe from Saint Paul to my home town of Lyons, which was later absorbed into Clinton, Iowa. We slept on sandbars as empty of life as the river itself. The archives of the Mississippi [Missouri?] Historical Society in Saint Louis stored the records of a hundred years. And now and then I came upon an old-timer with a vivid memory of past glory.

Marquis W. Childs, native of Lyons and author of Mighty Mississippi. *(courtesy Clinton County Historical Society)*

His first writing about the river dealt with, appropriately enough, Mark Twain's hometown of Hannibal, Missouri. It appeared in H.L. Mencken's *American Mercury* in 1926. True to the spirit of the magazine, it gave a slightly irreverent picture of the village-turned-city in the years after Twain had transformed its citizens into the characters of his stories. With a note of quiet cynicism, Childs pictures the sleepy village of the 1860s with its daily visits by river packets as changed into just another American town permeated with the boosterism of Babbitt's Zenith. Behind Childs's slightly sardonic comments rests an abiding reverence for the nineteenth-century life Mark Twain captured in his writings.

During the early 1930s Childs took a leave from United Press and returned to his home-

town, intending to write a novel about the city and its river environment. After several attempts he concluded that he lacked the "equipment" to write successful fiction. His narrative account of fictional Winslow, Iowa, published in *Harper's Magazine* in 1932, seems to be the only substantial legacy of his efforts to interpret the river while on leave.

Over the next fifty years he became a distinguished journalist with the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and published fifteen or sixteen books dealing mainly with the relationship between politics and the social and economic status of people. His studies based on what he calls "observation knowledge" show a sensitive and insightful understanding of important problems. They are written with a freshness and clarity that give zest to discussions that in other hands have become arid tomes of social science. For years following February 1944, his column, "Washington Calling," was widely syndicated in newspapers across the country and gained him a reputation as one of America's most respected journalists. As radio and television expanded, he added to his reputation and influence through guest appearances and his discussion program, "Washington Spotlight." In 1969 he won the Pulitzer Prize for commentary.

Yet in all his rich and varied career, he never lost his original feeling for the river, to which in his retirement he returned in *Mighty Mississippi*. There he has distilled his understandings and love for the river, which make this little volume one of the most significant expositions on the river available today.

Childs's efforts to produce a novel in the early 1930s failed, but he did publish a fictionalized version of life in Clinton in *Harper's Magazine* and wrote much of what would later become *Mighty Mississippi*. The *Harper's* article, "River Town," was set in Winslow, Iowa, a thin disguise for Clinton. The article can only leave us wishing he had done more in the same vein. His approach might not have succeeded as a novel, but as a narrative of river lore it had great potential. The characters in his tale were removed far enough from their prototypes to save him from libel charges, but they have a ring of authenticity that makes "River Town" a convincing picture of one period in the history of the Mississippi.

The original *Harper's* article appears in somewhat revised form as chapter 13 of *Mighty Mississippi*. Several of the revisions, though minor, weaken the tone and spirit of the original. They leave the reader wondering if they were made by Childs himself or by some in-house editor who had never tasted or felt the river. Here I will follow the original version from *Harper's*, treating it as a work in itself and not as a segment of the longer book.

In the article Childs recalled his experiences and his reactions to what he observed in Clinton. He hoped in part to give to the upper Mississippi some of the attention that Twain had brought to the lower. "The province of the upper river does not deserve its obscurity," he wrote. Life along the upper reaches of the river had its own peculiar quality which added "a defiant, reckless courage and arrogance that the stream to the south lacked." Towns on the river in Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois have a special quality or tone, he maintained; they are more closely associated with the river than with their region in general. "By virtue of the Mississippi, the extravagant commerce that flowed for so many years on its broad surface and the incorrigible human cargo that came along with the commerce, the river towns escaped the blighting respectability of the mid-western Main Street." Childs found in his fictional Winslow a spirit much different than that of Gopher Prairie and other towns pictured by Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, and others who denounced the "village virus," the blight on American small-town life that had come with village aspirations for genteel respectability. Unfortunately by 1936

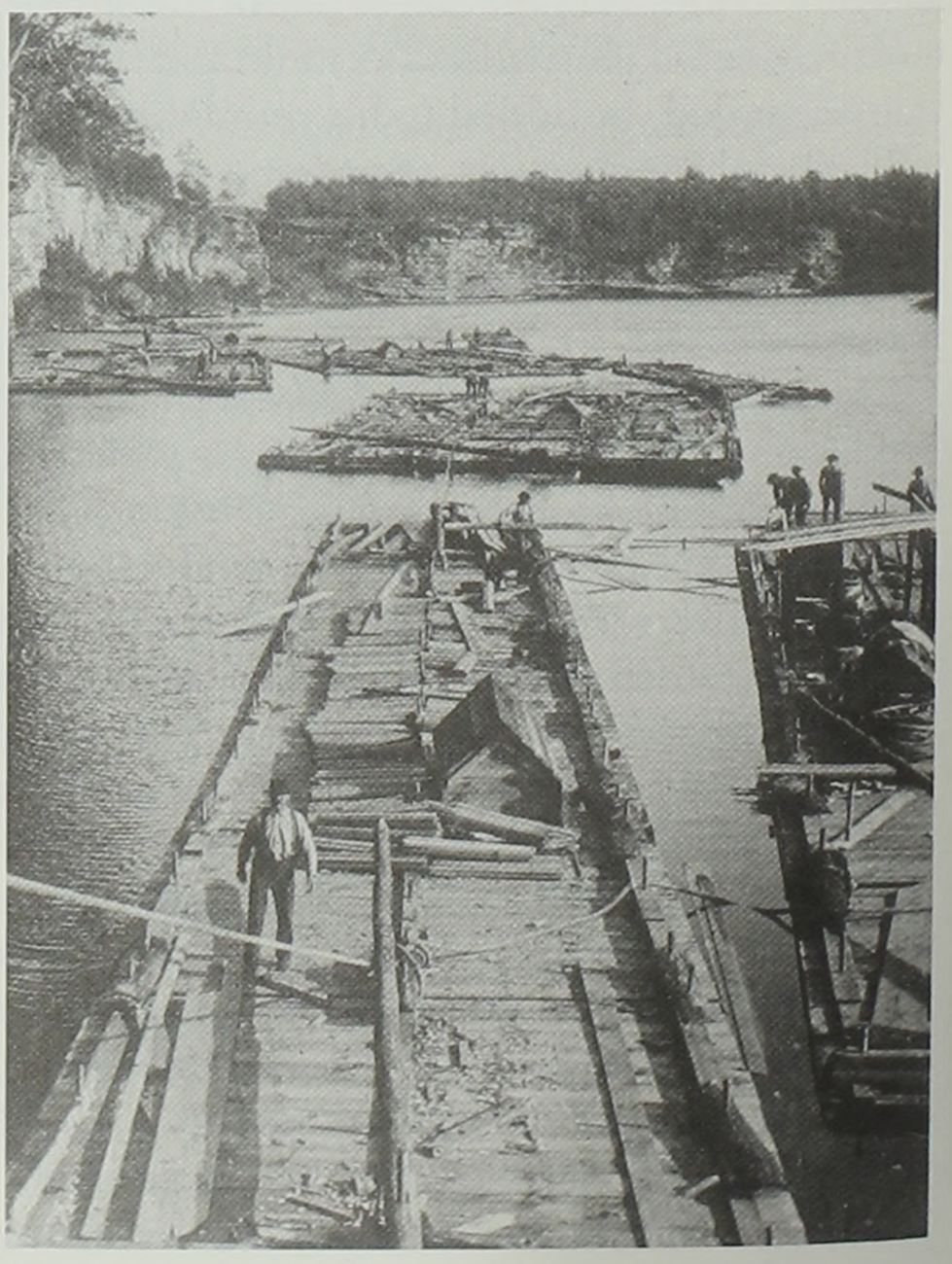
many of the river towns that had flourished during the lumbering era had become ghost towns, and the surviving towns too often had been "shrinking slowly into a pale semblance of the past."

"Winslow is a town such as Clinton or Dubuque," Childs wrote. "It is in Iowa but it has no more to do with that rural State than has Tombstone, Arizona." The town began back in 1836 when Joshua Winslow, a "hard-bitten Yankee," and his wife arrived from upstate New York and settled on a stretch of the river as free from sandbars and other navigational hazards as he could find.

By the end of the Civil War, Winslow had a population above three thousand and had become conscious of its need for a civilizing urbanity to supplement the often riotous life of its lumber raft crews: "It had eighty-six saloons and a subscription library." The sponsors of the library brought in noted lecturers to help elevate the tone of the thriving city. It is hard to see what such visitors as Horace Greeley, Ralph Waldo Emerson, P.T. Barnum, and Frederick Douglass had in common except that they were all notable figures on the national scene who could keep Winslow in touch with the best the East had to offer. Emerson, for example, made at least one lecture circuit, speaking at such places as La Crosse, Wisconsin, and St. Paul, Winona, and Faribault, Minnesota, when these cities were hardly a decade old. Winslow, like other river settlements, kept its Yankee roots alive by frequent inoculations of established culture from the seaboard.

But Winslow's vitality came not from its cultural contacts with the East but from its strategic location in the lumbering trade. "To the north were the incredibly fine stands of pine, so large that man could never exhaust them; to the west was the treeless prairie, with the railroad beginning to push in; and the river was at their door, a free highway for the northern lumber." From the close of the Civil War to the end of the century, Winslow and its sister cities along the river enjoyed a thriving economy based on the seemingly endless resources of the Wisconsin pineries. With prosperity came jobs for the workers, who risked life and limb on the rafts and in the sawmills; with it also came a life of luxury for the lumber barons and their families, who "began to realize that God had been indeed very good to them." Childs was fascinated by the barons' extravagant lives and the opulent houses they built on the hills above the city. He was equally aware of the rough-and-ready life of rafters and sawmill workers. United by the bonds of lumbering, the two groups led lives as different as if they had been living in distant civilizations, yet together they dominated the upper river until the early years of the new century.

Childs's picture of the lusty life of the rafters, especially on Saturday night after they had collected their week's wage, has all the virility and bombast usually associated with the



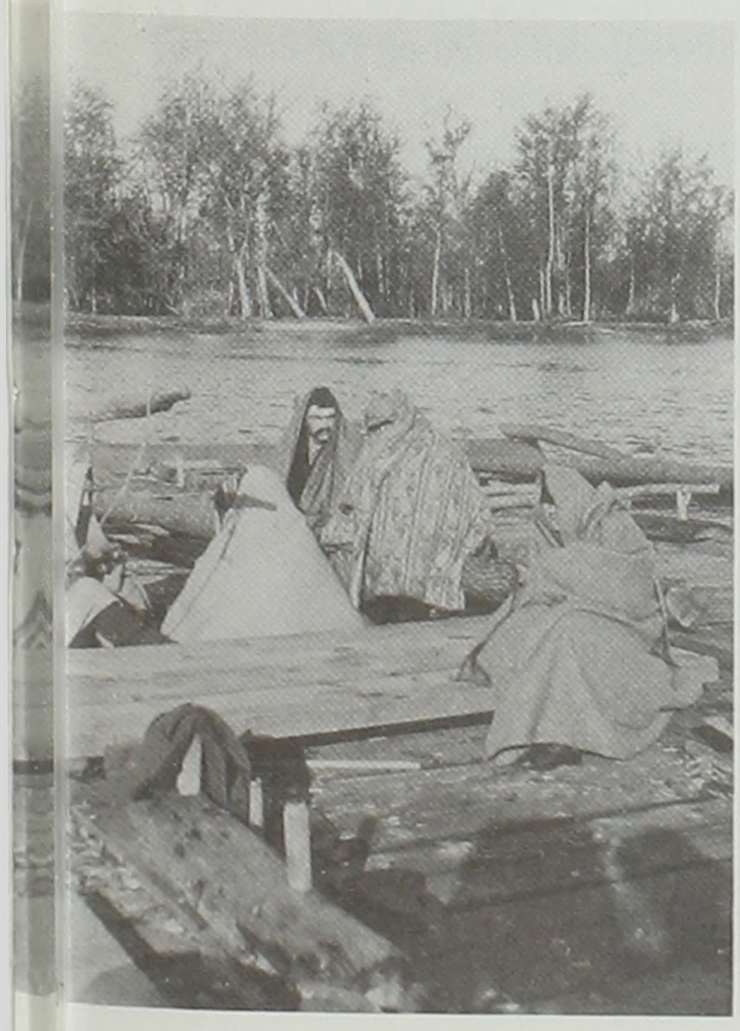
saloons on the western frontier. If anything was lacking here, it was the genteel gallantry bestowed on frontier women. Here, "on Saturday pay night no good woman stirred out of the house without a strong man at her side." The saloons and brothels, including those on floating barges which followed the rafts, did a thriving and boisterous business on the night of celebration following the week of long days and dangerous work. Winslow assigned two constables just to keep the drunks on Main Street from falling under the wheels of passing traffic.

