The

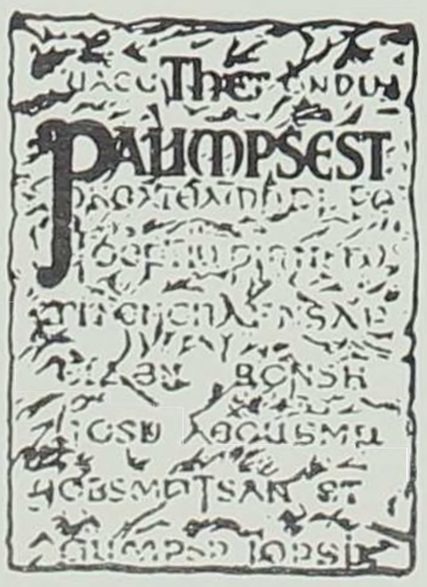
PALIMPSEST

Volume 69, Number 3 IOWA'S POPULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE Fall 1988 $3.50

Inside —

© 1988 DAVID PLOWDEN

Van's Clothing Store, Victor, Iowa, April 1986, photographed by David Plowden. For more photos by David Plowden, turn to the photo essay beginning on page 106, and watch for Plowden's *A Sense of Place* this November. Copublished by the State Historical Society of Iowa and W. W. Norton, New York, the book offers rich, insightful photos of rural and small-town Iowa, taken by a skilled photographer of people and their landscapes.



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.

THE PALIMPSEST (ISSN 0031-0360) is published quarterly by the State Historical Society of Iowa. © 1988 State Historical Society of Iowa.

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA (SHSI) is the historical division of the Department of Cultural Affairs of the State of Iowa. The Society operates in two locations, Des Moines and Iowa City. The museum, historic preservation, and a research library are located at Capitol Complex, Des Moines, Iowa 50319, phone (515) 281-5111. Publications, development, field services, and a research library are located at 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240, phone (319) 335-3916.

SUBSCRIPTIONS/MEMBERSHIPS/ORDERS: Contact Publications, SHSI, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240, phone (319) 335-3916. *The Palimpsest* is distributed free to Society members. Membership is open to the public. Current single copies $3.50, plus $1 postage/handling. (For prices of pre-1987 issues, contact Publications.) Members receive a 20% discount on books and free entrance to historic sites administered by the Society. Gift memberships of subscriptions available.

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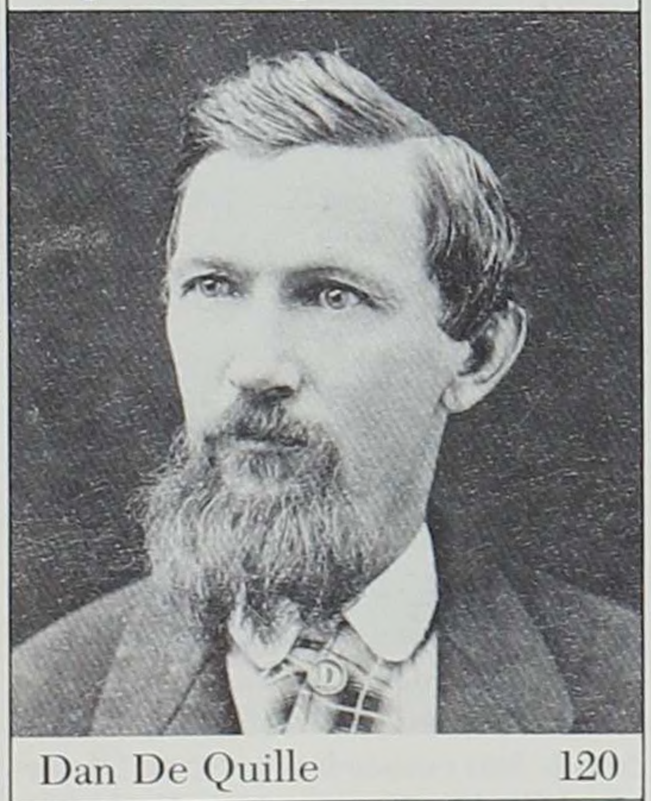


Dan De Quille 120

COVERS: (Front) Wrought-iron Pratt truss bridge, Bluffton, March 1987. (Back) Iberg's Garage and DX Station, Victor, June 1986. For more photos of Iowa by David Plowden, turn to page 106.

The

PALIMPSEST

IOWA'S POPULAR HISTORY MAGAZINE

Ginalie Swaim, Editor

VOLUME 69, NUMBER 3 FALL 1988

David Plowden Photographs Iowa

photos by David Plowden

Buena Vista County, June 1986

For the last decade David Plowden learned about Iowa first-hand: he met the people, and he photographed its farms and towns. Plowden's photographs show Iowa in great economic flux, when much that has been familiar is vanishing. They also show the images of Iowa that endure.

In the past Plowden has directed his considerable talent towards other subjects — bridges, trains, industrial landscapes. His superb photographs are both an artistic experience and historically important documentation — of occupations, architecture, material culture, humans' interchange with their natural surroundings. Our thanks to David Plowden for recording for our descendants what 1980s Iowa looked like, and for showing present-day Iowans how much we have to save.

These photos preview Plowden's newest book, *A Sense of Place*, copublished this November by the State Historical Society of Iowa and W. W. Norton, New York. The entire collection — over 120 images — will be on exhibit in the State Historical Building in Des Moines from December 1988 through February 1989. A traveling exhibit of fifty prints is available through the Iowa Humanities Board. Funding for the photographs was provided by the State Historical Society of Iowa and an Exemplary Award to the Iowa Humanities Board from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

