

# You Gotta Know the Territory

## Material Culture from Territorial Iowa

by Michael O. Smith  
photos by Chuck Greiner



## People for the Land

*"So one of the things that is taught to us is to be free with everything we have. In those days food was regarded as one of the greatest gifts anyone could give; and so the food, if we have food, if we have plenty, we should not think only of ourselves, but of our people first."*

Youngbear (Mesquakie), interview

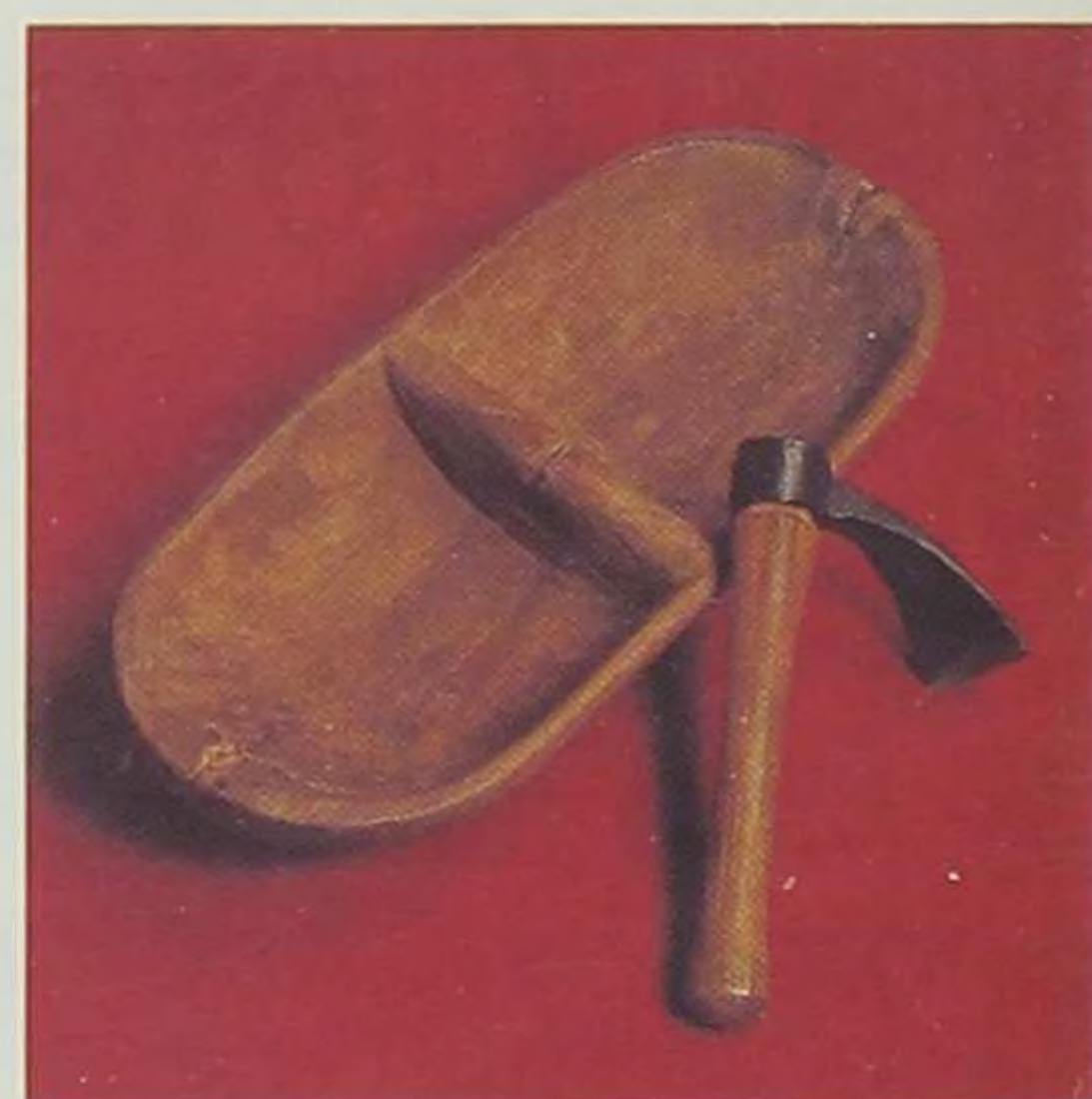
Several Indian tribes lived in territorial Iowa, with different languages, customs, and artistic expressions. But all tribes followed a common native ethic of sharing. Work and the products of hunting, fishing, gathering, and gardening were shared among kin and, on certain occasions, among larger groups.

During religious feasts, Mesquakie food was served in a bowl such as the one above. Communal sharing of food reinforces unity among participants. Today the Mesquakie in Tama County, Iowa, continue many of the customs that they followed 150 years ago.

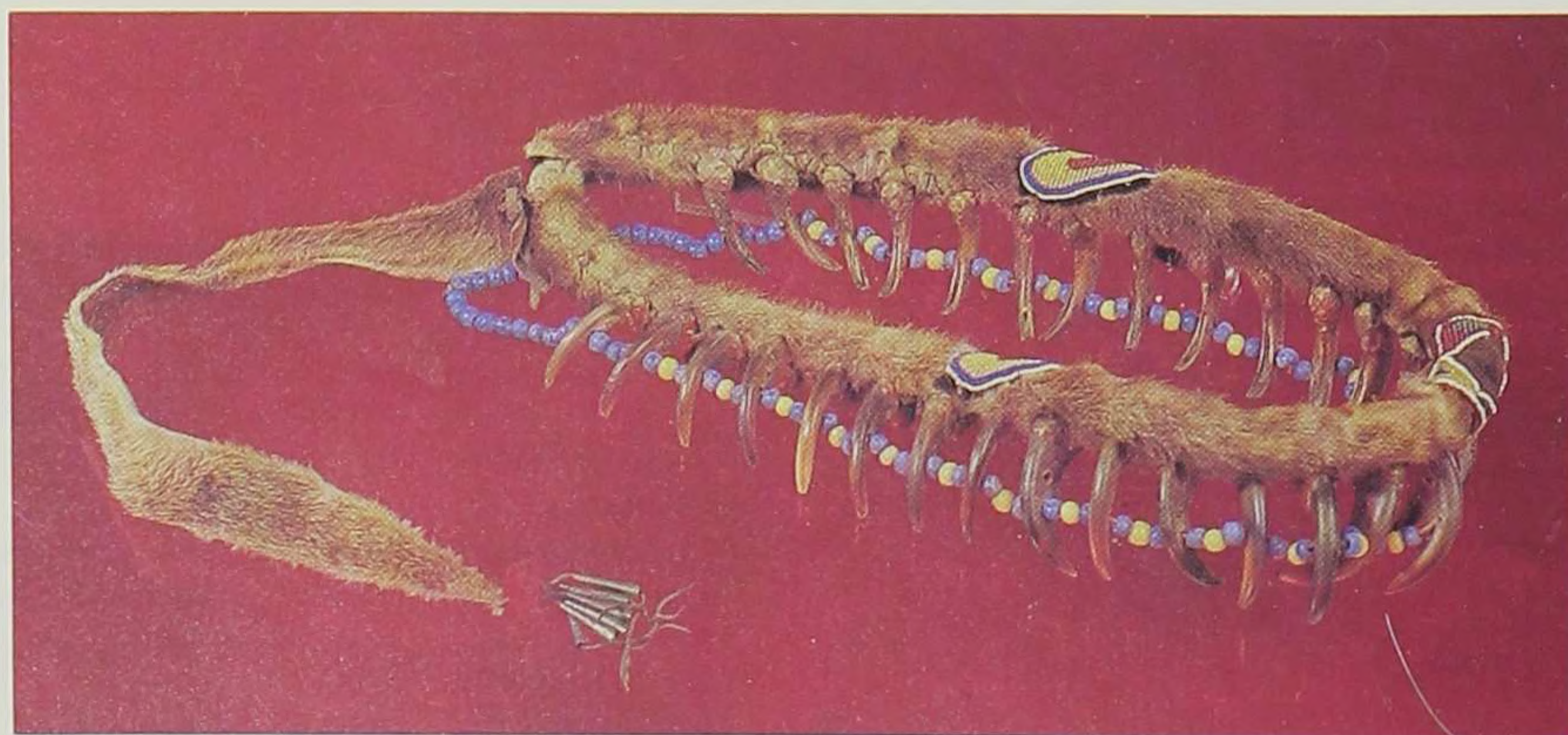


Within a tribe, governing was divided between military and civil tribal leaders. Work was divided between men, women, and children. Generally the men hunted and women gathered wild food and gardened. Through play and assigned tasks, children learned the skills they would need as adults. Men and women made the objects they used for everyday life and for ceremony.

Right: Men used axes, adzes, and specially forged "crooked knives" to sculpt objects of utility and ceremony, such as wooden bowls for serving food, spoons for ceremonial feasts, and dugout canoes. This Mesquakie hand adz was brought back to Iowa from Kansas in 1856, when the tribe bought land in Iowa for a permanent home.



Though not chosen for their military accomplishments, civil chiefs and other men of influence were often respected warriors. Clubs and bearclaw necklaces symbolized a warrior's status. Above: This club, a formidable weapon, may also have functioned as a leadership emblem. It was carried by Chief Keokuk's son, Moses. Below: Clan leaders and warriors of distinction wore bearclaw necklaces for ceremonial occasions.







Women produced the clothing worn by men, including leggings, moccasins for festive and daily wear, beaded garters, and ornamental bags worn on special occasions. Above: Detail of Mesquakie breechcloth, made of trade wool and seed beads. The breechcloth, part of a complete set of men's clothing, was probably made for a ceremonial occasion.



Many tribes of the Upper Mississippi River regions made and often traded ornamental bandolier bags. Left: Detail from Santee Sioux bandolier bag. Geometric designs are typical of Sioux design. Above: Detail from bandolier bag, possibly Mesquakie. Mesquakie used both abstract geometric and abstract floral designs.



*"Well, I played with dolls. . . . That is how one learns to sew, by practicing sewing for one's dolls."*

Anonymous Mesquakie woman



John Youngbear carved this Mesquakie doll from red cedar in the early 1900s.





