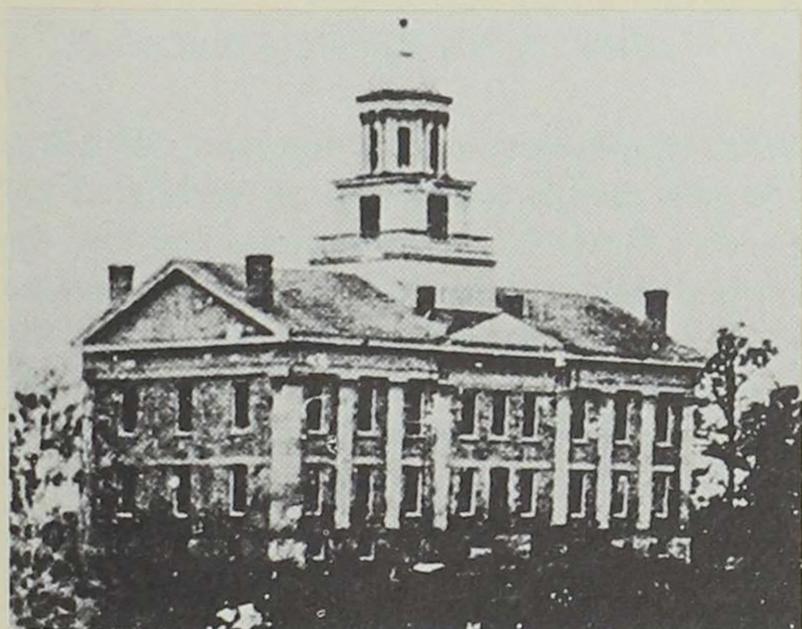


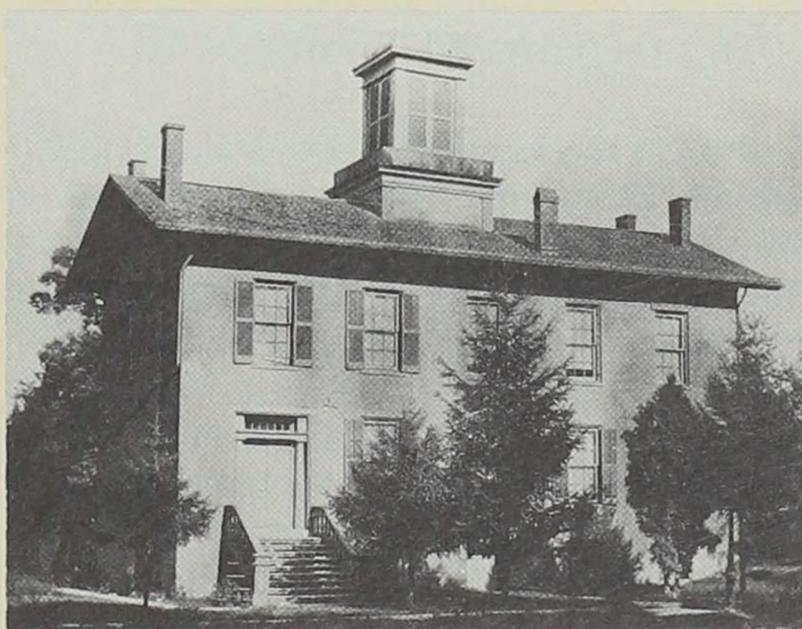
# Former Homes of the State Historical Society, 1857-1960

by Alan M. Schroder



THE OLD STONE CAPITOL, 1857

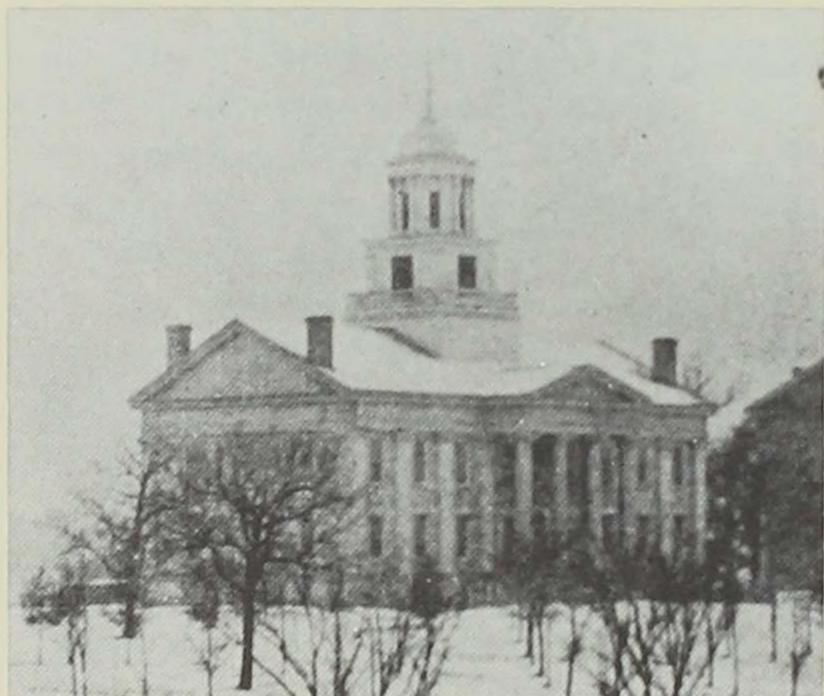
Not long after it was organized in February 1857, the State Historical Society of Iowa moved into its first home, a basement room in the southwest corner of the Old Stone Capitol that it shared with the State University of Iowa library. As the university library grew, however, it required more space, so in the fall of 1859 the society moved up to the former United States District Court Room on the first floor. The university's continuing growth prompted a second move in 1862, this time to the Normal School building, commonly known as the Mechanics Academy.