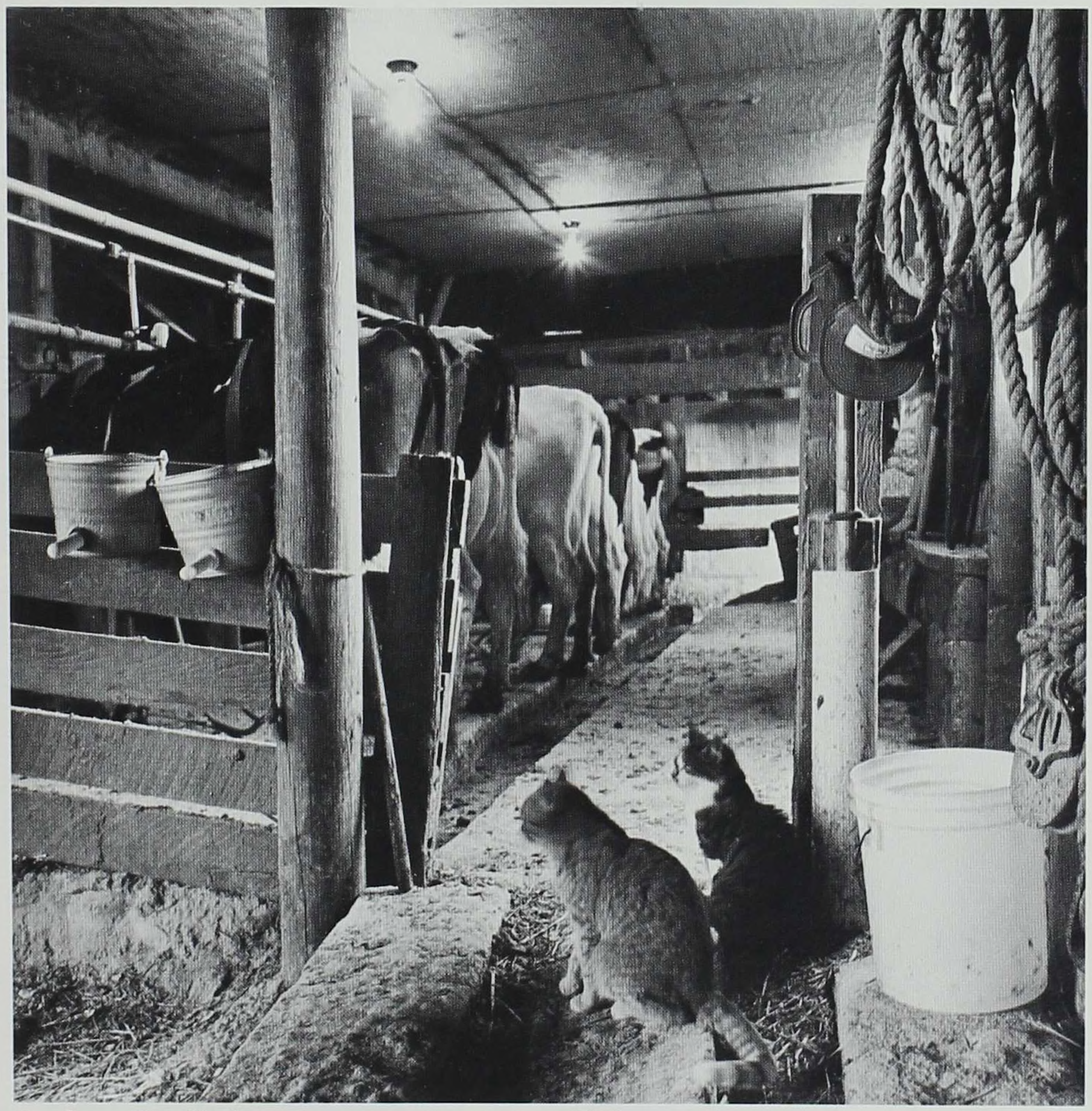
—The Editor

Soybeans, Clay County, June 1986

Cedar County, May 1985

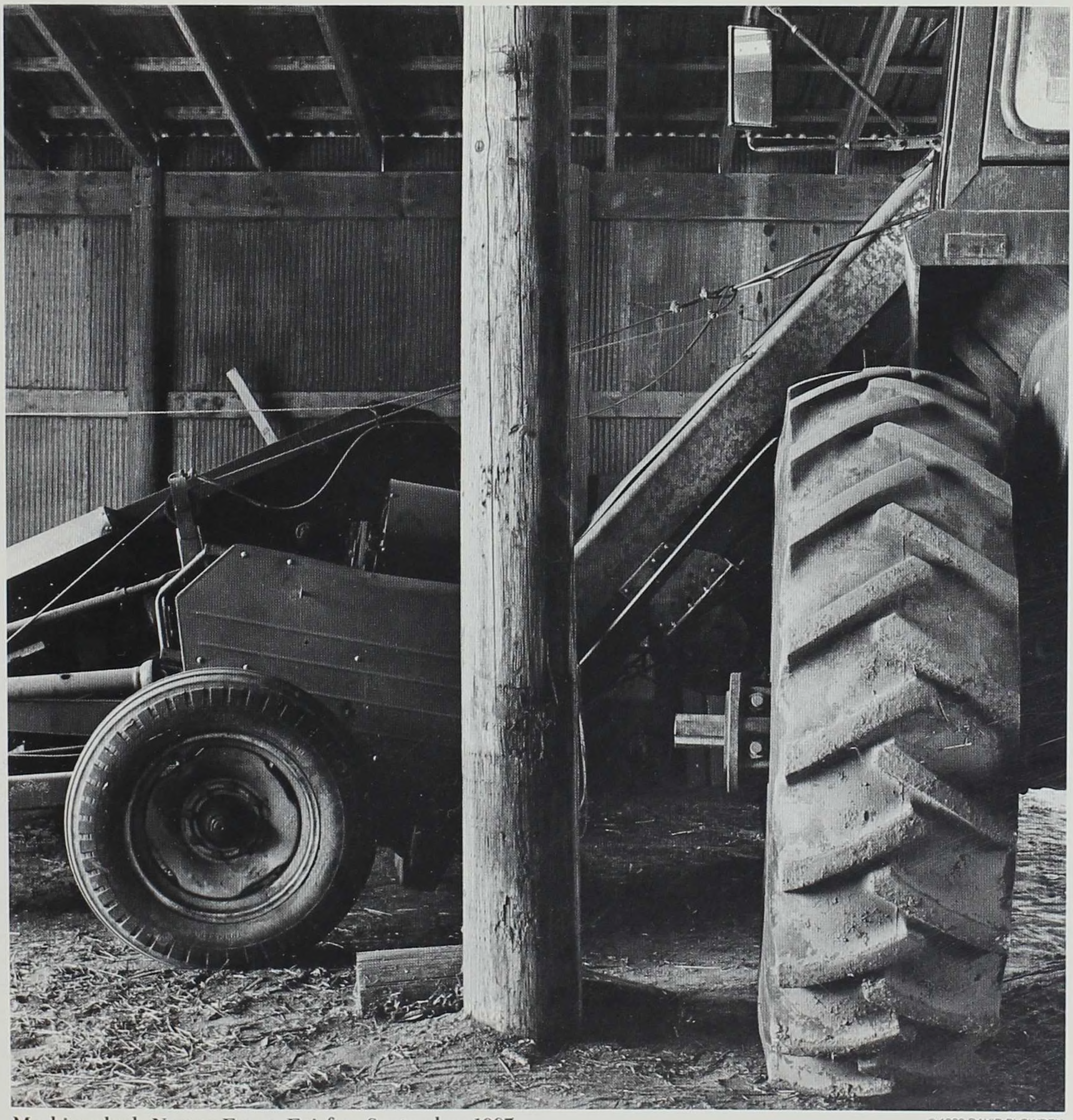
Klahn Farm, Cedar County, June 1986

Buena Vista County, June 1986



Cow barn, Van Olegham Farm, Iowa County, June 1986

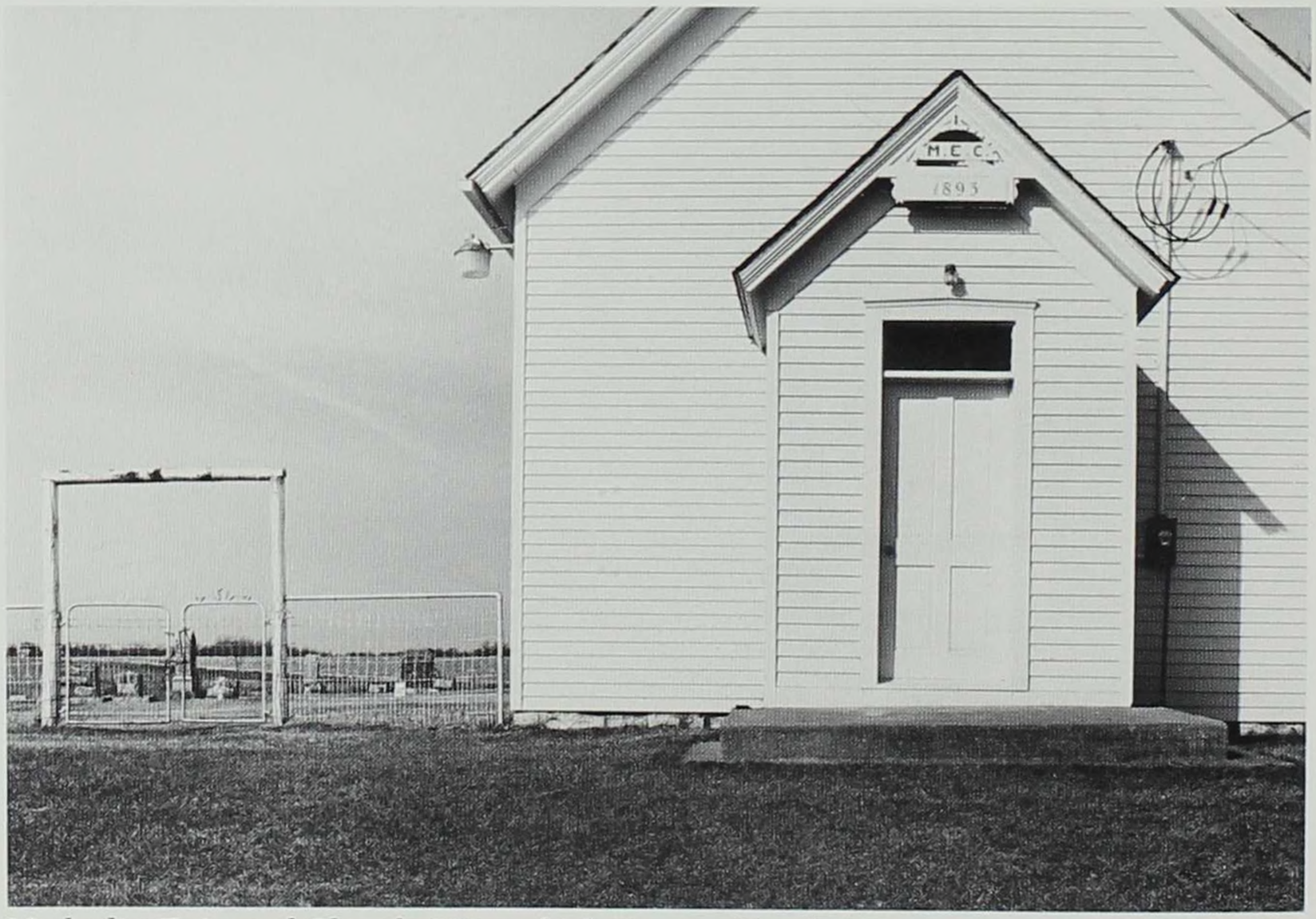
Cumberland, April 1987



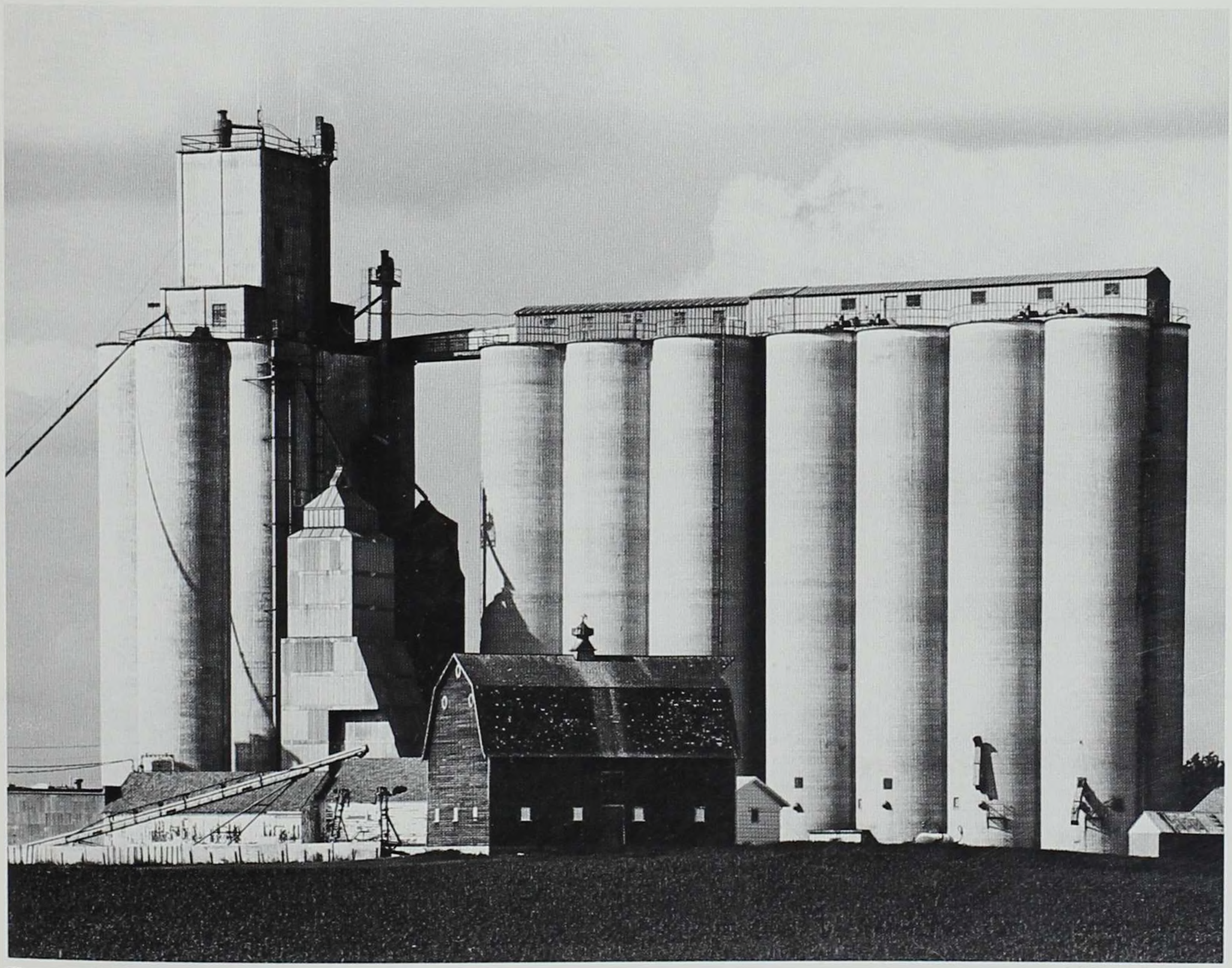
Machine shed, Nemec Farm, Fairfax, September 1987

Ossian, March 1987

Bill Haroff, Postmaster, Hastings, April 1987



Methodist Episcopal Church, Winneshiek County, March 1987



Farmers' Co-op Elevator, Bradford, June 1986

Kelley Bradley, Scotch Grove, May 1987

Peterson, June 1986

Iowa Pioneers Find a Lost Child

A Dan De Quille Memoir

by Lawrence I. Berkove

DAN DE QUILLE had long since made his mark as one of the West's best-known authors when in 1892 he published a story about a dramatic event in Iowa's pioneer history. The story no doubt enthralled the thousands of enthusiastic readers who followed his frequent byline. Today, this De Quille story about early Iowa, "Trailing a Lost Child," is reprinted here (beginning on page 124) for modern readers.

The search for a lost child is a compelling story in any century, but De Quille's recollection of how a pioneer community in eastern Iowa responded to a call for help is noteworthy for several reasons. First, it rescues from forgotten records a poignant incident of local Iowa history — reminding us how so much that is rich is often lost from historical summaries, and how chancy is what we find out about the past. Second, De Quille's narrative skill renders the episode with authentic and enlivening detail. Finally, the account casts valuable light on this nineteenth-century author just as he is beginning to be rediscovered.

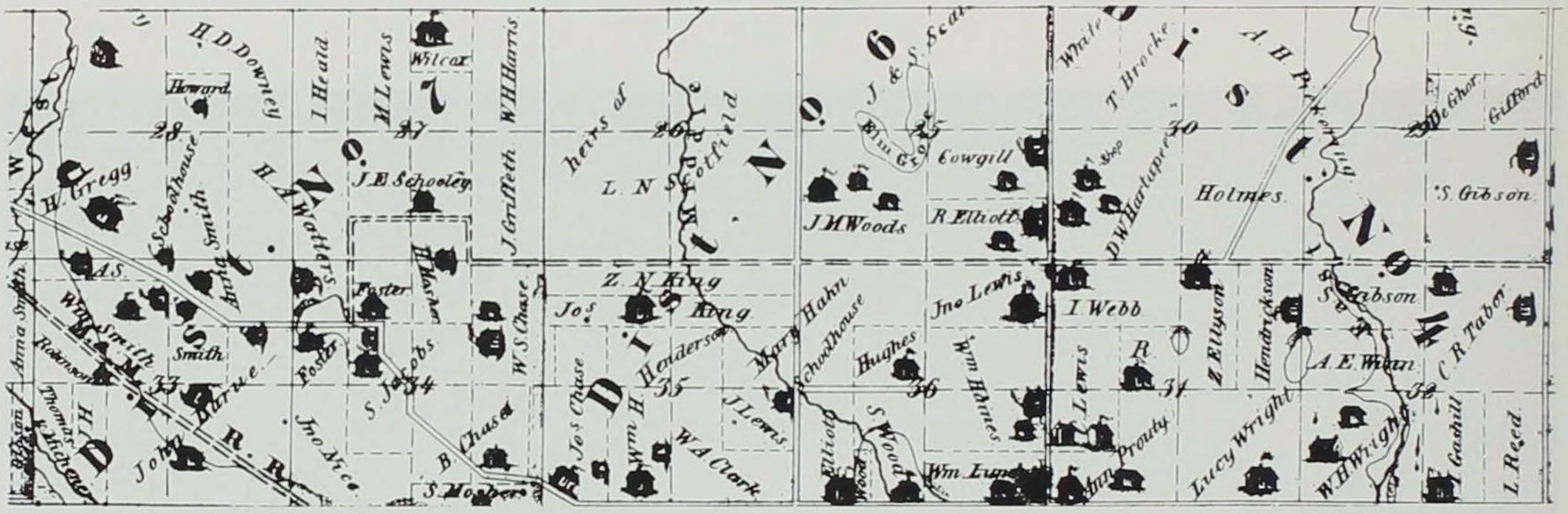
Dan De Quille was the pen name, assumed in Virginia City, Nevada Territory, of William Wright. Born in 1829 on a farm near Fredericktown, Ohio, he lived there for eighteen years until his family emigrated in 1847 with other Ohioans to the settlement that became West Liberty, Iowa. He became the mainstay of his family when his father died soon afterward. He made a success of the Wright farm on the southern edge of Cedar County, then left it to his mother's care when he married Carolyn Coleman in 1853 and set up a nearby farm of his own. He and his wife had five children in close succession, two of whom died in infancy. The lure of California gold called him, and he went west by himself in 1857 and moved to Virginia City in 1860 (a year after the rich silver vein known as the Comstock Lode was discovered). He spent most of his life there, returning to Iowa only twice: in 1863 for a visit, and in 1897 to live out his last year.