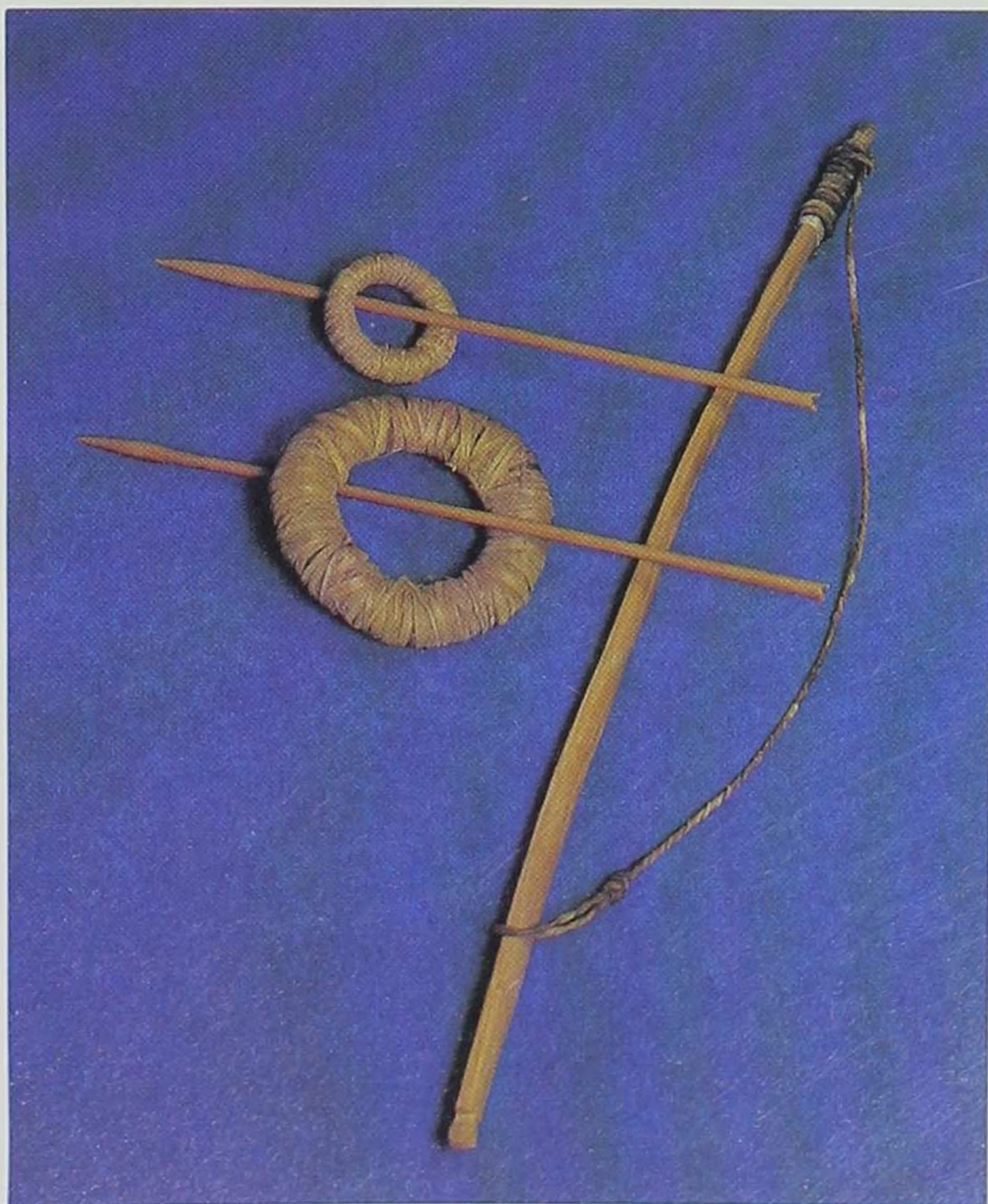
*"And when I was eleven years old I likewise continually watched [my mother] as she would make bags. 'Well, you try to make one,' she said to me. . . . And soon I knew how to make it very well."*

Women's tasks included weaving, preparing buckskin, and beadwork. Scraping buckskin hides removed the hair and softened the hide. Left: Basswood fiber and twine bag, hide scraper made from elk antler, and heddle with beadwork (all Mesquakie).

*"The first bow and arrow that was made and given to me was when I was eight years old. . . . I was told not to shoot at the dogs, horses, or people, and . . . I was taught to shoot the birds and rabbits and things to eat."*

Youngbear (Mesquakie), interview

Mesquakie boys practiced with small bows and blunt-tipped arrows by shooting at raffia-hoop targets rolling along the ground.





# Give and Take



Above: Native Americans traded for necessities that made their work easier — such as this Green River steel skinning knife and wool blanket cloth (then often decorated by native women with silk ribbons or beadwork). They also traded for items of adornment or status, such as this silver peace medal from the American Fur Company, the flintlock pistol, and the pipe tomahawk.

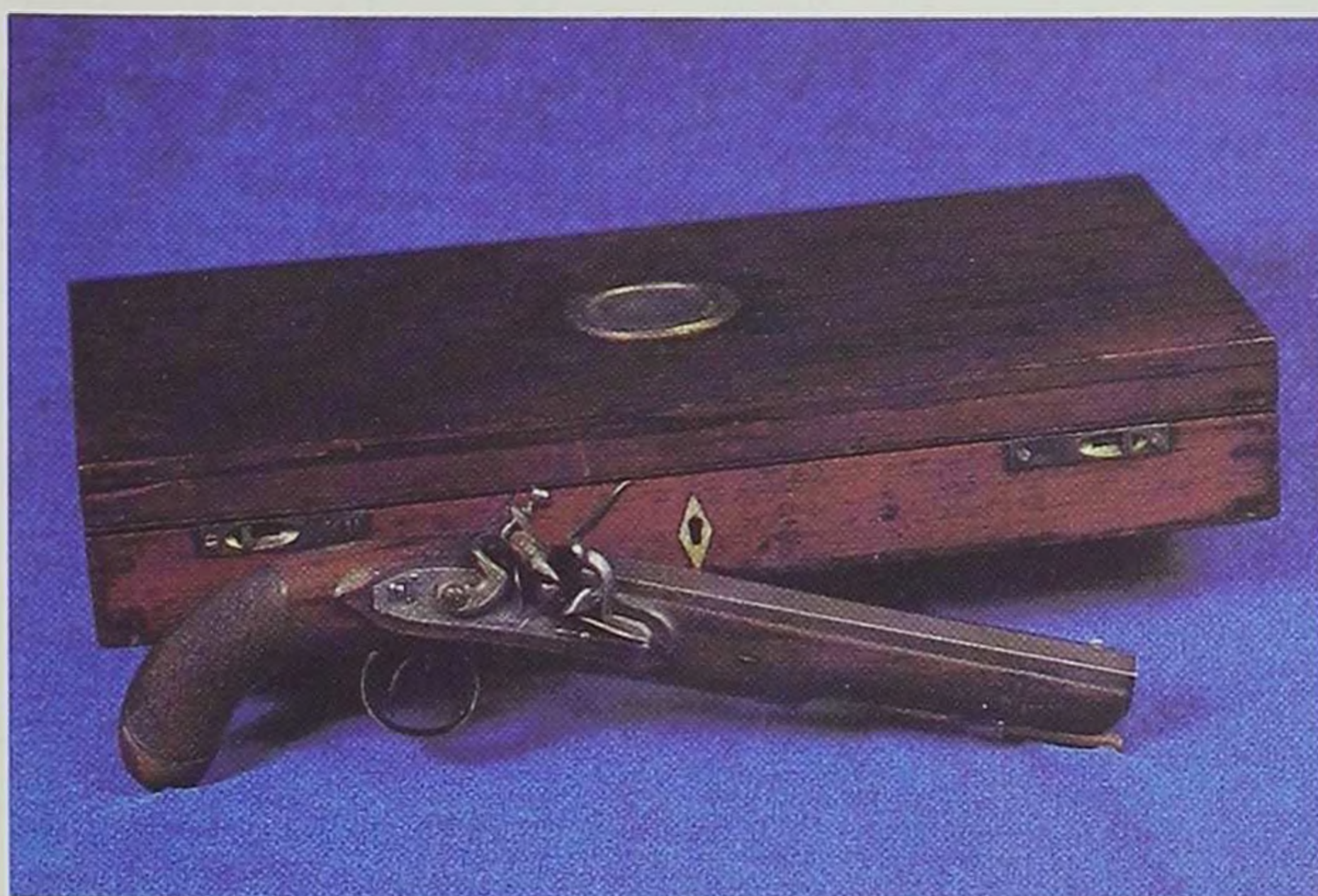


The federal Indian agent's job was to enforce policies and treaties that removed tribes from their land, while protecting native rights under those treaties. As agent, he might accompany tribal leaders to Washington for treaty signings, where peace medals with the president's image (left) were often given to the Indian leaders.

The army in territorial Iowa also enforced federal policies and treaties and maintained law and order. But a soldier probably used this hoe blade and brace and bit (right) more than he used the 1841 Hall cavalry carbine. Basically the army explored and mapped the land, built forts, and raised food. A soldier's life was filled with boredom, hard labor, and little action or glory.



By the 1830s the fur trade in Iowa had ended, but traders such as Colonel George Davenport at Fort Armstrong continued to supply American or European manufactured goods on credit to native tribes. Cash replaced furs as the medium of exchange. Goods exchanged resulted in wealth. Each culture perceived wealth differently. What one culture needed or valued was not necessarily useful or valuable to the other.



George Davenport used the wealth he accumulated through the fur trade to buy luxury or status items. For instance, only "gentlemen" owned dueling pistols. Davenport's pistol (above) and his sword (right) reinforced his position in the frontier community that bore his name. His children inherited his wealth; silver punch urn (upper right) was bought by Davenport's son George L. Davenport.

