

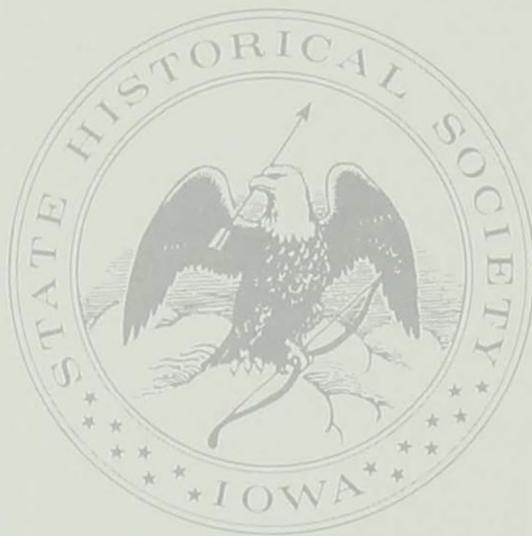
*The*  
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IOWA'S POPULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE

VOLUME 67 NUMBER 3

MAY/JUNE 1986





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The Palimpsest

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The  
PALIMPSEST

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Mary K. Fredericksen, Editor

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Cover: *Victory*, the statue which stands atop the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument in Des Moines. In two articles in this issue of the Palimpsest, Louise Rosenfield Noun describes the career of Harriet A. Ketcham and the competition to design and later construct this most interesting of Iowa's many Civil War monuments.



*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.

# Harriet Ketcham, Resolute Artist

by Louise Rosenfield Noun



Harriet Ketcham of Mt. Pleasant reached the height of her artistic career in 1889 when she won first prize in a design competition for a Civil War memorial to be placed on the grounds of the Iowa State Capitol. How was a woman living in a small Iowa community able to attain such success and how had she been able to develop her artistic skills? News stories written about Ketcham during her life and at the time of her death in 1890 reveal a woman determined to pursue an artistic career despite family responsibilities, a lack of encouragement from her friends, and little opportunity for adequate training.

Harriet McDivitt Ketcham was born in New Market, Ohio, in 1846. Her mother had come from Ireland but her father was American by birth. The McDivitt family moved to Mt. Pleasant in 1851. All we know of Harriet's schooling is that she attended Iowa Wesleyan College for a short time but left school when she became engaged to William B. Ketcham of Mt. Pleasant. The couple was married on August 27, 1868, when Harriet was twenty-two and William thirty-three.

William Ketcham was one of eleven children whose parents had moved from New York State to Henry County, Iowa, in 1855. Ten years later his family settled in Mt. Pleasant. William Ketcham's brother, Frank, married Harriet's sister, Mary Jane McDivitt. The two brothers owned a large grain elevator and flour mill in Mt. Pleasant as well as coal mines in Mendota, Missouri. They were also the chief suppliers of timber for construction of the Burlington Railroad across southern Iowa in the 1860s and were said to have cleared off most of the timber from Henry County as well as from areas in the western part of the state and in northern Missouri.

The Ketchams had three children. A son, Albert, was born in 1869 and another son, Ernest, was born in 1873. Fourteen years later,

when Harriet was past forty, she gave birth to a daughter, Roma Beatrice. Harriet Ketcham was an animated, dark-complexioned woman, highly nervous in temperament. At times she was even incapacitated by a condition known as nervous prostration. The Ketchams lived in a substantial Victorian-style home on the corner of Walnut and East Washington streets in Mt. Pleasant. One room of the house was given over to a workshop for Harriet and a small barn on the back of the property also served as a studio. Several pieces of furniture in the house were evidence of Ketcham's love of handicraft. A secretary, a bookcase, and a cabinet were embellished with her carving and the plush bands on the draperies in the parlor were decorated with hand-painted designs. The house also served as a gallery for Ketcham's paintings and sculptures.

Ketcham, like other middle- and upper-class women in the nineteenth century, was trapped in a family situation where femininity was to be realized exclusively in homemaking and child rearing. Home decoration and dilettante artistic efforts were admired but ambitions of a career as a professional artist were considered out of the question for a wife and mother. Unmarried women were less hampered by social constraints as long as they led exemplary and celibate lives. Ketcham, despite social pressures, was resolute in her determination to be an artist. She managed for brief periods to escape the confines of Mt. Pleasant in a search for instruction and wider opportunities to pursue her career but most of her life she worked alone at home, learning by trial and error.

Harriet Ketcham began by painting fruit and flower still lifes but within a few years she decided that she wanted to be a sculptor. Although she liked to paint and continued to do so throughout her life, she believed that sculpture was a higher form of art. This belief in the superiority of sculpture was in tune with current attitudes toward art. Longfellow in his

poem, *Michel Angelo*, called sculpture "the most majestic of the three sister arts . . . to whom all others are but the handmaids and servitors, being but imitation, not creation."

During the nineteenth century there were several American women working as sculptors who were probably role models for Ketcham. Among the most prominent were Emma Stebbins (1815-1882) who started as a painter and later became a sculptor, Harriet Hosmer (1820-1908) who was one of the best known sculptors of her generation, and Vinnie Ream (1847-1914) who received a commission from Congress for a figure of Abraham Lincoln while still in her teens. (When she was thirty, Vinnie Ream married Lieutenant Richard Hoxie, a native of Iowa City, and gave up sculpture in deference to her husband's wishes.)

While painting was considered an acceptable avocation for a woman of her time, the idea of being a sculptor seemed preposterous to Ketcham's friends. She was determined, however, to show them that she could succeed. For her first venture she copied a small bust of Shakespeare purchased at a local bookstore. Ketcham's brother helped her find some clay which she tried carving with a penknife. When this tool proved unsatisfactory she finished the piece with a hairpin. Her friends, she said, ceased to scoff when they saw how well she had done. Ketcham did not comment on the attitude of her husband or other close relatives but one may assume that they looked on her artistic endeavors in much the same light as her friends. Her husband, however, must eventually have become convinced of her artistic ability because he later financed trips to New York, Washington, and Europe, so she could pursue her artistic studies.

Ketcham's second sculptural project was a figure of St. Cecilia. She had difficulty finding suitable clay for this work and after many disastrous experiments she decided that she would try to make her own. With the help of a servant she gathered several barrels of clay from a

riverbed. She diluted this material to the consistency of cream and then ran it through a series of sieves to rid it of all sediment. It was then left in the barrels until all the water had seeped through the staves leaving the clay ready for use. Ketcham found this material very satisfactory. Ketcham also faced difficulties in casting the St. Cecilia. She had no one in Mt. Pleasant to turn to for help so she arranged for an artist to come from Chicago to teach her. Subsequently Ketcham did her own casting which she found extremely heavy and tiring work. She found, however, that the physical disadvantages she faced in getting materials and doing her own casting were nothing compared to the mental discouragement with which she had to contend. Every one of her friends, she told a *Des Moines Register* reporter in 1886, had to be won over and were it not for her determination she would have given up long ago.

By the summer of 1876 Ketcham must also have convinced her husband that she had sufficient artistic ability to be permitted to go to New York to study. As there were no art schools at this time she hoped to find a sculptor in whose studio she could work. But since only male artists maintained studios in New York, and since they were not inclined to admit women students, she had a difficult time finding an instructor. Ketcham was under the impression that these men resented Vinnie Ream's success and didn't want any more competition from women. Finally, through a friend who was head of the Woman's Medical College in New York (probably Emily Blackwell), Ketcham found a place in the studio of James Wilson MacDonald (1824-1908), a sculptor known for his portrait busts and his Civil War monuments. Albert TenEyck Gardner of the Metropolitan Museum has described his work as "monotonously realistic and lifeless." Nonetheless, MacDonald was well respected in his time. Ketcham found him greatly prejudiced against women but by summer's end he

showed respect for her ability.

When she was in the East during the summer of 1876 Ketcham also visited the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia where she made copies of some of the works which were on exhibition there. Among the women sculptors represented at this exposition were Edmonia Lewis, Vinnie Ream, Margaret Foley, Florence Freeman, and Anne Whitney. These women must have reinforced Ketcham's determination to succeed in her chosen field. However, before the summer was over Ketcham — overcome by fatigue and the heat — became ill and was forced to return home.

Ketcham was not satisfied to continue her work alone in Mt. Pleasant. She set her sights on Europe — especially Rome — the mecca for American sculptors to study and work. While she was making plans for a European trip she was persuaded by "friends" (could have been family?) to stay in the United States where her originality would not be inhibited by foreign instruction. As an alternative Ketcham went to Washington, D.C., sometime prior to 1886, where she rented a studio and found instruction from Clark Mills (1815-1903), an architectural plasterer turned sculptor. Mills is best known for having modeled a equestrian statue of Andrew Jackson by the lost-wax process the first large bronze sculpture made in the United States. This was an equestrian statue of Andrew Jackson which today stands in Lafayette Park opposite the White House. Mills also developed a relatively painless way of making masks of living persons which Ketcham learned from him. Like other sculptors of her time she used these masks as the basis for portrait busts. One of the busts she made in Washington was of Judge Samuel Freeman Miller of Iowa, a personal friend who had been appointed to the United States Supreme Court by President Lincoln. This bust at one time was displayed in the Supreme Court chambers. While in Washington Ketcham also copied a

painting in the Corcoran Gallery of Art depicting the French patriot, Charlotte Corday. A reporter for the *Burlington Hawkeye* admired the copy for the faithfulness with which Ketcham depicted the tear-stained face.

During her career Ketcham made portrait busts of a number of distinguished Iowa men including Judge George F. Wright, Colonel John Scott, Governor Samuel Kirkwood, Senator William B. Allison, and Senator James Harlan. In addition, Ketcham modeled busts of historical and mythological characters as varied as Abraham Lincoln, Horace Greeley, St. Jerome and Laocoon. She made full-figure statues of Venus, Sappho, and John Wesley as well as portrait medallions of family and friends, including a likeness of President Wheeler of Iowa Wesleyan College. Busts of her mother, sisters, and her children adorned her home.

In April 1886, Ketcham visited Des Moines hoping to persuade the legislature to commission her to make busts of Iowa Civil War heroes to be placed in the vacant alcoves in the rotunda of the newly completed state capitol. She offered to donate her time and talent to make one such bust if the state would pay for the materials and incidental expenses. There is no record of the legislature having accepted this offer. Civil War regimental flags instead of sculptures were placed in the alcoves.

None of Ketcham's portrait busts have been located. They probably have not been preserved because they were cast in plaster, an easily damaged and non-prestigious material. Ketcham would not have had access to a foundry where her works could be cast in bronze, and in addition, marble, not bronze, was the preferred medium for sculpture in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was considered the height of Victorian elegance to display in one's parlor a marble statue or bust executed in the neoclassical style.

Ketcham was well aware that her sculpture was not highly regarded because of the ma-

terial she was forced to use. "The general idea is that art is all in the marble," she told a *Register* reporter during her trip to Des Moines in 1886, "but the fact is that the modern sculptor calls to his assistance an army of cutters who do the most of his work upon the marble, while he only puts on the finishing touches." Ketcham contended that the artist's genius is best displayed in the plaster cast where the artist's handling of the clay is more directly expressed.