Until very recently, Dan De Quille was overlooked by all except a few western historians and Mark Twain scholars. Although popular in his own time, De Quille neglected to collect and anthologize the scores of stories he had published in dozens of periodicals across the country. When he died, they were lost, and he was almost forgotten along with much of his ephemeral journalism.

Two features of his life, however, saved him from total oblivion. One was that he had been a friend and colleague of Mark Twain's in 1862–1864. The men roomed together when they worked as reporters for the Virginia City *Territorial Enterprise*, the leading newspaper on the Comstock Lode and one of the greatest of the Old West. De Quille was six years older than Twain and more experienced as a writer. Twain became much the better author, but within his more restricted literary range De Quille was also a master and was always preferred over Twain by most Comstockers. Twain scholars have long been aware that each man influenced the other, but recent findings indicate that the extent of that influence was

PHOTOGRAPHED BY RANDALL TOSH THROUGH THE COURTESY OF EVANS MORRIS, OWNER OF ORIGINAL PAINTING

Dan De Quille was forty-nine and a popular nineteenth-century western writer when this 19½″ × 23¼″ portrait was painted and signed "Petrovits 1878." Reproduction here through courtesy of his great-grandson Evans Morris.



In "Trailing a Lost Child," set in 1851, De Quille wrote of several families (Gregg, Lewis, Henderson) whose farms still appeared on this 1862 plat of southern Cedar County. De Quille's family farm (Wright) is east of these.

somewhat more long-lasting and extensive than had been thought. The other feature that saved De Quille from oblivion was that in 1876 he published *The Big Bonanza*. The book is still in print and is regarded as the best contemporary account of the history and culture of the Comstock Lode and its Big Bonanza, the richest silver strike in American history.

Shortly after the book's publication, however, the price of silver began to drop. The great mining boom was followed by a bust from which the region never recovered. Most Comstockers left the region for more profitable locations, but not De Quille; he loved it too much. The challenge of a long battle with alcoholism spurred him to greater achievement. He took on a job as a weekly correspondent for the Salt Lake City *Daily Tribune*, which was becoming a major newspaper, and he also became a popular freelancer of both fiction and journalism. In the mid-1890s, however, his health broke and restricted his activities. By 1897 he left the Comstock for good. Poor and sick, he returned to his family home in West Liberty, Iowa, where he died in 1898.

BECAUSE HE BELONGED, along with Bret Harte and Mark Twain, to the original generation of western writers, De Quille is an invaluable source of information about the Old West. Living in the West for close to forty years and chronicling its events as a journalist, he also expressed his intimate knowledge of it in his stories. Research over the last several years has located many of his lost and forgotten writings. Several well-written and historically rich pieces are being edited and some have already been published, finding a new audience in the twentieth century.

Research has also revealed that although De Quille became a westerner, he never forgot his early years in Ohio and Iowa, and sometimes he wrote about them. These recollections, such as the one that follows, fill in blanks about his life and teach us more about his art of transmuting life into fiction.

In the weekly columns which he wrote and mailed from his home in Virginia City, De Quille normally wrote about Nevada. But like today's columnists, he oftentimes let his interests or his fancy dictate his choice of subject matter. He published the Iowa memoir, "Trailing a Lost Child," in the Salt Lake City *Daily Tribune* on Sunday, June 17, 1892. The following week he published another reminiscence of Iowa, "Old Times on the Prairie," a description of the "hunter's paradise" that was Iowa in 1847. Of the two, he must have recognized that there was more dramatic interest in the "Lost Child" article because he modified it slightly and recycled it to another periodical in the form that follows.

The "Lost Child" narrative is essentially true. "Wapse-noe-nock" is the full name of what is now called Wapsie Creek, and De Quille's translation of it as "White Earth Creek" settlement is one of several familiar, local efforts. Families mentioned in the story

(the Hendersons, Greggs, Bozarths, and Lewises) did have homesteads in the area — to the west of the Wright farm — and some of the families still live around West Liberty. Most important, little Lizzie Henderson did get lost one night, and the entire community did turn out to help find her.

De Quille's story is substantiated by a much shorter account of the incident which appeared in chapter 22 of Lemuel O. Mosher's *Log Cabin History*, published in 1910 and reprinted in West Liberty's 1938 centennial history. The De Quille and Mosher versions are remarkably similar regarding factual matters; the only significant disagreement is over the date. De Quille recalls that the incident occurred in 1851; the centennial version, in 1850.

The accounts also differ in some interesting details. The centennial history, for instance, does not mention Milton Moore, whom De Quille calls his cousin and credits with finding Lizzie. In De Quille's tale of the frontier line dividing settlement and wilderness, Milton Moore's portrayal as a white man who is powerfully drawn to Indian ways is peculiarly interesting. This type of man was familiar on the frontier and indeed was a necessary product of the frontier. Moore may thus be regarded as a real-life counterpart of such fictional creations as James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo, of the Leatherstocking tales. De Quille tells us that Moore eventually resolved his ambivalence about his identity; it is part of the glory and tragedy of Cooper's Natty Bumppo that he did not.

The danger, particularly to a small child, of wild animals — wolves or coyotes in this instance — is given greater emphasis in De Quille's story than in the centennial story. Furthermore, in the second paragraph of De Quille's original, *Tribune* version, De Quille had mentioned another danger: the call of the wild. That paragraph was dropped in De Quille's revision for the other periodical (the version we reprint here), but perhaps it explains how Milton Moore, twenty-four years old and single, could understand and anticipate a child's behavior so well. De Quille wrote in that paragraph:

"When a child is lost in a wild region, search must be instituted at once. The distance to which even the smallest toddler will often wander is astonishing. Very often, too, children will become wild after being lost for a few hours and instead of showing themselves or answering when they hear voices calling will crawl into a thicket or some other hiding place and be as close and quiet as would a hunted animal. In the early days in Ohio a sixteen-year-old boy who had been lost in the woods for a day and a night suddenly made his appearance in front of his father's house, leaped a pair of bars and ran on like a wild animal. When pursued and caught by a man on horseback he for a time fought with teeth and nails like a young wolf. He had been frightened out of his wits, temporarily, by the blowing of horns and the firing of guns, for in the early days when a child was lost in the vast primitive forests of the West a great racket was kept up during the night search in order to frighten away wolves and other dangerous animals."

Knowing what it was like to be wild himself, the frontiersman Milton Moore was able to empathize with young Lizzie and guess her movements and motives as he tracked her.

Such subtle touches show De Quille to be psychologically astute as well as a good reporter and storyteller. His ability to combine these skills made him a popular writer in his day and demonstrates why he is worth reading today.

"Trailing a Lost Child"
begins on the next page.

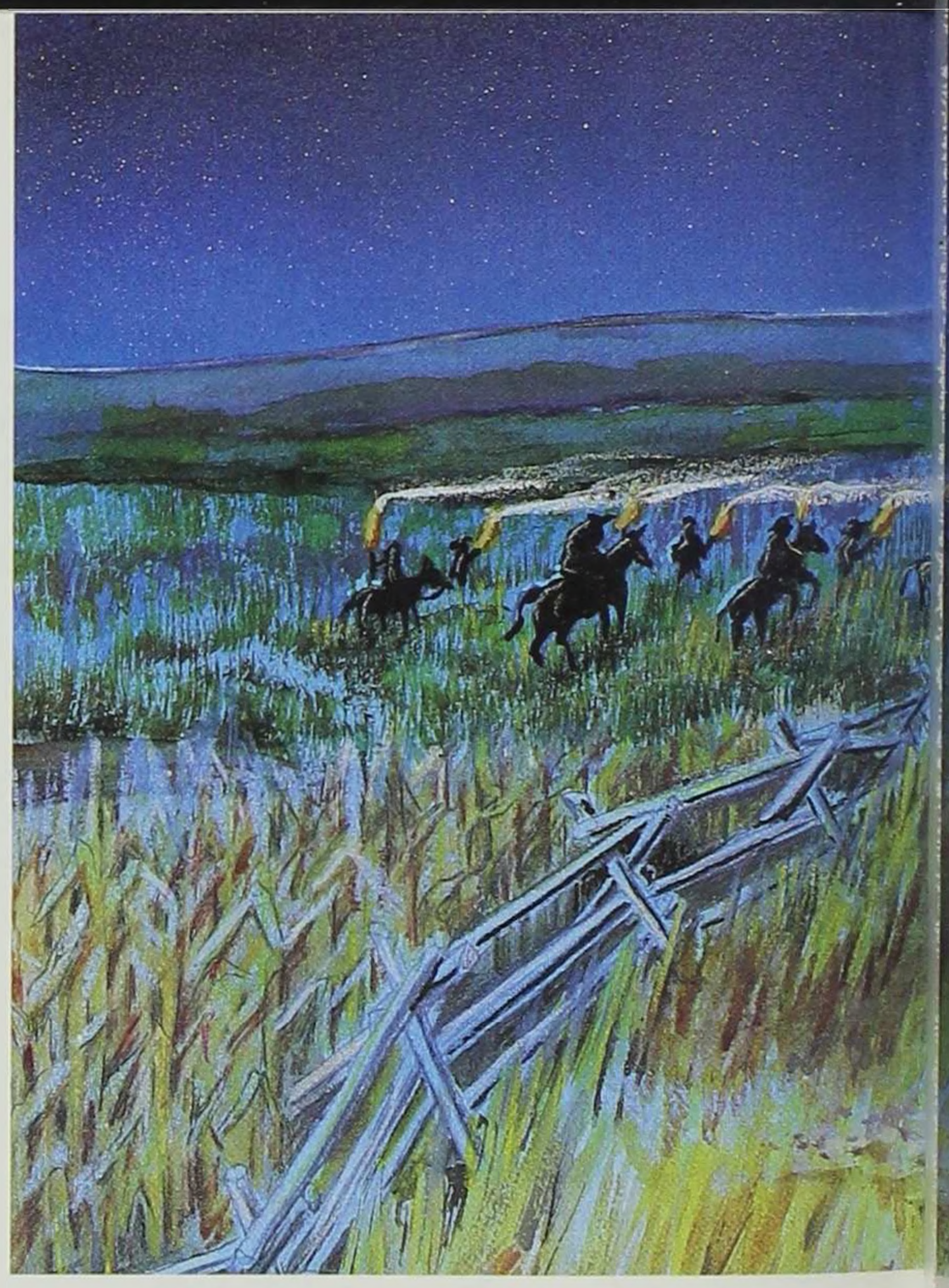
NOTE ON SOURCES

The most important archive of De Quille material is the collection of the William Wright Papers in the Bancroft Library, University of California-Berkeley. The Nevada Historical Society at Reno and the State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City) also have important holdings. No biography of him presently exists, but a substantial biographical and critical essay is now available in Lawrence I. Berkove's introduction to Dan De Quille, *Dives and Lazarus* (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1988), a newly discovered novella. Other important editions of his works include his *The Big Bonanza*, ed. with intro. by Oscar Lewis (New York: Crowell, 1947); C. Grant Loomis, "The Tall Tales of Dan De Quille," *California Folklore Quarterly*, 5 (Jan. 1946), 26-71; and James J. Rawls, ed., *Dan De Quille of the Big Bonanza* (San Francisco: Book Club of California, 1980). A series of Ohio memoirs, edited by Lawrence I. Berkove, is being published this year by the *Northwest Ohio Quarterly*. The author wishes to express his gratitude to Evans Morris, the great-grandson of De Quille, and to other citizens of West Liberty for their valuable assistance in gathering information about De Quille's Iowa years.

Trailing a Lost Child

by Dan De Quille

illustrated by Brenda Robinson



TO-DAY I SAW in a Pacific coast newspaper an account of a lost child. It brought freshly to my mind a search for a lost child in which I participated forty years ago. It was the only case of the kind with which I ever had anything to do. Children are often lost in large towns and cities, to the alarm and grief of their parents, but the straying of a child in a place thronged with people is not so serious a matter as is the wandering away of a little one into the boundless wilds of an unsettled country. The police are notified, advertisements inserted in the daily papers, and as some one is pretty sure to have found and taken care of the little waif, it is soon restored to the arms of its parents, except in the rare cases of kidnapping. In wild regions, however, when a child is known to be lost, it is necessary to at once organize searching parties and scour the country for miles in all directions. Nothing more quickly arouses the people of a settlement in one of our western wilds than the news that a child has been lost. The sympathy of even the most stolid in the community is awakened. In isolated settlements all are drawn together as a sort of class or large family, each member of which is familiarly acquainted with every other member, both great and small. This being the case, when a child is lost by one of the families of such a community, it is only necessary to mention its name to bring its image to the mind's eye of every one; besides, there will be scores of persons who have fondled and dandled the missing little one, looked into its innocent eyes and listened to its pretty prattle.