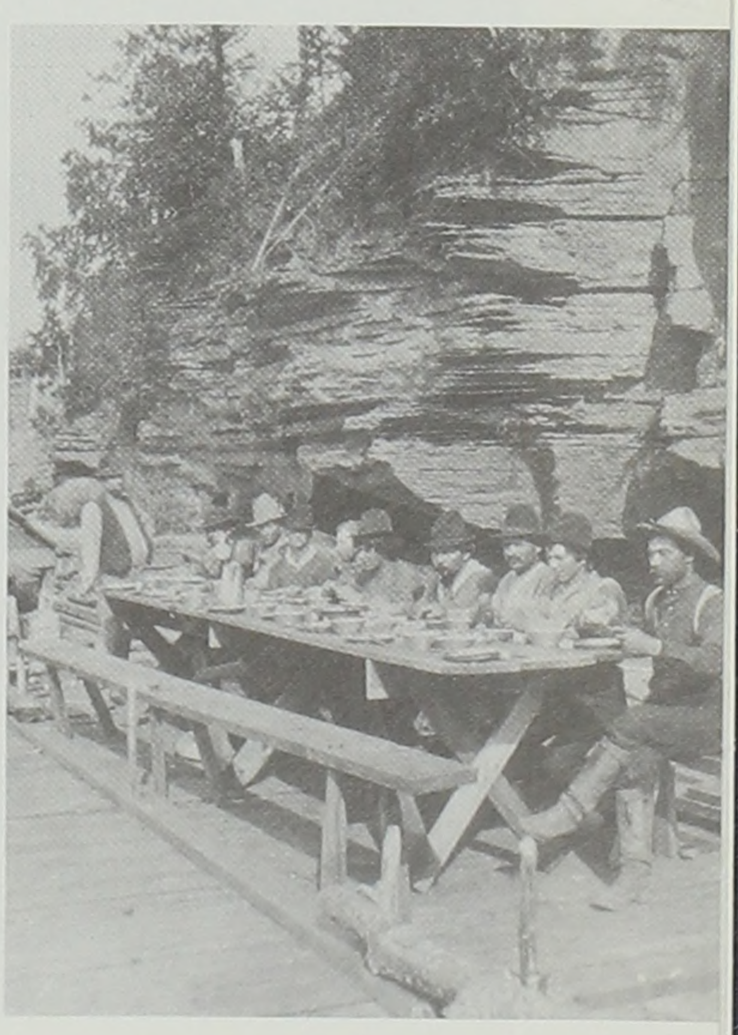
Although Iowa had already passed strict prohibition laws, Winslow and most river towns were unaffected by legal efforts to assure sobriety. The regularly imposed fines on saloonkeepers amounted to little more than a license fee. The sixty-three saloons along the six blocks from the levee to Sixth Street did a thriving business unhampered by excess competition. The local rafters and the Wisconsin woodsmen hit the town on Saturday nights, and no one could hinder their pursuit of pleasure. If the weeks were filled with fourteen-hour days at no more than a dollar and a quarter wage, the weekends sped by on hard drinking and violent carousing.

The rafters enjoyed a reputation as fighters and, with the help of a few drinks, challenged and often trounced local competition. Reputedly men of tremendous size and strength, the lumbering crews intimidated most of the town heroes, but they had enough takers to fill Monday morning court sessions with defeated competitors charging brutality as well as disorderly conduct. One local boy had grown up to be one of the most feared Saturday night carousers.

> Big Jack Manville had been a Winslow boy, but no one was so feared. Once he smashed a dozen windows on Main Street before the constabulary could control him. He appeared in court the next day, sober and subdued, tall and dignified, looking like a kindly colossus. Two or three merchants had come to see that he was at last put in jail, but they lost their courage when they saw Big Jack in the flesh. After waiting a while, he said, "If there's not

The rafting crews who brought the bounty of northern forests downriver also brought their rowdy lifestyle to river towns along the way. Here, a crew tends to more domestic chores: food, shelter, and dirty dishes. (SHSI)





going to be any action here I'm going home," and went out.

Weekend violence along the river most often took the form of physical confrontation rather than of blazing guns associated with similar encounters in the Far West.

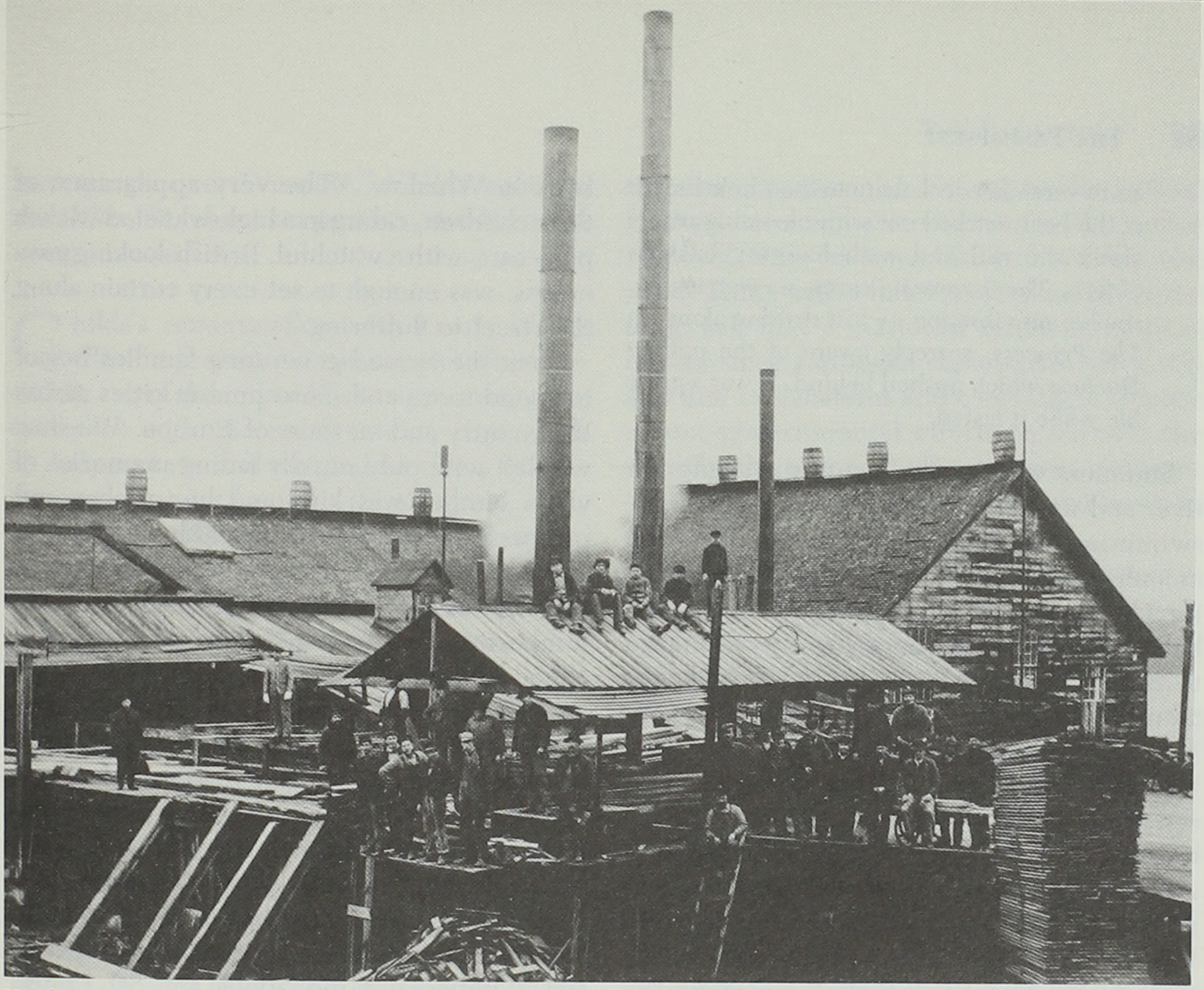
The entire town of Winslow was touched by the lumbering trade brought by the river. When men arrived home on the rafts, their wives often made them change clothes in the woodshed before coming into the house. Neighbors knew when a lumber man had come home because his clothes would be strung along the fence for delousing by wind and sun. During the winter while the frozen river held up the rafts, waterfront boatyards paid substantial wages to skilled workers from town to build and repair boats.

During warm summer days young boys defying parental warnings swam and dove from the big log rafts, lured by the thrill of danger. An unanticipated slip on the logs could mean a plunge into the depths with little chance of coming up again. The whine of ripping saws and the sweet odor of heaped sawdust pervaded the whole area. The rich scents and the incessant noise bespoke the town's prosperity.

While the laborers and their families grew on good wages brought by the river industry, it was the Winslow lumber barons — the Abbotts, Westbrooks, Devines, and their colleagues — along with Weyerhaeuser and other competing lumber lords, who harvested the wealth. Competing companies had formed an alliance to assure that the flow of wood from the Wisconsin pineries was harvested, rafted, and milled to meet the needs of settlement rapidly spreading westward from the Mississippi, beyond the Missouri to the foot of the mountains. With no concern for the future, the barons depleted the Wisconsin and Minnesota forests as if there were no end to the seemingly boundless supply.

But the careless destruction of the forests brought an end to the lumbering industry during the first decade of the twentieth century. Until then, the river barons and their families enjoyed a life of leisure and luxury, which

An extreme example of how the Mississippi influenced the daily life of residents of river towns: flooded streets of Clinton in the 1880s. (Originals owned by Ed Zastrow, Sr.)



Workers take a break on the roof of the Dorchester and Hughey Sawmill (Bellevue, 1886). (SHSI)

Childs recalled with admiration and wonder. Today that splendor lives on only in the large frame houses, though the interiors have been subdivided into apartments for students and other impecunious residents. Fortunately a growing interest in historical preservation is saving some of these mansions from oblivion by restoring them to their original opulence. Before the pineries were exhausted, and the sounds and odors of sawmills gave way to stagnation, the lumber lords and their families basked in their wealth.

Though river towns, as Childs suggested, may have escaped "the blighting respectability of the mid-western Main Street," the families of the lumber barons were not beyond displaying their affluence in the large mansions built on the bluffs above the town and river. Even old Goat Abbott, the tireless pursuer of an ever-greater fortune in Winslow, finally yielded to his wife's pleas and "built a huge house, all turrets and towers and porches and three upstairs balconies and a stained-glass window on the stairway twenty feet high." He insisted only that his private study be paneled in white pine so he could savor the odor of the source of his wealth.

Probably the most conspicuous spenders were the Devines, whose three houses towered over the entire town. Their greatest pride was their houseboat *The Princess*, named after the family title for daughter Fanny. The houseboat was pushed along by *The Duchess*, a towboat piloted by the most skillful rivermen in Old Man Devine's crews.

> *The Princess* was fitted out by Marshall Field's, eight bedrooms, five baths, a main saloon, a dining saloon, the master's library,

> and a verandah deck that ran the whole length of the boat, tricked out with blooming plants along the rail and with hanging baskets of fern. There were no cares, no worries, no smoke, no vibration — just drifting along on *The Princess*, scarcely aware of the puffing *Duchess* which pushed behind. It was a great life while it lasted.

Summers were spent leisurely cruising the river and its backwaters, with ample time for swimming, evening sandbar picnics, and moonlight dinners to the accompaniment of the black servants who doubled as singers and banjo players. At least once a year a pilgrimage to distillery towns from Peoria to Louisville replenished supplies for the season's entertainment. When the river season ended, they and their lumber society friends moved their social activities to the Outing Club five miles below town, "where the river makes a great bend, sweeps by in all its swelling might and majesty." Winters often took them to the East and Europe where they picked up continental habits and mementoes that they displayed for the admiration or envy of their lesser neighbors back in Winslow. "The very appearance of their children, riding in a high-wheeled wicker pony cart, with a watchful, British-looking governess, was enough to set every curtain along the street to fluttering."

Soon the second-generation families began to spend more and more time in cities across the country and on tours of Europe. Winslow was left with only rapidly fading memories of when lumber was king and his princes and princesses reveled in the wealth that floated downriver from Chippewa Valley and Beef Slough. With each decade of the new century, lumbering and its associated industries declined and Winslow became little more than a river crossing for railroads and highways on which passengers rushed by, heading from eastern cities to interesting places on the horizon. Passengers in streamliners looked out fleetingly, probably wondering what town they were speeding through, little suspecting the rich and vigorous life that once had made Winslow one of the most prosperous sawdust towns between Minneapolis and St. Louis. "Although an air of quiescence and decay hangs

In backwater sloughs, surefooted raftsmen first chained the longest logs into loose frames, in which other logs would float. A raft often contained a million feet of logs, covering three acres. (SHSI)

increasingly over Winslow," Childs wrote in the 1930s, "its character persists, stubborn and unregenerate."

Childs's reminiscences of his early life in Clinton preserve a vibrant picture of the middle era of the upper Mississippi, an age between the mid-nineteenth-century river, with its daily packets, and the modern river, with its tremendous tows loaded with oil, grain, coal, and other bulk commodities. The superpowered diesel boats push on night and day on this modern river, in fair weather and foul, passing Hannibal, Keokuk, Clinton, Dubuque, plying the federally sponsored nine-foot channel with tows exceeding in value the shipping of a whole season at the turn of the century. The river is no longer plugged from shore to shore for miles upstream by the chutes that funneled logs to their assigned mills. The whine of great circular saws ripping the logs into lumber no longer pierces the countryside. Winslow and the upper Mississippi had three or four decades of wild and prosperous life fed by the apparently endless supply of timber from Wisconsin and Minnesota forests. But the forests vanished and were not systematically replaced. With them went a period in river history that has nowhere been more vividly preserved than in the nine pages of Marquis Childs's article "River Town."

Childs gave up his efforts to write about the river, and after "River Town" he published little about it until his *Mighty Mississippi: Biography of a River* appeared in 1982, almost fifty years after much of it was written.

Mighty Mississippi will remain a living testimony to his fascination with the river. In itself it is a substantial addition to the interpretation of the Mississippi and its role in American life and culture. His journalistic skills are apparent in the crisp, clear writing that telescopes whole volumes of history and interpretation into sentences and paragraphs. For any reader looking for an interesting introduction to the entire scope of river history, Childs has filled the need. Those with a fuller understanding of the topic will find a masterful synthesis of river history since European exploration. They will also find explanations and evaluations of more recent governmental efforts to harness the river for the economic development of the regions along its 2,300 miles from Lake Itasca to the Gulf.

In the brief sixteen pages of the opening chapter, Childs reviews the history of Spanish, French, and English explorations of the valley during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. Hearing Indian legends of a broad "sea" to the west, explorers dreamed of finding an easy passage to the Orient, the hope of European monarchs and entrepreneurs who fancied that the land of America was just a brief impediment to the storied wealth of the East. Only after Joliet and Marquette had floated down to the mouth of the Arkansas River were explorers convinced that the river was not their long-sought passage to India.

> It was important that the river was no longer a mirage, no longer the symbol of a vague and futile dream. It was seen to be one of the great rivers of the earth, with tributaries of seemingly incredible extent, draining a vast area of forest and prairie that abounded with all natural riches. Through the slow channels of European information these facts gradually penetrated. But it remained for still another adventurer to appreciate the significance of this highway at the heart of a continent.