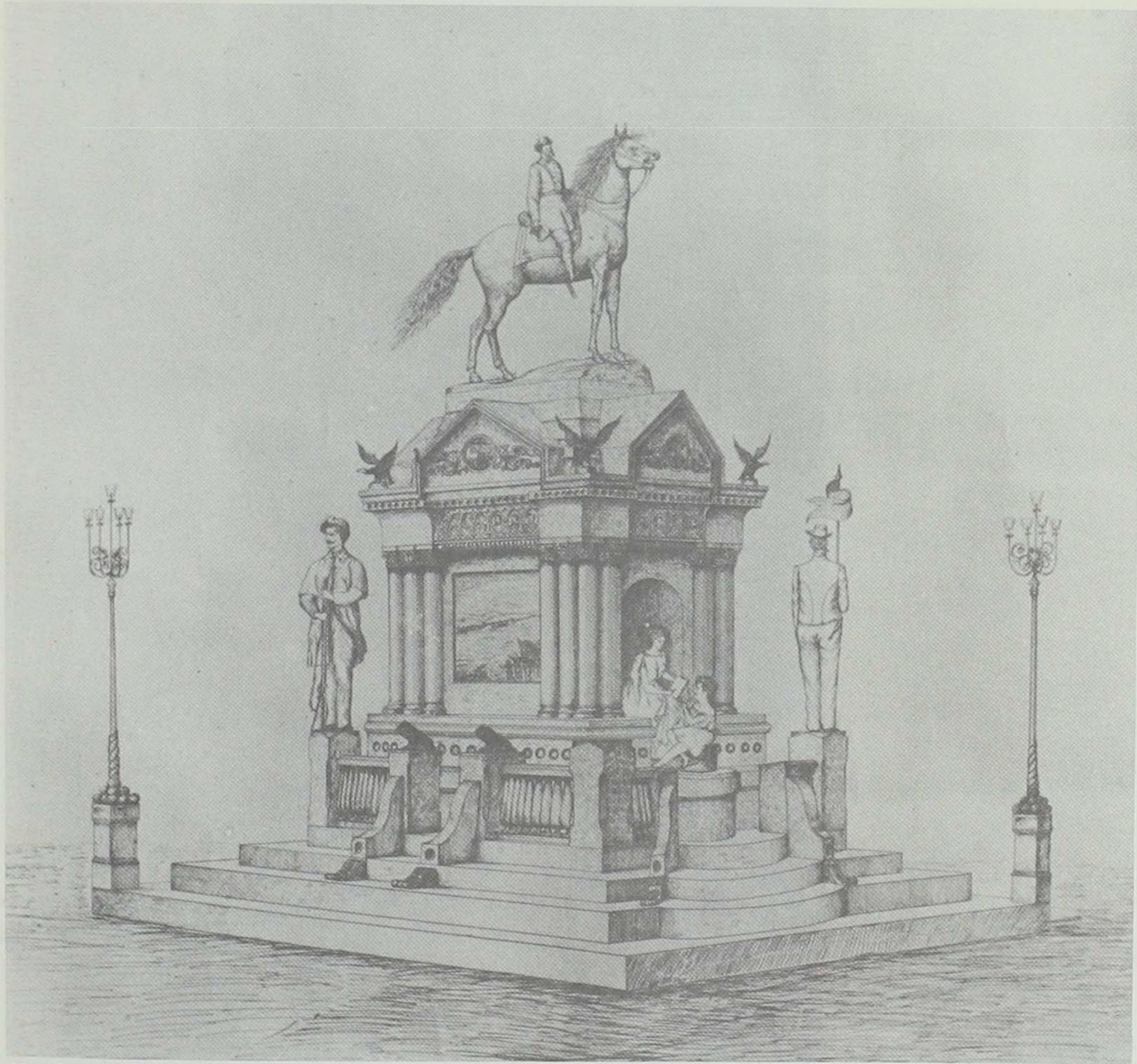
Despite this rationalization Ketcham longed to go to Rome where she could have her sculptures cut in marble. Here Italian stonecutters used an ancient pointing system to translate works from plaster to stone. It was this attraction which lured many American sculptors to Rome, including women such as Harriet Hosmer and Vinnie Ream. Ream went there to have her figure of Abraham Lincoln enlarged and cut in marble by Italian workmen.

Shortly after her Des Moines visit in 1886 Ketcham realized her ambition of traveling to Europe. She spent a year there and her husband and two sons were probably with her during this time. She was in Rome when her daughter, Roma Beatrice, was born on May 2, 1887. Whether Ketcham was pregnant before she left home is a matter of speculation. It seems reasonable to assume that she would not have undertaken such a long journey if she were expecting another child. While in Europe Ketcham visited galleries in France and Germany and spent some time in Florence but the greater part of her time was spent in Rome. Here she received instruction from Franklin Simmons (1839-1913), an expatriate who was famous in his day for his depiction of classical subjects in the ideal manner as well as for his public monuments and portrait busts. Ketcham also studied under Giovanni Ferrero, an Italian painter and engraver, who ran a school for American artists in Rome.

While in Rome Ketcham made a figure of Peri at the gates of heaven pleading for admis-

sion into paradise. Peri is a Persian mythological character who was made popular in the nineteenth century by Thomas Moore's book *Lalla Rookh*. Ketcham modeled the beautiful Peri with outstretched arm, luxurious, long hair, spread wings, and graceful drapery. This piece was cast in plaster and then cut in marble by Italian workers. It was completed just three days before Ketcham gave birth to her daughter, Roma. Upon her return to Mt. Pleasant, Ketcham displayed this piece in a draped and carefully lighted recess in the parlor of her home. After her death it was shown in the Iowa Building of the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago and it was later exhibited in the library of the Iowa State Capitol. What eventually became of *Peri* is not known. In fact, none of Ketcham's work seems to have remained in Iowa. At the time of her husband's death in 1921 two of the Ketchams' children, Albert and Roma (Roma Ketcham Farrell), were living in Seattle, Washington, and Ernest was a resident of Mendota, Missouri. They probably took some of their mother's work with them when they left their Mt. Pleasant home.

Ketcham also spent a good deal of her time in Europe copying paintings in the galleries which she visited. One of the pictures which she brought home was a copy of an angel in Raphael's *Madonna di Foligno* in the Vatican. She made a copy of this copy for her sister, Mary Jane Ketcham, of Burlington. She also copied a Rembrandt self-portrait and a Titian portrait of his daughter. Other pictures by unidentified artists which Ketcham copied and which were noted in news stories of the day included *Falconer's Bride*, *St. Michael and the Dragon*, *Marguerite at the Whispering Well*, and an unfinished madonna and child in the Dresden gallery. During Ketcham's lifetime copies of famous paintings were highly prized as symbols of culture for Victorian homes. Her efforts in this direction were thus praised rather than scoffed at as they probably would be today.



*Ketcham's original prize-winning design which was to be notably altered. (SHSI)*

In the spring of 1888 a commission appointed by the Iowa General Assembly announced a competition for plans for a monument honoring Iowa's Civil War veterans to be erected on the grounds of the state capitol. Three prizes ranging from \$500 to \$150 were offered for the best designs. Ketcham, who was determined to win first prize, spent the next year working on a plan for the monument. In June 1889 the commission announced that her sketch had won first place over forty-seven

others submitted by contestants throughout the country. Photographs of Ketcham's entry, along with contemporary newspaper descriptions, provide information about Ketcham's winning plan. Her design called for a bronze equestrian statue of heroic size mounted on an elaborate base at each corner of which was a standing figure representing the four branches of the armed service. On each side of the base was a bas-relief of a battle scene and above them a frieze with portraits of Iowa ser-



*Ketcham's revised design with a tall column and Victory replacing the equestrian statue. (SHSI)*

vicemen. Those to be honored were to be selected by the monument commission. In an arched niche at one end of the base was an allegorical figure representing History relating the story of the war to a youth, and at the other end a weeping allegorical figure of Iowa placing garlands on a funeral urn. Dimensions of the monument were 34 feet high, 45 feet long, and 30 feet wide. Judging from photographs of

other entries, it is hard to believe that an unbiased judge would have rated Ketcham's design the winner. Several others were superior both in their monumentality and the skill with which they were executed. The various elements of Ketcham's design were not well integrated and the drawing was hesitant and stiff. A soldier was missing from one corner of the base despite newspaper descriptions of fig-



*The finished Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument. Carl Rohl-Smith was responsible for interpreting Harriet A. Ketcham's design and completing the monument.*

ures at all four corners. One can only speculate that Ketcham did not have sufficient mastery of perspective to enable her to draw the missing figure properly.

The *Des Moines Register* reported that some people were saying that Ketcham's design resembled an equestrian statue of Frederick the Great in Berlin. The *Mt. Pleasant Journal* retorted that "the design is all original with

Mrs. Ketcham who spent many anxious months in the development of her idea." This paper acknowledged widespread disappointment and jealousy on the part of other Iowa contestants who were passed over in favor of a woman but pointed out that they would hardly have been pleased had the award been given to an out-of-state contestant. The *Journal* contended the criticism was sour grapes and that

Ketcham had won the prize fairly and honestly. In retrospect, one cannot help but wonder if the fact that Ketcham's neighbor, James Harlan, was one of the competition judges did not have a salutary effect on the decision of the commission.

Ketcham, herself, must have had reservations about her winning design because she immediately set to work to improve it. Her revisions appeared in an illustration published in the *Burlington Hawkeye* at the time of her death in 1890. The entire monument had been enlarged and the equestrian figure on the top had been replaced by a tall column crowned with a figure of Victory. Eagles resting on the four corners of the base had been replaced with four large equestrian figures and the platform on which the base rests had been raised from three to six steps high. Ketcham seems to have borrowed most of the new elements in her revised plan from the designs of other competitors. Overall, the composition of the monument was now well integrated and the drawing was less naive than the original sketches. In fact, the improvement in Ketcham's design, both in concept and execution, was so marked that it seems as though some more experienced artist might have helped with the revisions.

In October 1890 Ketcham suffered a slight stroke and within four days she was dead. Ketcham's death was unexpected. Although of an extremely nervous disposition, she had continued working until her last illness. In addition to working on revisions of her winning plan, she had recently completed a bust of her daughter, Roma, as well as an ornamental carving on a large bookcase. "Her loss is not only to her family and her friends in Mt. Pleasant, but to the state of Iowa . . .," commented the *Mt. Pleasant Journal*. "For fifteen years or more she has studied and worked, has breasted opposition, has faced cold apathy, has conquered every obstacle, all for art." Mrs. Ketcham was unfortunate in being fifty years ahead of her time, the *Journal* said, for in the Mis-

issippi Valley people were too busy making money to be ready to indulge in the leisure of contemplating art.

The Twenty-fourth Iowa General Assembly meeting in 1892 approved Ketcham's plan for the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument and authorized its construction. In March 1894 the monument committee hired the Chicago sculptor, Carl Rohl-Smith, a native of Denmark, to carry out Ketcham's design. It is difficult to know the details of the design Ketcham submitted to the commission because her original drawings have been lost. In general, the monument as it now stands on the capitol grounds seems to conform to the sketch published in the *Burlington Hawkeye* at the time of her death.

In several instances, however, Rohl-Smith probably did not interpret Ketcham's design correctly. James Harlan, speaking at the cornerstone laying ceremony of the State Historical Building in July 1899, commented on certain "deformities" in three of the figures on the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument. He noted the absence of repose of the figure standing on the summit, the "inaptness" of the allegorical figure of Iowa, and the "misconception" of the bronze group representing History. Ketcham's original plan for a mourning allegorical figure of Iowa had been replaced by a female representing bountiful Iowa who was naked to the waist with head and shoulders thrust back and hands cupped under her thrust-out breasts which she offers for succor. She certainly does not look like a figure designed by a proper Victorian woman. The group called History, according to Mt. Pleasant tradition, was to be modeled after sketches made from a tintype of two young people living in Ketcham's neighborhood. She had taken these youngsters to the studio of a local photographer where she dressed them in flowing robes and posed the seated young woman reading a history of the war to her brother seated at her feet. This concept is

clearly shown in the photograph of Ketcham's original design where a young woman is shown seated in an arched niche reading to a youth. The niche was eliminated in the completed monument and the group as executed by Rohl-Smith depicts a stiff-backed, gaunt old woman staring straight ahead. A nude young boy offering her a scroll stands at her side. Harlan attributed these "deformities" to "an artist born and educated in the north of Europe."

Ketcham's conception for the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument with its granite base and column rising over 130 feet was impressive both in its massive scale and elaborate detail. But even more impressive were the number of bronze sculptures which Ketcham planned for this monument. These included:

Four equestrian figures of soldiers.  
 Four standing figures of soldiers.  
 Thirty-five medallions with portraits of Iowa soldiers.  
 One medallion with the coat of arms of Iowa.  
 Two bas-reliefs of battle scenes.  
 Three female allegorical figures.  
 One figure of a boy.