My experience in hunting for a lost child was had in Iowa, in 1851. It was in what was known as the Wapse-noe-nock (White Earth Creek) settlement, half way between Muscatine and Iowa City. To the southward was a heavy body of timber, a mile or two in width and extending for thirty miles along the creek — the Wapse-noe-nock — while to the west and north lay the wild and boundless prairie.

One night, late in October, I was aroused by a cry of "Hello! Hello! The house!"

It was about ten o'clock at night. Springing out of bed I raised a window and sang out: "Hello!"

"A child is lost — William Henderson's little Lizzie. They missed her about sundown, and since then we have been searching everywhere. Come and bring all the help you can. I am going to carry the news to the other neighbors in this direction," and the man, a neighbor, whose voice I at once recognized, galloped on.

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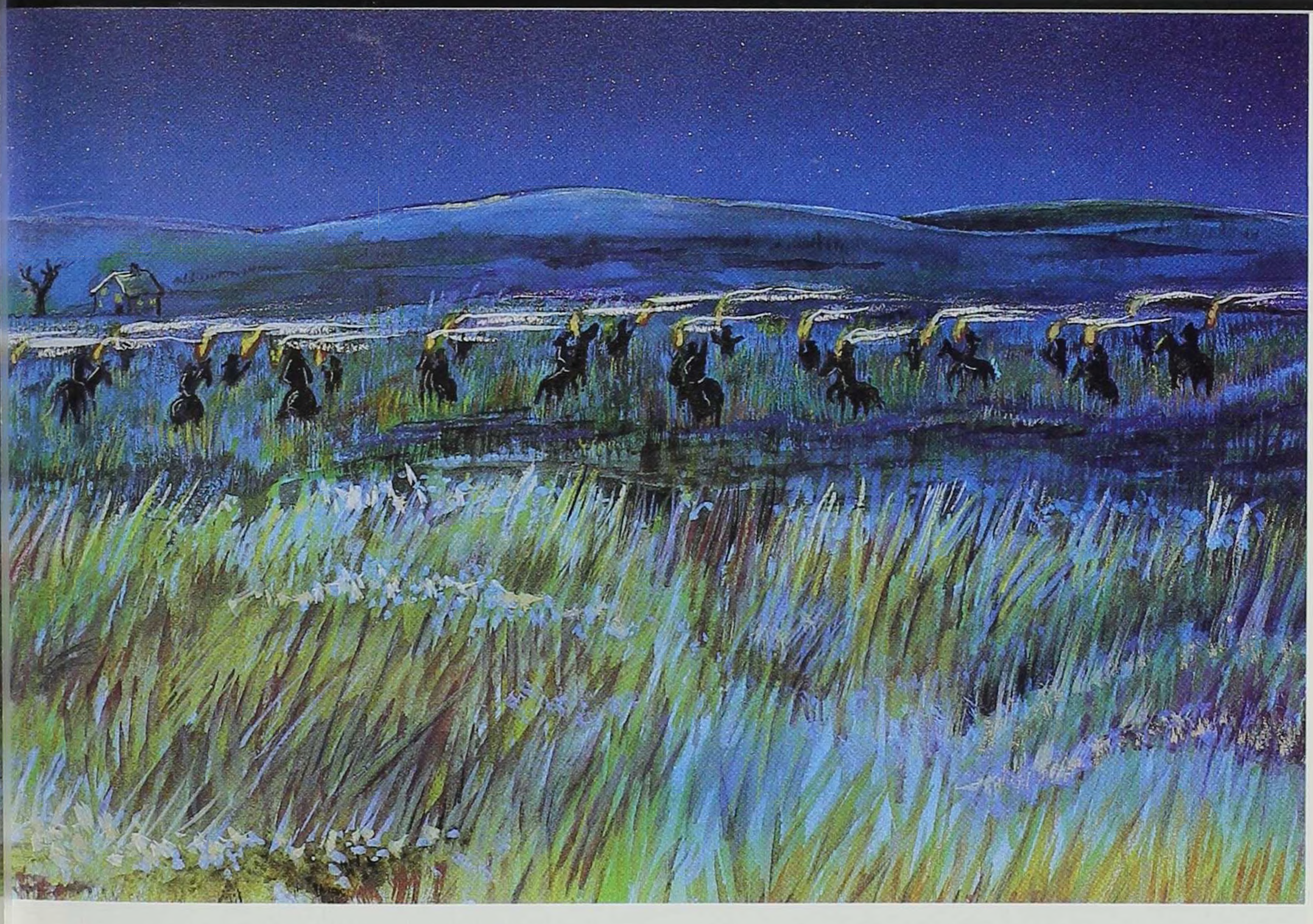


miles away, on the edge of the boundless prairie lying to the northward. My brothers and every man about the house turned out and began dressing, for all had heard the alarming news and all knew the lost child — a little four-year-old. Without waiting to go out upon the prairie to catch up horses, we all struck out on foot for the Henderson farm. When we arrived at Henderson's house, we found it filled with women. Mrs. Henderson was wild. She was determined to rush forth into the prairie, despite the darkness of the night. "The wolves! the wolves!" was her constant cry. "The wolves will kill my poor child!" Twenty women were present, and all nearly as frantic as the mother. The house was a perfect bedlam.

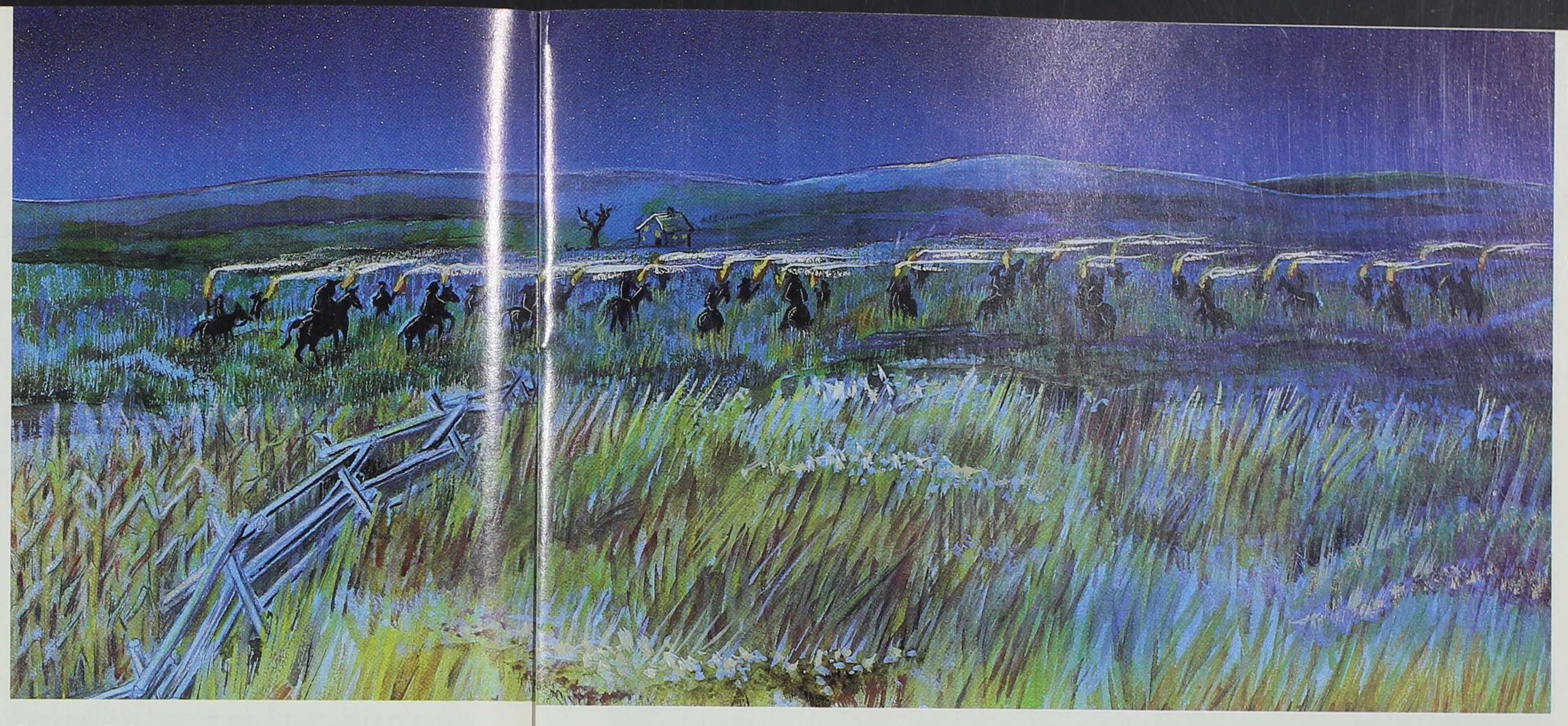
It was not without reason that the mind of the mother was filled with fear of wolves. At that time the prairies were full of coyotes, bands of which nightly prowled about the outlying farms, ready to slip in and carry off lambs or fowls. When intent upon such thieving they are quiet enough, but if balked by the flashing of lights or an unusual commotion, they stand off at a distance and yelp out their disappointment and anger. This evening the hungry brutes, owing to the stir about the farm, had been particularly noisy and indignant. The howls and yelps were torture to the poor mother. Some boys had two or three times gone out into the prairie back of the fields with dogs, but the wolves were in such force that they each time turned and followed the dogs in as soon as the boys turned about. Whenever the wolves began yelping, the poor mother would make a rush for the door, but four or five women, who had resolved themselves into a sort of body-guard, always piled upon her and dragged her back. As the mother was an unusually large and strong woman, these struggles were so fierce as to frighten the fifteen or twenty youngsters collected at the house and set them all to screeching at the top of their voices.

After witnessing a skirmish or two of the kind mentioned, and being unable to obtain any useful information at the house, we beat a retreat. The men were all out in a stretch of prairie that lay east of the farm. Toward them we hastened. Before us was a beautiful sight. Not only all the farmers but all the residents of the little village of West Liberty had taken the field. About sixty men on horseback, each with a huge torch, were seen moving slowly in line

Trailing a Lost Child

by Dan De Quille

illustrated by Brenda Robinson



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across the prairie. The horsemen were about fifty feet apart, and between each pair was a footman. They swept over a wide swath, and when out a mile from the fields would turn, form again and move back again over new ground. In order not to trample the child under the feet of their horses, they did not move out of a walk. At the fields a number of old men were splitting up fence-rails and making torches. Thus they were going over the prairie nearest the house, almost foot by foot.

This unusual sight stirred up the impish coyotes, and they could be frequently heard yelping in the prairie to the northward of the farm, quite heedless of the gun and pistol shots when they raised their infernal howl.

The father of the lost child was among the mounted men. He was calm, but his face looked like that of a dead man in the glare of his torch. We had failed to obtain any useful information at the house, and when the father came to the fence where the torches were renewed, a cousin who was with me approached him. "Mr. Henderson," he said, "keep up your courage. Your child will be found; if not to-night, then surely very soon after daylight. What kind of shoes did she have on?"

"A pair of little buckskin moccasins," said the father.

"That is all I wanted to learn," said my cousin — "Take courage, Mr. Henderson."

My cousin then went to a man from the village who had a bulls-eye lantern, and borrowing it, started off alone in the direction of the house. This cousin — Milton Moore by name — had recently returned from the pineries of Wisconsin, where for three years he had been lumbering on the Chippewa river. He was a great hunter, and had been much among the Chippewa and the Winnebago Indians. In his hunting expeditions among the Indians and with their young braves he had become an expert in the art of trailing. I think few Indians could have beaten him.

When he left with his lantern, I asked no questions. I knew he was off on business; I also knew that he did not like questions. Although only twenty-four years of age, he had the gravity and stoicism of an Indian brave. A few years more among the red men would have fixed him in their ways for life. As it was, he did not get the Indian out of him for about three years; he would every once in a while take his gun and slip away to join some roving band of Indian hunters, presently returning a painted brave and adorned in all the finery of a young red man, every stitch of his civilized dress swapped off for fringed and beaded buckskin, and many dollars given to boot.

In about an hour my cousin came back. A large bonfire of fence-rails had been made, near which I was standing. Seeing my cousin come into the edge of the circle of light thrown from the fire and make me a sign, I went out to him and we withdrew into the dark.

"Well, what news?" I asked.