It was Robert Cavelier de La Salle who first understood the latent wealth of the unsettled continent. Thwarted by petty jealousies, greed, and natural disasters, he struggled to build French settlements, first along the Illinois and Mississippi rivers and after 1682 near the Gulf. He realized the potential of the natural resources of the valley, but he failed to

convince his superiors and colleagues of the validity of his dream. It was not the economic promise of the river valley but its military advantage in splitting the Spanish empire in America that led Louis XIV to finance La Salle's efforts to settle the lower valley. But "La Salle's colony [at what he thought was the river's mouth] was a grim failure, beset by misfortune from its wretched beginnings to its miserable end," Childs writes.

> Three times during the years 1685 to 1687 he struck out from the dwindling colony in search of the river, knowing that if he did not find it and get help from the French in Canada they all should die. On the last search he was a man lost to hope; his face was without expression, numbed as though with the frost of northern winters; his eyes were withdrawn and blank. He and his party wore sailcloth clothes; they had no shoes. Rivers swollen with the spring rise were crossed in improvised boats of skin. Quarreling broke out among the men, in which the leader took little part. Those who were most disaffected plotted to kill him. As he walked down a trail to discover why the plotters had stayed behind, they shot him down and he died within an hour.

La Salle's vision of what the vast wilderness of the Mississippi basin would one day become largely died with him, at least for the moment. "The river was still to a large degree a lost river, a long, shining, empty expanse with, here and there, remote little collections of huts — they were hardly more than that." Years rolled by with little to mark their passage, but small settlements of French petite bourgeoisie and peasant farmers gradually brought elements of civilization to the wilderness, which prepared it for the transformation still to come. By the Treaty of Paris in 1763, France lost its territory east of the Mississippi, and many of its citizens moved across the river to the fur trading post of St. Louis, preferring control by the Spanish over submission to the British. The French presence further diminished twenty years later when another Treaty of Paris brought most of the area east of the Mississippi under American control.

> Beneath the outward show of history — the jealousies of the European system at work in America, wars, treaties, proclamations — a mighty army was forming, an army that was to possess the heart of a continent not by virtue of a quaint ceremony but by subduing the wilderness and peopling it with their children and their children's children, an army beyond the petty authority of law and convention, an army lawless and wild and free, yet moving steadily westward in inexorable conquest. History falters before this migration. . . . There was still land, and good land, on the eastern slope of the Alleghenies. Yet this army marched on as though the gates of a new Eden had been flung open and man in his innocence freed again to gather the fruits of the earth.

For Childs, the Indian legends of the great water to the west culminated in the fulfillment of La Salle's dream of a civilization based on the natural resources of the Mississippi basin. He alone of the early explorers had had the vision to see in the wilderness the potential for human greatness and new civilization spreading out from the shores of the great river.

Even before the land east to the Atlantic came under American domination following the Revolutionary War, La Salle's dreams began to materialize. Already the banks of the Mississippi and its tributaries were sprinkled with tiny settlements, the nuclei from which the opening of the West grew. Valley commerce to and from New Orleans expanded at remarkable speed, and the inland rivers were dotted with boats of all descriptions. Control of the harbor mouth of the Mississippi at New Orleans, long threatened by Spanish and French rule, came once and for all to the Americans through Jefferson's foresight and Robert R. Livingston's diplomacy as ambassador to France. Even before the Louisiana Purchase in

1803, the destiny of the vast interior basin had been determined by the "remarkable migration of a free people," and Jefferson's accomplishment but ratified the conquest.

> It was something strange and marvelous and not a little terrifying that had happened in the wilderness. A wandering people had been given a country of incomparable richness; they were free as man had never been free before. It was a wild, proud, fierce kind of freedom, an arrogant freedom, a headlong, reckless, dancing freedom. And nowhere was it so proud, so wild, as in the men of the river, the men who were half horse and half alligator.

But it would take more than the braggadocio of Mike Fink and his ilk to conquer the river and make it a servant to dreamers bringing civilization to the wilderness.

The year of the comet, 1811, began with spring floods from New Madrid, Kaskaskia, and Sainte Genevieve down to New Orleans. In the fall a blazing comet stretched across the sky. The year ended with the great New Madrid earthquake in December, whose tremors lasted into the new year. Childs writes:

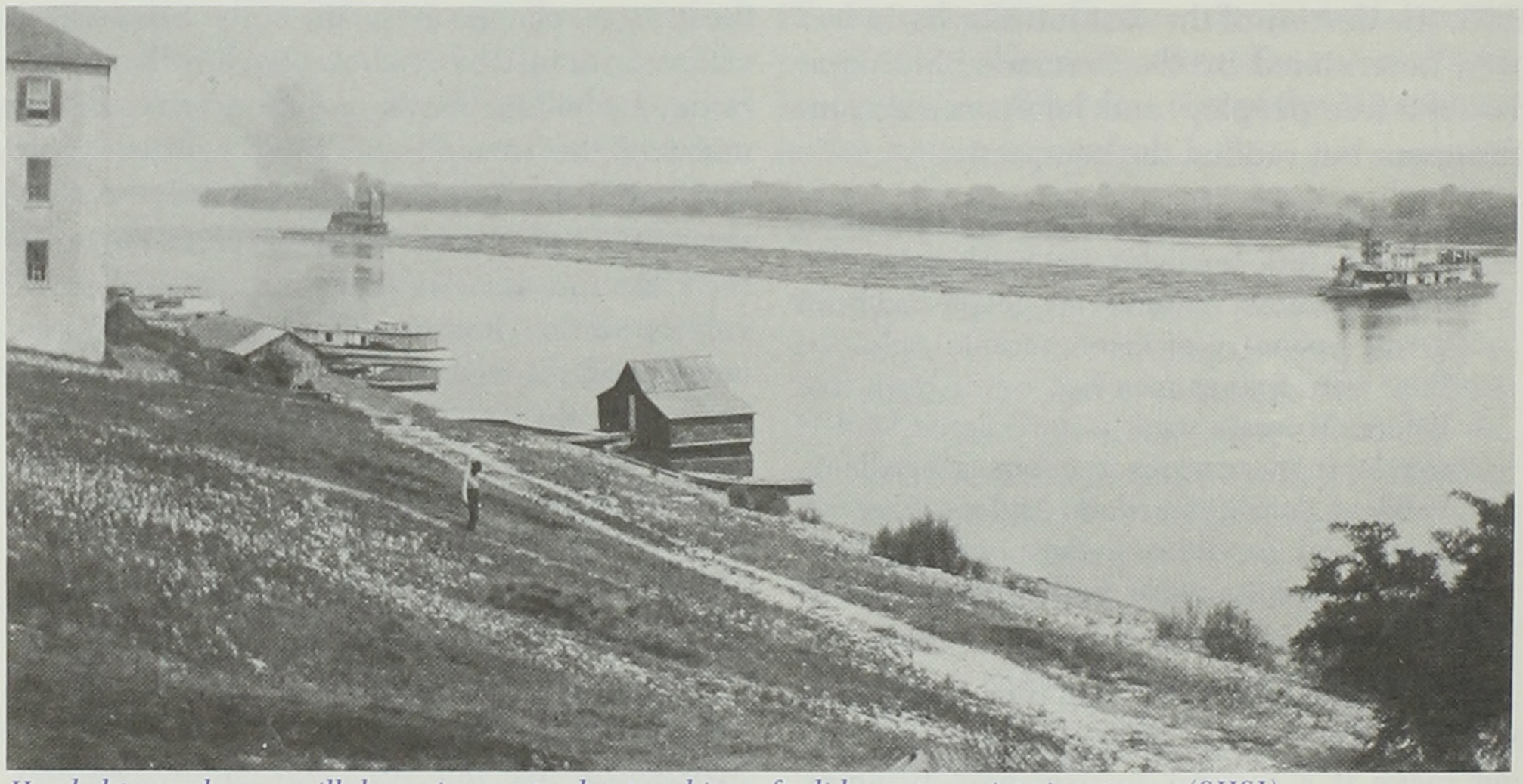
> A pall darkened the air, the smell of sulphur was strong, geysers of steam and hot water shot up thirty feet high, hell's mouth gaped. In the river it was as though some huge leviathan lashed its tail in torment. A barrier was thrown up in the course of the tremendous upheaval, and for a time the current swerved sharply. Contemporary records say that the Mississippi flowed, briefly, to the north instead of the south.

Reelfoot Lake on the borders of Kentucky and Tennessee remains a permanent monument to the north-flowing river and to the changes in topography wrought by one of the greatest inland earthquakes in history.

But it was not the smoke and spume of a natural phenomenon, however, that worked the greatest change in the life of the Mississippi valley. Late in 1811 Nicholas Roosevelt and his bride, Lydia Latrobe, found themselves in the midst of the turmoils on their venture from Pittsburgh to New Orleans aboard the first steamboat to navigate the river. Coming out of the Ohio into the Mississippi, Captain Roosevelt found the channels he had previously surveyed and the surrounding lands completely altered by the ongoing tremors. Still the little *New Orleans* pushed its way south and finally arrived at its namesake city on January 12, 1812. "It was a thrilling, heroic journey," Childs writes, "this first trip of a boat propelled by steam on western waters."

With all the fire and brimstone surrounding the excursion of the *New Orleans*, the mighty Mississippi had not yet been conquered and brought under human control. The tiny pioneering boat lacked the power and design to move successfully against the current. Not until Captain Henry M. Shreve designed a true riverboat and powered it with high-pressure engines did steamboats become practical modes of commercial travel on inland waterways. (Shreve also invented the snag boat, used to clear the river of the dead trees called "snags" that were mired in the riverbed and that posed a major hazard to steamboats.) It took a United States Supreme Court decision in 1824 to clear river commerce of the "legal" snags — previous monopolies by Livingston and Robert Fulton — and thus open the river system to free competition. Even the scorn of the half-alligator keelboatmen faded before the increasing technology of steam.

> But the iron arm would win, and with it the country filled up even faster than it had before. Between 1810 and 1820 the population of the Valley increased from 1,370,000 to 2,580,000. . . . Land took on a cash value and land sharpers and land speculators came into existence. The seeds of an inevitable growth had been scattered along the principal rivers of the West. Individuals and isolated events



Headed toward a sawmill downriver, a towboat and its raft glide past a quiet river town. (SHSI)

> seem small and unimportant beside the stream of humanity that flowed into the Mississippi valley.

And the stream was a democratic one. Men and women of all social and economic classes moved along the western rivers and filled the interior with the beginnings of the commercial civilization dreamed of a century and a half earlier by La Salle and a few others who could see beyond the limiting aspirations of a semi-feudal Europe. Here men and women free of oppressive forms of government could pursue their dreams of individual wealth and achievement. When the *Virginia* puffed its way from St. Louis to Fort Snelling in 1823, it opened the river from the Falls of St. Anthony to New Orleans and brought it under the sway of modern technology. For years steamers continued to compete with older boats of all styles and designs, but with the coming of mechanical power the valley became a channel for ever-increasing commerce.

Childs conveys the limitless possibility that animated the people who flowed into the valley in increasing numbers, and he quietly relates the river to the nineteenth-century spirit of destiny then so characteristic of the nation. "Here was the rich fertility of the American earth translated into the terms of commerce." The river and the westward movement combined to give America that peculiar spirit which Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893 attributed to the frontier. "This constant current of travel and trade had a profound effect on the character of the people of the valley," Childs writes, "The people along the river had a large sense of their own importance. The independence, the forthrightness, the cockiness, the pride of the West took many forms. They were different from people in the East, they knew it, they boasted of it."

The mumblings about crude manners and lack of elegance heard from visitors such as Mrs. Trollope, Charles Dickens, and other transients from eastern cities and Europe fell on deaf ears. The vitality and enterprise of the new country drowned out the whimperings of effete civilizations. Pride in their accomplishments, epitomized in the opulence of their steamboats, gave valley people a sense of destiny that could not be denied. "This was one of the sources of sectional pride that is found

again and again in almost every book and newspaper of the period," Childs notes. "Out of the swift development of the Mississippi system came a growing sense of dominion."

The region's "awareness that a new way of life had come into being" was best expressed in the river romances of Mark Twain. In chapter 6 Childs shows great admiration for Twain's pictures of river life, especially in *Huckleberry Finn*, *Tom Sawyer*, and *Life on the Mississippi*. The reader gets the unmistakable feeling that Marquis Childs would like to do for the twentieth-century river what Twain had done for the nineteenth. He shares Twain's feeling for the river in all its majesty. The pervading presence of the river touched the lives of everyone along its banks and gave to the valley its peculiar spirit. Childs writes, "because of the very presence of the river . . . a special way of life [came] into being, a kind of compromise that came out of the conflict between the new and the old." Twain's great theme, according to Childs, was "an onslaught against the dead and sterile forms of civilization that had been brought from over the mountains. . . . In part one may put it down to Mark Twain's own rebellion, his lifelong revolt against all that was narrow and stupid and mean and petty, but in larger part his use of this theme identifies him with his time."

Twain's young rebels found fulfillment in the "primal world" of the river, a world where the free individual could live on a raft and revel in the beauty of the stars and shiver in the face of storms ripping the trees along the bank.

> Appealing very deeply to something that is, or was, at the root of many Americans, and rare in our literature, there is, in particular in *Huckleberry Finn*[,] an appreciation of the solitude of the river. It is the identification of the individual with all that is rich and rare and strangely beautiful in his environment. . . . For men of the river, a kind of solitude was a part of everyday life, and as real as any other part.

The best expression of this spirit appears where Huck and Jim luxuriate in their freedom, a freedom soon to be spoiled by the appearance of the Duke and the Dauphin. "In this, the most superb poetry, is the essence of what I mean," Childs continues. "It is not isolation, it is not desolate loneliness. It is a primal world, shared by a companion, its solitude accentuated by occasional evidence of other life — a light on the far shore, a passing raft with voices coming mysteriously out of the fog, a steamboat very small across the mile-wide river."