It is questionable if Harriet Ketcham's artistic skill and physical endurance would have been equal to such a monumental task. We can salute her, nevertheless, as a woman of tenacity and vision who had the daring and courage to conceive this elaborate monument and the willingness to undertake its construction. □

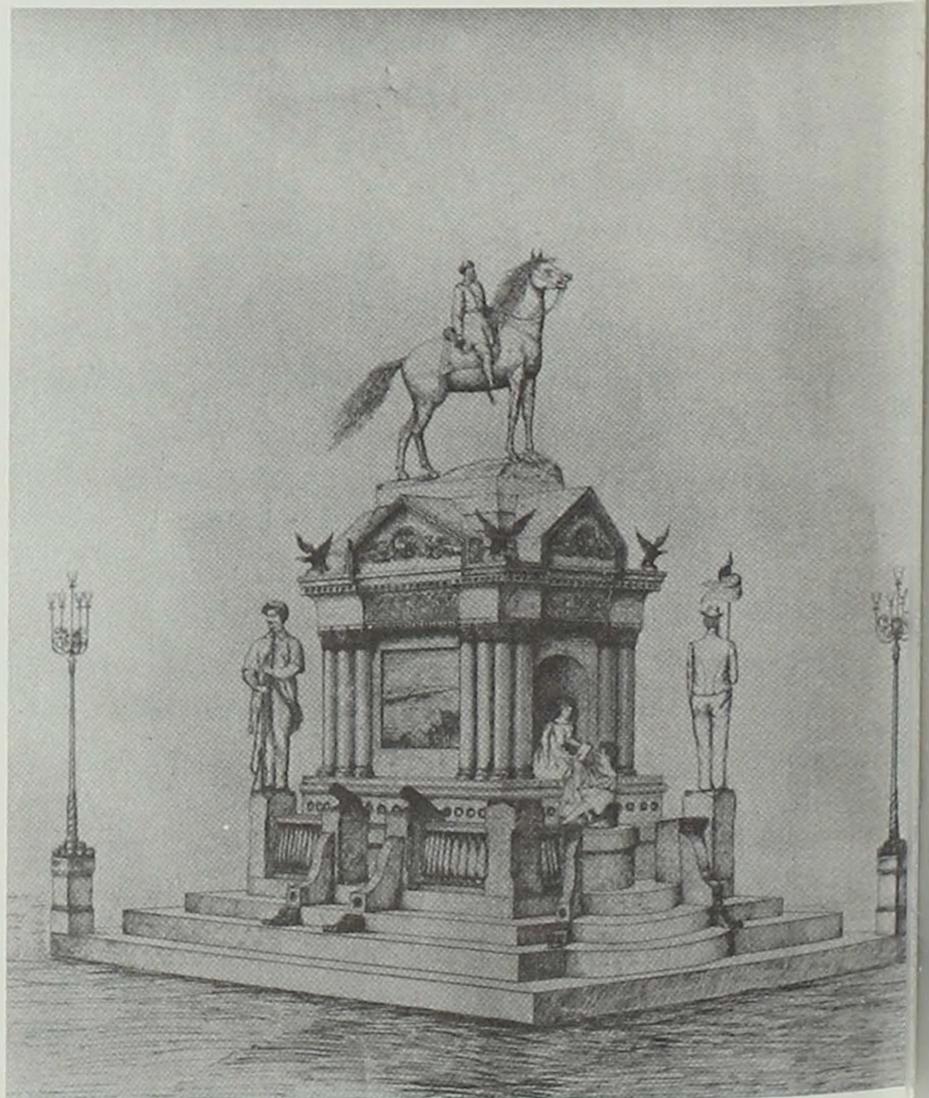
# The Iowa Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument

by Louise Rosenfield Noun

Most people driving past the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument, which rises to the south of the Iowa State Capitol, do not recognize it as a memorial to Civil War veterans. Even among those who know what this monument represents, few realize the depth of emotion and the years of planning which went into making it a reality. The history of the monument goes back to 1887 when the Iowa branch of the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.), the organization of Civil War veterans, asked the Twenty-second General Assembly to provide for a suitable monument honoring those Iowans who had fought in the war. Iowa had done more than its share in supporting the Union cause. Nearly half of all Iowa men of military age had served in the military during the war. Of the 70,000 Iowans who went to war, 3,500 had been killed or mortally wounded in battle, 8,498 died of disease, 515 died in prison camps, and 8,500 had been seriously wounded. There was a strong feeling throughout the state that these men should be honored.

In response to the G.A.R.'s request, the legislature in 1888 appointed a six-member commission with authority to advertise for designs for a monument to be placed on the capitol grounds. The commission, however, was only given authority to examine these plans and report to the next session of the General Assembly. The commission accordingly advertised for designs to be submitted no later than April 2, 1889. Three prizes ranging

from \$500 to \$150 were to be awarded. Forty-eight competitors, nine of whom were Iowans, submitted plans. In June the commission announced that Harriet Ketcham of Mt. Pleasant was first prize winner. Robert Krause of Boston was awarded second prize, and J.D. Hunter of New York City was awarded third prize. Several well-known artists did not enter the contest because the commission was unable to designate a specific site for the monument.



*Harriet A. Ketcham's design, which was the first choice of the monument commission. (SHSI)*

Ketcham's design, which consisted of a large equestrian statue on an elaborate base was one of the few plans submitted which did not have an upward thrust. Most designs included tall columns or obelisks. Others were in the form of Romanesque towers. Ketcham's design was criticized by disappointed contestants who charged that it was modeled after a statue of Frederick the Great in Berlin. According to the *Des Moines Register*, Krause's proposed monument, which included a tall column surmounted by a figure of a soldier, had much more popular appeal. It certainly was a more competent design than Ketcham's and one can only wonder why the commission chose her plan over Krause's or several others which obviously had more merit. Ketcham subsequently revised her design, substituting a tall column surmounted by a figure of Victory for the large

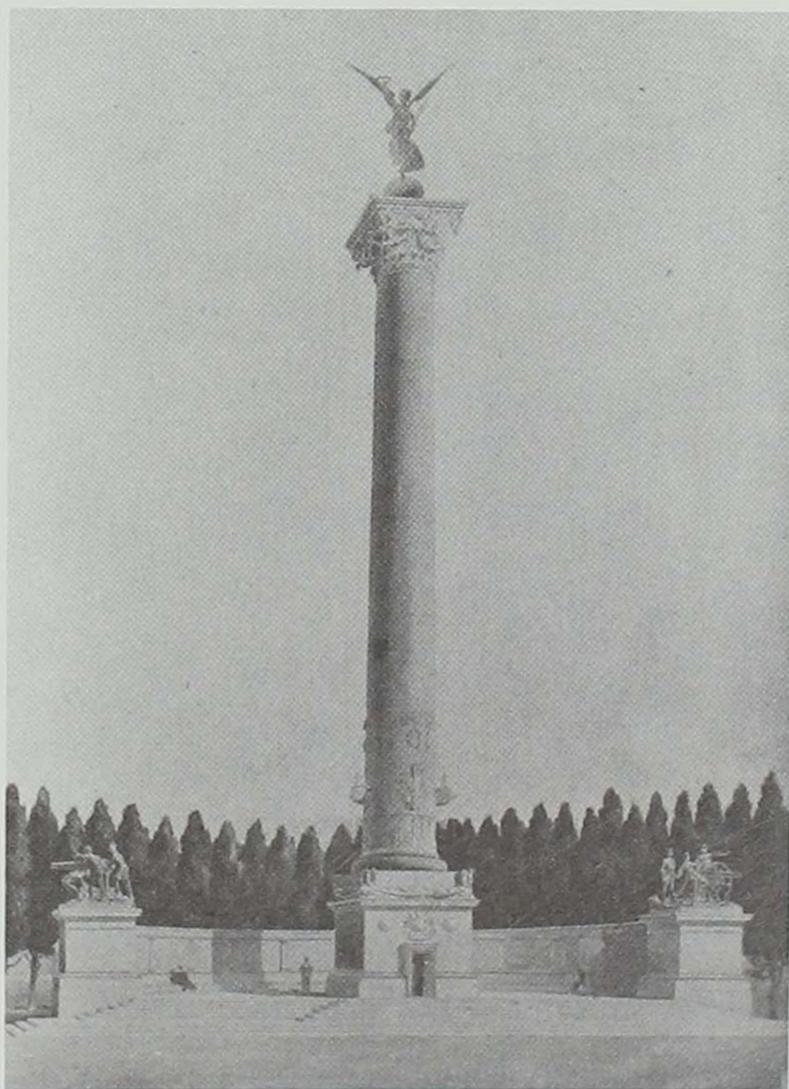
*Of the forty-eight designs submitted for the competition, nine were from Iowa. The other eight designs by Iowa residents appear on the following two pages. In clockwise order from the upper left design on page 82, the artists are as follows: John Bawden, Keokuk; A.W. Richards, Indianola; Mrs. Eunice E. Gibbs Allyn, Dubuque; C.A. Dunham, Burlington; Albert R. Ross, Davenport; C.A. Menth, North Buena Vista; Theodore D. Boal, Iowa City; and, Elliott Waring, Oskaloosa. (SHSI)*

equestrian figure on her original design. She died before the legislature authorized the construction of a war memorial but her design was retained by the commission and served as the basis for the monument as we see it today.