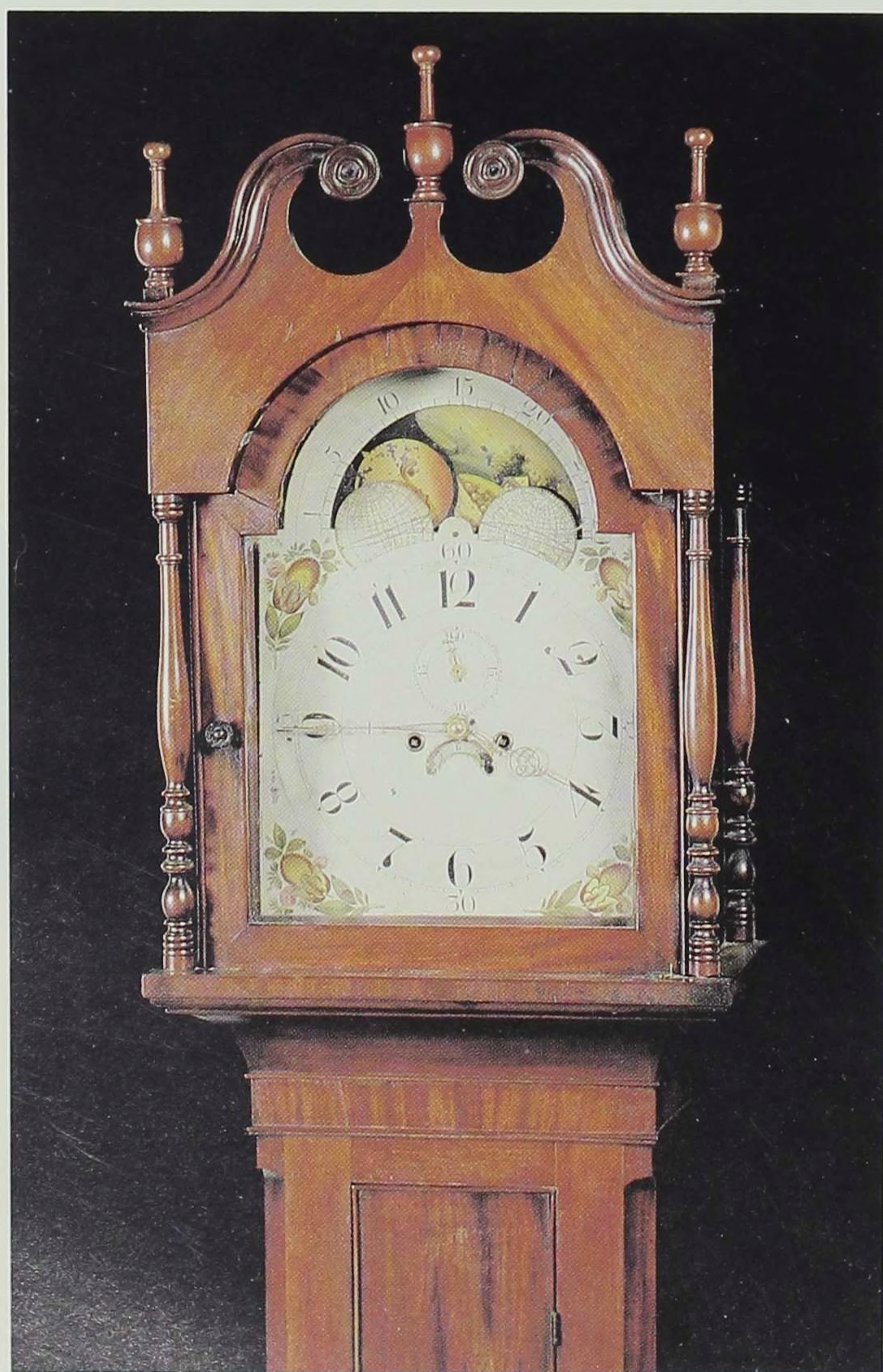




# On the Road Again

*"We are finding it a little rough to have to give away a lot of things you have owned since you can remember, things valuable to yourself only."*

Mary Alice Shutes, diary



Whether coming by train, steamboat, or wagon, a first step for emigrants moving to Iowa was to decide what could be taken along. Here are some of the possessions emigrants chose to bring with them to their new homes.

Left: As a carpenter in Salem County, Indiana, Martin McDaniel had received this eight-foot mahogany clock as payment for work. He brought it to Iowa in 1839.

Opposite, clockwise from upper left:

When Captain Paul Dahlberg moved from Sweden to Iowa in 1843, he brought this 1827 map (printed in Swedish).

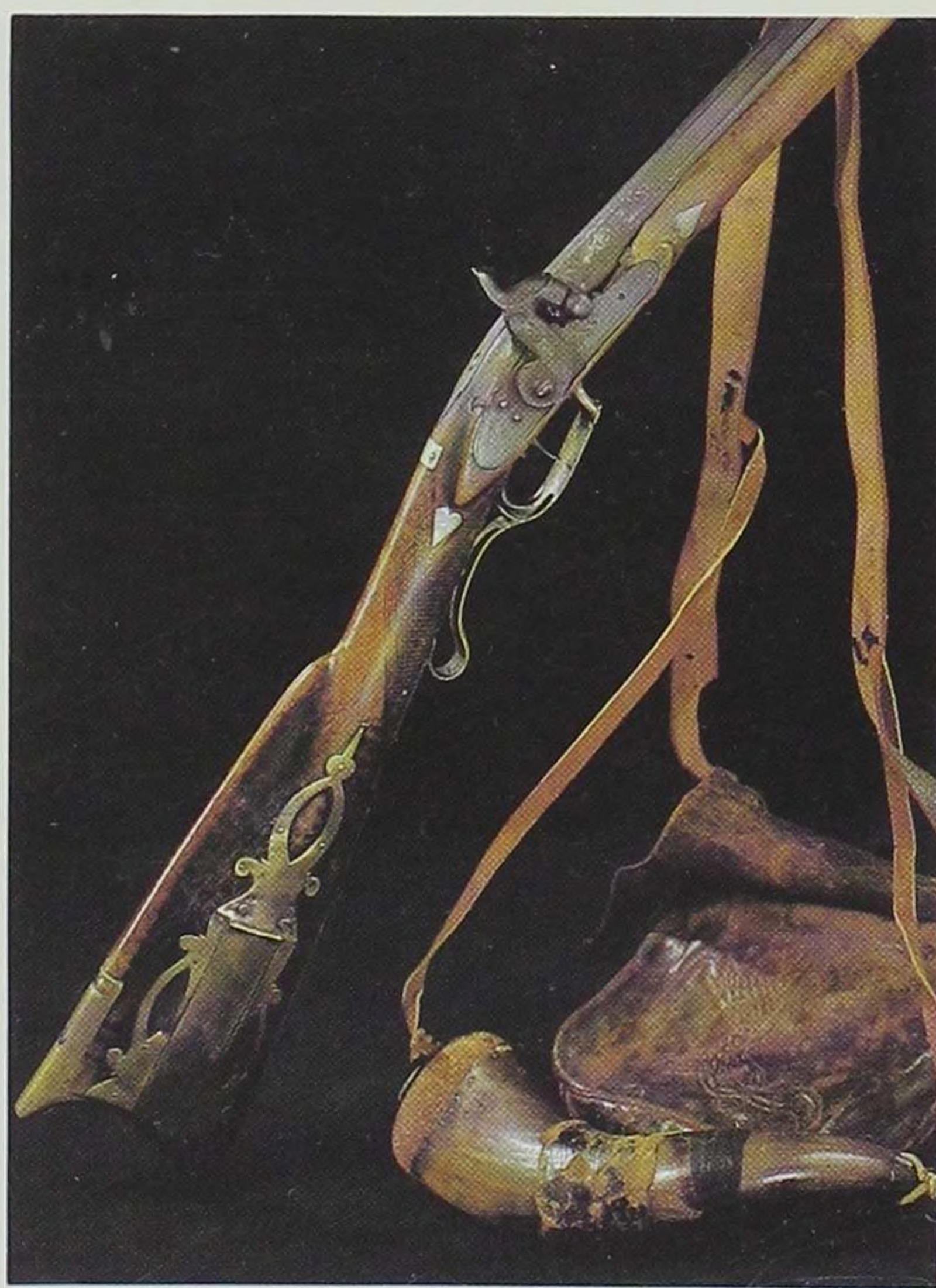
In Indiana, a Mr. Wittenmyer traded an extra farm wagon for this rifle and accoutrements when he came to Iowa in the 1840s. A bird design appears on the leather pouch.

Martha Taylor made this cotton appliqué quilt in Decatur County, Indiana, in the 1830s. She brought it to Iowa.

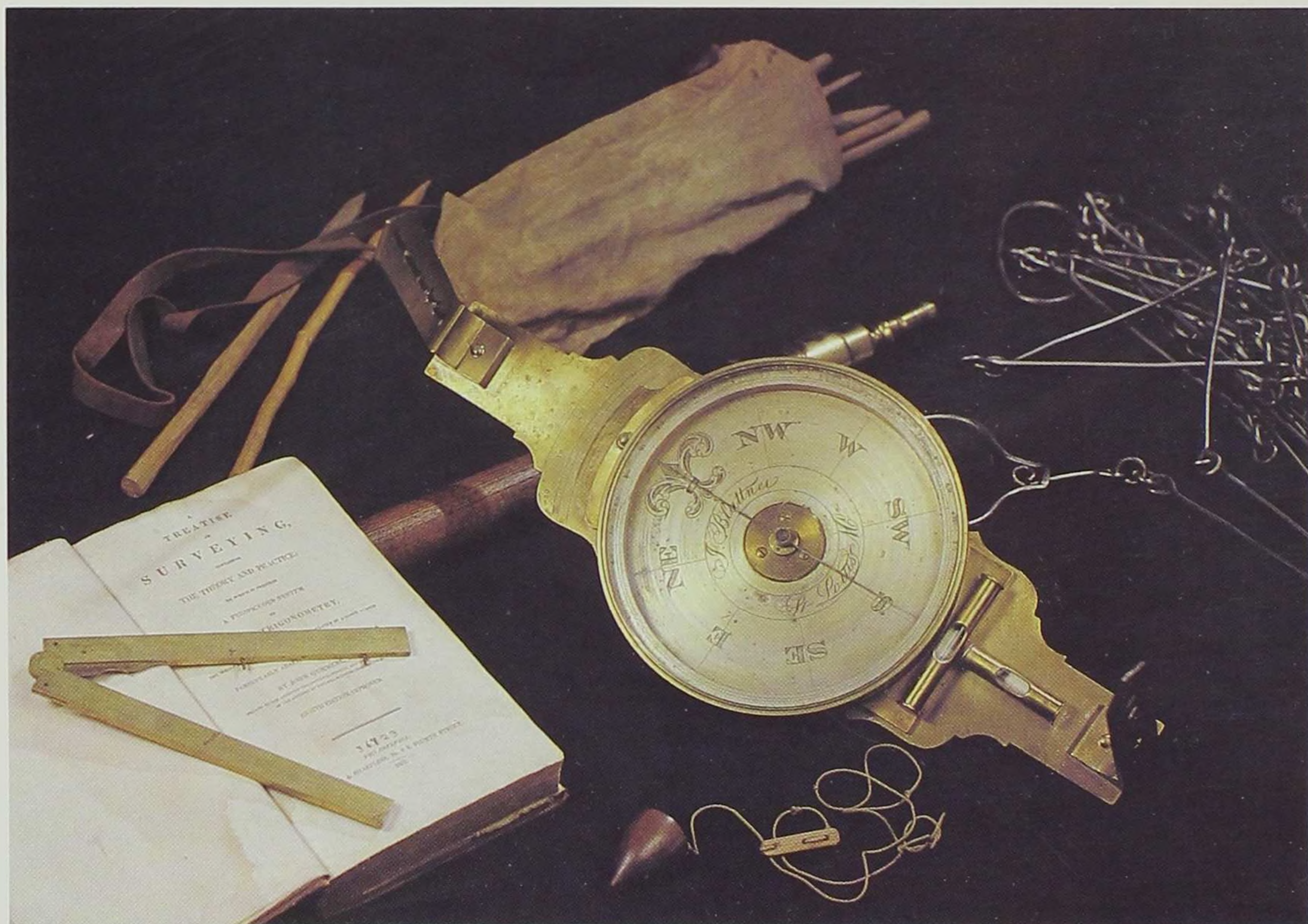
In Ross County, Ohio, Ann Dean had this wool and linen coverlet woven in 1846 for the birth of her son. The next year she brought it with her to her new home in Des Moines.