For Childs, as for Twain, it was an intimate experience of the force of untrammeled nature, the ever-flowing solitude of the river, that gave its peculiar flavor to mid-nineteenth-century life in the valley. The "wild torrent of energy" felt on the river animated the lives of all who pushed their ways into the unsettled great basin.

> In journals and letters of the time, even in formal books of travel, there is a sense of this vast sweep of energy, the sense of a beginning world in which all the colors are brighter and fresher than anywhere else. This may be in part the glow of high hope, a sustaining belief in what the new country was destined to become, but that these qualities, as of a new and innocent world in which men were endowed with radiance and power, did exist, at least for the people of that time and place, is plain.

Twain's life in Hannibal and on the river came to a crashing halt with the outbreak of the Civil War. The first thrust of the steamboat and its contribution to the building of the West slowed markedly and never really recovered its commerce or its romance.

The disruption of river travel imposed by the Civil War was but a hint of a more

lasting curtailment of river transportation. Steam power had brought technological conquest of the river, but the development of the steam locomotive created a competitor that all but destroyed the steamboat on the upper Mississippi. Childs focuses on three interrelated

In its heyday, a steamboat was a microcosm of the worlds of work and leisure, separated by decks. Passengers pose beside the millwork ornamentation of the upper deck; on the lower deck, freight crew lean on crates, barrels, and bundles of brooms. (SHSI)

aspects of the challenge to steamboating in its golden years before 1865.

In the first place, Childs sees the change as part of a much larger development in American history, the growth of sectionalism. Southern agrarian interests, who largely dominated river commerce, too easily thought that the binding force of the river would forever keep the upper valley aligned with the southern states. They saw the union as an inviolable product of natural forces that could not be denied. From the nation's earliest years there had been a commercial rivalry between Atlantic port cities and the western trade aligned with the Mississippi. But southern gentlemen, more concerned with their agricultural prosperity and their satisfaction with things as they found them, failed to measure the growing commercial threat posed by the more business-centered cities. They felt that nothing could sever the union created by common interests in the river valley. Even with the spread of canals linking northern states to eastern outlets, southerners failed to recognize this challenge, which would switch the flow of commerce from a north-south axis to an east-west axis.

Childs, with all his propensity for romanticizing the influence of the river, does not let that enthusiasm blind him to the harsh realism of the increasing flow of commerce from the valley toward eastern points. He justly charges the complacency of those bound to the status quo with failure to realize that commerce would follow the lines of efficiency and profit and would not be bound by a romantic conception that the bonds of the great basin were etched in unchanging nature. As late as 1846, at a convention in Memphis sponsored by river businesses from St. Paul to New Orleans, leaders felt that common interests made their union inevitable and lasting. They failed to recognize the spread of railroads and canals across Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois as a threat to their sectional unity. Only eight years later, in 1854, railroads touched the Mississippi at Rock Island, Illinois, and the realignment of the sections became nearly complete. The failure of southern leaders to see shifting sectional alliances was only one of their misestimates of their ability to remain free of eastern domination. Childs sees the decline of river commerce as an important aspect of sectional realignments leading to and resulting from the Civil War.

The second and most lasting challenge to river hegemony was the technological progress which brought the railroads. Visionary entrepreneurs realized the wealth to be gained in

The Diamond Jo Line promised elegance, comfort, and reliability in this advertisement. (SHSI)

linking cities and towns by networks of rails serving commerce and travel. In their dreams the Mississippi was a challenge to be overcome, but not an insurmountable obstacle. Although cities such as Galena, Illinois, stubbornly held to the invincibility of river transportation, Chicago became the hub for railroads stretching ever westward.

Ironically, those who shared in the elaborate celebration of the arrival of the railroad at Rock Island in 1854 did not sense the larger implications of the event. Notables from many states,

THE

COMMERCIAL DESTINY

OF THE

MISSISSIPPI VALLEY

AND THE

IMPROVEMENT OF ITS GREAT WATER SYSTEM.

A LECTURE.

BY L. U. REAVIS.

"Southward the tides of commerce run,
From lands of snow to lands of sun."

"The Valley of the Mississippi is the chosen seat of population, product, and power on this continent." — Gen. N. P. Banks.

"It is a shame that Great Britain should scoop up th
Islands. It is a shame that France and Great Britain s
America. These territories open their markets for you a
and most easily reaching neighbors, and it is part of the t
send out her enterprise, to send down her steamers and
commerce of South America." — Henry Ward Beecher, "

Heretofore the experience of our people has been such as to convince the most incredulous that the goal of their ambition and wealth was to be reached somewhere in the path of empire as it lies across the continent East and West. And such has been the rapid western march of the American pioneer, and such the succeeding progress of the railway to the Pacific Ocean, that men have seemed for a time to forget that they must conform to nature, rather than with the implements of art become masters of nature; but we have only to question this mental blindness to expose its absurdity.

Man's mightiest achievements in every field of activity and thought have been more easily and truly won when his efforts were directed conjointly with nature herself, or in other words, when he more nearly coöperated with nature.

The water is more easily utilized in the channel of the river; the railway is better and easier built where nature has more nearly prepared the track.

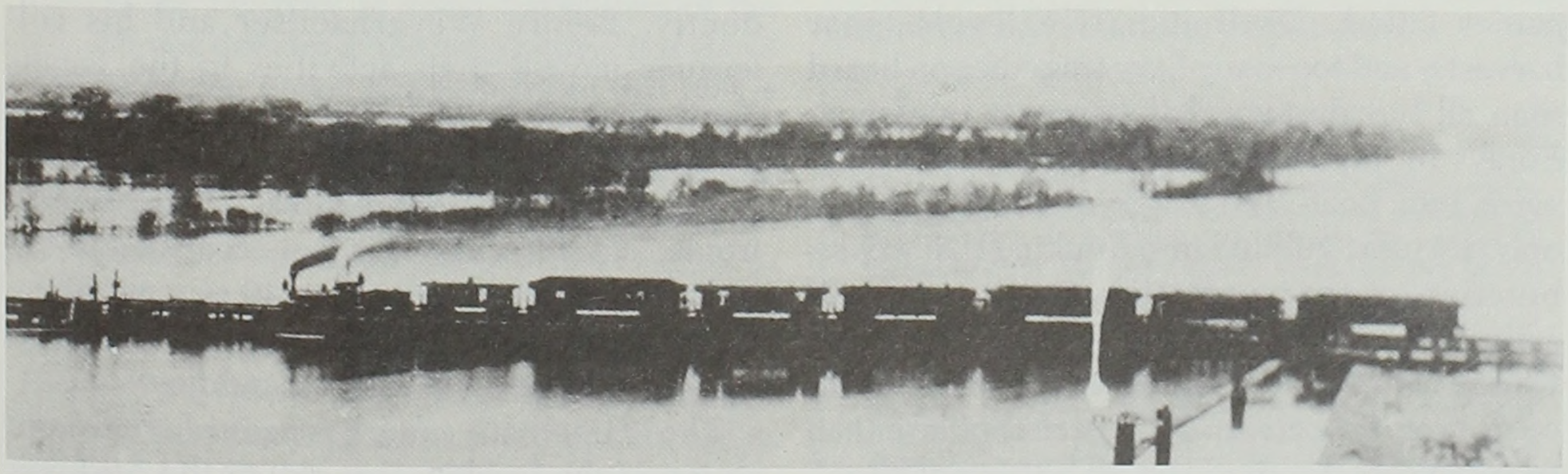
In the latter half of the nineteenth century, north/south sectional interests pleaded for river improvement — a uniform depth, levees, and river commissions to study and support river commerce. This published lecture (cover and excerpt shown here) was distributed to congressmen in Washington in 1878. The 1880 version of it ironically bears a back-cover advertisement for a railroad, the very competitor of river commerce.

including former president Millard Fillmore, were escorted from the train to waiting riverboats, which then steamed upriver along the Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota hills to St. Paul, where they celebrated the new link to the eastern half of the nation. They were so taken by the beauties of the river scenery and the surprising culture of the cities at the point of farthest commercial navigation that few, if any, realized that their triumphant journey foreshadowed the demise of the luxurious steamboats by which they traveled.

Before long the third challenge emerged: what later became the Illinois Central Railway began to extend its route from Galena and Chicago toward Cairo. Its route, parallel to the river, helped seal the doom of the steamboat as the backbone of inland transportation. Just as Shreve's high-pressure engines mounted on shallow draft hulls spelled the end of the keelboats, so the steam locomotive initiated the decline of the riverboat. America's ever-growing pursuit of speed and efficiency would not be hindered by nostalgia for the leisurely luxuries of steamboat gothic.

The arrival of railroads on the eastern bank of the Mississippi was followed almost immediately by plans to span the river and thus open the way for rail service across Iowa to Council Bluffs on the Missouri River. Bridging the river added a new and more immediate threat to river commerce. Even before the first bridge crossed from Rock Island to Davenport in 1856, rivermen fought the intrusion into their domain. They charged that bridge piers would impose new dangers to navigation and cause erratic currents that would engulf even the most powerful steamboats. As always, the claims of the old lost out to the demands of the new; even prolonged legal battles in the courts of St. Louis and Chicago could not prevent the inevitable. The railroads were represented by, among others, an unassuming young lawyer from Salem, Illinois, who argued that as much as he favored the open river, he realized that "there is a travel from east to west whose demands are not less important than those of the river. It is growing larger and larger, said the prairie lawyer, building up new states with a rapidity never before seen in the history of the world." Abraham Lincoln's arguments convinced the courts, which found in favor of railroad interests and authorized the bridges. Legal challenges continued but the unavoidable prevailed. As the river people feared, more and more bridges offered ever more numerous navigational threats.

Warnings that erratic currents around bridge piers would cause disasters were all too soon fulfilled. The *Effie Afton*, the first steamboat to attempt to push upriver past the Rock Island bridge, was caught in one of the whirlpools around the piers. "The pilot on duty made a valiant effort to hold her to a straight



Railroads broke the challenge of the Mississippi and steamboat interests when construction of bridges allowed trains to continue their east/west path across the nation. Above: Railroad pontoon bridge at Marquette, around 1874. (SHSI)

course but the boat was like a chip in the violent current sweeping under the bridge." A sister ship, the *J. B. Carson*, rescued passengers and crew, but the brand new *Effie Afton* and its cargo broke out in flames and began drifting downriver. Its destruction was not entirely without revenge. As flames mounted from its decks, they caught the wooden timbers of the new bridge, which soon, too, was engulfed in flames. "Bridge and boat burned fiercely with the awful sound of the trapped cattle and horses rising above the crackling and hissing of the fire itself."

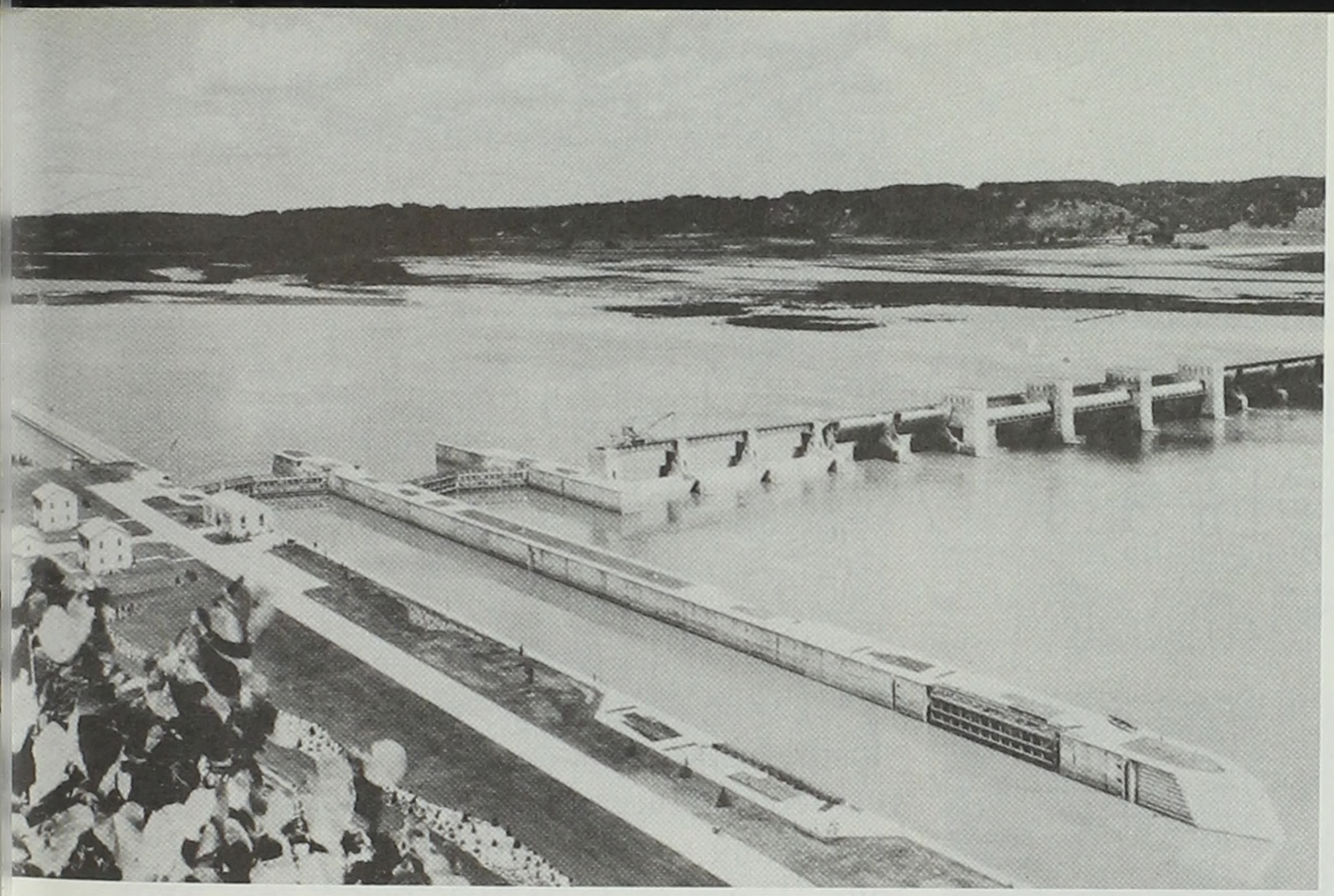
Appeals that the piers be removed and the river returned to its untrammeled course were futile, and in a short time the rebuilt bridge again carried trains into Iowa. Eventually river pilots learned how to circumvent the new hazards. But by then the east-west movement had replaced forever the north-south flow that for decades had ruled travel and commerce in the great inner basin. The river had faced its challenge and was now forever mastered by technology.