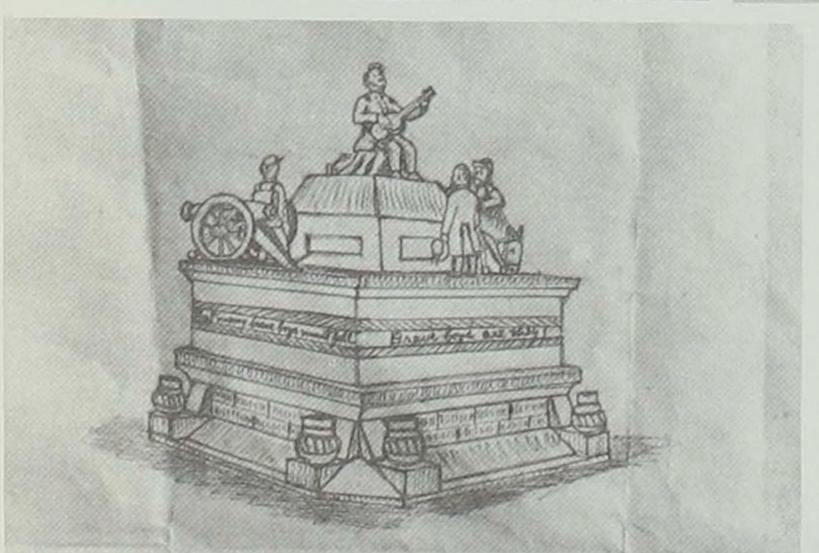
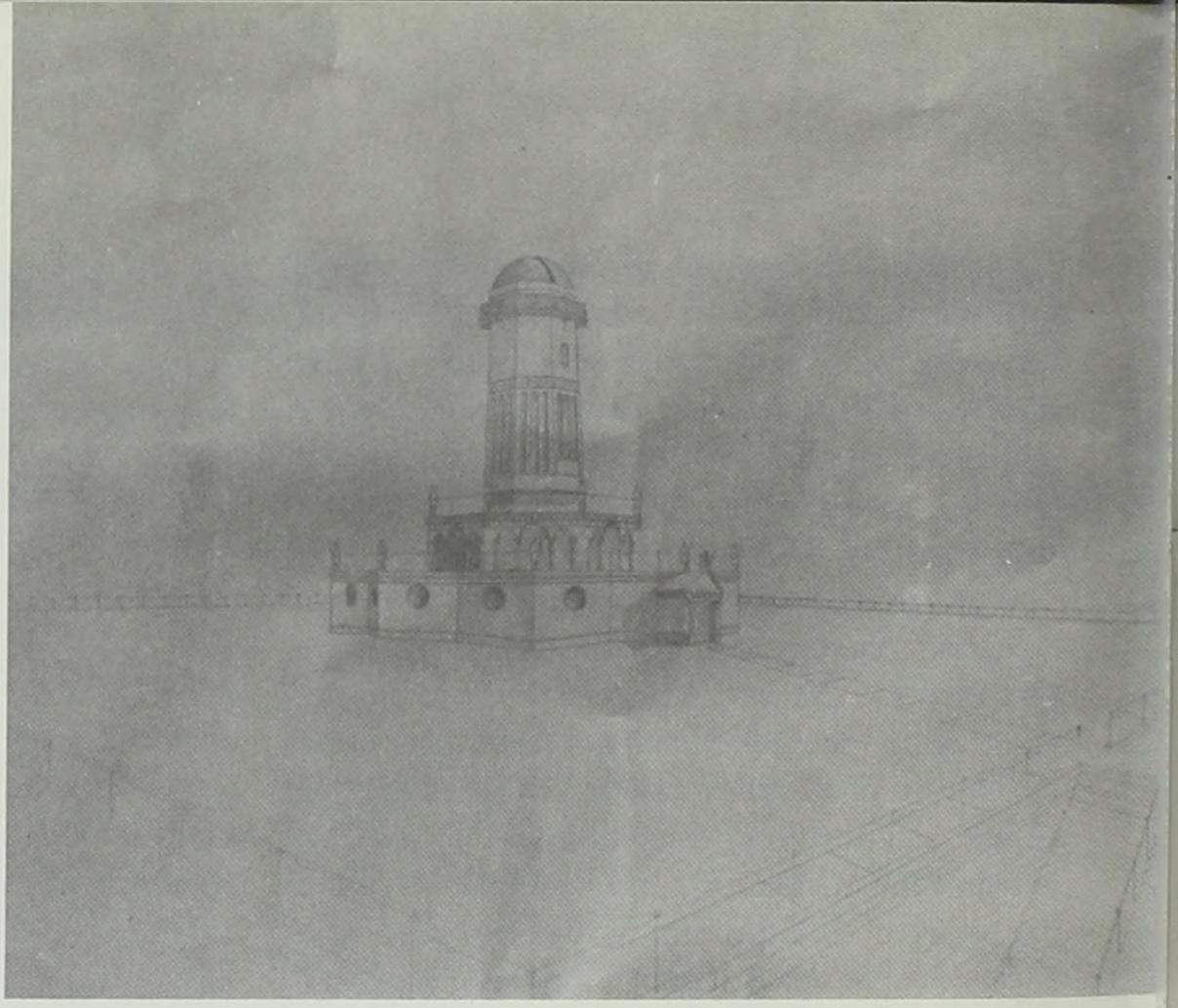
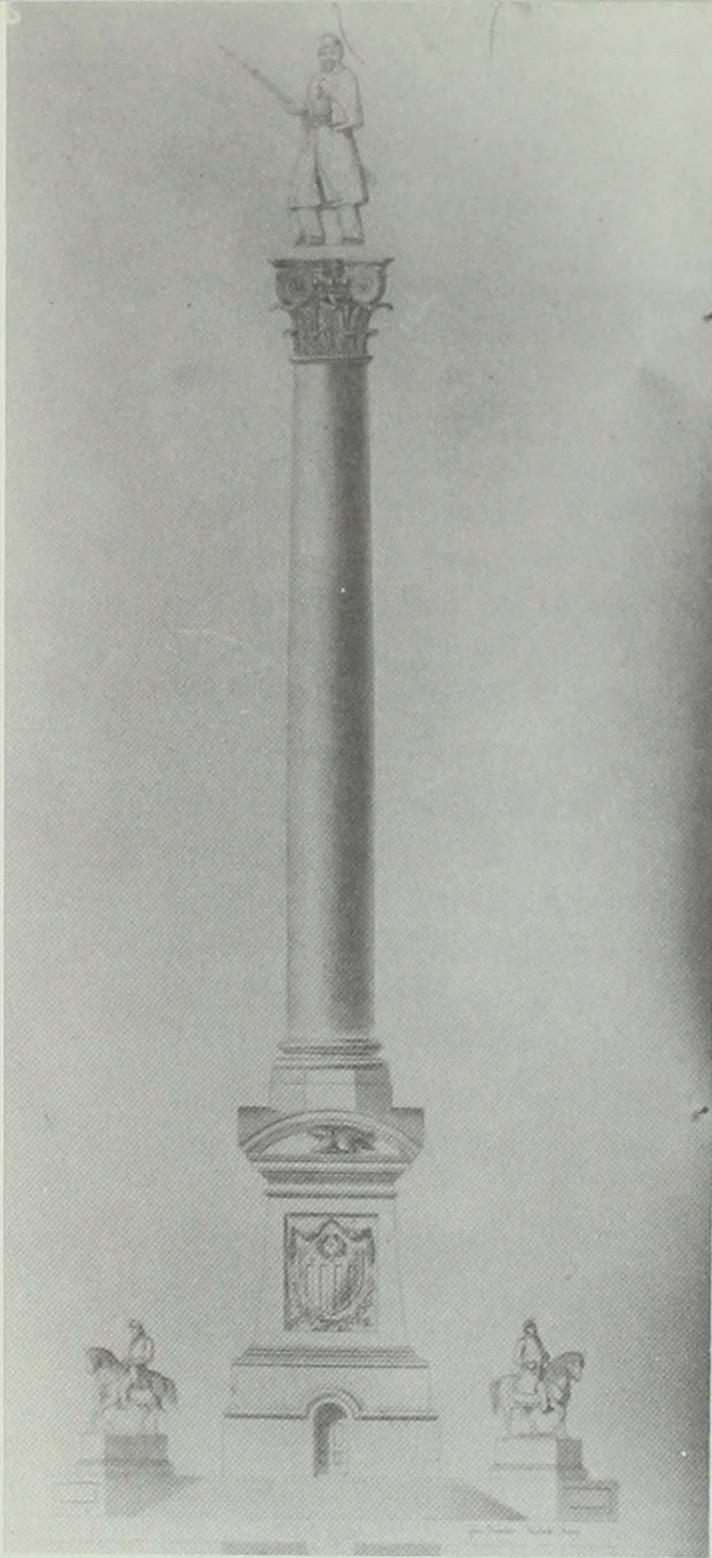
The commission in its report to the 1890 legislature expressed the opinion that no monument should be built within the narrow con-



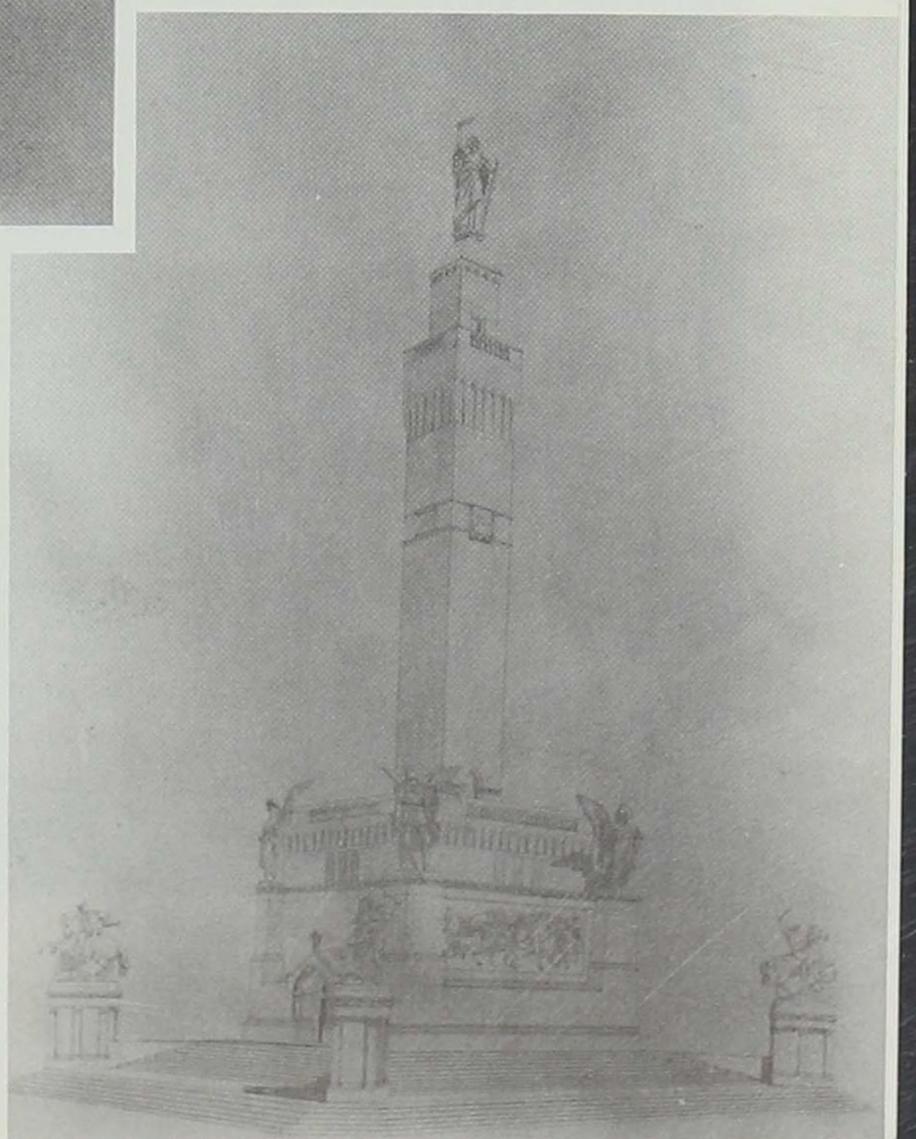
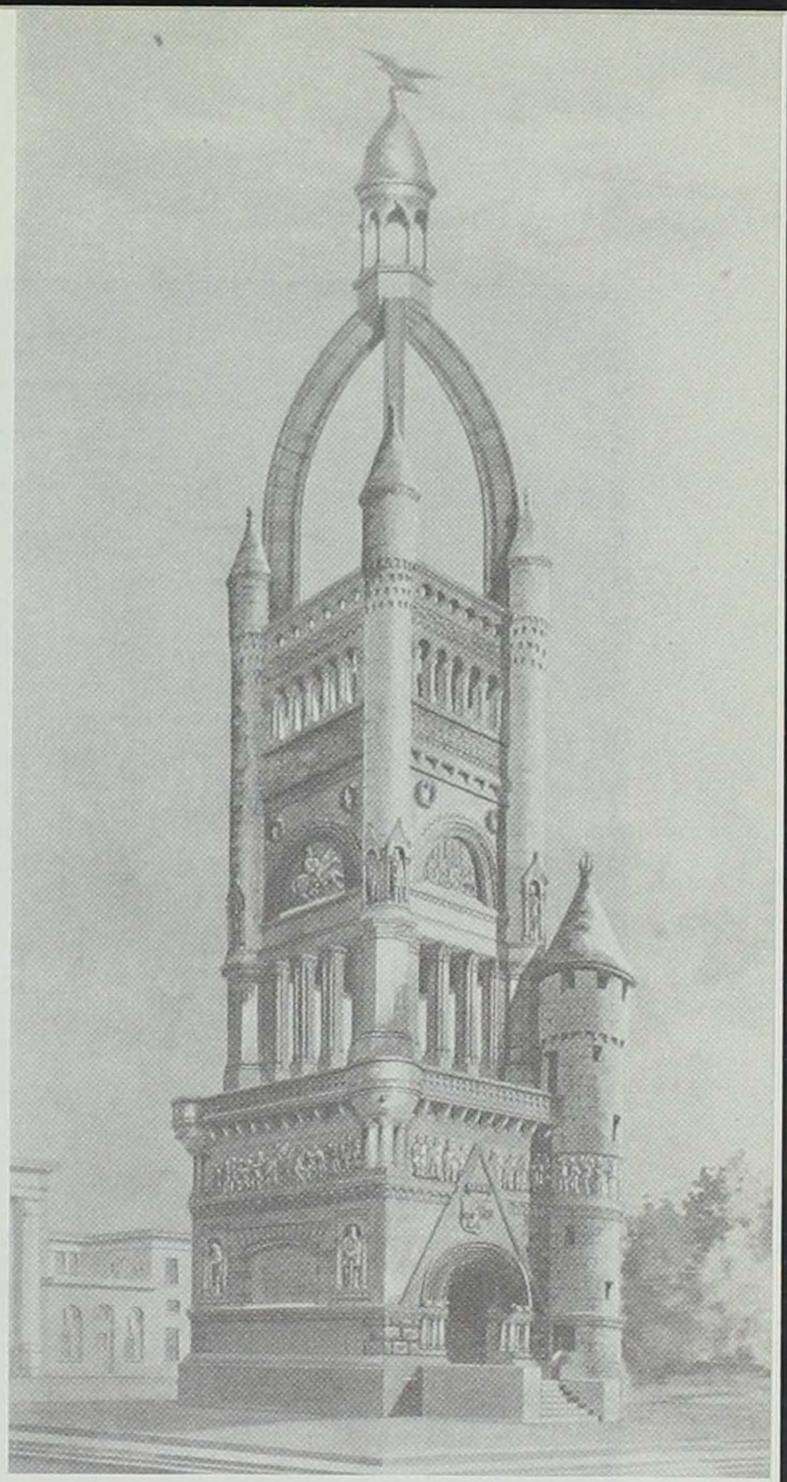
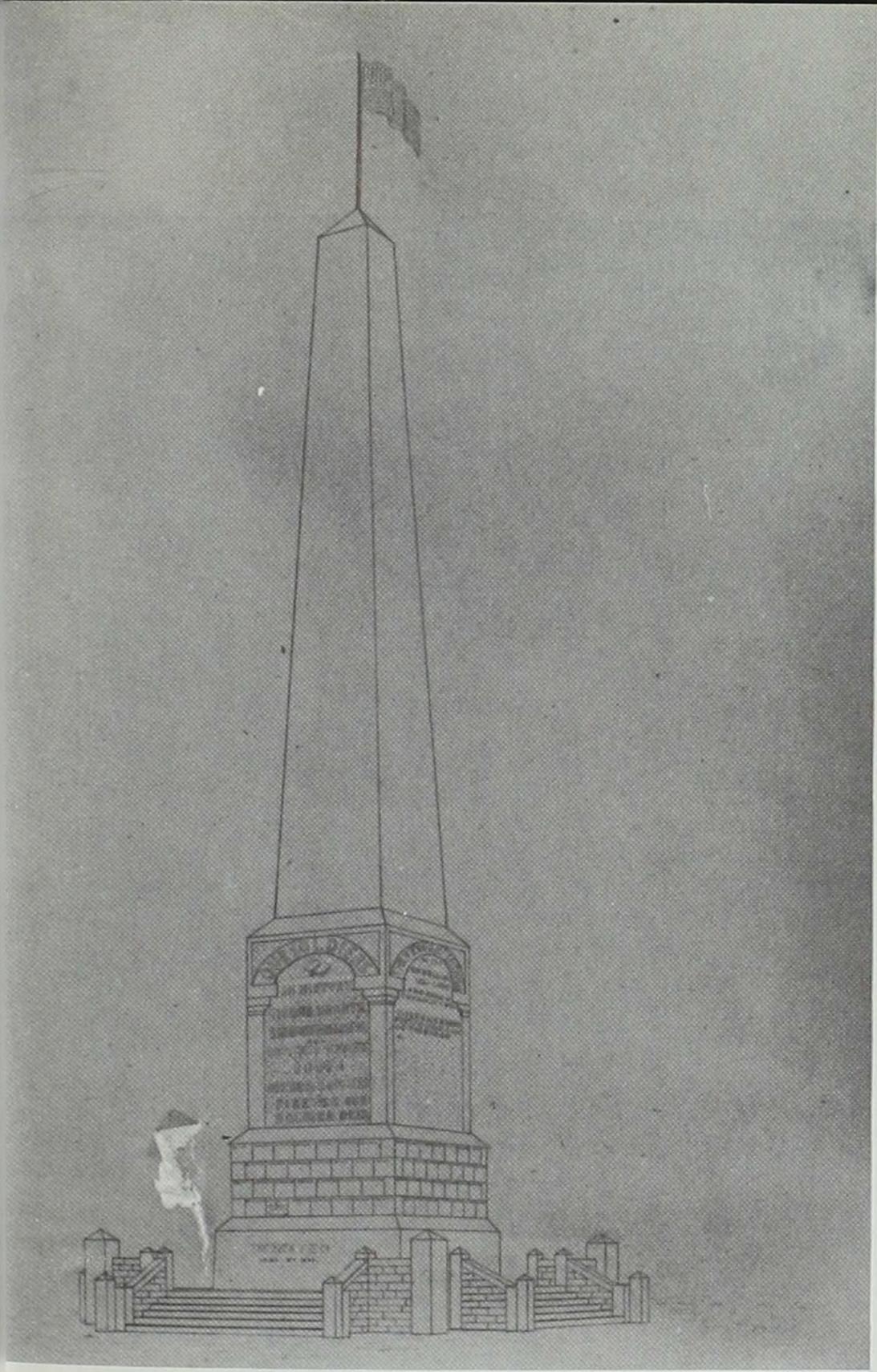
*The commission's second choice was a design by Robert Krause of Boston, Massachusetts. (SHSI)*