THE MECHANICS ACADEMY

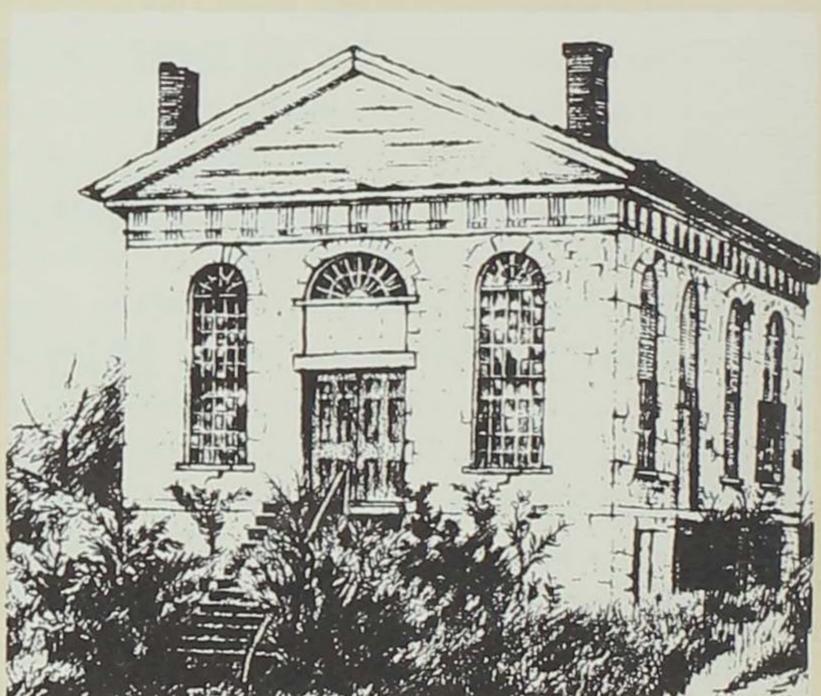
The move into the Mechanics Academy, on Linn Street between Iowa Avenue and Jefferson Street, provided the society with a considerable increase in space for its collections. But a dispute soon arose between the society's officers and the Rev. Samuel Storrs Howe—who had been the society's librarian and editor—over the use of part of the building. As a result, in 1864 the society petitioned the university for other quarters, and in March 1865 it was allowed to move back into the Old Stone Capitol.

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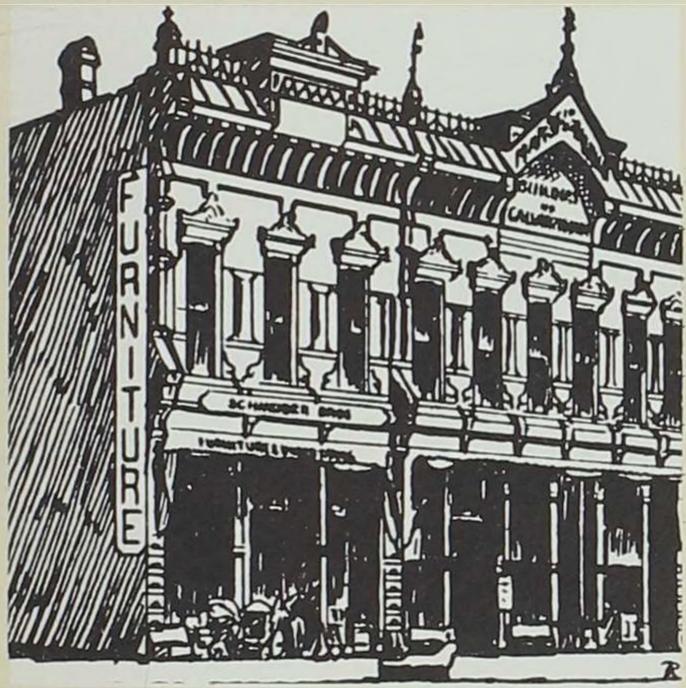
THE OLD STONE CAPITOL, 1865

The society's stay in the remodeled Old Capitol was brief. The society's collections were again sharing a room with the university library; part of the collections were in fact stored in the basement, where, the curators noted, they suffered from "damp, mold and moth." Continuing space problems and a dispute with the university over the ultimate control of the collections led the society to incorporate as a private nonprofit corporation and to seek a special appropriation from the Iowa General Assembly to provide the funding needed to secure its own quarters. When the appropriation passed in 1868, the society rented the Old Stone Church to house its collections.