The need for military transport during the Civil War led to the building of large numbers of steamboats, and the flush of business continued after Appomattox long enough to convince rivermen that the days of glory would continue. The inevitable doom initiated by the spread of railroads, however, became increasingly clear. Efforts to save river commerce by combining owners into large companies failed. Declining river levels, poor harvests, and too many fiery tragedies on board soon all but destroyed the prewar opulence. Forays by Jay Gould and other railroad magnates into boat- and barge-ownership fooled only the most gullible into thinking that a combination of transportation facilities would assure the future of river transport. Sadly Childs records the passing of the nineteenth-century riverboating: "In a period of less than twenty years the river was all but swept bare." For years to come, except for short-haul packets between river towns, inland waterways were all but devoid of steamboat transportation.

Putting regional questions into larger national terms, Childs sees, for example, the conflict between riverboats and railroads as more than a local economic struggle. For him, the fight was an important element in the growing national shift (from agriculture to industry and commerce) and the growing sectional shift (from a linking of the North and the rapidly opening West with the South to a new link of the East and the West). Too many river proponents had fallen into the southern agrarian conviction that the old ways were part of eternal nature that never could be disrupted. Galena river captains who refused to admit the threat from Chicago railroads were much like southern plantation owners who believed that cotton always would be king. New technologies and new political-commercial links forever reshaped sectional alliances and reinforced the westward movement that Frederick Jackson Turner saw as the formative influence on American civilization. Childs, unobtrusively but effectively, relates the microcosm of the inland waterways to the macrocosm of America.

His fascination with the lumber industry, especially in his hometown of Clinton, does not blind him to the rapacity of the lumber barons who laid waste to vast forests of Wisconsin and Minnesota with no regard for the future. The thirst for rapid profits blinded them to their responsibility to use natural resources prudently. Before Weyerhaeuser and his colleagues moved their activities to the Pacific Northwest, they had destroyed the pineries with a disregard for efficiency that wiped out millions of acres of prime forest. "What is most ironic," Childs states, "is that according to the best estimates not more than 40 percent of the forest ever reached the sawmill. The rest was sacrificed to careless logging and fire."

The immediate consequence was the rapid slump of the lumber industry in the Midwest and the decline of cities such as Winona, Clin-



In the final three chapters, Childs considers the modern river. Left: Lock and Dam No. 11 at Dubuque. (SHSI)

ton, and Hannibal, most of which never recovered the prosperity they had enjoyed during the short lumbering period.

Longer-term consequences — land destruction, water depletion, periodic floods — are harder to assess and their costs are impossible to estimate. Childs asks: To what extent, for example, were the disastrous floods along the lower Mississippi in 1927 and later years attributable to the deforested lands of the upper valley, deprived of their water-holding capacities by the destruction of natural coverage?

> It was in the American tradition: they came, they saw, they grabbed. How profoundly the pillage of these forests has affected the life of the great valley, we have only now begun to understand. Floods and fires, the earth itself, and the water under the earth have a relation to the behavior of those freebooters of the closing decades of the last century. It is above all in the towns along the river that one is aware of their impact and of the vast forces that they typified, aware of it if only in the quietude, the slow stagnation that has settled along the upper reaches of the river.

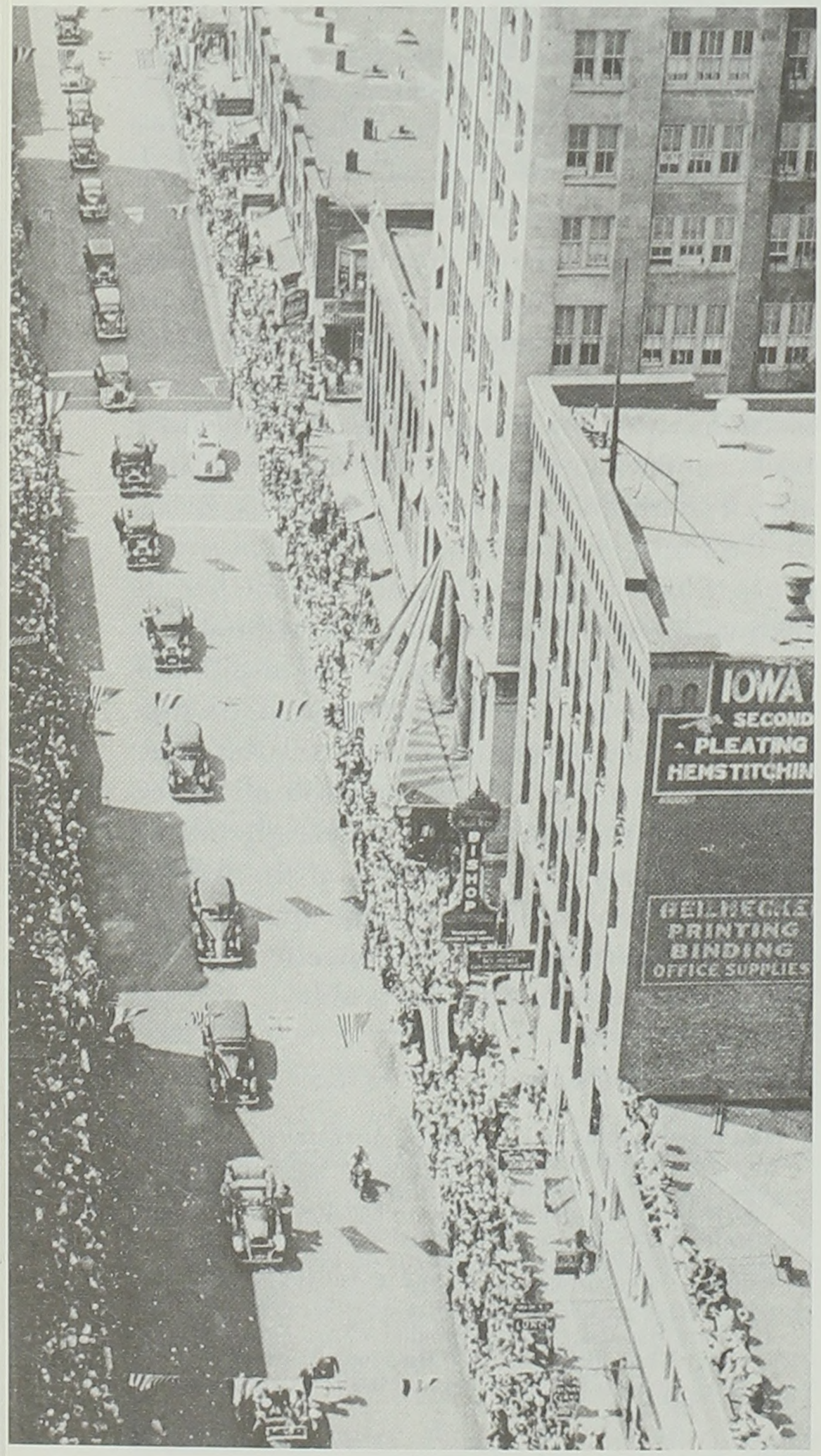
From his recollections of mountains of sawdust (in chapter 13) and of family vacations by boat into the backwaters of Deer River (in chapter 14) Childs turns his attention in the final three chapters to the modern river, identified with governmental efforts in the 1930s to harness it and turn it into a series of lakes providing a nine-foot channel from the Twin Cities to St. Louis and beyond. Despite Mark Twain's warnings — "ten thousand river commissions, with the mines of the world at their back, cannot tame that lawless stream, cannot curb it or confine it, cannot say to it, 'Go here,' or 'Go there,' and make it obey; cannot save a shore which it has sentenced; cannot bar its path with an obstruction which it will not tear down, dance over and laugh at" — despite this warning, the Corps of Engineers with the support of Congress undertook to tell the river where to go. When Childs first wrote about the river in the mid-thirties, he was ready to suspend judgment on the success of the federal efforts. When his book finally appeared in 1982, he seemed ready to concede that the engineers had done the impossible. □

NOTES ON SOURCES

The subject of this essay — *Mighty Mississippi: Biography of a River* by Marquis W. Childs — was published in 1982 by Ticknor & Fields (New York). The source of information on Marquis Childs's education and career was *Twentieth Century Authors*, First Supplement, *A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature*, edited by Stanley J. Kunitz (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1955), p. 196. Childs's "River Town" appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, 165 (November 1932), 710-18. His article on Hannibal, Missouri ("The Home Town of Mark Twain") appeared in *American Mercury*, 9 (September 1926), 101-5.

The National Drought Conference in Des Moines: When FDR and Alf Landon Met

by Herb Plambeck



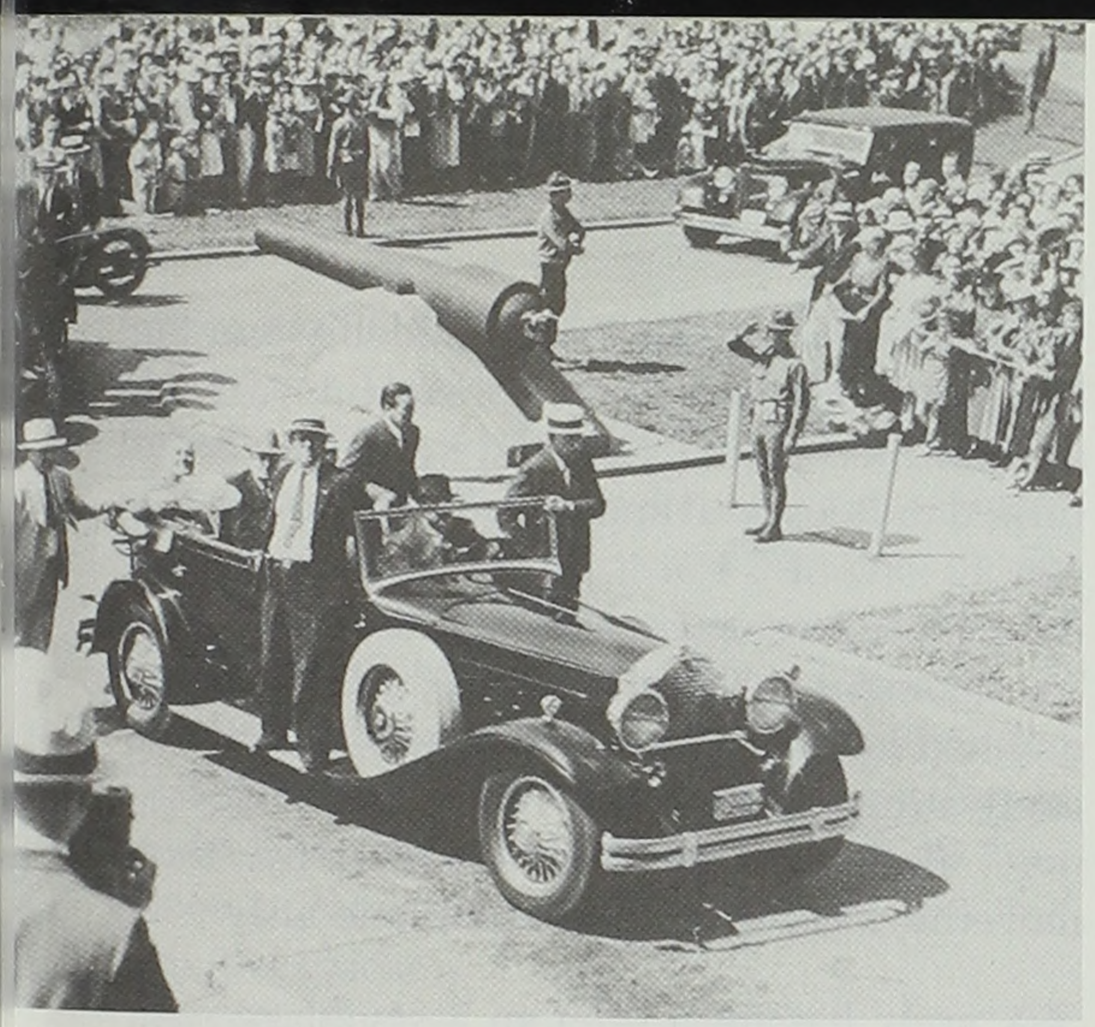
The year 1936 was one of the most trying in the history of farming in Iowa. Early in the year temperatures dropped to bitterly low levels causing severe hardship throughout the state. Marks of 35 degrees below zero were recorded at Sibley with many other northern and central Iowa communities reporting −30 or lower. For a period of more than two weeks readings never went as high as zero in northern counties. Snow measured up to 40 inches in depth in western Iowa. Livestock feeding became an ordeal. Milk deliveries were a daily challenge.

Later on, the summer months were in striking contrast. Searing heat and widespread, disastrous drought gripped the entire state and much of the rest of the Corn Belt, as well as the western plains. Temperatures in July soared up to 117 degrees in Atlantic and Logan, Iowa. Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma reported readings even higher.

Adding to the nation's farm plight, prices on some farm commodities plunged to near all-time lows early in the year. Corn was quoted at 47 cents a bushel in Iowa elevators. Wheat brought as little as 80 cents per bushel in the Plains states. Hogs sagged to $8.70 per hundredweight in Iowa.

Thousands of farm families were on the brink of ruin. Parched fields and burned pastures were the story from Colorado through Illinois. Livestock feed ran precariously low. Forced

Left and opposite: Crowds lined Des Moines streets as FDR and Landon arrived. (Des Moines Register)



sales were a daily occurrence. Unemployment was high. Relief rolls soared.