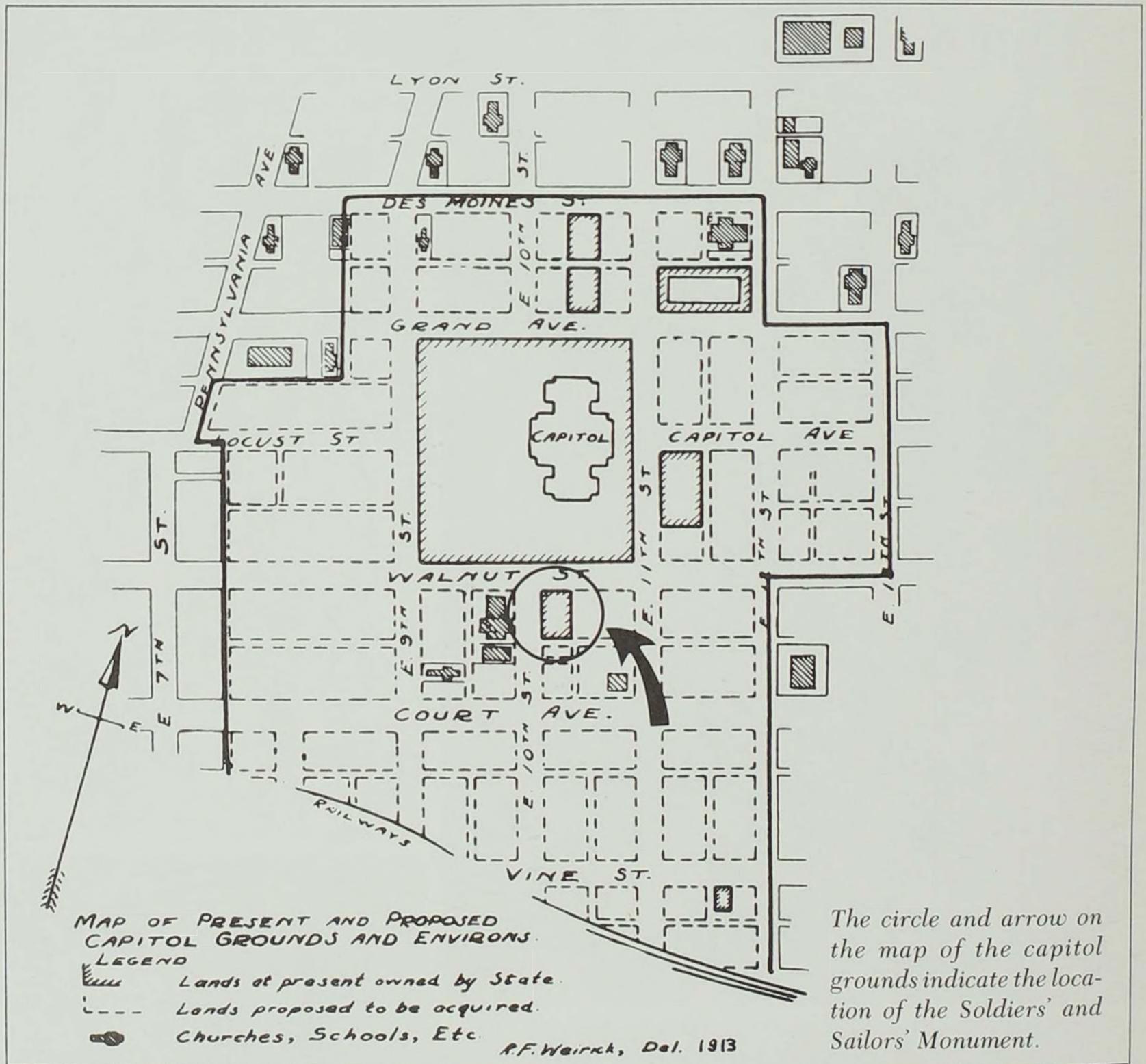


*The design of J.D. Hunter, Jr., of New York, was the monument commission's third choice. (SHSI)*



Design for a  
Soldier's Monument





fines of the capitol grounds, which at that time consisted of less than ten acres. Commission members believed that the memorial should be placed in a spacious area such as that surrounding the Washington monument in the nation's capital. "Iowa should build nobly or not at all," the commission declared. Meanwhile, there was agitation for something other than a monument. Some wanted a memorial hall or a hospital. Others thought a triumphal arch would be more appropriate. The legislature referred the controversy to the commis-

sion and instructed it to report to the next general assembly with a recommendation as to whether a monument, a memorial arch, or a memorial hall and monument combined should be built.

Public opinion was divided on the question. Charles Aldrich, future curator of the Iowa Historical Department, in a letter to the *Des Moines Register* in July 1890, favored a memo-

*Opposite is a photograph of Carl Rohl-Smith, the sculptor retained by the commission to complete Harriet A. Ketcham's revised monument.*

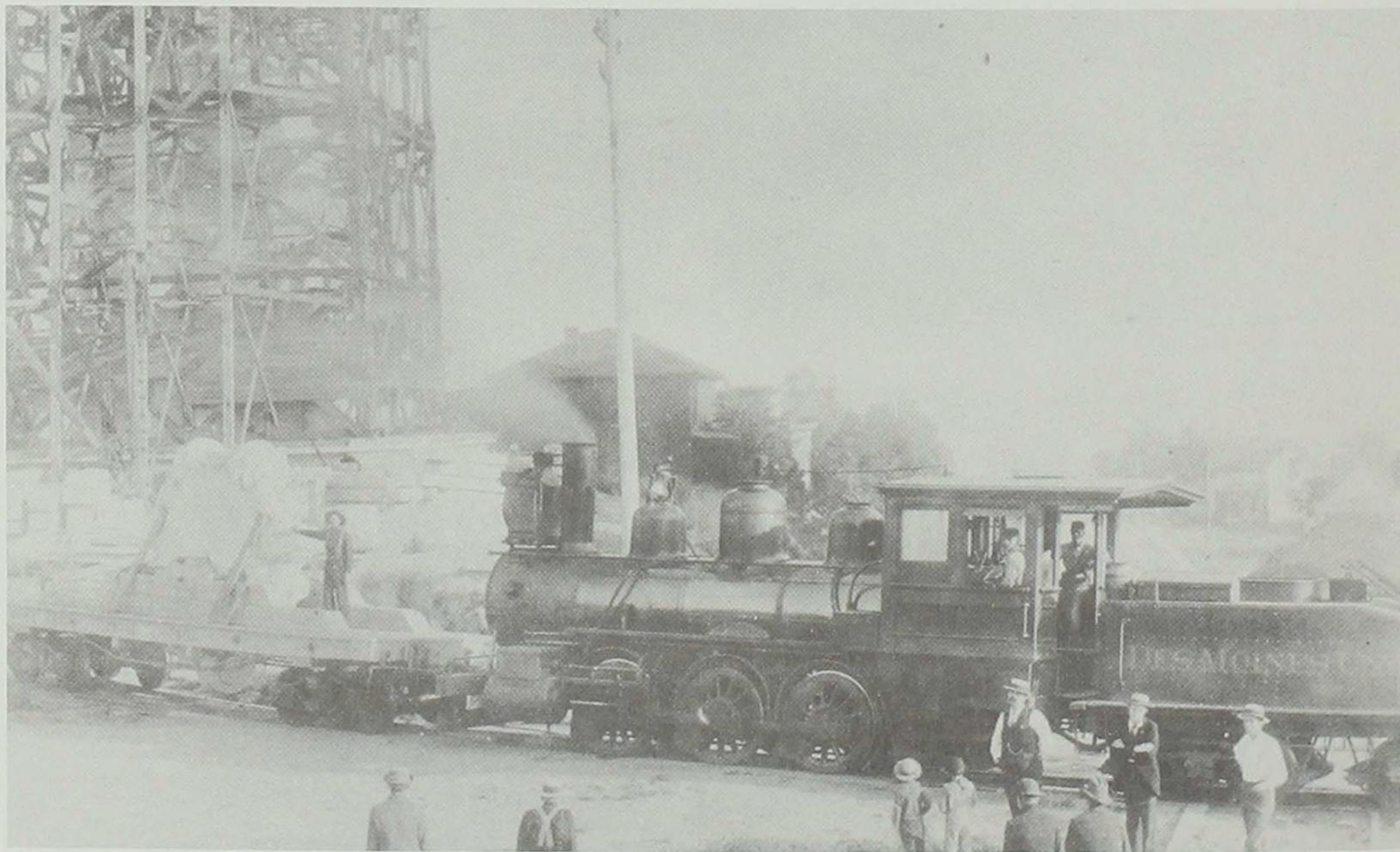


rial hall in which the name of every man who ever bore arms for the state could be inscribed. A monument, he said, perpetuates no one's name. A memorial hall could also serve as a historical building and art museum. On the other hand, the Iowa Women's Monument Association carried on an active campaign for a monument. Nettie Sanford Chapin of Marshalltown, a member of the women's association, argued for Ketcham's design with its marble shaft like the one in the Place Vendome in Paris. "Has Iowa always to be looking after pork or hominy?" she asked a meeting of the Dubuque G.A.R. in April 1891. "For the sake of the unknown dead who are sleeping on southern battlefields, let us have the shaft," she urged.