Rhoda Chaplin Parker sat in this maple side chair in a wagon from New York to Iowa in 1840. The family of Abraham Henkle used this flax hackle first in Virginia, then moved it with them to Illinois in 1829, and then to Iowa in 1836. In 1844 in Ohio, V.R. Van Hynning packed up his wooden leather vise. Seated at a chair, Van Hynning used the vise to hold leather steady while he worked on it.









## Law of the Land

Under the Land Ordinance of 1785, recently acquired public lands had to be surveyed before they were sold. Federal surveyors divided the land in orderly, square parcels called townships and sections.

Above: A survey crew measured and marked the land and made careful notes of soil and timber types, waterways, mineral deposits, and existing towns. Tools included (from left) ruler, *A Treatise on Surveying*, plumb bob, jacob's staff and compass, survey pins, and chain.

Left: Ira Cook, Iowa surveyor in the 1840s and 1850s.



# Farmer-Capitalist

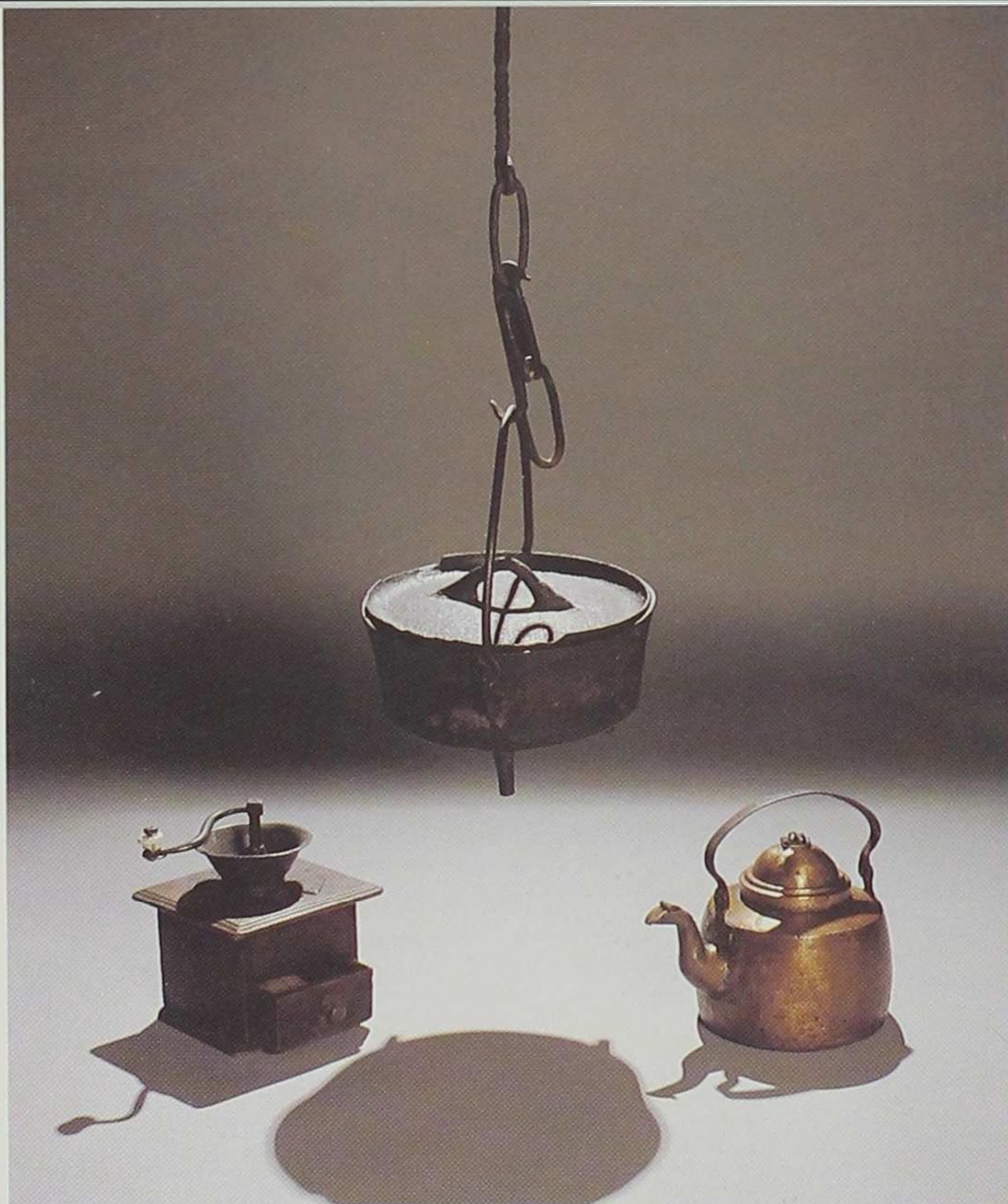
*"The best business, or surest one in this country, I think is that of farming. It is only necessary for you to go out a few miles from town and to make a selection of the best land the sun ever shone upon for your farm, build your house, and make your fence, plow your ground, and live unmolested, as regards payment for perhaps 2 or 3 years: then you will have a farm of 160 acres, worth several thousand dollars, for which you will have to pay but \$200."*

Joseph Fales, letter



After building some kind of shelter, the pioneer farmer began plowing. Breaking the prairie sod was a major step; what had been an investment in land now would become a farm. Endless seasonal work and the constant need to expand and fence fields often required the man in the farm family to turn to other family members or neighbors for help. Some tasks were hired out, if the cash was available. Above: Grain shovel and breaking plow with horn handles.





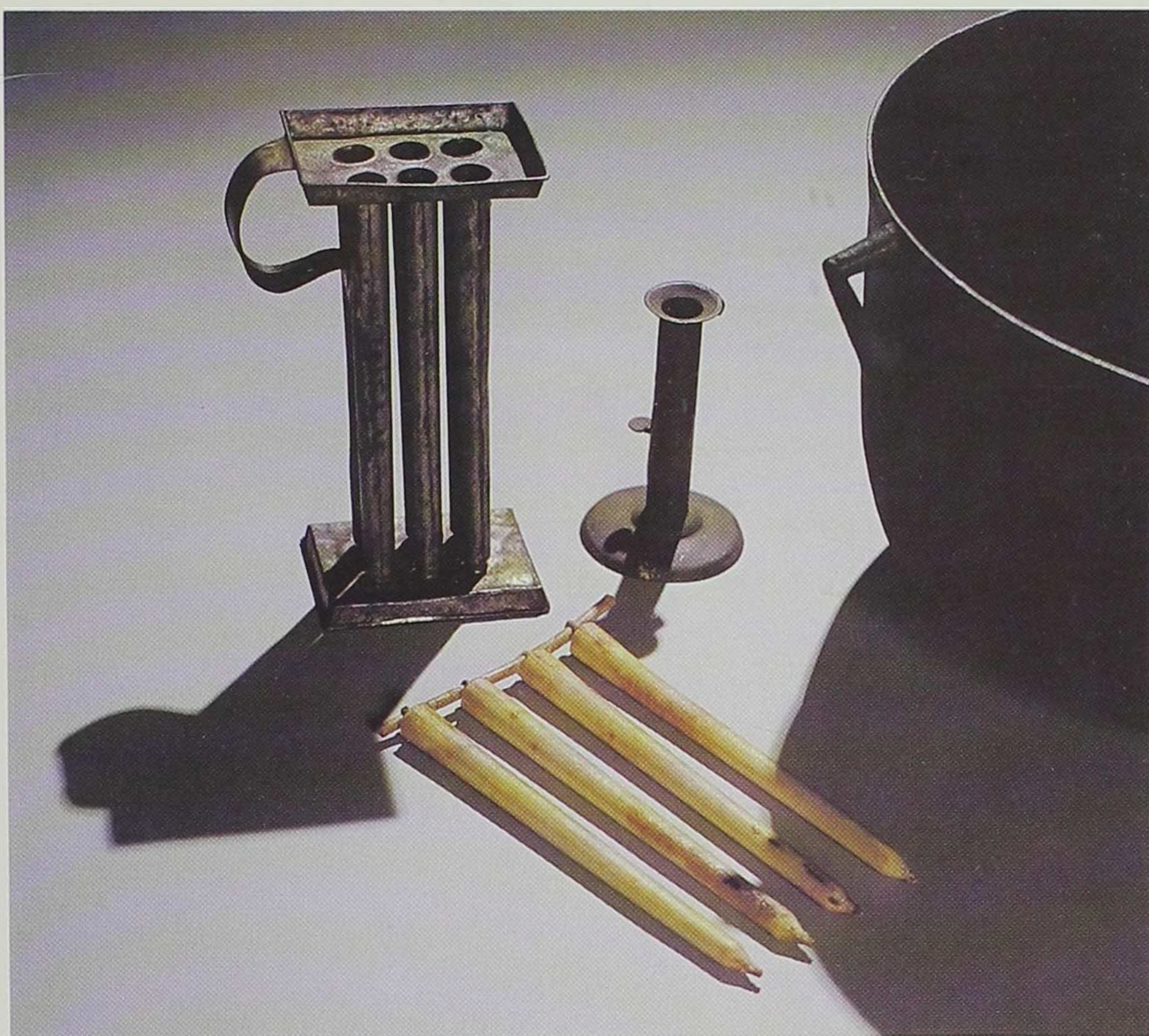
In 1842 Kitturah Belknap wrote in her diary, "Now my name is out as a good cook so am alright as good cooking makes good friends." Basic cooking equipment included (above) a coffee mill, copper hot water kettle, and, hanging from a trammel, a cast-iron Dutch oven, in which one fried venison, roasted chicken, and baked bread. Women earned cash (sometimes the only family income) by selling their garden produce, eggs, butter, cheese, and honey. Below: bee hive, butter churn, egg and field baskets.