By mid-August the situation had become so critical that President Franklin Delano Roosevelt ordered that a national drought conference be held. Iowa's capital city was chosen as the site. September 3 was designated as the date.

Because 1936 was a presidential election year, political ramifications at any gathering were inevitable. The proposed drought meeting involving United States senators, governors, and various other officials from seven or eight states would have to include Governor Alfred Landon of Kansas, the Republican nominee for president. Thus, for the first time since 1916, when President Woodrow Wilson and Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes met in Cincinnati, a face-to-face meeting between two presidential aspirants would take place. Although both FDR and Landon immediately decreed the forthcoming conference to be nonpolitical, the nation's top news reporters, broadcasters, and newsreel camera crews lost no time in making reservations for the Des Moines meeting. That the conferees could avoid politics seemed utterly impossible.

Iowa governor Clyde Herring and Des Moines civic leaders were well aware of the significance of the September meeting and the nationwide attention it would receive. Elaborate preparations were made at the statehouse and in the downtown area. Secret Service officials arrived early to map out parade routes, check rail depots, determine the safest entryways, select meeting rooms, make meal arrangements, and attend to every other detail.

Telegraph operators, newsreel directors, newspaper editors, and radio broadcasters also set up shop early. Political operatives, however, could do little because of the nonpolitical, nonpartisan order issued at the outset. Nevertheless, hawkers managed to have a generous supply of FDR-Garner and Alf Landon campaign buttons on hand.

Most conference invitees and other distinguished guests also arrived early, as did many journalists, including pollsters (who at that time were giving Landon an early lead). First to arrive were the governors, senators, Works Progress Administration (WPA) and Resettlement Administration leaders from Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin, and unofficial representatives from Colorado, the Dakotas, Illinois, and other states. Iowa participants, some of whom attended State Day at the Iowa State Fair on September 2, also arrived early.

September 3 dawned somewhat cloudy with temperatures much cooler than those earlier in the week. Ironically, forecasters indicated the possibility of showers during the hours of the drought conference.

An air of exciting expectancy prevailed. The president, coming by train from Salt Lake City, was due to arrive at noon. By 10:30, thousands had gathered at the Rock Island depot to welcome him. Governor Landon had left Topeka by auto at an early hour and would enter Des Moines by motorcade from Indianola.

By noon an estimated 200,000 onlookers lined the FDR parade route from the depot, through downtown, and on to the Capitol. All downtown traffic was halted. Police and firefighters were stationed along the route. Thunderous cheers greeted the president on his

arrival at the Rock Island depot. Warm applause was heard all along the two-mile parade route as FDR, with Governor Herring and Des Moines mayor Joseph Allen at his side, made his way to the Capitol. Smiling warmly and continuously waving his panama hat, Roosevelt acknowledged the warm welcome. At one point a farmer, clad in overalls, yelled, "God bless you, you saved my farm."

On crossing the Des Moines River, FDR is said to have noted that the water level was up. To that Governor Herring replied, "Yes, we had a good rain a few days ago and were afraid it might drown out the drought conference." The president was reputed to have chuckled about that for half a block.

With countless others, I was stationed along the parade route. I had signed on as farm director at WHO Radio just a week earlier. With an ear toward my broadcast the next morning, I wanted a glimpse of the popular chief executive. Little did I dream that within an hour I would find myself in a room a few feet from him.

On leaving the parade route I hurried to the statehouse to find a position where I could see FDR enter through a closely guarded back door, but I was not in time. Because the Landon motorcade arrived late, I did get a glimpse of Governor Landon, nattily attired in a light tan suit and straw sailor hat, waving to the crowd as he entered the building barely in time for the luncheon.

At the luncheon set for 1:15 the two presidential contenders first met — almost by chance. On his arrival at the statehouse at about 1:10, Landon had gone directly to the washroom just off the reception area. Roosevelt was in his wheelchair in Governor Herring's private office.

When the call for lunch was sounded at 1:15 Landon was still adjusting his necktie. Realizing he might be late he hurried to the luncheon room entryway just as the president was being wheeled in by his son John. Suddenly Landon found himself alongside the president. After an awkward second of pause, the Kansas governor turned to Roosevelt and said, "How do you do, Mr. President." For a split second the president did not recognize who had addressed him. The moment recognition came, FDR quickly grabbed Landon's extended hand and, with his captivating smile, said, "Why, hello Governor." Both men blushed momentarily, then moved toward their table simultaneously.

Rarely has Iowa seen an assemblage with greater national clout. More than fifty high-ranking national, regional, and state officials were in the room. Among them were Henry A. Wallace, United States secretary of agriculture, and Harry Hopkins, WPA administrator, both Iowa-born. Rexford Tugwell, director of FDR's Resettlement Administration, Senators Lester Dickinson and Guy Gillette of Iowa, Arthur Capper and George McGill of Kansas, Harry S Truman and Ben-

Both bidding for the presidency, contenders Alf Landon and FDR bid hello at the drought conference. Senator Roy L. Cochran (Nebraska) looks on. (SHSI, Des Moines)

nett "Champ" Clark of Missouri, Thomas Gore and Elmer Thomas of Oklahoma and Bob La-Follette of Wisconsin joined Governor Landon of Kansas and the drought conference host, Governor Herring of Iowa. Other governors included Guy Park of Missouri, Hjalmar Petersen of Minnesota, Roy Cochran of Nebraska, Ernest Marland of Oklahoma, and Phil LaFollette of Wisconsin. Ironically no actual farmers were included among the luncheon guests, who dined on sweet corn and milk-fed chicken.

Many who had assembled outside the Capitol, obviously hoping for another glimpse of FDR or Landon, left before the lengthy luncheon ended. Meanwhile, I had a hunch that another contingent of conference participants — officials from the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA), Resettlement Administration, Farm Security, flood control, and other advisers — would enter through the back way before the official conference session was to begin at 2:30. Accordingly I moved close to the entryway. My goal was to comment on the procession's personalities for my next morning's radio program. But my move toward the door changed everything.

To my delight, shortly after 2:00 a group of a dozen or more national and regional advisers arrived. One of them was a longtime close friend, B.W. Lodwick, then a Resettlement Administration official in Indianapolis. Walking four abreast, Lodwick was on the outside, right were I was standing. He instantly recognized me and extended his hand for a handshake. Naturally I was pleased and quickly grabbed his hand. What happened next is hard to believe. Holding my right arm firmly and without losing a step, Lodwick suddenly had me in the procession right alongside him. The next thing I knew I was entering the building walking directly past Secret Service and other guards.

Once inside I expressed my amazement to Lodwick, pointing out that I had no credentials, no pass, not even a press or radio card. Needless to say I was bewildered and concerned. Previous contacts with the Secret Service had convinced me that no one could get near the president without clearance.

While waiting for the inevitable challenge — and distressed about the embarrassment that would result — I noticed a sudden commotion in the adjacent room. Then things became very quiet.

The next thing I knew we were filing into the conference chamber. Once again Lodwick placed me right behind him. Once again I was certain the "other shoe" would fall. A few seconds later the group I was with was in the presence of the president and his key advisers, Wallace, Tugwell, Hopkins, and others, some of whom I did not know. We were told to be seated.

George Yates, noted *Des Moines Register* photographer, and other photographers and newsreel crews were busy getting their shots of the conference leaders. George Wilson, the *Register's* Washington Bureau director, and several other reporters were making notes. I looked for H.L. Mencken, Roy Roberts, Barry Faris, Robert Trout, and other famed editors and broadcasters on hand for the conference, but I failed to see them (though they were there).

Despite my nervousness, the reporter in me jotted down names of participants. I kept hoping that Wallace, whom I had interviewed recently, would not see me and wonder why I was there.

Shortly after 2:30 Governor Herring called the conference to order. After a few short comments by some of the dignitaries, we watched the state delegations form for their reports to the president.

Many assumed that the Kansas delegation, led by Governor Landon, would be the first to be called. But the order was based on when the participating states entered the Union. Mis-

From left, standing: Senator F. Ryan Duffy (Wisconsin), Senator Lester Dickinson (Iowa), Governor Alf Landon (Kansas), Senator Thomas Gore (Oklahoma), Senator Roy L. Cochran (Nebraska), Senator Henrik Shipstead (Minnesota), Senator Harry S Truman (Missouri). Seated: President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Governor Clyde Herring (Iowa). (SHSI)

souri, admitted in 1821, was first. Iowa, admitted in 1846, was second. Landon and his group appeared third.

Iowa actually had two groups participating. One was made up of Senators Dickinson and Gillette and other elected officials. Dickinson was one of the few who openly questioned the president's program and urged more home rule in distribution of relief funds.

The second Iowa group included Francis Johnson, Iowa Farm Bureau Federation president, several farmers (Harold Teachout, Shenandoah; A.E. Wendell, Bronson; Roy Smith, Spirit Lake; and Hervey Hazen from Denmark), Herman Aaberg, Iowa's assistant secretary of agriculture, and Robert Combs, Scott County extension agent.

The Iowa farm group asked for a reduction in freight rates for feed and seed, faster processing of AAA checks, purchase of seed corn by the federal government, rapid implementation of rural electrification, added funds for Extension Service, more crushed limestone from the WPA for alfalfa production, greater emphasis on soil and water conservation, subsidized shelterbelts, continuing Civilian Conservation Corps work camps, and the return of Iowa's resettlement offices from Indianapolis to Des Moines. Johnson offered to verbally summarize the report, but in typical bureaucratic fashion, Marvin McIntyre, the president's White House secretary, requested it be submitted and filed as written.

While seated next to Lodwick, I noticed

members of the press assembling at a nearby doorway. Some were receiving notes from fellow reporters. Fearful my unauthorized presence would be revealed at any moment, I hastily wrote a note to H.R. Gross (then WHO news director and later an Iowa congressman) in which I made a few comments about conference proceedings and listed names of Iowa delegation members. Intending the note to be conveyed to Gross by another reporter, I reached the doorway just as Gross and his right-hand man, Jack Shelley, appeared.

When Gross saw me coming from the conference chamber, he caught his breath a moment, looked at me sharply, and exclaimed, "What the hell are you doing in there?" Inasmuch as he had hired me only one week earlier, I wasn't sure whether that was a reprimand or merely a statement of total disbelief that I had been in the inner sanctum. Nevertheless, he eagerly accepted the note.

I went back into the chamber. The various state groups were reporting their plight and their needs. I could not see or hear the delegation reports, but we were told that FDR proved to be a good listener and a serious interrogator. Wallace, Hopkins, and Tugwell also listened well and asked tough questions. The gravity of the 1936 midwestern drought could not be minimized. Iowans reported 34,000 farmers in dire need of crop loans and another 14,000 requiring subsistence. Senator Truman of Missouri told how 107 of Missouri's 115 counties were drought-stricken and grasshopper-plagued. Oklahomans declared their state to be "drier than dust" and said that close to 100,000 farm families faced financial ruin and many would experience hunger. Governor Landon's Kansas group asserted that the Kansas harvest would yield only 30 percent of the livestock feed needed.

Other sobering facts were called to FDR's attention. The latest corn crop estimate was down 23 percent from July, for a national total of 1.426 billion bushels compared to 2.291 billion the year before. (By comparison, the corn crop estimate in October 1986 was over 8.220 billion bushels.)

The midwesterners repeatedly recommended to the presidential party federal crop insurance, a national policy on soil and water conservation, and the ever-normal granary (a concept inspired by Secretary Wallace wherein the government would acquire and store large quantities of grain to assure adequate food and feed supplies in the event of another serious drought; the stored grain would also help stabilize prices in years of plenty or of scarcity).

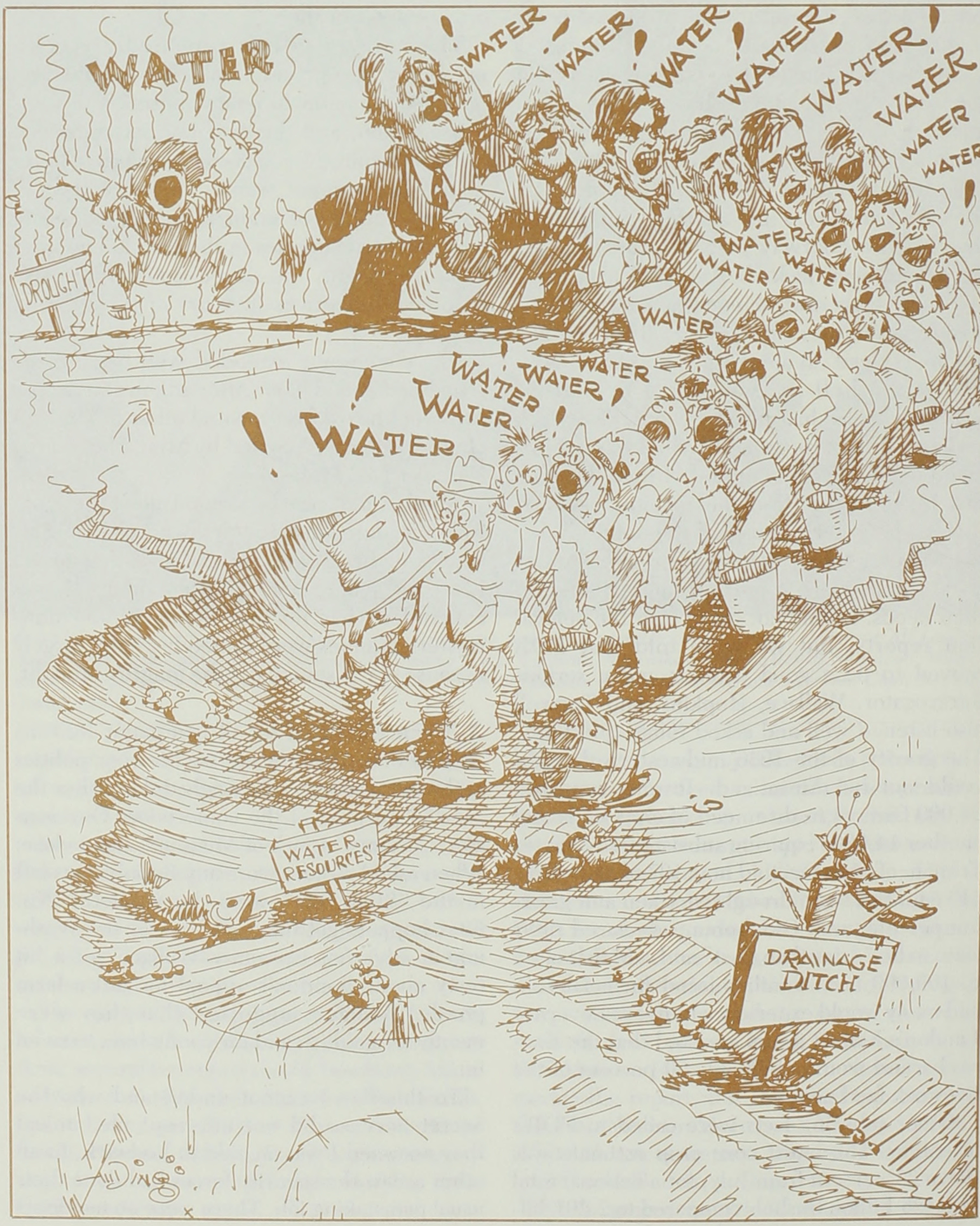
The conference extended well beyond the scheduled end at 4:30. After adjournment, the president heard from several other groups, including a peace group led by Mrs. Alice Carey Weitz of Des Moines.