The commission reported to the 1892 General Assembly that it favored a monument over other types of memorials. Triumphal arches in Paris and Berlin were at the end of long boulevards. Des Moines had no such boulevards.

Soldiers' homes and soldiers' hospitals had no lasting historical value. A memorial hall could be used to show war mementos, flags, etc. "But flags decay and turn to dust and arms lose interest as years race on . . ." A monument, on the other hand, would last for centuries.

On April 17, 1892, the legislature finally approved \$150,000 for the construction of a monument and specified that it be placed on the site of the old capitol, a small lot (100 feet by 160 feet) directly across Walnut Street from the new capitol building. There was a great deal of dissatisfaction with this location as the site was considered too small; the monument would be dwarfed by the capitol building across the street; and private houses and other structures abutted the site which were both unsightly and a fire danger. The commission was empowered to purchase another sixty feet in order to square the lot but, probably because no appropriation was made for this purpose,



*The railroad spur which was built in 1894 to haul materials to the construction site. (SHSI, Des Moines)*

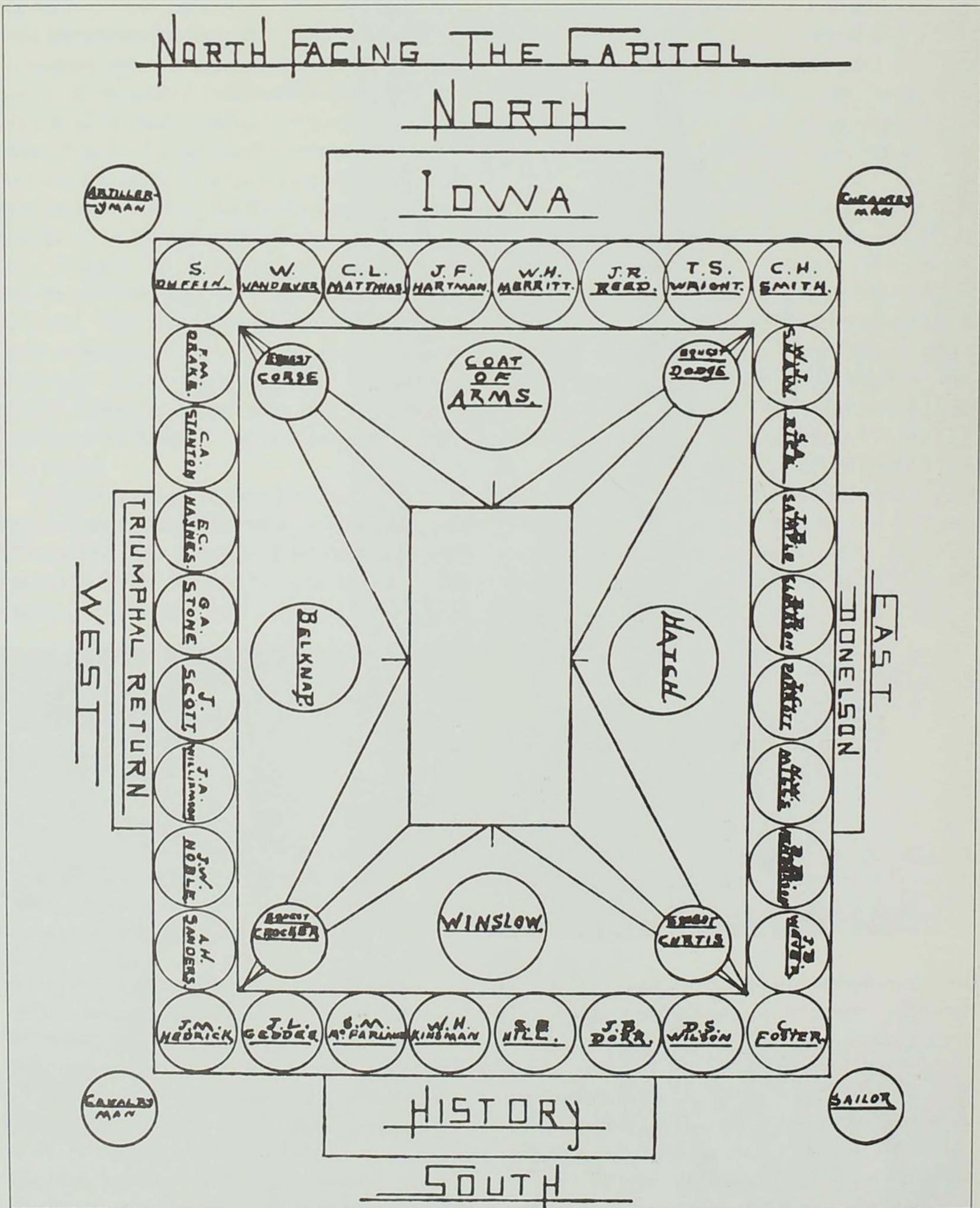


*The Iowa Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument as it appeared in 1898, sometime after its completion.*

the site remained unchanged until 1913 when the entire area surrounding the capitol grounds was enlarged.

**I**n March 1894 the commission contracted with Carl Rohl-Smith, a Danish-born artist currently living in Chicago, to execute the sculptures for the monument. His low bid of \$21,500 was just \$500 less than that of the noted sculptor Lorado Taft. Rohl-Smith was to do the work in his Chicago studio and commis-

sion members were to approve each piece before it was cast by a Chicago bronze works. Construction of the monument also began in 1894. The walls of the foundation were dug twenty-seven feet deep to provide a sturdy base for the 3,800,000 pounds of granite which were used in building the monument. A spur from the railroad south of the capitol grounds was constructed to bring building materials to the site. On September 6 a cornerstone laying ceremony was held with James Harlan, a com-



A turn-of-the-century map of the monument. On the map are listed the names of some of the individuals who appear on the monument whether on medallions or in fuller statue form.



*An allegorical figure of Iowa as a young mother. Iowa is located on the north side of the monument and faces the capitol.*

*History is located on the south side of the monument. With her is a young Iowa presenting her with a record of Iowa in the Civil War.*



mission member, the orator of the day.

Rohl-Smith's contract for sculptures, to be executed according to Ketcham's design, called for an impressive number of pieces. There are thirty-five medallions of servicemen which were to be "modeled from life if living; if not, from the best pictures to be had," also four life-size figures of actual servicemen representing the cavalry, the infantry, the artillery, and the navy, as well as four large equestrian figures of Iowa generals. There are two bas-reliefs on the base. One represents the Battle of Fort Donelson, in which 128 Iowa men were killed; the other is an imaginary triumphal scene of the return of troops from the war. Included in the triumphal scene are a welcoming committee of ten, among whom are three women, Mrs. John Scott, Mrs. William Larrabee, and Harriet Ketcham. Annie Wittenmyer, a Civil War nurse, stands among the returning soldiers. All the figures on the bas-reliefs, however, are so small that it is doubtful they were ever identifiable. Standing at the top of monument is an allegorical female figure representing Victory. Ketcham's design also called for two more female allegorical figures on either end of the base of the monument. One was to represent a mourning Iowa placing garlands on a funeral urn, and the other History, who was to be represented by a mother holding a book or scroll containing the story of the war and reading to a youth seated at her feet. Rohl-Smith, however, modeled History as a stiff-backed, gaunt old woman staring into space. A nude young boy stands at her side. Rohl-Smith chose to make the figure of the mourning Iowa representative of the state's bounty rather than of her war sacrifices. She thus became a young woman naked to the waist with head and shoulders thrust back and hands cupped under thrust-out breasts.

Commission members went to Chicago periodically to approve Rohl-Smith's sculptures before they were cast. In one