"Bad, bad!" said he. "The child has gone into the hog-pen."

"Great God! You don't mean to say that she has been devoured by the hogs?"

"No; I hope not. I could find no fragments of her dress. But if she escaped the hogs, I fear she is drowned. At the side of the lot in which the hogs are penned is a slough-well about ten feet deep. I found the child's tracks in the lane leading from the house out to the prairie; the tracks turned and followed the fence of the field. Then she crawled through the fence and went toward the well inside the hog-pen, in a corner of the fence. There I lost the track. Don't let the father know. Take a lantern and half-a-dozen men; then quietly slip away, rig some kind of grappling-hooks and examine the well. If you don't find the body in the well, search every part of the lot for scraps of the child's dress. I shall go southward along the line of the field, and if she came out of that pen alive, I hope somewhere to again find the little moccasin-tracks."

Soundings showed the slough-well to contain only about four feet of water. I would wait for no grappling-hooks. Taking a rail from the fence for use as a ladder, I slipped off my clothes, and descended to the bottom of the well. It was a very cold bath, but I examined every inch of the well's bottom, and found nothing but a drowned pig. This relieved our minds of all thoughts of the well. While I was dressing, the men with me took the lantern and began searching the corral, a lot of half-an-acre containing about sixty half-wild hogs of some unrecognizable prairie breed. While looking

for shreds of clothing, the men were also to look for blood on the jaws of such of the hogs as were white-haired.

Stooping and groping up to my neck in water had so chilled me that I left the examination of the lot to the others, and bent my course toward the bonfires, a quarter-of-a-mile away to the southward. Just before reaching the fires I met my cousin. Said he: "All looks well again. The child came out of the hog-pen all right. I have found the prints of her moccasins in three places in the dirt thrown out of gopher-holes. She is following the main line of fence southward among the cornfields of the different farms, crawling back and forth through the fence. I left her track in the cornfield of her Uncle John Lewis. What I want you to do is to call off the horsemen who are working southward over the prairie. I want nobody to go in that direction to obliterate the trail I am following. Make the father understand this. Tell him that, if left to myself, I will find his child. To

convince him that I know what I am about, give him these threads which I found in places where his little girl had crawled through the fence," and he gave me three or four bright woollen threads from a fringed hood worn by the child.

I went toward the half-dozen bonfires blazing on the edge of the prairie, while my cousin hurried away to the southward. It was now about one o'clock in the morning and so cold that groups of men were huddled about all the fires. The horsemen soon came in when I announced the news of the tracks of the child having been found far to the southward of the hog-pen.

"The hog-pen!" cried the father. He had been kept in ignorance of the child having been trailed into the corral. When fully informed of what has been related above, the father cried out: "Thank God that she passed there in safety!" Soon, however, he said: "But are you sure her tracks have been found beyond the hog-lot?"

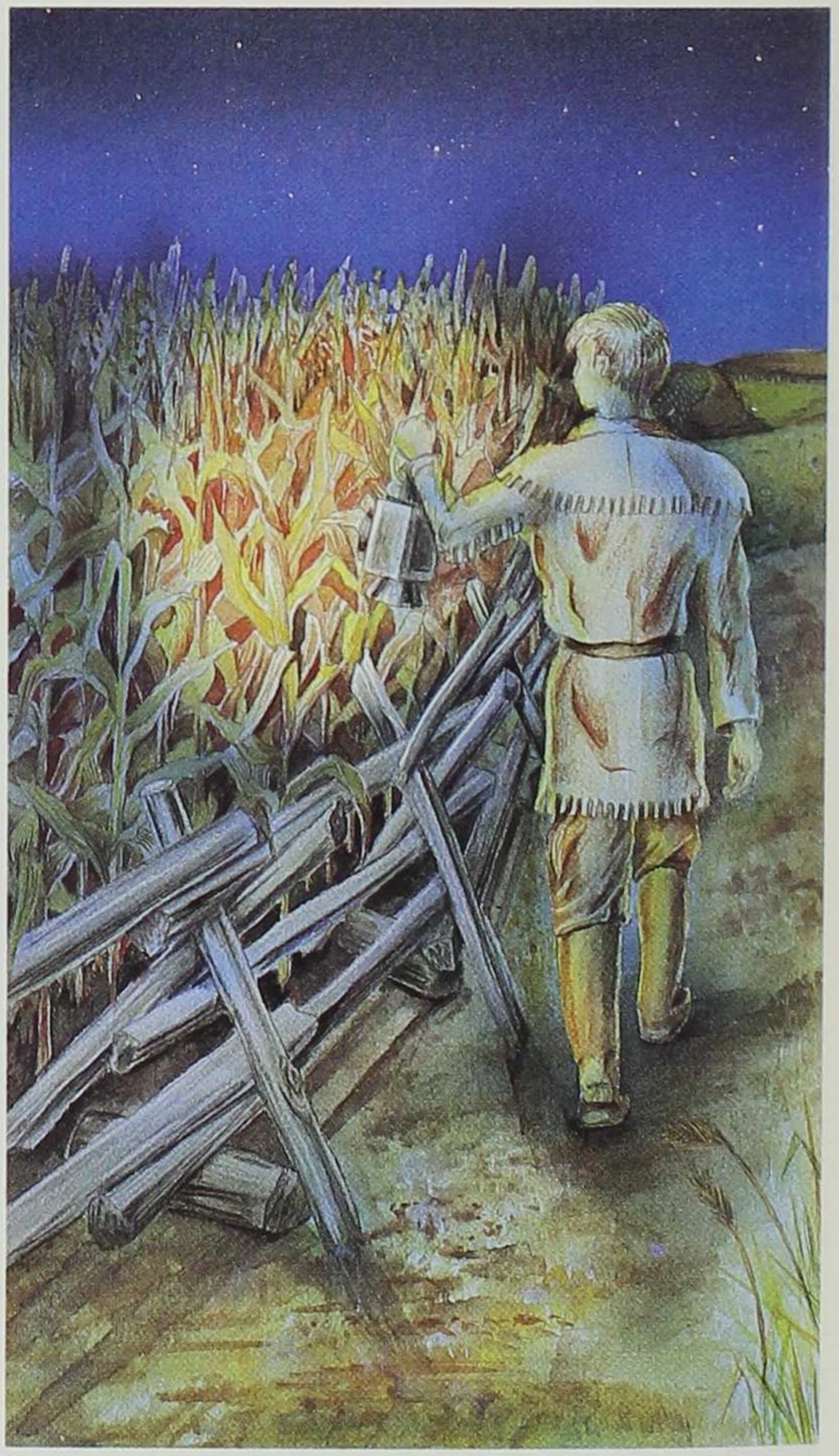
"Yes, sure," said I. "Here are threads from the child's hood found in places where she crawled through cracks in the fence."

The father clutched the threads and kissing them placed them in his vest pocket. "I am convinced," said he. Being informed of my cousin's wishes, Mr. Henderson then asked all to discontinue the search until further orders.

The horsemen dismounted and, tying their animals to the fence, gathered about the fires. Fence-rails were heaped upon the bonfires as freely as though they had been ordinary cordwood. The men brought corn from the adjoining field and parched it on the cob, either by burying the ears in hot embers or by toasting them on a stick. Armfuls of corn were also brought out for the horses. One seemed in a camp of Missouri jay-hawkers.

Men, on foot and on horseback, had been coming in all night, and a considerable number were still arriving, some from farms five and ten miles distant. Altogether nearly three hundred men, young and old, were in the field. There were present representatives of about twenty families, all nearly related to the lost child, with old Enoch Lewis, the Quaker grandfather, at the head.

News was sent to the mother that the child



had not gone out into the prairies; that her tracks were being followed southward among the cornfields, of the farms surrounding the village of West Liberty. This was news that would relieve her mind from fear of the packs of wolves that had been yelping in the prairie to the northward. The cowardly brutes would not venture southward past the bonfires and the crowds of men about them.

About two o'clock I stole away from the camp and went in search of my cousin. I followed the main fence leading south. I came to where the fence formed the dividing line between the Gregg and Bozarth farms, but still had not found my man. Climbing the fence of the Gregg farm into a great cornfield, I again moved along the line of the central fence. I had gone about ten rods when I was brought to a

halt by the voice of my cousin, the light of whose lantern I had long been straining my eyes to see.

"Well, which way?" said he. I looked about me on all sides, but in the dim starlight could see no one.

"Where are you?" I asked.

"Here," said my cousin, "sit down."

Stooping, I peered into a fence-corner and found my man lying among the grass and weeds. "What are you doing here in the dark?"

"Waiting. My lantern went out just here."

"Well, why don't you come up to the camp and get another? If the child is not soon found she may chill to death."

"O, no — she has on over her dress a good thick cloak. Her father told me that. She's all right. She's found."

"Found! Where is she?"

"Not far away. She is taking another bit of a nap just now."

"Good Lord! and you lying here to let her take a nap while her father, mother and all her people are wild about her. Where is the poor little thing?"

"Somewhere out in this cornfield. I have not yet seen her."

"If you haven't seen her, how do you know where she is?"

"I'll tell you how I know. I tracked her out of her Uncle John's cornfield to this cornfield on the Gregg farm. She first went a little way into the prairie — I don't know how far — but turned and came back to the fence, as I was sure she would, for the rise in the prairie just there would make all before her the same as blank. She would turn about in search of some object familiar to her, and seeing the fence, would come back to it. Just ahead was the cross-fence of this field, which would bar her way, so I came on and soon found where she had crawled through it, leaving behind a little woollen mitten. I trailed her along the line of fence to this spot. Here she turned into the cornfield, and I had not followed her ten feet before my lantern went out, so I just halted here on the trail and curled up in the fence corner to wait for daylight."

"But how do you know she's alive and sleeping?"

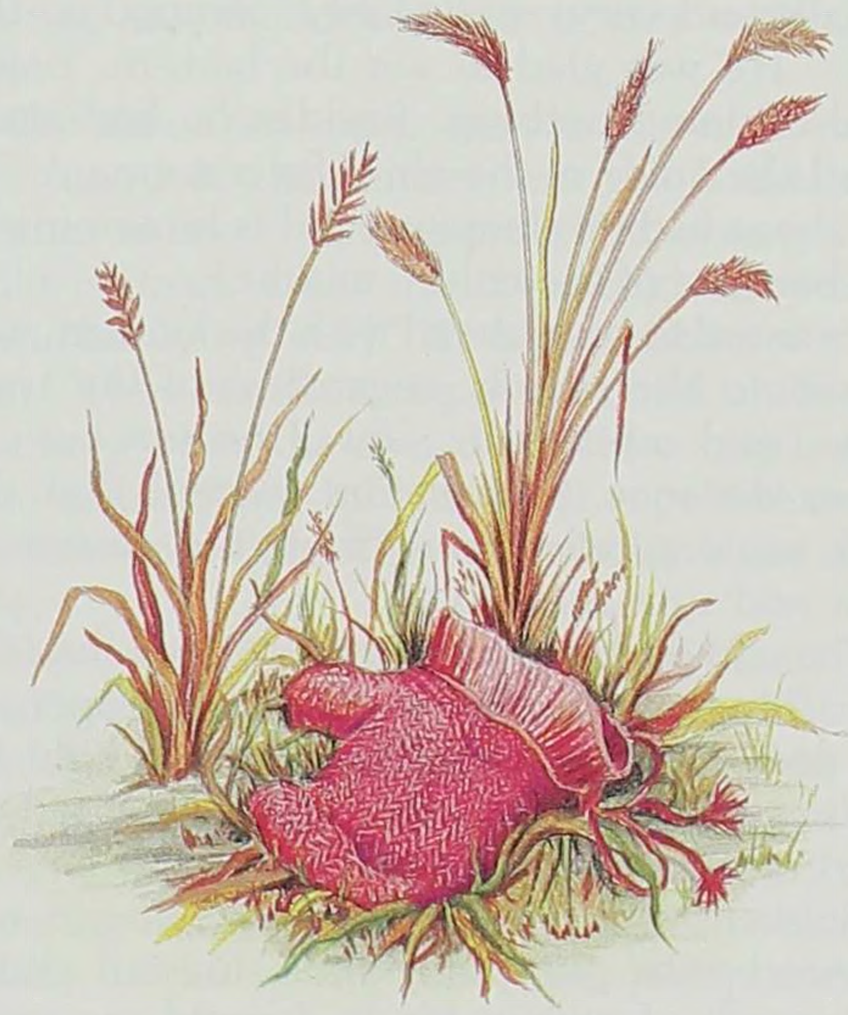
"Well, half-an-hour ago I heard her cry for a moment, just as children do at times when disturbed in their sleep. I started up, but as she ceased crying almost immediately, I lay down again with my ear to the ground. About daylight, when a little breeze starts up, it will be colder, and she will cry again. Then I may get her; if not, I'll find her as soon as it is light enough to see the trail. She is not two hundred yards from this spot, but I don't know the direction exactly."