Another large crowd formed along the route from the statehouse to the president's rail car, where he dined with the seven visiting governors, and where, among other things, it was concluded that no less than 350,000 midwestern families were in need of help, largely because of the severity of the lengthy drought.

Even though a lot of campaign buttons were hawked throughout the day, politics in the usual sense surprisingly did not alter the avowed purpose of the conference. One senator, "Champ" Clark of Missouri, came close: When asked if there were any Republicans left in the "Show Me" state, he replied, "No. Grasshoppers got them all." As for the Washington advisers, Secretary Wallace got a bit testy about Landon's appeal for more farm ponds. Wallace suggested that they were mainly for goldfish and for young boys to swim in.

To this day I cannot understand why the Secret Service did not intercept me, unless they assumed I was an aide to Lodwick. In all other areas, the security forces had done their usual painstaking job. There were no incidents

THE CANDIDATES WILL NOW PRESCRIBE FOR THE DROUGHT



Left: Cartoonist Jay N. "Ding" Darling suggested the obvious solution to the drought in the morning edition of The Des Moines Register, *September 3, 1936. (courtesy University of Iowa Libraries)*

along the parade route or during the conference. The angel food cake, lovingly baked for the president by Mrs. George Hicks of Des Moines, was minutely checked to make certain it contained no bomb. Elizabeth Clarkson Zwart, popular *Des Moines Register* writer, could also attest to Secret Service thoroughness. She made four attempts to get through a barricade, smilingly referred to as the "magic" canvas curtain — as waitress, photographer, secretary, and aide to Lieutenant Governor Nelson G. Kraschel. Each time she was thwarted. The fourth time Chief Secret Service Officer Woods gave her the final "no." (Zwart was the only female reporter on the scene. Today, women reporters are at work on every presidential assignment. No security officer or Secret Service agent would dare deny admittance to a female reporter with credentials of the kind Elizabeth Zwart had back in 1936.)

Iowa and Des Moines had had only three weeks to prepare for the historic meeting held fifty years ago. Led by Charles Grahl (adjutant general of the National Guard and Governor Herring's chief military adviser) the undertaking was carried out to near perfection. The eyes of the nation had been watching what some described as "one of the most dramatic events in American political history." Des Moines officials and other Iowa leaders had managed to keep it nonpolitical.

Although I find no documented record of the results of the Des Moines drought conference and its impact on problems facing agriculture in the mid-thirties, there can be no denying that the Iowa meeting focused nationwide attention on the plight of midwestern farmers and on millions of Americans dependent on farm prosperity. Well over 100 journalists (some estimates place the figure at over 300) wrote, broadcast, filmed, or editorialized about the conference. Most leading newspapers had top news personnel on the scene, as did all the wire services, radio networks, individual stations, and movie newsreel syndicates.

Possible solutions to major farm concerns offered to FDR during the conference were given heavy focus. Soil and water conservation efforts were greatly expanded in the late thirties, with County Soil Districts formed throughout the nation. Extension Service funds were increased and farmer-controlled government farm program committees became extremely popular.

Rural electrification, discussed at length during the conference, was rapidly implemented. In 1936 one farm in ten had electricity. Five years later more than half of the nation's farms and ranches had been electrified, and by 1950 the figure was above 80 percent. (Today over 99.9 percent of American farms, ranches, hamlets, and small-acreage homes enjoy the benefit of electric light and power.)

Subsidized shelter belts, emergency feed programs, better seed distribution, consolidation of government farm agencies, increased emphasis on supply management — these are some of the other spin-offs of interest to farmers and ranchers resulting from the day President Roosevelt and his Republican challenger, Governor Alf Landon, met in Iowa in the depths of a farm depression back in 1936. □

NOTE ON SOURCES

The major sources behind this article were the author's personal daily diaries; newsroom records and farm news scripts from WHO Radio; news coverage in the *Des Moines Register* and *Des Moines Tribune*, September 2-4, 1936; and the author's recollections as an eyewitness of the drought conference. Weather information and crop and livestock prices were provided by Paul Waite, state climatologist, and Duane Skow, state statistician, in the Iowa Department of Agriculture. Portions of this article in a slightly different form appeared in the *Iowa Farmer Today* (September 27, 1986).

Orders Misunderstood

An Illinois Central Train Wreck at Raymond

by Fred J. Pierce

When Illinois Central passenger train No. 2 steamed serenely out of Waterloo, Iowa, at 2:33 A.M. on June 19, 1903, a terrible destiny waited just seven miles away. Any notion of an impending disaster was far from the minds of the train crew, mail clerks, and many passengers aboard.

Passenger train No. 2 routinely left Fort Dodge eastbound and arrived in Waterloo about 2:00 A.M., where it would meet a train coming from Minneapolis. In Waterloo the cars on the Minneapolis train were usually connected to No. 2 headed for Chicago. On June 19, however, the Minneapolis train was almost an hour and a half late. Train schedulers had decided that No. 2 would leave at its regular time and that when the Minneapolis train arrived in Waterloo, a second section would be made up and would depart for Chicago. Passenger train No. 2 continued on its way.

John R. Griffin, from Waterloo, was the engineer of the passenger train. The locomotive was a relatively new "Prairie" type, considered the ultimate in rail motive power when first put into use. It pulled an express car, a mail car, two smaller freight or baggage cars, four coaches, and two passenger cars.

The predawn hours were calm, and the exhilarating air was fragrant with the pleasant odors of a growing outdoor world. But it was still dark, and no moon revealed the varied features of the landscape as the train picked up momentum after leaving the Waterloo depot.

In less than a half-hour, passenger train No. 2 reached a place referred to by trainmen as Raymond Hill, a quarter-mile west of the Raymond depot. There the terrain sloped downward into Raymond from the east and the west. The train traveled at top speed, accelerated by the downward slope.

Another train, freight train No. 87 pulled by Engine No. 44, was coming from the east. It, too, moved at top speed.

Fate decreed a further tragic twist: the trains were headed toward a deep cut and a curve where vision was almost totally obscured. At another place their headlights, though dim by today's standards, could have been seen.

At about 3:00 A.M. the freight train and passenger train collided head on. The terrific crash almost welded the two locomotives together. Two lead cars of the passenger train were demolished, and seven freight cars were splintered to kindling. The sound of escaping steam mingled with the cries of the injured and dying.

The wrecked trains lay in complete darkness; dawn had not yet broken. Nearby farmers and Raymond residents arrived with lanterns to help in the rescue work. The two locomotives, seven freight cars, and two lead cars of the passenger train lay scrambled in a pile as high as the telegraph poles. Other

freight and passenger cars were derailed and in various degrees of damage.

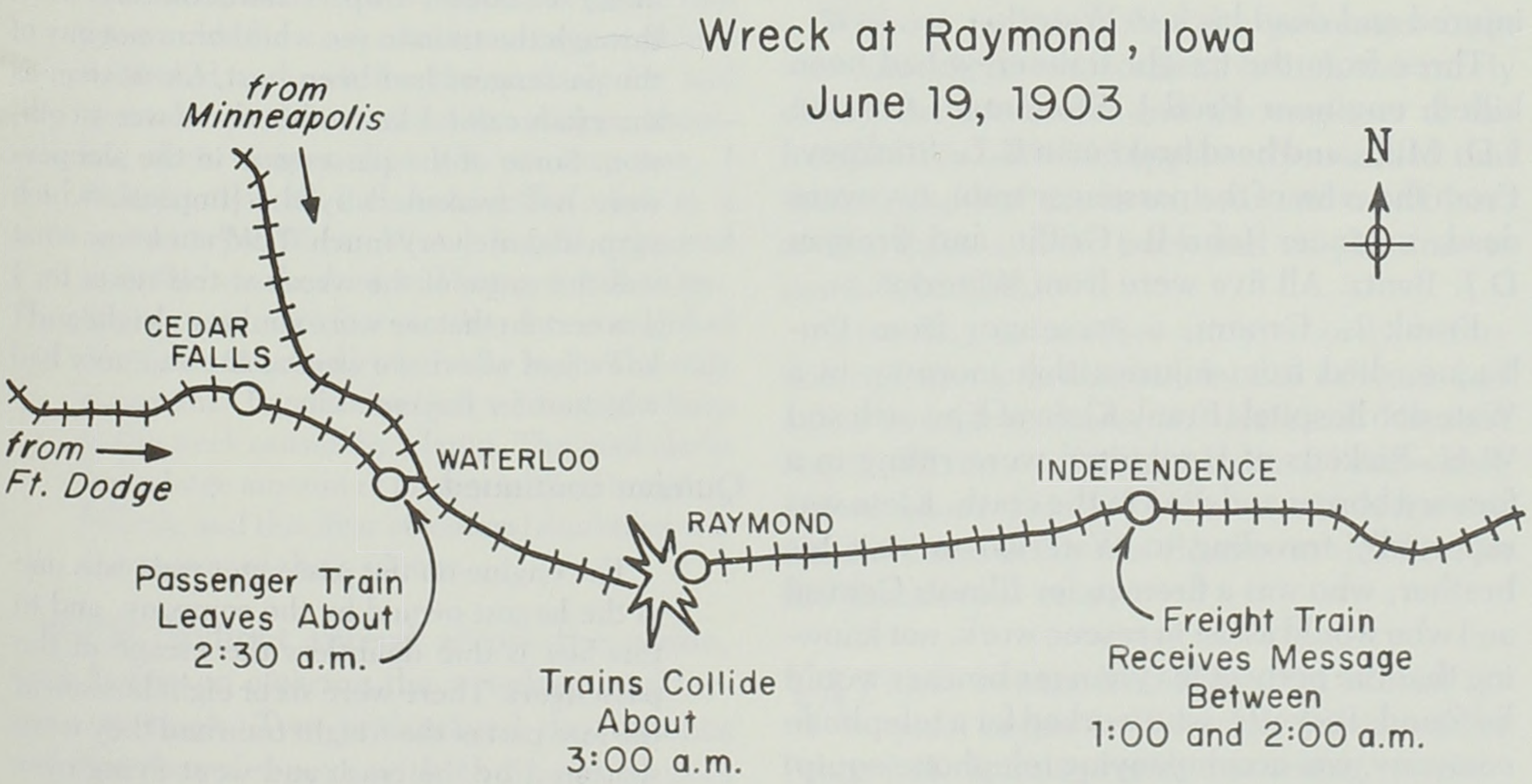
In an account published in the *Dubuque Morning Telegraph*, June 20, C.J. Mekkleston, a passenger, described the crash and the time leading up to it:

> We pulled slowly out of Waterloo and gained a high rate of speed as time passed. When about 7 miles this side of Waterloo near Raymond, after the engineer whistled for the approach, an awful crash came. Everybody was shaken up. Women and children ran about crying and trying to get out. Conductor Quinlan and the newsboy held them down well and assured them that there was no danger. The crying and wailing continued for a long time. Several men, of which I was one, managed to get out of our car and we immediately went forward to the front of the train. There were no lights and those which had been on the train were extinguished. After a little time had elapsed a couple of lights were secured. Farmers came to the scene. The sight was appalling. The wreckage was piled high. Groaning and cries for help were heard on all sides.

Passengers, too, tried to help the injured. The same news story reported that "A woman passenger entered the baggage car and took off her jacket and started in to work. To the injured she was a comfort. Through long hours of the morning she remained with the dying and dead. She worked hard attending to their wants. She modestly refused to give her name."

E.N. Birdsall, a passenger from Waterloo, had been sitting at the window smoking a cigar as the train approached Raymond. He had heard the engineer give the signal and shut off the steam to go down the grade. "While rounding a curve," he explained in a *Waterloo Daily Reporter* story on June 20,

> the trains came together. There was nothing seen of the freight engine. It was smashed and covered by debris. The cars were piled up



MAP BY KAY CHAMBERS

high. The front cars of the freight train were telescoped. Groaning was heard on all sides. When the shock first came, the cushions on the seats were thrown in the air. I was thrown underneath a seat on the opposite side. The men on the car started the relief of the victims as fast as they could.

We found Griffin [engineer of the passenger train] at the right of his engine with his legs cut off and covered with debris. When day began to dawn we walked to the right side of the wreckage. In a ditch a little distance from the scene, Engineer Stoneman of the freight train was found. He appeared to have been killed instantly.

Rescue work began immediately. At the time of the crash the operator of the Raymond depot, which was only a day station, had been asleep at his home nearby. He went to the depot at once and notified division headquarters at Waterloo and Dubuque. Every available doctor in Waterloo was called to the train there, and both cities rushed relief trains to Raymond. The Waterloo train carried the injured and dead back to Waterloo.