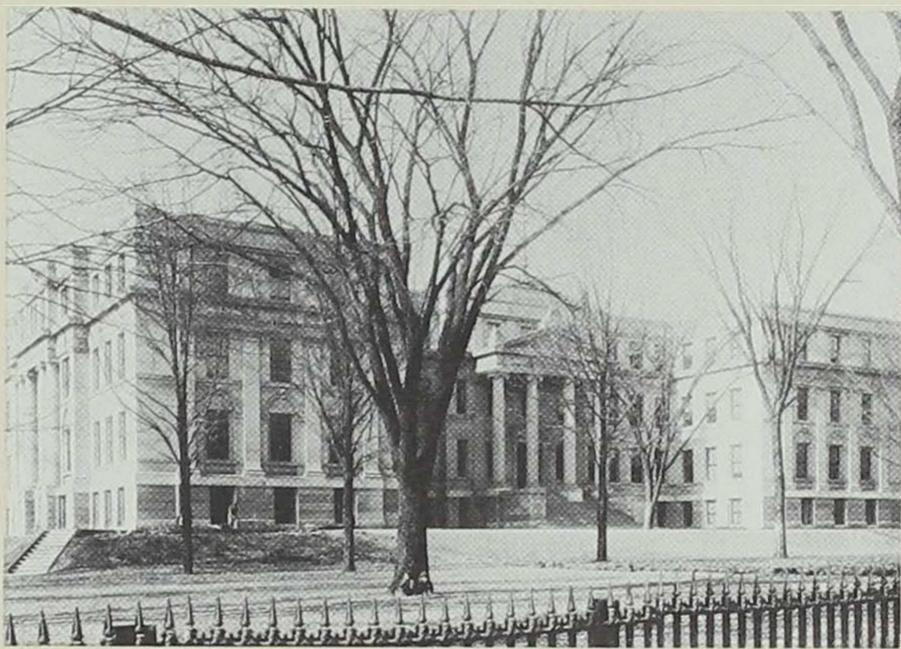
THE OLD STONE CHURCH

When the society moved into the Old Stone Church, on the north side of Burlington between Clinton and Capitol, the curators described their new exhibit area as a "pleasant room." A later biennial report noted that "the books are arranged in cases along the side walls, so formed as to make a shallow alcove at each window, and thus room is found for all except the large stock of public documents held for exchange. The battle flags, portraits, and other objects of historical interest are displayed on the walls above the book-cases, and in other cases upon the floor." The curators were not as complimentary toward the building itself, however. "The ancient edifice we occupy," they declared in 1875, "is rickety and crumbling and no first class earthquake or Vesuvian eruption would be necessary to entomb it." Their search for better quarters led them to a newly constructed iron-fronted brick building in downtown Iowa City.



THE WASHINGTON STREET ROOM

In 1882 the society moved into an eighty by thirty-five foot room on the second floor above Maresh and Holubar's hardware store at 210½ Washington Street (the store on the right in the above engraving). Later, a native Iowa Citian described the society's room as it was then: "In those days it was one of the few places which visiting relatives and friends just had to see. There was a whole museum of curios and of real relics like the Civil War flags, the tiny brass cannon which John Brown left as he passed through, etc., etc. The dear old curator, Mr. Lathrop, knew the complete history of every object and related it with gusto to visitors who had the time and interest to linger."



SCHAEFFER HALL

While the Washington Street room was a pleasant enough home for the society's collections, it clearly could not provide adequate room for a modern state historical society, and this was what Benjamin F. Shambaugh had in mind for the society when he became a member of its board of curators in 1897. Shambaugh, who was also a professor of political science at the university, sought to make the society into a major research and publishing institution, and to do so he led the society's effort to obtain rooms in the university's planned Hall of Liberal Arts, now Schaeffer Hall. When the building was completed in 1901 the society was allotted the south wing of the third floor for its new home (on the top floor, left, in the above photograph). The Historical Department had been established in Des Moines by this time, and it assumed the functions of an historical museum, so the society's new home was essentially a research library. Schaeffer Hall was to remain the society's home for the next six decades, until a fund drive by Superintendent William J. Petersen resulted in the construction of the society's current home, the Centennial Building, which was completed in 1960. □