Women were the chief laborers in a diverse domestic economy. Chief responsibilities were to process the unusable raw materials produced outside the home into consumable finished goods, and to care for, nurture, and develop the labor force.







*"Mother bore and cared for the babies, saw that the floor was white and clean, that the beds were made and cared for, the garden tended, the turkeys dressed, the deer flesh cured and the fat prepared for candles or culinary use, that the wild fruits were garnered and preserved or dried, that the spinning and knitting was done and the clothing made. She did her part in all these tasks, made nearly all the clothing and did the thousand things for us a mother only finds time to do."*

George Duffield, *Memoirs*

Left: Housekeeping in a log cabin or sod house was a next-to-impossible task. Floors were made of roughly split slabs or, in many cases, dirt or sand, sometimes swept by broom into momentary patterns pleasing to the eye.

Above: Women melted a year's supply of tallow in a cauldron for candlemaking, then dipped wicks or filled molds. Below: Produce was dried, canned, salted or pickled, and packed away. Here, cabbage shredder, brass preserve kettle, and stoneware crock.







In times of illness, women acted as doctor, using herbal home remedies and store-bought medicines. Above: "Humphrey's Homeopathic Remedies."



"All this winter I have been spinning flax tow. . . Now the wool must be taken from the sheep's back," wrote Kitturah Belknap. Women made most clothing and linens. Above: Wool blanket, tow linen towel, knitted wool stockings, sewing sundries.



"The children had their work to do as soon as it was possible for them to work," remembered E. May Lacy Crowder. A metal infant feeder (above) and a sheet iron cow bell (below) symbolize some typical chores — caring for younger siblings and herding cows. In spare moments, children played with simple toys — ceramic marbles, wooden tops, ice skates, and dolls.





# The Urban Frontier

Not everyone who came to the new Iowa Territory was a farmer. New towns offered opportunities for business. They were centers for trade and distribution, provided crafts and services to surrounding rural areas, and served as regulatory centers, all of which offered a variety of non-farm occupations.

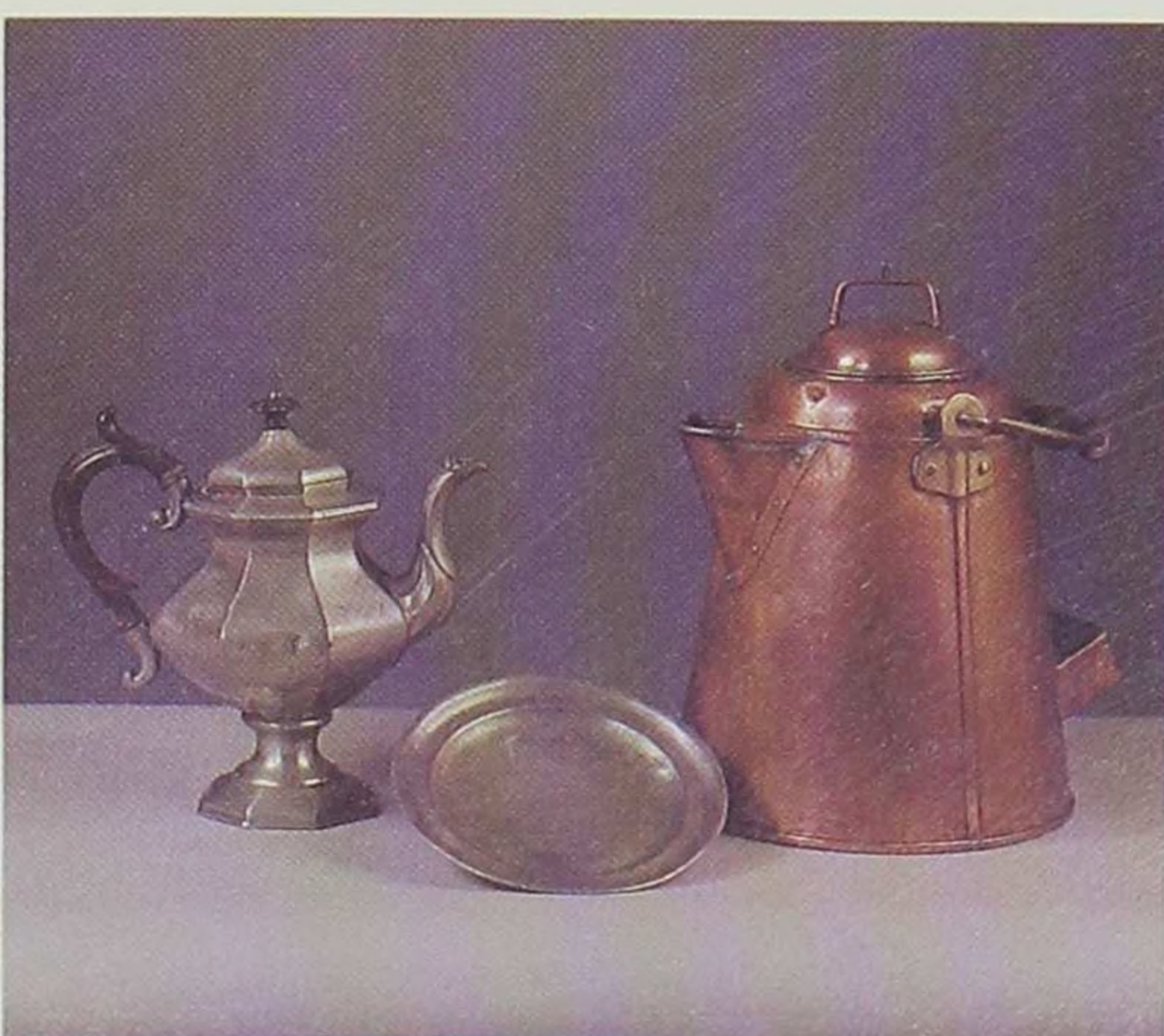
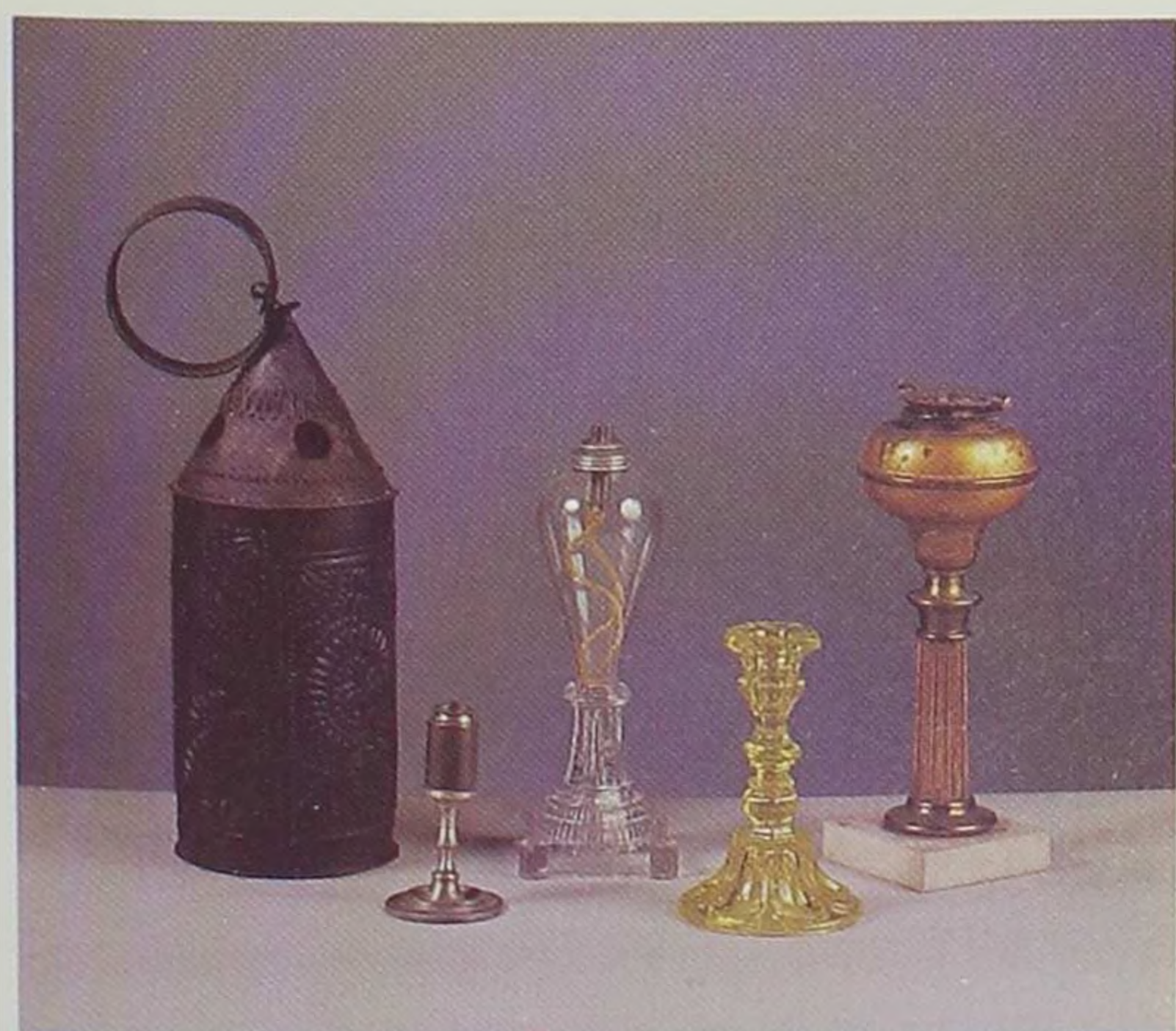
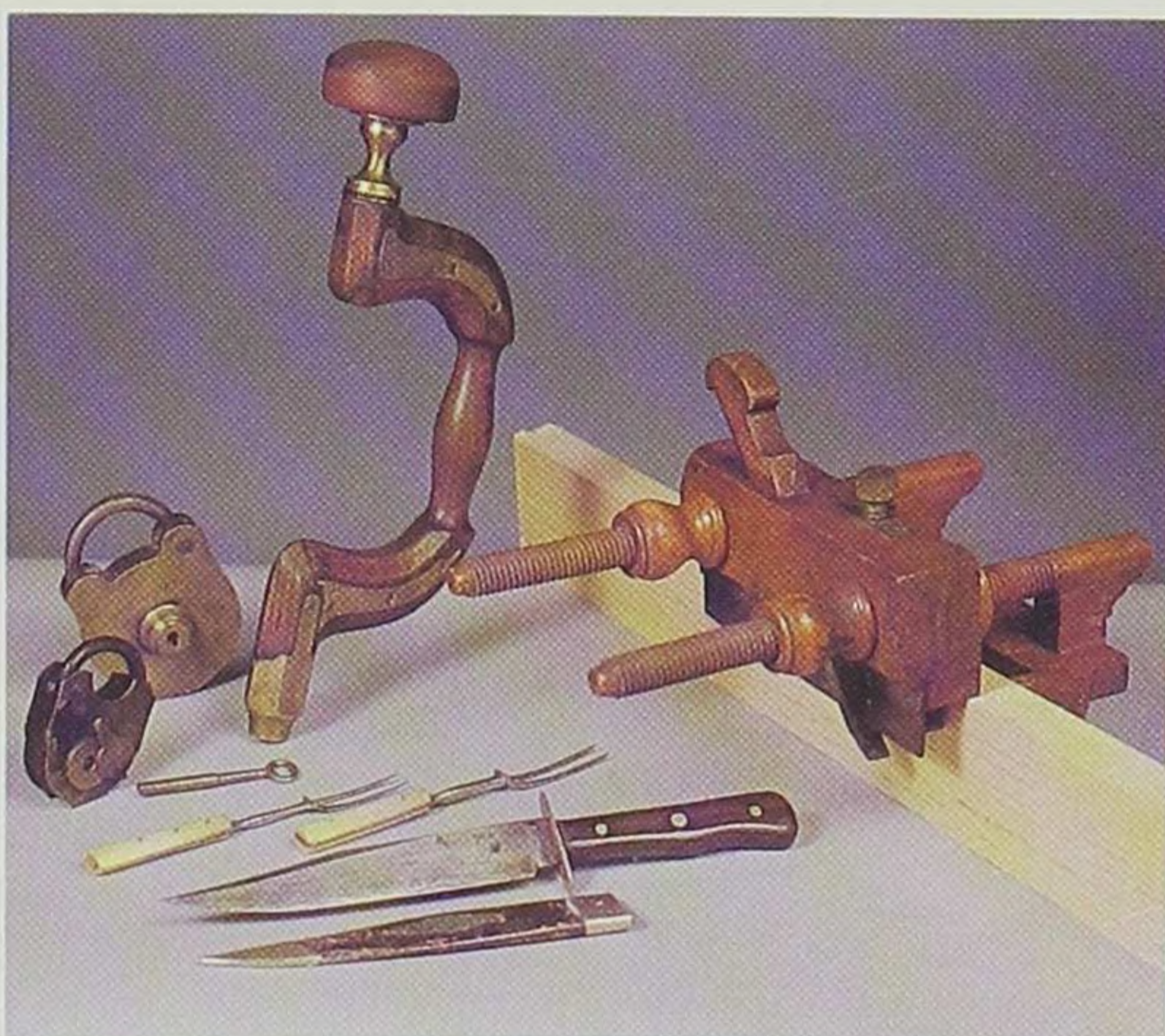
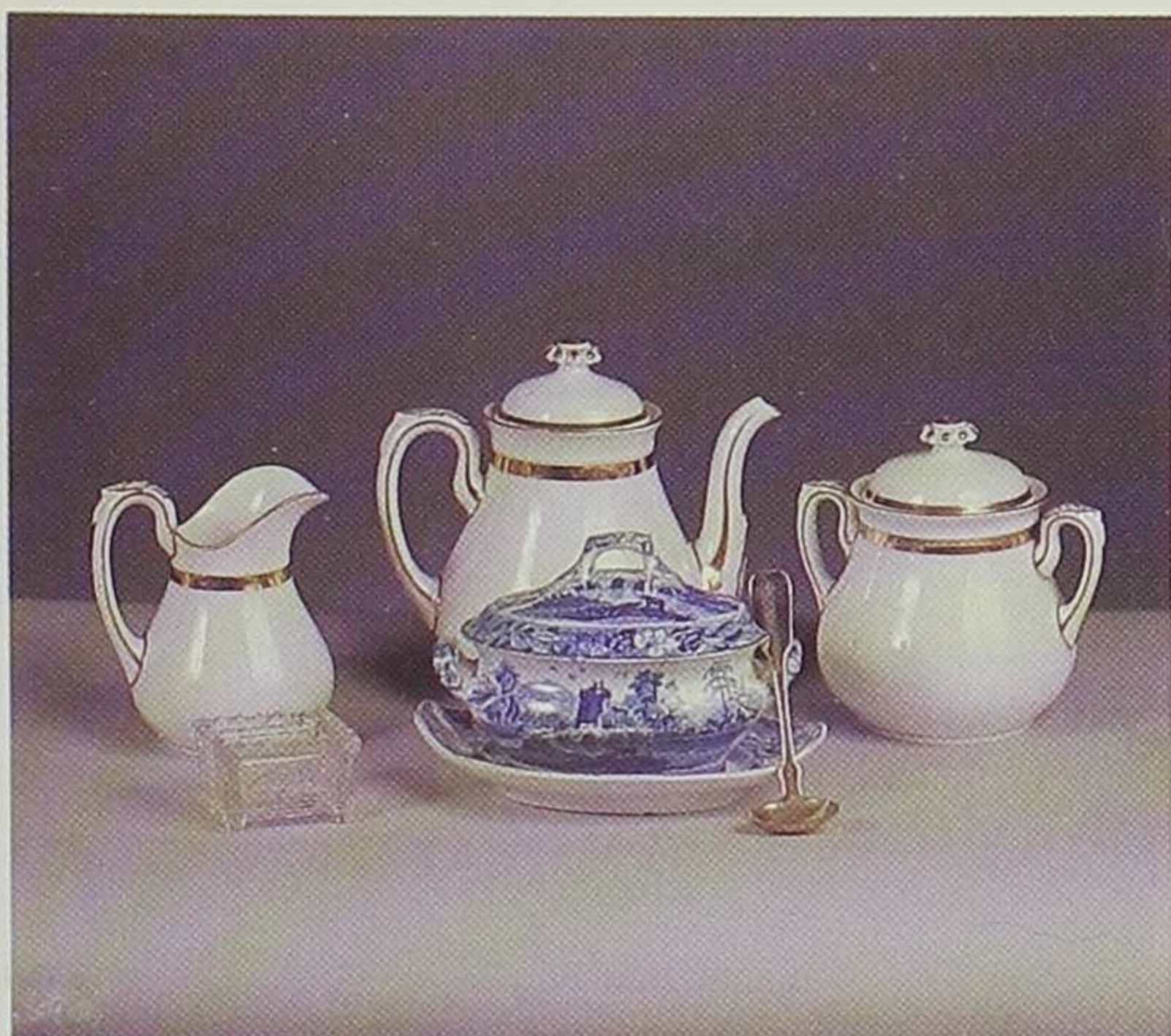
Soon after the territory opened, a broad range of manufactured goods from the world's growing industries was available in frontier towns. Below are some of the items that could be bought (clockwise from upper left):