"You take things very coolly. Let me go and get another lantern. Think of the wretchedness of the parents. Besides, the child may chill to death."

"No fear of her death from the cold. These little prairie youngsters are very hot-blooded. I have not found it cold lying here in the weeds and grass. I told the father I'd find his child, and I'm not going to have all that rabble rushing down here, tearing through the corn like wild men. Now, go back to camp. About daylight let the child's uncle, Clark Lewis, come on his horse to the cross-fence. Then you come on here, and we will go and get the child."

"But the father, what shall I tell him?"

"Give him this little mitten; tell him that I



have not lost the trail and that he shall have his child before the sun is an hour high. But tell him to keep this news to himself and remain quietly at camp. If the men up there want to ride about the prairies, let them go — I don't want a crowd down here in this cornfield."

I went back to the camp and, taking the father aside, gave him the little mitten and as much comfort as I could. A great fear that his little girl was dead immediately seized him, however. "No," said I, "she is sleeping quietly enough."

"Quietly sleeping! How do you know that?"

For answer I repeated what my cousin had told me. When I mentioned the crying of the child, the father wanted to at once rush away to my cousin. "No, let him go on in his own cool, slow and sure way. You will make him nervous and hasty."

Next I sought out Clark Lewis, and by the time I had told him what was required of him signs of dawn were visible in the east. He wished to set out immediately, and while he was getting his horse, I borrowed a lantern containing half a candle, in order to begin the trailing at once; for until after sunrise the light would be dim among the tall corn.

Clark Lewis halted at the cross fence while I went on and joined my cousin where he was literally and very comfortably "camped on the trail." He was glad to see the lantern, being tired of doing nothing. Besides he had again heard the voice of the child for a moment. "It has about had its sleep out and is beginning to fret because of the cold," said he.

I wanted to rush ahead with the lantern, and prosecute the search, regardless of the trail. "No," said my cousin, "for I am not sure of either distance or direction, except that the faint wailing cries came from the eastward. Slow and sure is the plan."

The old-fashioned tin lantern was found a poor thing for our use. It was only by opening the door of it that a sufficiently broad light for trailing could be obtained, and then it fell far short of the bull's-eye.

Between the rows of corn the ground was covered with pumpkin-vines, fox-tail grass, and weeds of various kinds. I could see nothing. My cousin, however, saw everything. When shown, I could see where a pumpkin-vine had been dragged out of place by the tired feet of the little one, but I could not see the moccasin-prints, and failed to note bent and crushed weeds. As the ground was thickly covered and hidden in most places, it was practically by what he saw among the weeds and plants that my cousin followed the trail.

It was slow work, but by flashing the light ahead to where a vine had been dragged, or a corn-blade broken off, we occasionally went forward ten feet at a bound. The trail, too, zigzagged about — did not go straight ahead between any two corn-rows.

"She cannot be far away," said my cousin. "She has here been wandering in the dark. Darkness came upon her about the time she turned away from the fence. All looked alike to her, or she would have still held to the mark which had guided her so far — the fence."

Daylight found us still puzzling over the windings of the trail. In eccentricity it reminded me of the trails of the opossums I had followed in boyhood. Not a sound had we heard from the child. This worried me, as I feared she had chilled to death.

"Nothing of the kind," said my cousin. "She has heard us and is lying low. She is in a condition to be afraid of every noise she hears."

Sunrise came and we made better progress. The trail had turned and was leading back toward the fence. My cousin, who was about ten feet in advance, suddenly turned and motioned me to move forward. When I came up to him, he pointed in silence to a spot about three steps beyond where we stood. There in the midst of a mass of pumpkin-vines I saw the lower part of the child's red dress, but her head and the upper part of her body were hidden under some large vine leaves.

The sight gave me a great shock. "My God!" cried I, "she is dead! The poor child has perished."

At the sound of my voice up came the child's head. For a moment she stared at us with wild eyes, then on all fours she began to scuttle away, keeping her little body close to the ground, like a cat when in pursuit of game. In a moment my cousin had her in his arms. She clawed and fought him like a little wildcat, but not a word or sound escaped her lips.

She had got back to within fifty yards of the

fence. As we carried her out of the field, we tried to soothe her, but she would not speak and was constantly struggling to escape. When we had carried her to her Uncle Clark, who was waiting at the cross fence, and he had told her he would take her to her papa, the wildness went out of her face at once and she cried: "My papa! my papa!" She was her father's pet, and it was afterward found that it was in search of him that she had bundled up and sallied forth, knowing that he had gone to a neighbor's near the village.

When half-way back to the camp we came to the father, who, seated upon his horse, was waiting to hear from us. The child had hidden its face against its uncle's bosom, and seeing it carried in that way, the poor man thought it was dead. "Dead, dead!" cried he. "My poor little Lizzie is dead! Oh, I feared it!"

"Dead!" cried the uncle. "No, she is as much alive as a little wild-cat!"

In a moment Lizzie was in her father's arms and almost smothered with kisses. Still, she looked rather wild-eyed, and would not speak further than to occasionally murmur fondly, "Papa — my papa."

Wild were the cheers that rent the air when we arrived at the camp — cheer upon cheer. Then a half-a-dozen young men rushed for their horses, and there was a wild race across the prairie to carry the news to the mother, and those who had all night been waiting at the house. Whooping like wild Indians, they thundered along, spurring with their heels and smiting the flanks of their horses with their hats.

The shout sent up at the camp, a mile away, was heard at the house, and the half-crazed mother at once misinterpreted it, crying: "My child is dead. Hear the shrieking! They have found her lying dead!" In vain the other women said: "They are cheering — the child is safe." It was only when the crowd of wild young horsemen came flying in with their report that the mother would allow herself to believe the child safe.

The crowding about of so many men and their wild cheering so frightened the lost girl that she clung to her father's neck and hid her face in his bosom. Then he all of a sudden caught the excitement of the moment, and spurring his horse, dashed homeward about as wildly as the young men who had preceded him. □

"Let your Corn Stalks Buy a Maytag"

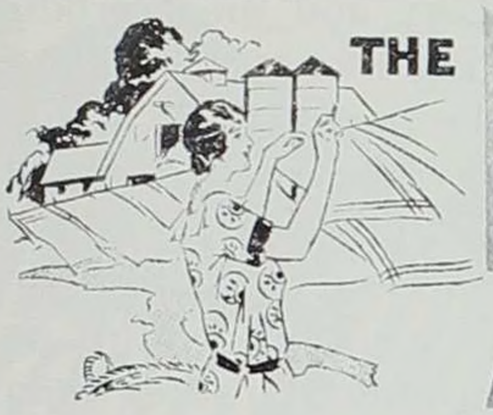
Prescriptive Literature and Domestic Consumerism in Rural Iowa, 1929–1939

by Katherine Jellison

SIXTEEN YEARS before the 1929 stock market crash, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) polled farm women around the country in an effort to determine their particular economic, social, educational, and domestic needs. The USDA received 2,241 replies to this 1913 survey, and most of them echoed the sentiments of an Iowa respondent who stated that from a woman's perspective, farm homes most needed "Motor power[ed] (inexpensive) . . . labor-saving machinery in and out of doors." According to survey results, farm women resented the fact that economic and power-source problems, and the priority placed on farm technology over household equipment, deprived them of the modern appliances that city women used.

In the year following that survey, the Smith-Lever Act responded to farm women's concerns by calling for the use of federal and state funds to support extension programs providing "instruction and practical demonstrations in agriculture and home economics." Much of the vast literature that emerged from the extension movement during the next twenty-five years prescribed the use of mechanical equipment in farm homes. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Iowa extension service pamphlets, bearing titles such as *Laundry Methods and Equipment* and *Planning and Equipping the Kitchen*, recommended the purchase of modern devices. During the Great Depression, appliance advertisements, as well as New Deal propaganda, took up the advice literature's call for farm home modernization and attempted to overcome any consumer resistance by exploiting many of the concerns farm women had been voicing since 1913.

Washing machine companies were among the chief advertisers encouraging impoverished farm women to buy their product. Before 1929, power-washer manufacturers had largely relied on the appliance's good reputation in prescriptive literature aimed at farm women. Such literature included a 1921 USDA bulletin, which had characterized laundry work as "among the hardest of the regular household tasks" and had promoted as the farm housewife's ideal "a separate room for her laundry, with running water and modern labor-saving devices." Extension service publications had argued that farm women particularly deserved such equipment because they could not rely on laundresses or commercial laundries as city women did and because farm women washed larger and dirtier loads of laundry than their urban counterparts. Reaping the benefits of such positive publicity, Iowa washing machine manufacturers, including the Maytag Company of Newton and the Voss Company of Davenport, had soon stepped in to fill the demand for power washers in farm households. But what advice literature had once characterized as a farm home necessity had become a luxury in depression-era Iowa,



THE

NEW MAYTAG

Sets a NEW Standard for farm washers

THE MAYTAG has always been the favorite farm washer . . . the first washer to be equipped with an in-built gasoline Multi-Motor The NEW Maytag, the latest and greatest achievement of the world's largest washer factory, more than ever appeals to farm women.

The NEW, roomy, one-piece, cast-aluminum tub, with quick-washing gyra-foam action . . . the NEW roller water remover, with enclosed, positive-action, automatic drain . . . the NEW quiet, life-time, oil-packed drive, with handy, auto-type shift-lever for starting and stopping the water-action . . . these and other new Maytag developments give the New Maytag value, usefulness and convenience that overshadow any previous Maytag, surpass any other washer.

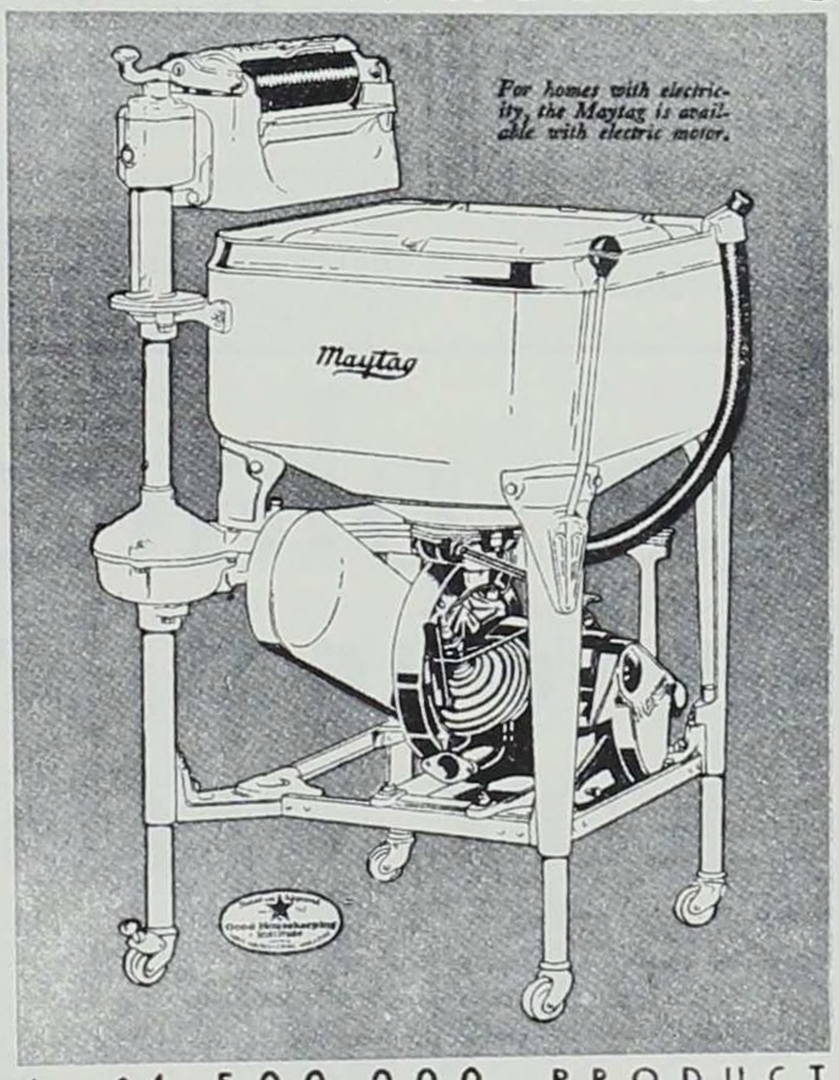
THE MAYTAG COMPANY

Newton, Iowa

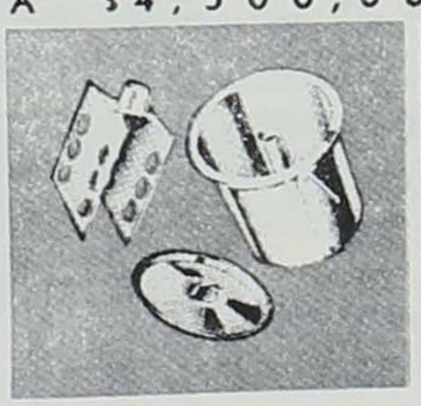
Founded 1893

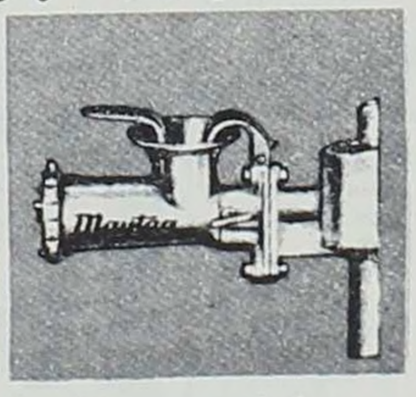
NORTHWESTERN BRANCH:
515 Washington Ave. North
MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.