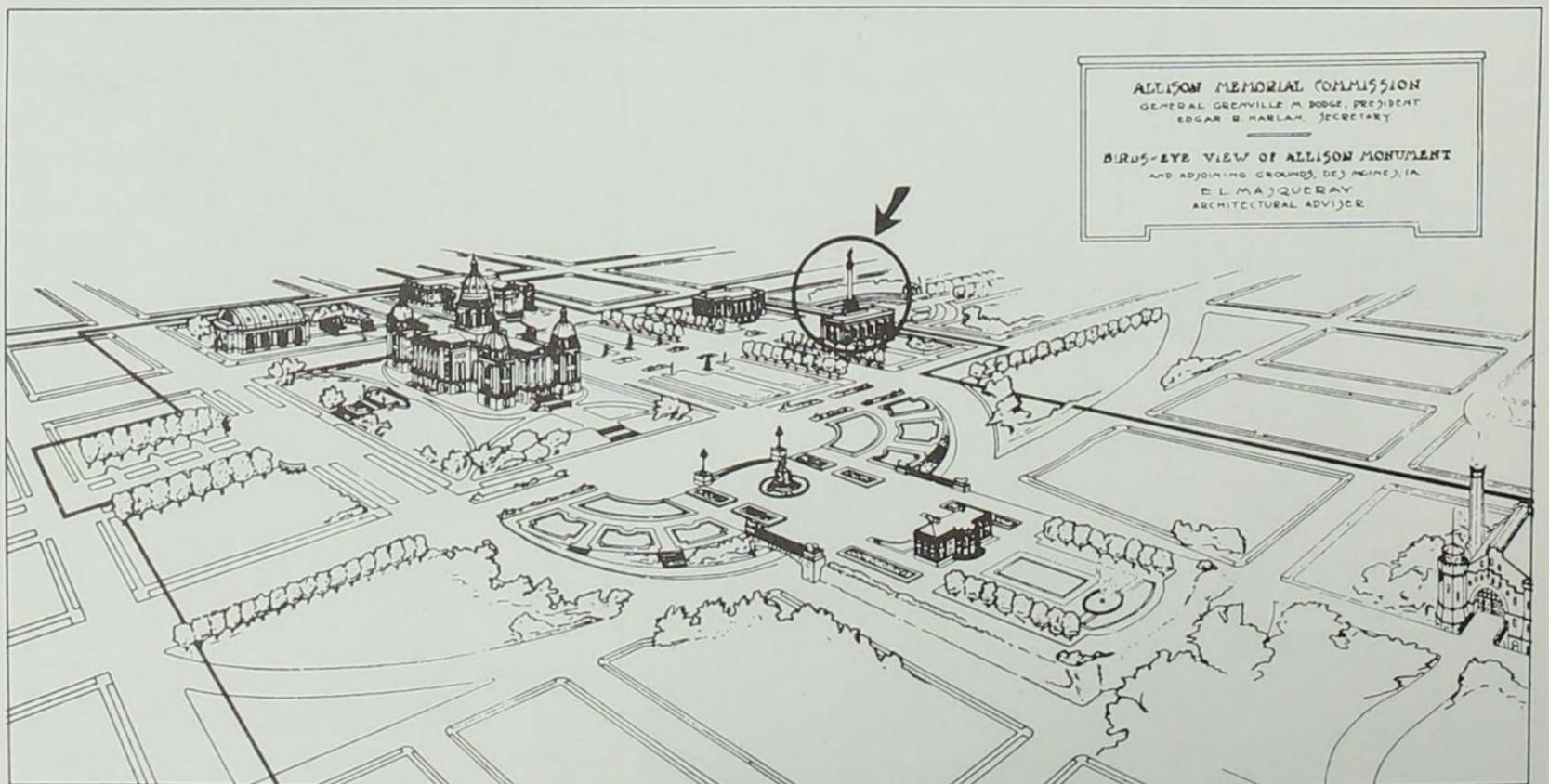
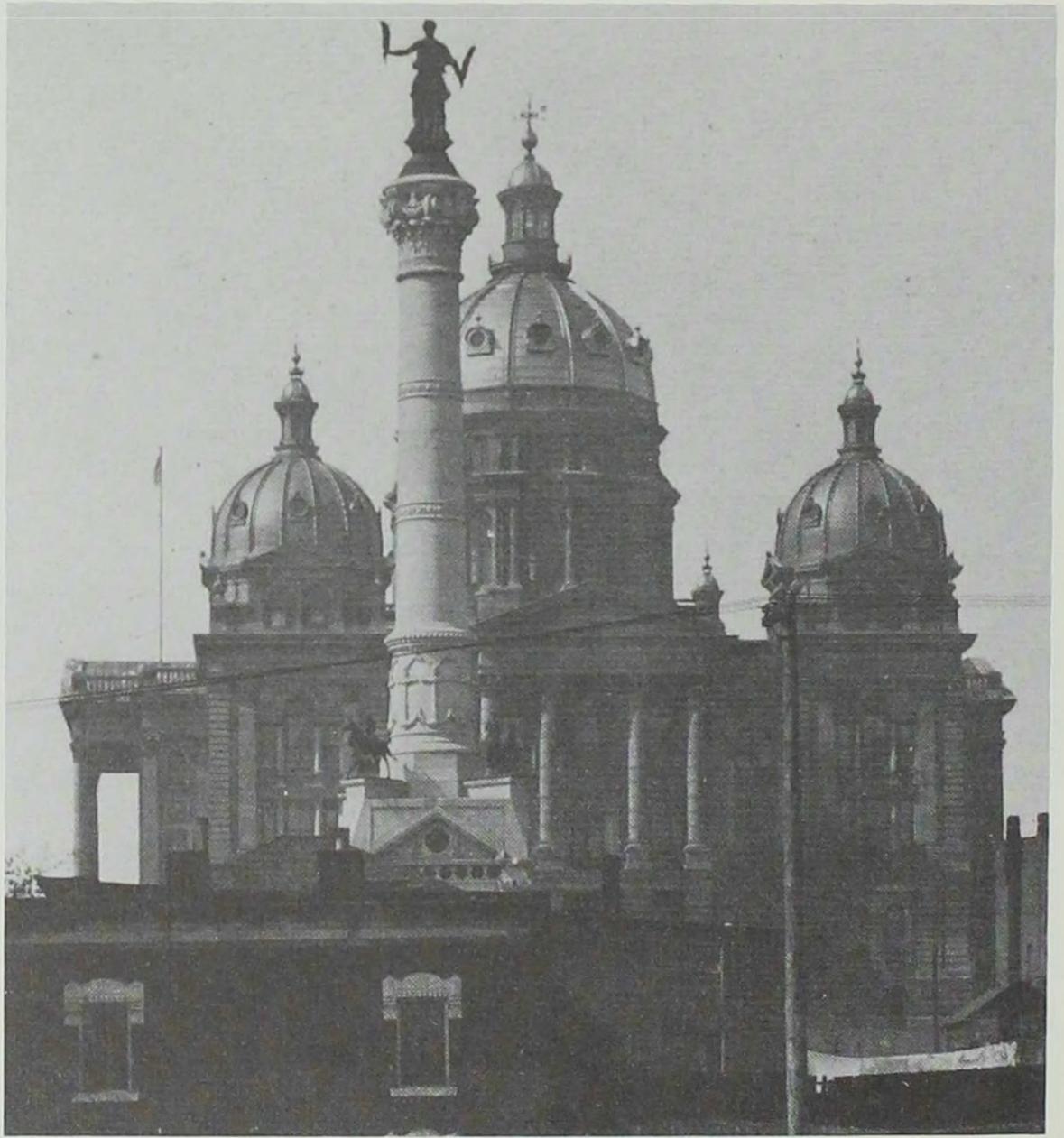
instance at least there was a serious division of opinion about the merit of the work. James Harlan was especially indignant about Rohl-Smith's interpretation of the group representing History. At a meeting in Des Moines in April 1894 the commission approved a motion by Harlan, "that History be so made as to represent an Iowa mother, not older than middle life in a sitting posture, in an attitude of instructing her son in the history of the war . . . and that the figure representing the son be not more than 10 years of age." The commission, however, reversed itself at its next meeting on a motion offered by Cora Weed of Muscatine. Two negative votes were recorded on this action. Harlan also objected to the figure of Iowa which in a speech several years later he called a "misconception" executed by an artist "born and educated in the north of Europe." Further indication of dissatisfaction with the artwork on the monument was indicated in a 1913 speech by Edgar Harlan, curator of the Historical Department of Iowa, in which he argued that if this monument were moved away from its present crowded location to a spacious setting it "[would] be regarded as the deliberate artistic expression of the generation producing it *and even if any slight deficiency of artistic merit then remain*, [emphasis added] the whole will be of too sacred a character to be touched by other hands."

Cora Weed, on the other hand, gave the allegorical figures of History and Iowa lavish praise in her 1898 *Hand Book for Iowa Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument*. She said that

*Opposite: (top) Donelson, a bas-relief on the east side of the monument, depicts a victory highlighted by the charge of the Second Iowa Infantry; (bottom left) General John M. Corse, one of the four equestrian figures on the monument; (bottom right) Infantryman, a statue of Shelby Norman, who fell at Wilson's Creek in August 1861. This statue is found on the northeast corner of the monument. At the other three points are statues representing the artilleryman, the sailor, and the cavalryman.*



*A photographic indication of why proposals were often made to move the monument to a more spacious location. One of the proposals, made by the Allison Memorial Commission in 1913, would have enlarged the capitol grounds and offered greater and more varied opportunities for viewing the monument.*



these two figures were the only ones on the monument which afforded the artist "full scope for his genius." History, she described as a "stern, inflexible, relentless chronicler of events, reminding one of Michael Angelo's Sybils, and even of the Sphinx." As History stares into the limitless future she is oblivious to the story of the war being offered her by the youth at her side. The figure of Iowa, Weed rhapsodized, is reminiscent of "the glorious goddesses on the frieze of the Parthenon." Her refined beauty of soul along with her "closed eyes, earnest brow and sensitive mouth" all convey the idea of Maternity. Her pose suggests "longing, waiting motherhood, with bounteous gifts for all her offspring." Weed pronounced this figure a true masterpiece of classical art. Differences of opinion among commission members over Rohl-Smith's work probably account for the fact that the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument was not dedicated until 1945.

There was also continuing unhappiness over the location of the monument on the small lot across the street from the capitol. The G.A.R. in 1911 complained that it was "almost an insult to the men it was intended to honor to let the monument remain in its present position." This group backed an effort to move the monument to the riverfront on the east side between Walnut and Locust. The Des Moines City Council offered to give the land if the legislature would pay for the monument's relocation. State officials, however, were cool to the idea and refused to cooperate.

Another proposal to move the monument to the end of a mall east of the capitol was made by the Allison Memorial Commission in 1913 in its plan for enlargement of the capitol grounds.

The proposed location would allow a clear view of the monument from all four sides and, in addition, there would be plenty of surrounding space for military festivities or parades. The G.A.R., however, opposed moving the monument to any location other than the riverfront. Other groups urged leaving the monument at its present site, pointing out that it might be greatly damaged in moving. By 1917 the capitol grounds had been enlarged and the site where the monument stands cleared of abutting buildings and debris. The G.A.R. at this time decided that the monument should not be moved. Even Harriet Ketcham's eighty-year-old husband, William, sent word from his home in Missouri that the monument should be left on its present site.

Despite the commission's hope of erecting a memorial which would last for centuries this monument is fast deteriorating due to lack of care. The stone needs pointing and the bronze work is being eaten by corrosive elements in the atmosphere. If it is to be saved — and it surely should be — immediate first aid is needed. □

#### Note on Sources

The manuscripts collection of the State Historical Society of Iowa has a complete set of photographs of the designs submitted to the Monument Commission. The collection is entitled "Entries for Iowa Soldiers' Memorial Monument Competition." One should note also Cora Chaplin Weed, comp., *Hand Book for Iowa Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument* (1898), and Edgar R. Harlan, *Proposed Improvement of the Iowa State Capitol Grounds* (Des Moines, Iowa, 1913). Photographs accompanying the two articles for which sources were not indicated were drawn from the two above-mentioned books. Key newspaper articles about Harriet Ketcham appeared in the *Burlington Hawkeye*, the *Mount Pleasant Journal*, the *Des Moines Register*, and the *Davenport Gazette*. James Harlan's piece, "The Iowa Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument," which appeared in the *Midland Monthly* 5 (February 1890):99-113, should also be noted.

# An Intellectual Centennial for Iowa City

## The No Name Club Reaches 100

*Editor's Note: This article is based primarily upon a paper by Mary Louise Lawyer delivered to the members of the N.N. Club in 1961. The occasion was the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the club. The Lawyer paper was revised and updated by members of the State Historical Society of Iowa's publications staff with generous help and support from the club's current historian, Winifred Scott.*

This year, 1986, marks the one hundredth anniversary of the founding of the No Name Club, Iowa City's second oldest literary society. Only the Nineteenth Century Club has had a longer continuous existence. In its origins, the No Name Club might be said to have been a by-product of the Civil War, which produced great changes in the lives of many American women. Forced out of their "domestic tranquility" by manpower shortages during the war into fields and areas not previously entered by women, many women in the post-war era desired more out of life generally.

A woman's congress convened in New York City in 1868 had brought together leading educators and professional women from throughout the United States. They had urged systematic study for all women, suggesting joint efforts rather than individual study. Thus was the idea of women's clubs born.

After this congress, similar ones were held annually in various large cities of the United States and, in 1885, one took place in Des Moines. Attending this congress was a promi-

nent Iowa City woman, Mrs. Emma Haddock (the first woman ever admitted to practice in the United States courts). Upon her return from Des Moines, Mrs. Haddock was full of enthusiasm for the creation of a new club in Iowa City — the Nineteenth Century Club had been organized three years earlier.

Thus in February 1886, Mrs. Haddock and twelve of her friends organized a new club for "mutual improvement and the study of history and literature." That first year, under the presidency of Miss M. Murray, they met spasmodically, engaging in a study of early

### N.N. CLUB

100th Anniversary  
1886 - 1986



IOWA CITY, IOWA  
1985 - 1986



Mrs. Thomas C. Carson, in whose home the N.N. Club was first proposed in 1886. (SHSI)

American women writers. A new president, Mrs. Gower, was elected in July 1886, and in December of that year there was much discussion over the naming of the club. Mrs. Haddock preferred the name "Sigourney Club" to honor a well-known woman poet of the mid-nineteenth century but her motion to that effect was defeated. Another motion called for the club to be named the "New Nineteenth Century," but that one lost as well. No decision was reached on the name at the January 1887 meeting but, on 1 February 1887, it was

decided unanimously to call it the "N.N. (No Name) Club," which was supposedly taken from Jules Verne's "Nemo."

The first printed program appeared in 1887. Its fly-leaf contained "Rules for guidance and help to new clubs," which had been laid down by the Chicago Browning Club. They appeared in the 1888 program as follows:

- 1 — Aim to *study*, not create, literature.
- 2 — Avoid red tape and parliamentary slang.
- 3 — Let but one talk at a time and that one, to the matter in hand.
- 4 — Start no side conferences; whispering is poor wisdom, and bad manners.
- 5 — Come prepared. Let the work be laid out systematically, in deliberate course of reading and study.
- 6 — Let papers be short. Beware of long quotations. "Brevity is the soul of wit."
- 7 — Be as willing to expose ignorance as to parade knowledge.
- 8 — Aim not to exhaust, but to open the theme. Incite curiosity. Provoke home reading.
- 9 — Begin and close to the minute.
- 10 — Meet all discouragements with grit and industry. Rise superior to numbers; for the kingdom of culture, like the kingdom of God, comes without observations.

Also in this 1888 document appeared the program order which was to be followed for many years:

- History . . . Thirty minutes.
- Conversation . . . Fifteen minutes.
- Literary . . . Thirty minutes.