**GLASSWARE AND CHINA:** French porcelain tea set, pressed glass salt dish, English pearlware sauce tureen, silver sauce ladle.

**HARDWARE AND CUTLERY:** Steel and brass padlocks, carpenter's plane, English-made bone and steel forks and wood and brass brace, and Sheffield steel knife with rosewood handle.

**METALWARE:** English pewter coffee pot, pewter plate, copper coffee pot.

**LAMPS:** Punched tin lantern, pewter fluid lamp, glass oil lamp, glass candlestick, brass and marble astral lamp.





Like signs outside businesses and offices, these groups of artifacts reveal the diversity of occupations in territorial Iowa. Across, from upper left:

**LAWYER AND BANKER:** Lawyer Charles Mason used this lap desk (he later became the first chief justice of the Iowa Supreme Court). Also, seal and wax, and currency. **HOUSEWRIGHT:** Hand tools and carpentry skills could earn a journeyman carpenter \$1.25 a day in 1840s Iowa. **JEWELER AND WATCHMAKER:** A fine selection of goods included pocket watches, jewelry, and ready-made eyeglasses (some even tinted).

**DRY GOODS MERCHANT:** Millinery shops were also women's social gathering places. Ready-made clothing here: man's cotton vest, muslin and lace handkerchief, wool paisley shawl from India, perfume, parasol with folding handle.

**CLERGY:** Religion played a major part in territorial days. The mahogany lap melodian is from Keosauqua's first church; the psalmist from a Burlington church.