Branches, Distributors or Representatives in London, Berlin, Hamburg, Geneva, Genoa, Oslo, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Wellington, Buenaventure, Buenos Aires and other principal cities.



A $4,500,000 PRODUCT





TUNE IN on Maytag Radio Programs

over N.B.C. Coast to Coast Network MONDAY Evenings 9:00 E.S.T., 8:00 C.S.T., 7:00 M.T., 6:00 P.T.

WJZ, New York; KDKA, Pittsburgh; KYW, Chicago; KSTP, St. Paul; WSM, Nashville; WREN, Kansas City; KOA, Denver; KSL, Salt Lake City; WKY, Oklahoma City; KPRC, Houston; KECA, Los Angeles; KGW, Portland; *and Associated Stations.*

The Maytag Gasoline Multi-Motor

The simplest, finest, most compact washer engine built . . . interchangeable with the electric motor by removing only four bolts. Only four working parts . . . a step on the pedal starts it. Flood-proof carburetor, bronze bearings, Bosch high-tension magneto and speed governor, give it a smooth, steady flow of dependable power.

A week's washing FREE - - - -

Write or phone the nearest dealer for a trial washing with the New Maytag. If it doesn't sell itself, don't keep it. Divided payments you'll never miss.

Power Churn Attachment

The Maytag churn attachment is an aluminum churn of 3 gallons churning capacity. It sets over the gyratator post and utilizes the same power that washes the clothes. Water in the washer tub keeps the cream at the proper churning temperature. Easily cleaned, durable and a time and labor saver.

F-4-30

A Power Meat Grinder Attachment

By simply lifting off the Roller Water Remover, this New Meat Grinder Attachment may be set over the shaft head of the power leg. Grinds sausage, mince meat, chops nuts, raisins, fruit, relish, etc. Saves time and labor. The churn and the meat grinder attachments are additional equipment sold at reasonable cost.

Maytag Aluminum Washer

MAYTAG AD, *WALLACES' FARMER*, APRIL 12, 1930, PAGE 19

Depression-era ads reveal tactics used for selling washing machines to farm women. Above: Manufacturers reasoned that adding meat grinder and butter churn attachments would increase the appliance's usefulness on the farm.

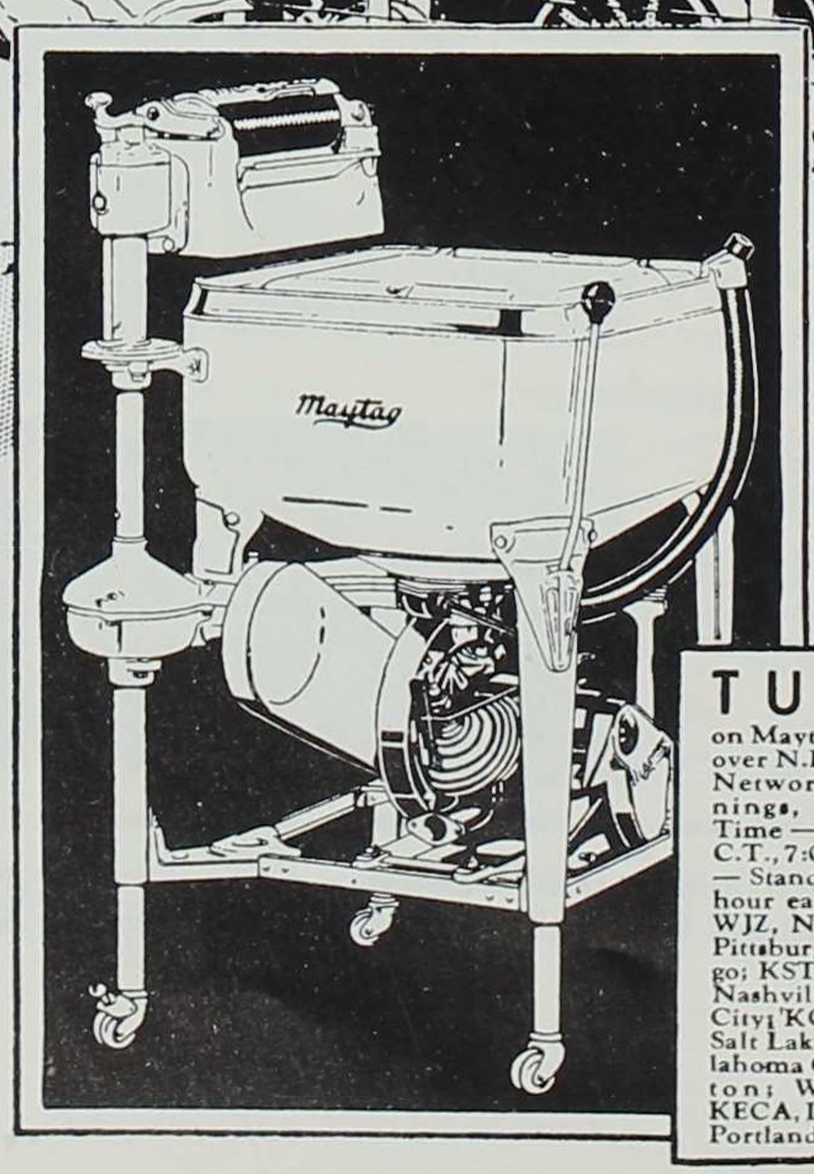
and washing machine companies had to develop new strategies to sell their product.

ONE ANSWER to this depression-era marketing problem was to alter the product itself in an attempt to enhance its reputation as a labor- and money-saver. The Maytag Company used this strategy early in the depression by providing butter churn and meat grinder attachments, "at reasonable cost," which could be placed over the washing machine's gyrator post and shaft head and thus powered by the washing machine motor. Maytag advertisements in *Wallaces' Farmer*, Iowa's major farm life periodical, often prominently featured these "labor-saving" attachments at a time when women were interested in saving money by preparing more dairy and meat products at home and in making money by selling such products outside the home.

Another strategy that washing machine advertisements employed was to capitalize on farm women's resentment of the fact that family resources often went to acquire modern field and barn equipment rather than new household devices. During the depression, outraged letters on the subject often appeared in *Wallaces' Farmer*. One, from a Pocahontas County resident who signed herself "A Disgusted Farm Woman," complained that "most men think that a modern kitchen is the bunk. Give us running water and electricity and refrigerators to keep our salads cool and our

Below and right: Ads played on farm women's resentment of the power machinery that men used to ease farm work.

Change places with your *husband* *next washday*



IF your husband did the washing, he would insist on having a new Maytag, for the same reason that he buys power machinery for his field work.

The quick-washing Maytag gives you extra hours to spend in other profitable ways. The gentle, water-washing action makes the clothes last longer . . . washes everything clean without hand rubbing.

For homes with electricity, the Maytag is available with electric motor.

TUNE IN

on Maytag Radio Programs over N.B.C. Coast to Coast Network Monday Evenings, Daylight Saving Time — 9:00 E.T., 8:00 C.T., 7:00 Mt.T., 6:00 P.T. — Standard Time is one hour earlier.
WJZ, New York; KDKA, Pittsburgh; KYW, Chicago; KSTP, St. Paul; WSM, Nashville; WREN, Kansas City; KOA, Denver; KSL, Salt Lake City; WKY, Oklahoma City; KPRC, Houston; WFAA, Dallas; KECA, Los Angeles; KGW, Portland *and Asso. Sta.*

MAYTAG AD, *WALLACES' FARMER*, SEPT. 14, 1935, PAGE 18

meats fresh, and we can be just as good cooks as you will find anywhere. . . . The men wouldn't consider planting oats by hand . . . but lots of women still use the same cooking devices our grandmothers used." Exploiting such sentiment, a 1930 Maytag advertisement asked farm women to "Change places with your husband next washday." The ad featured a drawing of a husband wearing an apron and carrying a full laundry basket as his wife drives by, waving from a tractor. The advertisement told women, "If your husband did the washing, he would insist on having a new Maytag, for the same reason that he buys power machinery for his field work." In 1931, Sears advertised its washers by arguing that "Men wouldn't think of pumping water for their cattle by hand. . . . So women shouldn't be doing their washing by hand when power can do it cheaper and quicker." By 1935, the image of the selfish farm husband had become such a staple of washing-machine advertising that the message of a Maytag ad featuring a man on a tractor, under the heading "Farm Women are also Entitled to Power," needed no further explanation.

Another major theme in appliance advertising of the period was the issue of modernity, with each washing machine company claiming that its product was the most modern alternative to the old-fashioned washboard. In 1929, the Voss Company claimed that "farm women have found . . . the Voss has every worth-while feature that you expect in a modern washer," and an advertisement for Thor washing machines promised that with the "World's Lowest Priced Quality Washing Machine . . . every farm home may have the most modern of all washers." In another 1929 advertisement, Maytag combined the modernity theme with the home-appliance versus field-equipment debate: "Farms of today demand modern labor-saving conveniences in the home as well as in the field. The Maytag is a washer in step with modern farm progress."

Advertising often exploited farm women's distress that they lagged behind urban women in the modernization of their homes. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, farm women's organizations and farm life publications voiced concern that women on farms were, in the words of one article, developing an "inferiority complex" because their homes did not live up to urban-defined standards. ABC Companion washer ads played on this concern by assuring consumers that "Farm women . . . as modern-minded as those who live in the city . . . need especially to banish the drudgery of wash day." The company's 1930 advertising campaign drove home the point that farm women were just as up-to-date as urban women by featuring pictures of the ABC Companion being used by a stylish young woman rather than the motherly, aproned female figure often seen in advertisements aimed at farm women.

Most of the era's washing machine ads emphasized the low prices of their products and included such key phrases as "Deferred Payments You'll Never Miss." Recognizing that farm women were using a variety of novel methods to earn money during the depression, the Maytag Company encouraged Iowa farm women to use one such method to purchase a new washing machine. Under the heading "Let your Corn Stalks Buy a Maytag," the 1929 ad urged farm women to take advantage of the new cornstalk paper industry by gathering and

selling "a product until now considered waste — [to earn] money for additional home comforts and conveniences." Most Iowa farm women, however, employed more traditional means to earn money for household expenses. Farm women reported to *Wallaces' Farmer* that they were stepping up their efforts to raise poultry and can garden produce during hard times. Acknowledging that fact, Maytag advertisements by 1935 were urging farm women to "Let the Maytag Give You More Time For Your Garden and Chickens." In other words, investment in a Maytag washer could indirectly lead to greater profits for depression-era women involved in raising and marketing their own products.

Opposite: Ads urged farm women to use extra income to buy washing machines. Above: A bobbed hairstyle and a washer spell modern living in this ad aimed at farm women who envied urban "luxuries."

ABC COMPANION AD, *WALLACES' FARMER*, JAN. 18, 1930, PAGE 12

NEW HOPE arose for improving farm women's economic situation in 1933, with the creation of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA). This controversial New Deal program to raise commodity prices by limiting farm production met with initial opposition from Iowans who were used to farming from "fence row to fence row" and who balked at the idea of cutting back on production at a time when people were starving in American cities. Secretary of Agriculture Henry A. Wallace responded to criticism of the AAA by using frequent radio broadcasts and the pages of his family's farm life magazine — *Wallaces' Farmer* — to convince farmers in Iowa and elsewhere of the program's merits. AAA propaganda directed at farm women included a front-page *Wallaces' Farmer* editorial, in which the author played on women's resentment that cash resources often went for improved equipment outside the home. The editorialist urged farm women to spend a portion of their families' first crop reduction checks to buy "a new sink and drain in the kitchen, a bathroom and complete water system . . . a new range, a power washing machine . . . and plenty of other things to make housework easier and to make the home more attractive."