The Thomas C. Carson home, 906 East College Street, Iowa City, Iowa. It was built around 1870 and is now the Alpha Phi sorority house. (SHSI)

Quotations from Literary Subject of the Day . . . Ten minutes.  
 Conversation . . . Fifteen minutes.

The history papers of the first year dealt with the United States presidential administrations beginning with Washington's and running through that of Cleveland. The literary papers took up the lives and works of English and American writers, including Helen Hunt Jackson, Bayard Taylor, Tennyson, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, the Brownings, Carlyle, and George Eliot. In addition, special papers were presented on the "Higher Education of Girls," the "History of Woman's Advancement in this Century," "Home Duties and Literary Culture," and "Edison, Contribution to Applied

Sciences."

Mrs. Chalfant, a charter member, presented the club with a gavel and she requested that the retiring president hand it over to her successor at the opening fall meeting of each year. She suggested that the "custom . . . be continued as long as the club exists." Apparently the club survived the gavel, for later club minutes frequently stated that "the *imaginary* gavel was handed to the new president by the former one." (Recently, Irving Weber, noted Iowa City columnist and historian, presented to the N.N. Club members a gavel which had a note attached indicating that it had been given to Mrs. Edward H. (Grace Burge) Weber when she was president of the club in 1925. It may well have been the "imaginary" gavel.)

Many rules were set up in those early days and some of them are still observed:

- 1 — Members shall draw for their papers at the annual business meeting.
- 2 — Only the hostess and program reader may invite guests.
- 3 — N.N. has precedence over any other engagement.
- 4 — Absences should be excused — only illness and absence from town constitute legitimate excuses.
- 5 — Rules and regulations shall be read at the first meeting of the year for the benefit of new members.



In the center is Mrs. Byron Lambert, a member of the N.N. Club, who became very involved in the "Bundles for Britain" program during the Second World War. (SHSI)

For a time a fine of \$.25 was levied for an unexcused absence and \$.05 was levied for tardiness. The minutes recorded names of absentees and their excuses, and sometimes stated that those with unexcused absences might well forfeit membership. During the 1890s, Miss Mira Troth was repeatedly elected secretary. Her minutes were invariably introduced in the same piquant fashion. She always wrote "*Pursuant to adjournment* N.N. Club met at the home of Mrs. \_\_\_\_." The designated "conversation" on each topic sometimes strayed from the subject, which led a Mrs. Barrett, wife of the Presbyterian minister, to suggest at one point that a set of questions pertaining to the subsequent program be handed to members for study and thus allow them to prepare for real discussion. A later innovation was the appointment of a referee as an authority on pronunciation. The term of appointment was for five meetings and the referee was actually required to give a report at the end of each meeting.

In 1893 three women were appointed to draw up a constitution. The document which they drew up has been seldom amended and basically remains in use to this day. The three members were Mrs. Haddock and Mrs. Barrett, founding spirits of the N.N. Club, and a Mrs. McGee. In that same year, 1893, the club joined the newly organized State Federation of Women's Clubs, having sent delegates to Des Moines for the federation's first meeting. The connection with the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs lasted until 6 October 1942 when the N.N. Club withdrew its membership in that organization.

By 1901 there was some talk of enlarging the membership which had been initially set at twenty-five. Since in the average home of the time one could not entertain more than that number, the group decided instead to sponsor a new club — the "Art Circle" which still exists and which recently celebrated its eighty-fifth anniversary.

While the literary programs continued in much the same form throughout the early years of the twentieth century, the historical papers dealt with a variety of topics such as civil service reform, conditions relating to child labor laws and to the wages of women workers, and to such statewide programs as "child saving, the care of the aged poor, [and] the care of defectives and tramps."

Over the years members of the N.N. Club took a decided interest in bettering local conditions. In the early years of the century they subscribed to scholarship and loan funds, passed resolutions approving the election of women to the school board, and established committees to be sent to Iowa City grade schools to investigate conveniences for the children. One committee was sent to the mayor of Iowa City to discuss the care of Oakland Cemetery. The mayor agreed that some organization should be created for maintaining the cemetery, so, with representatives from the N.N. Club and from other women's clubs, the Improvement League was formed which looked after the cemetery and took care of its needs until the city took over the responsibility for perpetual care.

The minutes of 1914 made first mention of an annual guest day with an outside speaker. Outside speakers for some years thereafter were drawn from the English or history departments of the State University.

The war years certainly changed things for the club. The program for 1917, for example, called for a study of Russian literature but in the midst of the war, members were asked to read from books on Russia rather than deliver papers and the listeners were urged to work on sewing or knitting for the Red Cross during the reading. Prior to that time, handwork had been frowned upon as diverting attention from the presentations.

By 1917 much was being done by the club to aid war work. At one point \$5.00 per member over and above dues were assessed for Near



Mary Louise Lawyer, whose paper entitled "Our Seventy-fifth" summed up the history and achievements of the N.N. Club through 1961. (SHSI)

East Relief. Similar assessments took care of an Armenian orphan or paid for soldiers' magazine subscriptions. Nor was local philanthropy forgotten. Frequently members answered roll call by reporting the number of towels hemmed by the Iowa blind which they wished to purchase. This was a statewide federation project.

By 1921 the hostess at each meeting was allowed to serve something in the way of simple refreshments. The question of light refreshments at the meetings had arisen as early as 1893 but had been apparently left unresolved. The added socializing added to the enjoyment of the club's membership which

was made up of faculty wives and townswomen from various parts of town and from different churches who seldom met together except at the N.N. Club.

A long continued custom was the annual spring dinner at which husbands of the members were guests. In 1929 such a dinner was held at the home of Professor and Mrs. Rollin Perkins. Since it was in May preceding the selection of presidential candidates, a straw vote was taken, which indicated rather clearly the political leanings of the members. Twenty votes were cast for Hoover, ten for Lowden, five for Dawes, two for Al Smith, and one for an unidentified husband. At the club meeting following the November election that year, the

roll call was answered by stating whether or not members had voted. One hundred percent of the members indicated they had been to the polls.

The job of the Program Committee had once been formidable. They had originally presented planned programs for approval which were often severely criticized by the club members and sometimes given back to the committee to be revised (often more than once). In 1935, when Mrs. Milford Barnes was chairman of the Program Committee, a program based on biographical study was approved, and that general pattern has been followed to the present day. It has proved to be a varied and well balanced approach for in the



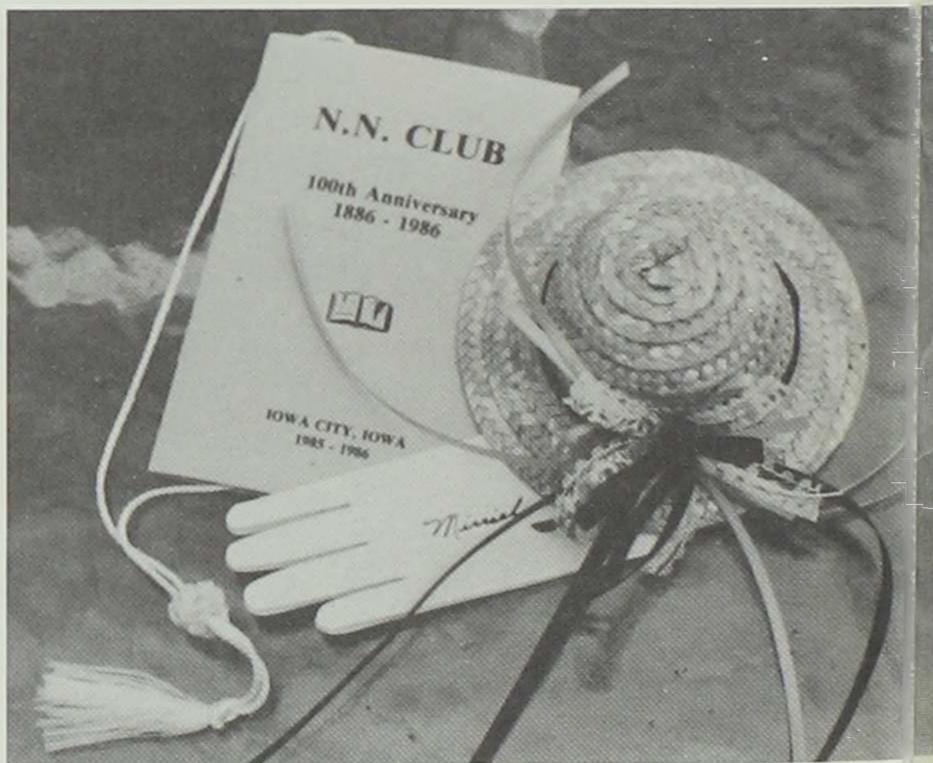
*N.N. Club, 1985-1986: (top row) Jean Brown, Jackie Knapp, June Wurster, Edna Crawford, Beverly Blades, Mary Frances Ramsey, Ann Bagford, Leota Rice, Jean Ann Goff, Sue Rollins, Marilyn Osborne, Carol Lach; (middle row) Harriett Carpenter, Maude Rate, Margaret Erbe, Mary Top, Marcy Fisher, Joan Summerwill, Betty Fernandez, Velma Stuit, Mirriel Bedell; (front row) Merri Rowden, Dorie Schultheiss, Darlyne Neff, Donna Epley, Margaret Kennedy, Winnie Scott; (not pictured) Aileen Zopf, Sue Hancher, Mary Hale, Shirley Binney. (courtesy Winifred Scott)*

biographies of great and sometimes not-so-great men and women the members have learned much of literature, art, history, music, science, medicine, religion, and diplomacy.

During the Second World War, as in the First World War, members were not just concerned with literary study. Minutes of wartime meetings show that the club served as a recruiting ground for members who could do Red Cross surgical dressings or serve as hostesses in the local U.S.O. The club was proud and gratified when one of its members, Mrs. Byron Lambert, received recognition from the British government for her work in the "Bundles for Britain" campaign.

The club over the years has included in its ranks a number of academic wives. The membership, however, has retained a surprising stability. Though occasionally wives accompanying their husbands on leave requested club leave and resignations came from women departing Iowa City for other climes, the turnover has not been great. The last new members (two) were taken into the club in 1983. Of the twenty-five current members of the club, seventeen became members between 1970 and 1980. The oldest active member became a member in 1954. Eight honorary members are included on the present membership rolls of the club. (Members of long standing are elevated to honorary membership, a status which exempts them from the formal presentation of papers. It should be noted, however, that the status exempts but does not prevent honorary members from active participation in the club. At least one paper was presented in the past year by an honorary member.)

The programs over the years have become more pointed as the biographical review has given more focus to the meetings. In recent years there has been perhaps a greater emphasis on contemporary figures but the spectrum of interests (business, literature, science, politics, history, etc.) has remained a broad one.



Anything one hundred years old might be considered an antique, yet age alone is not always a sufficient basis for a valid judgment. For an old piece of furniture to be classed as a true antique, it must have beauty of line and in addition should be of practical use. If clubs can be judged as chairs are judged, the N.N. Club is a real antique. Its history indicates it was built on good lines and that those lines have been maintained throughout the years. As to its practical use, in the early days it stimulated members to develop their minds by reading and study — and the goal of mental stimulation has been continuously present. For the women of the N.N. Club, "canned" amusements will never be a satisfactory substitute for the pleasures derived from an association of vibrant women devoted to "mutual improvement and the study of history and literature." □

#### Note on Sources

The sources for this article included the minute books of the N.N. Club, club programs, reports by club historians, and conversations with Winifred Scott, the club's current historian. The bulk of the N.N. Club materials are found in the manuscripts collection of the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City. The prime source for the first seventy-five years of the club remains the Mary Louise Lawyer paper delivered in 1961.

### CONTRIBUTORS

LOUISE ROSENFELD NOUN is a graduate of Grinnell College who did postgraduate work in art history at Radcliffe/Harvard. She is the author of *Strong-Minded Women, the Emergence of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Iowa*; a study of the Iowa-born sculptor, Abastenia St. Leger Eberle, which was published by the Des Moines Art Center; and several articles on Iowa women published in the

*Annals of Iowa*. She is an active feminist and a member of the Iowa Women's Hall of Fame.

MARY LOUISE LAWYER was a longtime member of the N.N. Club. Her paper delivered in 1961 on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the club was the primary source for the article in this issue of the *Palimpsest*.

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