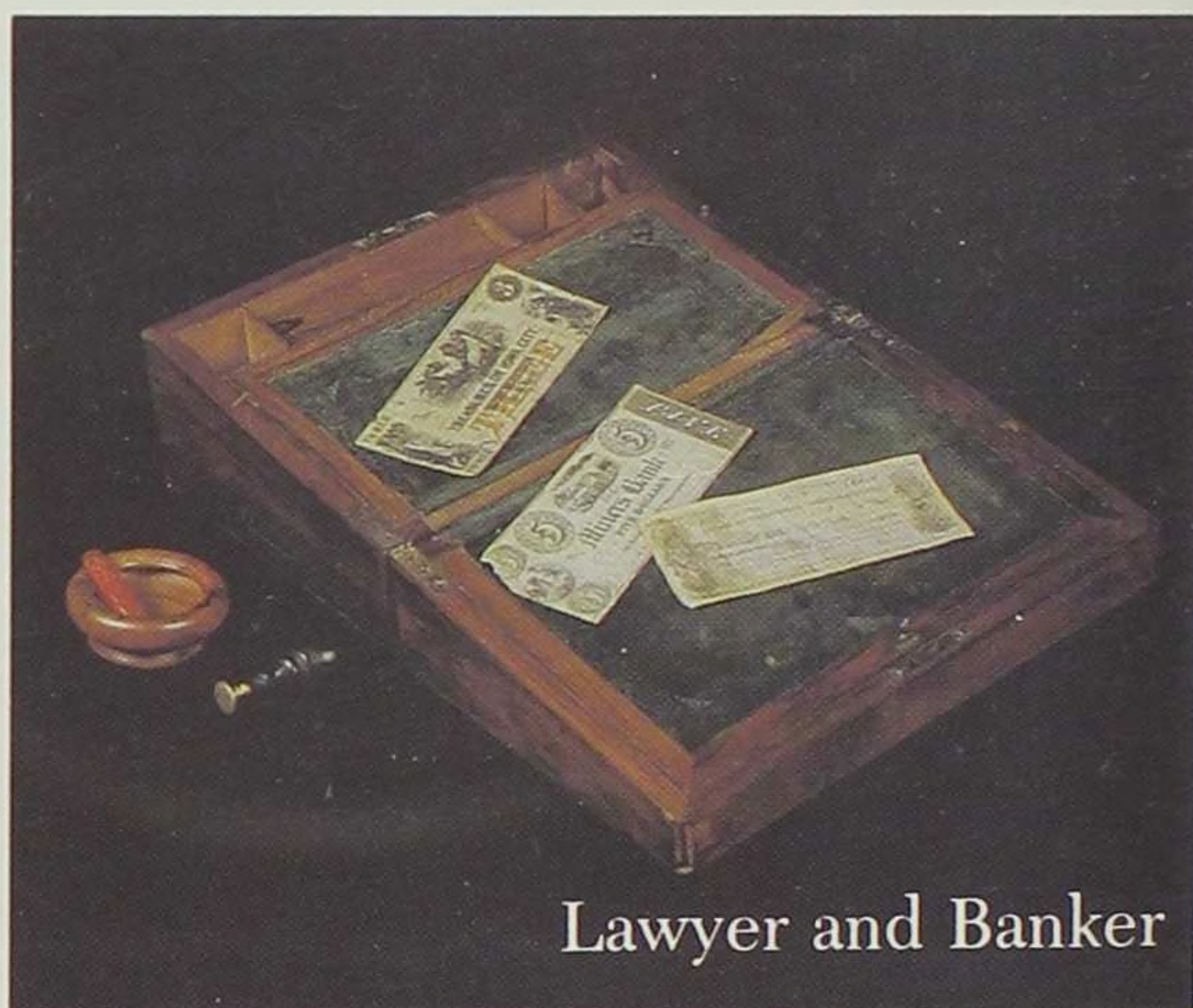
**COOPER:** Using a sun plane, adz, in-shave, and stave-set, coopers made barrels and casks that were used to ship both finished goods and raw materials.

**DOCTOR, DENTIST, DRUGGIST:** A constant battle against disease was fought with crude instruments and patent medicine. Here: surgical kit, dentist's turnkey, package of worm lozenges, obstetric forceps, and cedar stethoscope.

**PEACE OFFICER:** The administration of justice was centered in the towns. Most county seats had jails. Here, handcuffs, leg irons, wooden billy club.

**GUNSMITH:** The gunsmith was a needed tradesman in frontier Iowa. Here, pepper box pistols, screwdriver and rifling file, cap box and powder container.

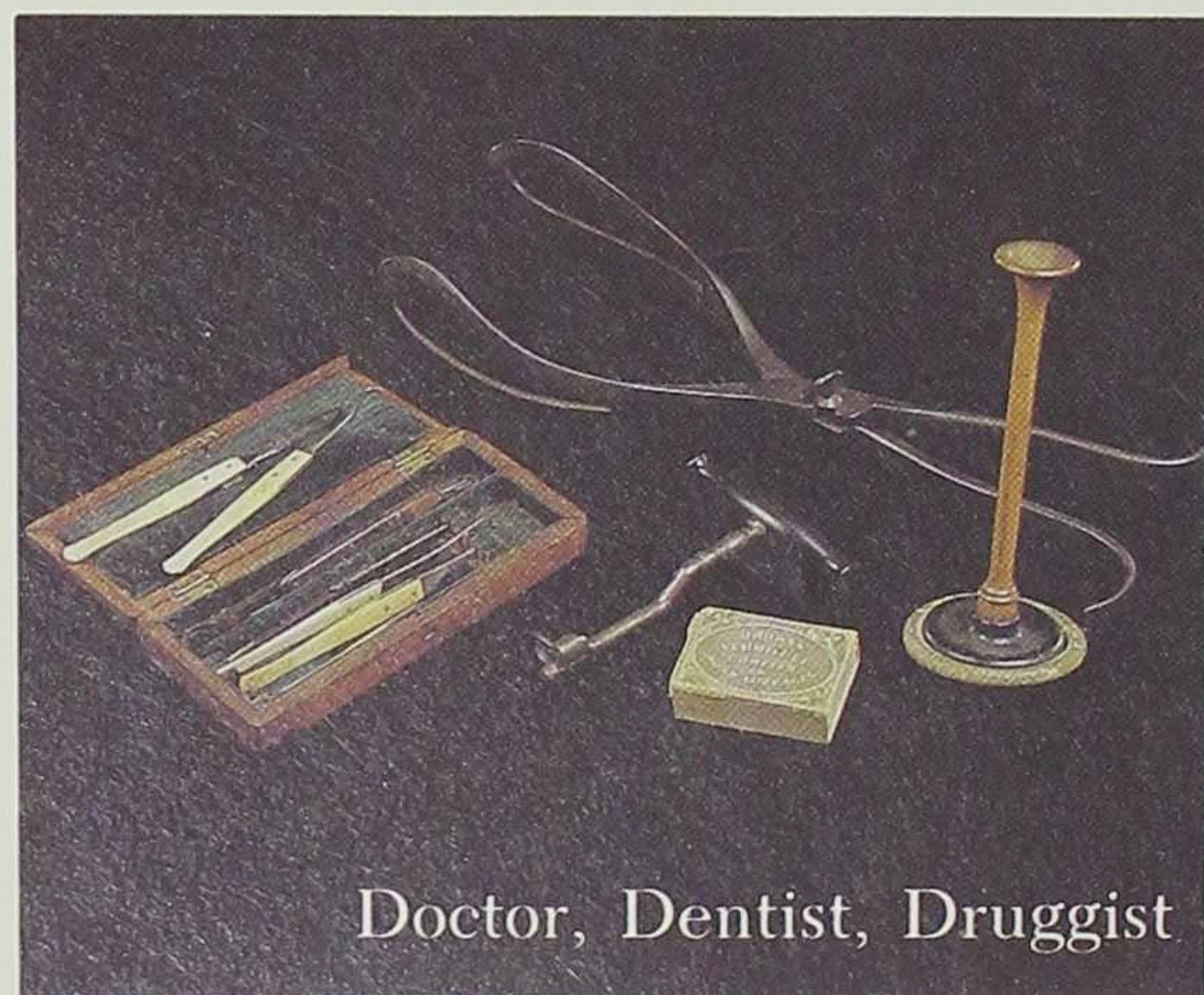
**LEATHERWORKER:** With a variety of tools and skills, shoemakers and harnessmakers supplied rural and urban customers with needed goods and repair services.