Three from the freight train crew had been killed: engineer Fred J. Stoneman, fireman I.D. Mills, and head brakeman E.L. Stickney. From the crew of the passenger train, two were dead: engineer John R. Griffin and fireman D.J. Bantz. All five were from Waterloo.

Frank L. Groom, a passenger from Dubuque, died from injuries that morning in a Waterloo hospital. Frank Klein of Epworth and W.H. Ricketts of Hopkinton were riding in a forward boxcar and died in the crash. Klein was reportedly traveling to Waterloo to visit his brother, who was a fireman for Illinois Central and who would assist in rescue work, not knowing that the body of his younger brother would be found. Ricketts, who worked for a telephone company, was accompanying telephone equipment destined for Hawarden.

Three men who were riding "blind baggage" (stealing a ride) in a boxcar also died of injuries. Two were identified as John O'Neil of Syracuse, New York, and sixteen-year-old Earl Book, of New York City or of Murphysboro, Illinois, where his stepfather lived. A third man was not identified.

Several persons on the passenger train sustained bruises and a few broken bones, but none were seriously injured. The wooden coaches then in use provided little protection compared to the steel coaches introduced later. It was theorized that the large passenger engine took most of the impact and saved the lives of many passengers. Tom Quinlan was the conductor on the passenger train. In the *Dubuque Morning Telegraph*, June 20, his account of the moment of impact described little panic or confusion in the passenger cars:

> Surprising as it may seem, the concussion was not as great as one would expect after seeing the wreckage. The passengers did not become greatly alarmed and there was little or no confusion, many not knowing what had happened and others thinking that we had merely made a sudden stop. I immediately went through the train to see whether or not any of the passengers had been hurt, for as soon as the crash came I knew that there was a collision. Some of the passengers in the sleepers were not awakened by the [impact], which surprised me very much. I did not know what was the cause of the wreck at this time, for I was certain that we were running alright and I knew just where we were as the engineer had whistled for Raymond.

Quinlan continued:

> The engine on the passenger train was one of the largest owned by the company, and to this fact is due doubtless the escape of the passengers. There were six or eight boxcars in the fore part of the freight train and they were shattered by the crash and went flying over both engines. The wreckage was deep and difficult to remove. I could not see the freight

crew as I think they were buried beneath the wreckage.

In the freight train at least three others riding the "blind" were injured but survived. One of the injured was found hanging by his ankles in a shattered boxcar. Two young men stealing a ride on the outside of a passenger car had been put off at Waterloo but had gotten on again when the train started. One received a serious head injury and the other a broken arm.

Quinlan, quoted in the *Waterloo Morning Telegraph*, attested to the crews' sense of duty:

> I do not know whether or not the men had time to jump. I do not think that they did, for the position they were in when found shows that they had remained true to their post of duty until the last. Moreover, we felt the application of the air brakes.
>
> The train had not advanced two car lengths before the crash came. Going outside of the train, we began to look for the injured. . . . Griffin, the engineer of the passenger, was found lying under the engine, dead. Bantz, the fireman, was a little farther away. He was terribly injured and it was seen at a glance that he would die. . . . As soon as possible I instituted a search for the mail clerks, and several times I ran around the mail car shouting their names, but got no response. I thought that all had been killed, but in a moment [W.W. or W.A.] Ingalls appeared from the wrecked car and began to talk to me. He assured me that neither he nor [John] Crisford [Cresford] was badly hurt. The only injury that Ingalls received was a slight burn in the neck caused by a lamp. The mail clerks had a large amount of money in their keeping, I think, and this [fear of looters] doubtless was the reason of their silence.

While daylight spread across the scene, work began on clearing the wreckage and laying new track. Two undamaged day coaches and the two sleepers with their passengers were pulled back to Waterloo. With a new engine, a new baggage car, and a train crew, the reassembled train was detoured on the Great Western as far as Dyersville, where it was switched onto Illinois Central tracks and started for Dubuque. It arrived at 11:30 A.M. With unusual composure, Conductor Quinlan managed to stay at his post and finish the trip.

Possible explanations of the disaster were quickly pieced together. Sometime between 1:00 and 2:00 A.M. the freight train had gone through Independence. There Conductor Charles Judd and Engineer Stoneman received a telegraphic order from Dubuque that stated, "Second No. 2, engine unknown, will run one (1) hour and thirty (30) minutes late Waterloo to Manchester."

Some people speculated that the wreck might have been caused by careless handwriting. According to one story, the order had been handwritten and although it stated that Second No. 2 was running late, the word "Second" had been abbreviated and written as "2nd" near the left-hand margin of the order sheet. The person reading the order might have inadvertently held his thumb over "2nd."

Without realizing that the passenger train was running in two sections (which was rarely done), the conductor and the engineer of the freight train both had apparently assumed that the regular No. 2 was an hour and a half late, giving them a clear track and ample time to reach Waterloo.

According to another story, shortly before the collision a brakeman in the caboose had asked to look at the order. He read: "Second No. 2 will run . . ." Then he asked, "But where do we meet No. 1?" A moment later the answer came as he was thrown to the floor in the thunderous crash.

Within twenty-four hours, an official inquest began in Waterloo. Justice of the Peace J.H. Kuhns presided as acting coroner. Jury members Frank L. McCune, C.W. Cotton, and A.S. Thompson heard testimony from

three witnesses — two freight crew members and the trainmaster from Dubuque. The other two men from the freight train who shared responsibility for orders — Stoneman and Mills — had been killed in the wreck.

The focus of the inquest was the order received by the freight crew. (The crew on the passenger train had received no order because passenger trains generally had right of way.)

Conductor Judd affirmed that he and Stoneman had received the orders, handed to each of them on hoops while the train was still in motion. According to the *Waterloo Daily Reporter* story on the inquest, Judd stated that

> he entirely overlooked the word "second" and thought the order referred to train No. 2 which he supposed was running as one train. According to Mr. Judd's own statement the order was entirely legible and it was purely an oversight on both his part and [the] engineer that it was not properly read.

Trainmaster F.J. Bechley explained the procedure for distributing orders:

> Engineers are required to read all orders to their firemen, who are supposed to also read and remember them, so that in case of any violation of the order on the part of the engineer the fireman can correct him. This same rule is required in the case of conductor and brakeman. There are just four men on every train who are responsible for the proper

The impact of the trains created a mass of twisted cars as high as the telegraph poles. (courtesy the author)

> execution of all train orders and they are the engineer, fireman, conductor and rear brakeman.

Bechley stated that "These two men, up to this time, had good records as railroad men. In fact no one had any better, but they seemed to have entirely overlooked or forgotten that there was a first section of No. 2."

Rear brakeman M.F. Gerin testified that the order concerning a second No. 2 had not been read to him, nor had any mention been made of a second section.

The inquest jury ruled that the collision occurred because "the conductor, engineer, brakeman and fireman on said freight train No. 87 mistakenly misread the order they had received for the moving and handling of said train."

Waterloo citizens mourned the five trainmen who died at Raymond. The wreck was called Waterloo's greatest disaster in terms of loss of life. The *Waterloo Daily Reporter* compared the wreck to the Burlington, Cedar Rapids and Northern wreck in May 1899 (in which more were injured) but confessed that it "did not so deeply affect the people of Waterloo, as none of those whose lives were lost at that time were residents of this city."

Area newspapers covered in detail the funerals of the five Waterloo trainmen. Griffin was a longtime resident of Waterloo, well known in the community. The minister presiding at Griffin's funeral eulogized, "He knew what it was to ride out into the darkness at a rate of thirty-five, forty-five, yea, and even a higher rate of speed. . . . Oft times with insufficient sleep and rest, he has been called to take charge of the monster steam horse, and for nearly a quarter of a century that he has been leading this life, he has never been found wanting, always ready when duty demanded."

Griffin was about 45 when he died. Stoneman, the freight engineer, was only 31. At Winthrop, Iowa, where his parents lived, twelve hundred people attended his funeral at the Opera House. The Illinois Central provided a special train from Waterloo for members of different fraternal orders who wished to attend the young freight engineer's funeral.

News stories reported that both locomotives were smashed beyond repair. But evidently No. 1008, the passenger engine, was rebuilt. In a 1937 news release, Harmon Buckley, Illinois Central engineer, said that No. 1008 in the Raymond wreck was still in active service on the Freeport division.

By coincidence, a Rock Island 2-6-0 "Mogul" locomotive — involved in the Green Mountain train wreck on March 21, 1910, in which fifty-five died — also bore the number 1008.

There was not much coincidence, however, about the number of train wrecks at the turn of the century. Railroading was plagued with accidents caused by defective equipment, inadequate tracks, unsophisticated signal systems, and human error. Automatic block signals might have prevented the Raymond train wreck by alerting each crew to the presence of the other train on the track, but automatic block signals were rarely in use anywhere in the United States in 1903.

A June 19 story in the *Waterloo Daily Reporter* underscored the risk of trainmen misunderstanding orders and the generally "dangerous character of the life [trainmen] are called upon to lead. As one engineer long in the service said, 'We are always facing death when on the road with an engine.' " □

NOTE ON SOURCES

This article was compiled from newspaper coverage of the collision and inquest in the *Dubuque Morning Telegraph*, the *Waterloo Daily Reporter*, the *Waterloo Times-Tribune*, the *Buchanan County Review*, and other unidentified newspaper clippings handed down in the family of engineer Fred J. Stoneman and now in the possession of Stoneman's nephew, the author of this article.

An Announcement and an Invitation

Dear Readers:

March 1987 will mark an exciting time for the *Palimpsest*. We will expand the magazine from thirty-two pages per issue to forty-eight pages per issue. Changing from a bimonthly schedule to a quarterly schedule allows this expansion of the *Pal* (that's what we often call it here at the society — we sometimes have trouble pronouncing *păl´ ĭmp sĕst* too). Subscribers will receive the same number of pages per year, but in four issues rather than six. The *Palimpsest* will arrive in your homes (fatter and handsomer, we believe) in March, June, September, and December.

Another change is that the *Palimpsest* will be printed on a glossy paper. Glossy paper produces sharper images of photographs and illustrations because less ink is absorbed. We guarantee an added brightness and sparkle to the pages.

Why change? A publication thrives on two concurrent aspects — stability and change. The *Palimpsest* has demonstrated stability over its sixty-seven years of publication, offering its loyal readers a close look at Iowa history. Over those same sixty-seven years the *Palimpsest* has changed three times — in size, frequency, cover design, and overall format. This will be the fourth, and we hope you like it. Let us know. We enjoy hearing from you.

And there is a more specific reason why the magazine will expand to forty-eight pages — to offer you in every issue a greater variety of articles. Larger issues allow greater diversity and flexibility in selecting and presenting visual material and written material of varying lengths.

The society newsletter, *News for Members*, also has a brighter look — and a new name. Revamped into a separate, bimonthly publication, *Iowa Historian* will be mailed to Society members bimonthly beginning with its December 1986 issue.

We renew our invitation to you to submit articles to the *Pal*. We are interested in manuscripts on the history of Iowa and the Midwest that may be of interest to the general reading public. Articles that focus on visual materials (such as photographs, maps, drawings) or on material culture are also welcomed. Originality and significance of the topic, as well as the quality of research and writing, will determine acceptance for publication. A manuscript of about twenty pages (double-spaced) can yield a solid *Palimpsest* article. But we are certainly interested in reviewing longer or shorter submissions, too.

We also renew our invitation to you for your thoughts on our publications. In response to our recent letter to all Life Members, we have received many comments and many generous donations. Thank you for your support and your devotion. And thank you for taking the time to let us know what you have liked — and what you haven't liked — about the *Palimpsest*. Your opinions are of great value to us.

When spring arrives, so will the new *Palimpsest*. Join us in our anticipation of this exciting change.

— The Editor

Index for 1986

compiled by John Melvin

CONTRIBUTORS

H. Raphael Erler was born in Rosemont, Minnesota. He holds English degrees from Loyola University and St. Mary's College in Winona, Minnesota. He has a Ph.D. in American Studies from the University of Minnesota. After several years teaching high school, Erler taught English and American Studies at St. Mary's College until he retired in 1981. Since then he has studied, written, and traveled along the Mississippi from St. Cloud, Minnesota, to New Orleans. Erler has published scholarly articles and local Winona history. Another of his pieces on the Mississippi appears as a chapter in *Historic Lifestyles in the Upper Mississippi Valley*. He is currently working on a history of St. Mary's Press.

John Melvin has been active in journalism and publishing for three years, most recently as editorial assistant at the State Historical Society of Iowa. He holds a B.A. in English from Indiana University and attends the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, where he composes poetry.

Fred J. Pierce has been involved in writing and publishing and in studying birds for most of his life. In 1931 he planned and published the first issue of *Iowa Bird Life*, the quarterly journal of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union, and served as its editor until 1960. The Winthrop native and his wife operated the Pierce Book Store from 1944 until 1979. Pierce has also worked as a farmer, carpenter, and newspaper reporter. For thirteen years he served in the biology section of the Iowa Conservation Commission. He is the nephew of Illinois Central engineer Fred John Stoneman, who died in the train wreck written about in this issue.

Herb Plambeck turned from newspaper and extension work to start the nation's first radio farm department in 1936 at Des Moines station WHO, where he worked for thirty-three years. He was a battlefield correspondent in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Plambeck was the first U.S. farm reporter to broadcast from the Soviet Union (1955) and the People's Republic of China (1976). He was an assistant to U.S. Secretaries of Agriculture Hardin and Butz from 1970 to 1973. After his service in Washington he returned to Iowa to continue writing and broadcasting on farm issues. Founder of the National Plowing Matches, Plambeck has been vice-president of Living History Farms and has served on the board of the National Farm City Council. He lives in Des Moines.

THE PALIMPSEST *is published bimonthly by the State Historical Society in Iowa City. Second class postage paid at Iowa City, Iowa. Postmaster: send address changes to State Historical Society of Iowa, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.*

USISSN 0031-0360