Lawyer and Banker



Dry goods merchant

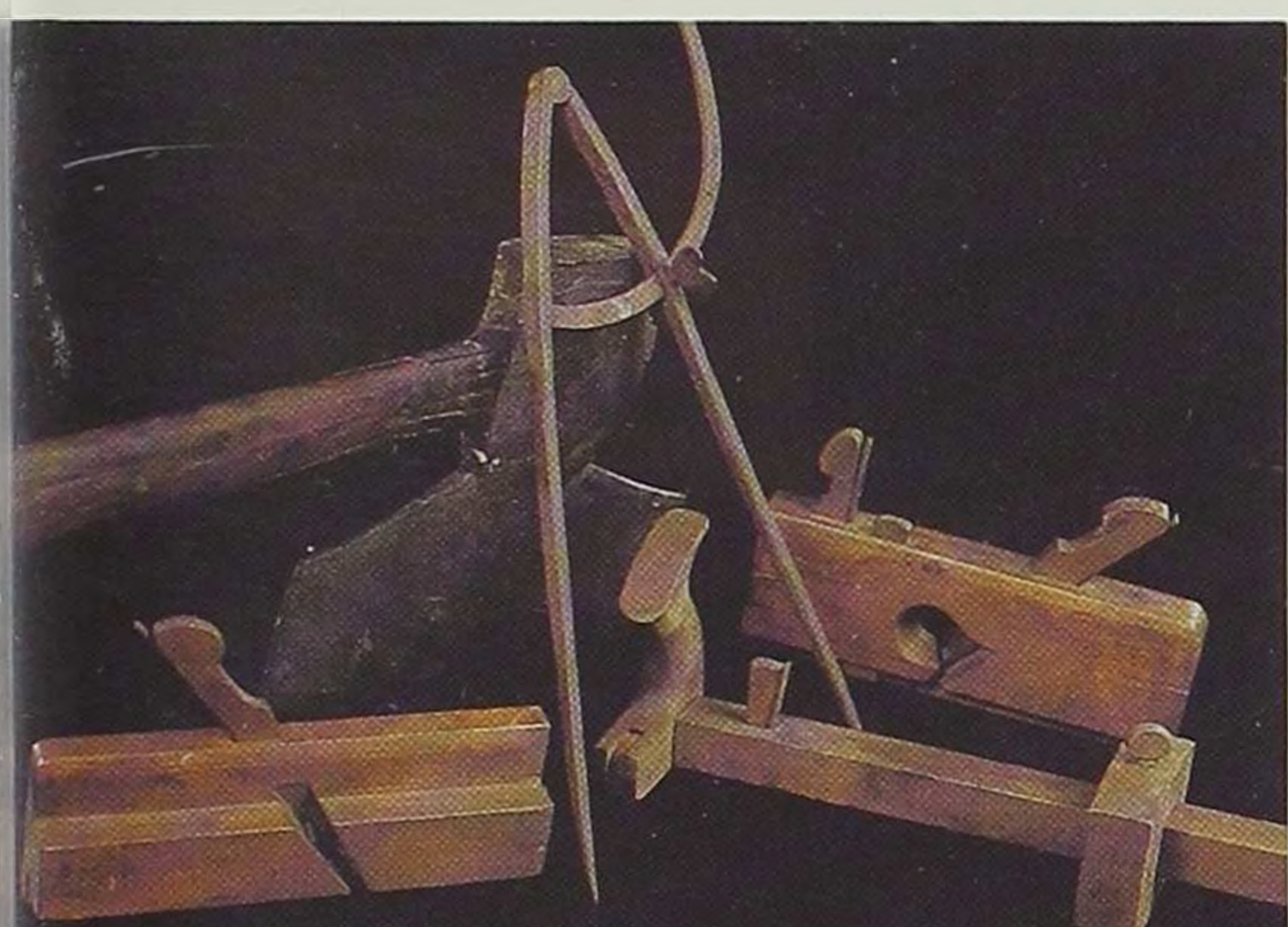


Doctor, Dentist, Druggist



Peace officer





Housewright



Jeweler and Watchmaker



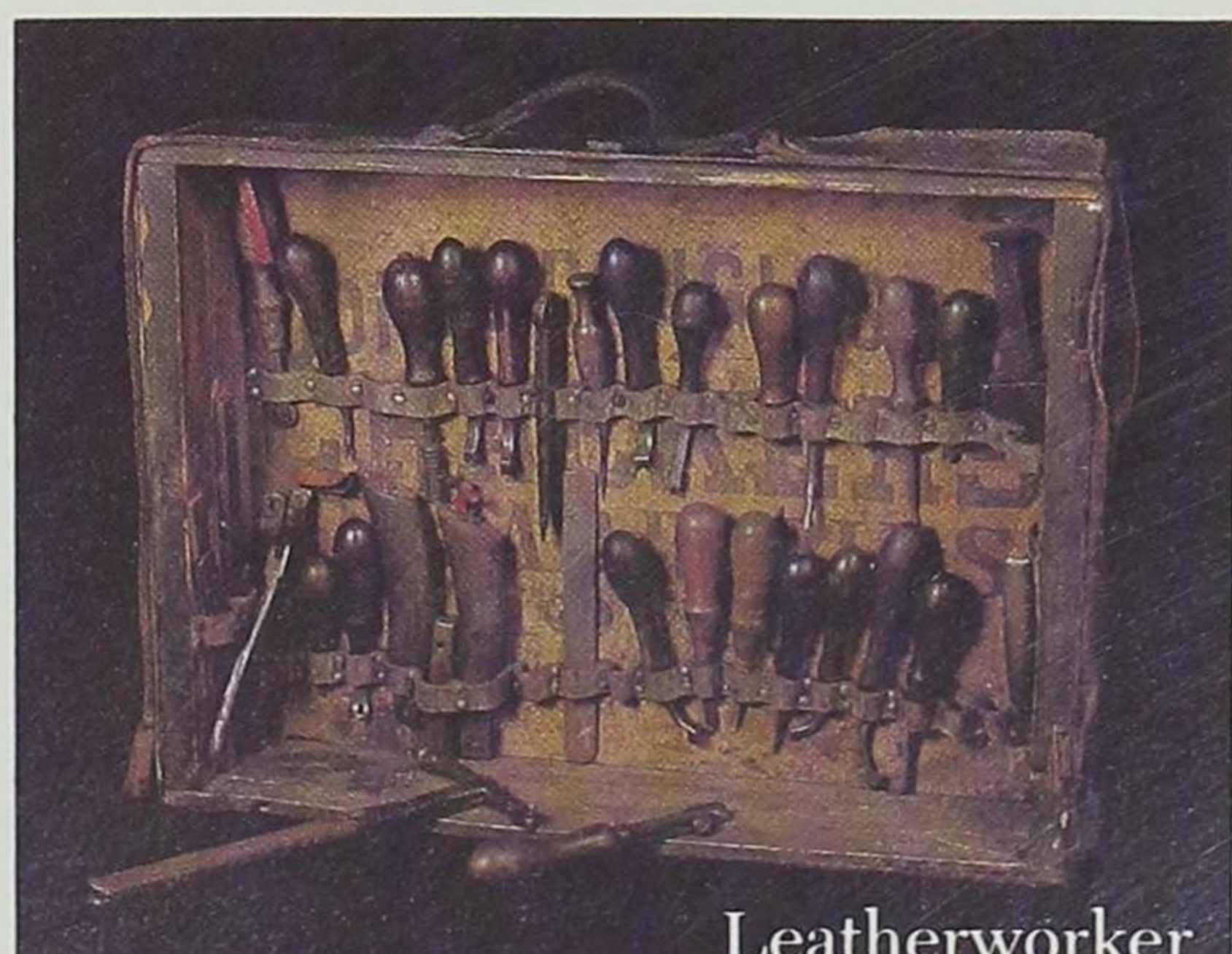
Clergy



Cooper



Gunsmith



Leatherworker



# Ordain and Establish



This rosewood and brass portable lap desk was used by Robert Lucas, Iowa's first territorial governor, whose duties included appointing judges, militia officers, sheriffs, and Indian agents and approving legislation.



One of the legislature's administrative duties was to regulate weights and measures for the territory. The standard was set by official brass measures (above), kept at the seat of territorial government.



Everyone was not equal under the law. Only free, white males over the age of twenty-one could vote in elections. Above, banner from the 1840 Harrison presidential campaign, the first to use placards, rallies, and floats.





On December 28, 1846, Iowa Territory became the twenty-ninth state to enter the Union. Here: The first official seal of the State of Iowa, with lion's head press.



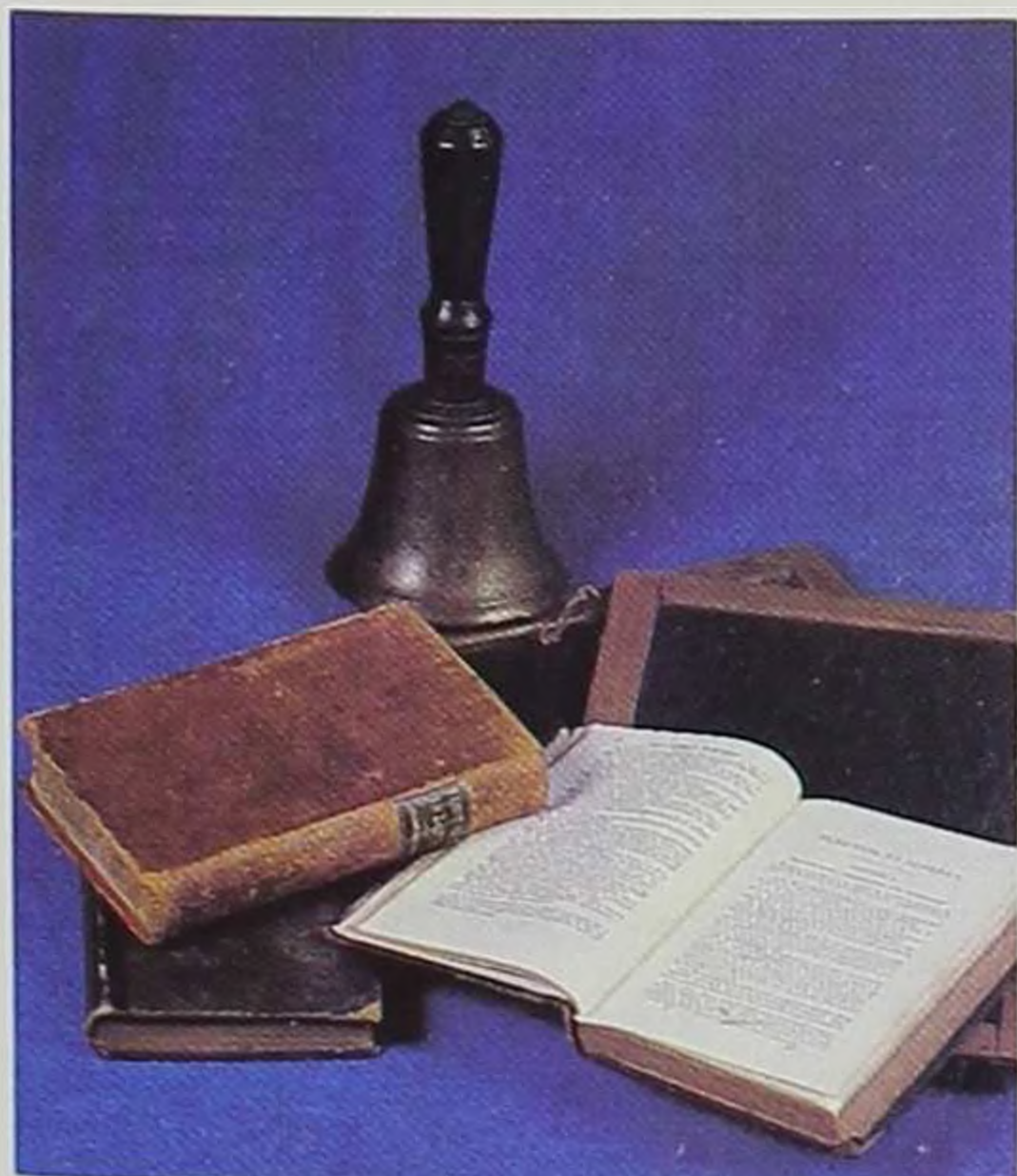
White men, elected by white men, made laws concerning rights of blacks and women, education, and criminal and moral acts. In their efforts to protect individual rights, some individuals were more protected than others:

"AN ACT concerning the rights of married women" (1846): a married woman could own property, but any profits belonged to her husband. Sale of property required the husband's co-signature. Individual divorces were also granted by the legislature.

"AN ACT providing for the establishment of common schools" (1839): open to "all white citizens between the ages of four and twenty-one."

"AN ACT for the prevention of certain immoral practices" (1843): One could not work, fight, fish, shoot, or sell liquor on Sunday (unless one observed Saturday as the Sabbath).

"AN ACT to regulate Blacks and Mulattoes" (1839): a freedman's \$500 bond was required of any blacks or mixed-bloods who wanted to settle or live in Iowa.





# SALE OF LOTS

IN THE  
COUNTY SEAT OF JOHNSON  
COUNTY, I. T.

WILL take place on the premises, ON MONDAY the  
**24th of May, 1841,**

Under the superintendence of the Board of Commissioners of said county, and will continue from day to day until all the Lots are sold, (at the discretion of said Commissioners.) This town is situated on the North West quarter of Section 15, Township 79 North, Range 6 West; lying south and adjoining the town plat of IOWA CITY, and is in effect, an addition to said city, the principal streets being laid out parallel and corresponding with the streets of the City. This town is situated on high and dry ground, nearly level, abounding with excellent timber and water. In point of health, this location cannot be surpassed by any in the Territory. IOWA CITY being so generally known, we deem a further description unnecessary. The value and rising prospect of property so advantageously situated, must be apparent to all who are desirous of making profitable investments.

## Terms of Sale.

One-fourth of the purchase money in hand, and the balance in three semi-annual instalments. Bond or Certificate will be given for the execution of a Deed when all the payments are made.

By order of

**PHILIP CLARK,  
JOHN PARROTT,**  
Commissioners.

S. B. Gardner, Clerk.  
February 8, 1841.

PRINTED AT THE "HERALD" OFFICE, BLOOMINGTON, IOWA.

Despite surveyors' efforts to square off Iowa, river towns tended to be laid out parallel to the rivers. Portion of Van Buren County plat and Keosauqua. Inset: 1841 ad for land sales in the new capital city.