Letters of support for the AAA published in *Wallaces' Farmer* demonstrated that Iowa farm women often followed such advice. A Fremont County woman wrote that her family's first purchase with its AAA check "was a power washing machine, because it would save so much time and hard labor." Supporters of the AAA also credited it with raising farm prices to a level where farm families could afford a variety of household improvements. A letter from a Hardin County woman, appearing in *Wallaces' Farmer* in the last weeks before the 1936 presidential election, measured the success of New Deal policies by the number of household improvements in her rural neighborhood: "In our community we know of new furnaces in farm houses, new cupboards, new rugs, electric refrigerators. . . . As a farm woman too busy to study either politics or economics, I just 'feel' that these new things have come because of increased farm incomes, and that increased farm incomes are the result of the Roosevelt-Wallace program."

Such statements served not only to encourage women's support of the AAA but to illustrate a main theme of New Deal agricultural policy — that farm life could be as pleasant and vital as life elsewhere. A major key to farm life happiness was the modernization of farm homes, and this was a primary goal of another New Deal project — the Rural Electrification Administration (REA), created in 1935. In a

MAYTAG AD, *WALLACES' FARMER*, JUNE 8, 1935, PAGE 23

Less time washing clothes meant more time for producing food, for home and market.

1936 speech to farm women, for example, Secretary Wallace promised them that the REA would allow farm women to enjoy the same modern equipment that city women used. A year later, *Wallaces' Farmer* offered cash prizes to farm women for the best letters describing how electricity in the farm home had changed their lives. First prize went to Mrs. L.C. Davis of Tama County who described electricity as a "good fairy . . . [who] has waved her magic wand across my path." She went on to describe how her electric range, refrigerator, vacuum cleaner, iron, cream separator, toaster, and washer "all help to make life comfortable." Other letters indicated that household electricity had cured farm women's domestic inferiority complex. Mrs. Ed Reiste of Dallas County wrote about the wonders of her new electric range and added that the "farm woman of yesterday envied the city woman. . . . But now, with our modern homes, I think the city woman may well envy her farm sister."

THIS STATEMENT represented extreme optimism at a time when economic realities still prevented most Iowans from achieving the modern domestic ideal. On the eve of World War II, only 16.3 percent of Iowa farm homes had mechanical refrigerators, 80.1 percent of Iowa farm women still cooked on wood- or coal-burning stoves, and only 21.5 percent of Iowa farm homes had running water. At this time, 40.7 percent of Iowa farm homes used electricity, but only a small proportion of them could rely on REA high lines; most farm homes still used undependable wind- or gasoline-powered home generators. Unlike high-line, central-station power, home electric plants could not run machinery twenty-four hours a day. They rarely powered major domestic appliances because their capacity was too low and because running farm equipment took priority.

Nevertheless, advertisers of the late thirties continued to dismiss the economic and power-source problems of farm women. Noting that most American farms did not yet have high-line electricity, a 1937 ad for Briggs and Stratton gasoline motors told farm women, "there is no necessity to wait . . . for the comforts and conveniences of hi-line service when you can have them right now with modern gasoline motor powered farm appliances, such as washing machines." Editorials in *Wallaces' Farmer* also continued to promote farm home modernization. In a 1938 editorial entitled "Power in Kitchen and Laundry," the author noted that only 18.5 percent of Iowa farm homes had high-line electricity, but stated that this situa-

tion "need not keep mother from having labor-saving power machinery, since much of it can be secured with gasoline motor equipment."

Such messages kept alive Iowa farm women's desire for modern appliances until the liberalization of REA loan policies in 1944 and postwar prosperity began to allow them to purchase more household appliances. The enthusiasm with which women embraced these new appliances is a testament to the strength of the message that New Dealers and advertisers espoused. By 1950, 83.3 percent of Iowa farm women would have mechanized refrigerators, and most would cook with modern ranges. In that same year, a majority of Iowa farm homes would have running water, and 90.9 percent, electricity. Within another ten years, 96 percent of Iowa farm homes would own washing machines. The words of Amy Bilsland of rural Archer, Iowa, demonstrate the excitement of farm women who finally achieved the domestic ideal that had been set forth in depression-era advertisements and New Deal literature: "Electricity went through in 1940-some. . . . Electricity, that was an awful wonderful thing. . . . I could iron whenever I wanted to; use anything I wanted to; had a toaster and a clock. . . . I got an electric motor on my washing machine — that was a great improvement."

Although subsequent time-labor studies would call into question the actual labor-saving value of such equipment, Amy Bilsland and other rural Iowans remained convinced of the merits of modern domestic appliances. For reasons of economic survival and political expediency, appliance advertisers and New Deal propagandists worked together to sustain the desire for mechanical household devices that USDA and state extension service advice literature had fostered in the decade and a half before the Great Depression. Playing on themes that farm women themselves had voiced for many years — economy, reduction of workload, resentment of farm men and city women — appliance advertisements and New Deal propaganda kept alive the ideal of mechanized domesticity in depression-era Iowa. □

Farms Have Changed ...So Have Washers!

FARM folks of yesteryear accepted hard work as a matter of course. Farms of today demand modern labor-saving conveniences in the home as well as in the field. The Maytag is a washer in step with modern farm progress.

MAYTAG AD, *WALLACES' FARMER*, OCT. 4, 1929, PAGE 23

NOTE ON SOURCES

Farm life publications such as *Wallaces' Farmer* (1929–1938) and *Rural America* (June, Oct. 1936) were rich sources of advertisements, editorials, and letters from farm women. The original 1913 USDA survey documents have been lost, but the results were published in a 1915 pamphlet series by the Government Printing Office, bearing titles such as *Domestic Needs of Farm Women*, *Economic Needs . . .*, *Educational Needs . . .*, and *Social and Labor Needs*. Another USDA publication consulted was Lydia Ray Balderston, *Home Laundering* (1921). For further discussion of Iowa extension service literature of this period, see Katherine Jellison, "Domestic Technology on the Farm," *Plainswoman* (Sept. 1987). U.S. censuses on housing (1940, 1950, and 1960) and on agriculture (1954) yielded statistics on modern conveniences in rural homes. The Amy Bilsland interview (July 26, 1978) is part of the Oral History Collection, Special Collections, State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City). This article was originally presented at the Missouri Valley History Conference (Omaha, March 9-12, 1988).

Why Bother with Museums?

by Willard L. Boyd

Editor's Note: Willard "Sandy" Boyd knows Iowa well and knows museums well. Former University of Iowa president, he now presides over the Field Museum. His speech at the Congress of Historical Organizations in Des Moines (partially funded by the Iowa Humanities Board and the National Endowment for the Humanities) has appeared in the *Des Moines Register*. His views may not represent those of the IHB or the NEH.

WHY BOTHER with museums? Why bother with history? Why bother with local museums? Why bother with local history? Why indeed bother with these dull subjects on a lovely June evening

Or even more to the point, why bother with them during the hours museums and historical societies are open? After all, I am interested in life, not artifacts and past events. Artifacts and past events are the dead hand of the past with no relevance to my present or future.

Why should I bother with the past when life belongs to the living and I want to live my life to the fullest?

Why bother with the past? Why bother? Because this is my history and it tells me where I came from, where I am, where I may be going. My history tells me who I am, not just statistically but spiritually as well.

A historical museum or society is more than a place filled with artifacts and a register of past events. It is a place of ideas, a place of ideals. It is my ancestral, cultural home.

My heredity and my environment shape me. Both my heredity and environment were shaped by the past, by those who came before, my ancestors and their community. I am a product of their genes and their culture. They set the stage for my lifetime performance. I am more their progeny than my own person. I am beginning to understand that as I wonder who I am now that I am sixty.

We do not yet fully understand the impact of our ancestors' gene pool on our daily life, yet the DNA impact on my life is formidable. So also is the impact of the culture in which I was raised. However imprinted on me, I cannot escape it. My culture is my shadow. It follows me everywhere, even when I move away.

My culture is here with me tonight, as you will sense. Five generations of my family have lived in Iowa, two generations before me and two generations after me. Jefferson and Johnson counties are our cultural life spring. The dates and artifacts of those five generations of Iowans are of only passing interest to me. Of overwhelming concern to me is the mental, emotional, and spiritual impact of Iowa's culture on me and my family. You can help me understand my heritage, my life, because you are keepers of our common traditions.

My culture is my shadow. It follows me everywhere, even when I move away.

Ah — tradition! In song and in prose we always hearken back to tradition. In song, Tevya in *Fiddler on the Roof* sings of tradition. In prose, Dorothy Day in her autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*, wrote:

> Tradition! How rich a word that is. To a thinking child it means a great deal. Children all love to hear stories of when their parents were young, and of their parents before them. It gives the child a sense of continuity. . . .
>
> "Tradition," G. K. Chesterton says, "is

democracy extended through time. Tradition means giving the vote to that most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. Tradition is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who are walking about."

I wonder if . . . stories of our ancestors [takes] away the fear of death that comes to us all, or whether it mitigate[s] it.

. . . Their tragedy, their pain made their lives a rich and colorful tapestry for us to gaze at, a Berlioz requiem with its glory and mourning to listen to.

Did they believe? What did they believe? . . . Do happy children ask these questions? Ecclesiastes said, "Only this I have found, that God made man right and he hath entangled himself with an infinity of questions" (pp. 15-17).

Even at sixty, I too have an "infinity of questions." I need to know where I am coming from

Is it true as the lyrics from the first *State Fair* musical put it — "Everything that I am I owe Ioway"?

to know where I am going. Did my forebears believe in the same values I do? Did they have the same aspirations?

Is there really "an Iowa way, that certain way of doing things" celebrated in *The Music Man*? Or is it true as the lyrics from the first *State Fair* musical put it — "Everything that I am I owe Ioway"?

"THE IOWA WAY" is homogeneous because Iowa's people have been homogeneous. In the broad vernacular they have been WASP European descendants of the Judeo-Christian tradition. They are Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic. Our forebears had such a strong commitment to God that Iowa was an integral part of the Bible Belt. My father told me often of the tent evangelists and of the "amens" of his youth over a hundred years ago around Fairfield.

Since I was raised to show no emotion, it is difficult for me to imagine northern European stock being emotional over religion. At any rate we Iowans tend to be quieter about our belief in God today. We are ethical in our conduct toward each other. The Golden Rule is key to our relationships. We treat each other fairly — perhaps because we do not differ markedly in our background. We share a common tradition and a common socioeconomic condition.

Iowa's economy began and remains heavily agricultural. Our European ancestors immigrated to farm as family entrepreneurs. They were the original rugged individualists revered in American folklore. These pioneers made it on their own, but they also helped each other out in time of need. Even though separated by many miles, these settlers had a sense of community.

While they were self-reliant, they were interdependent. This interdependence gave rise to formal communities for trading and schooling. Iowans prospered in farming and trading. Except for the weather there have been no extremes, no large groups of "haves" and "have nots."

Iowa life has been hard but it has been open. Nature can be brutal as well as beautiful. Natural and economic cycles of boom and bust have taken their toll, but Iowans respond by changing to new times rather than clinging to old times.

We have relied on education as a major means of change. We have prepared ourselves

While Iowa pioneers were self-reliant, they were interdependent. Except for the weather, there have been no extremes, no large groups of "haves" and "have nots."

for new opportunities elsewhere as well as in Iowa. Like our forebears we want "to make it on our own." We Iowans continue to view America as the land of opportunity, of mobility, of freedom. The frontier dominates our thinking, our action, our spirit.

Our traditions run deep. Our pioneering

forebears brought their deep roots with them. Our roots are not place-bound. They travel well. Our roots are in our culture, in our belief, and, for many, in our God.

WHILE WE LIVE in the Iowa countryside, we constantly observe nature's changing diversity. Humankind is a part of nature's greater context. We have the opportunity to grow in a world of diversity and change. Each of us can add to our cultural legacy. The WASP in me tells me I have a duty to nurture a better cultural legacy for my progeny, my children and their offsprings as they are also evolving through my culture as well as through my genes.

Too often our own homogeneous culture limits our vision. We become narrowly culture-bound and fearful of diversity and change. In fact there is a place in our lives for diversity and change as well as homogeneity and stability.

I work in a museum about diversity and change. The overarching theme of the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago is diversity: environmental diversity, cultural diversity. We recognize diversity as fundamental to life. Change is key to that diversity. We are a contemporary museum concerned with the present and future issues of the changing and diverse world of nature and cultures.

The Field Museum is both a research institute and a public educational center. Our research and teaching focus on nineteen million specimens reflecting the world's diverse geology, biology, and cultures.

Together with the University of Chicago and the University of Illinois, we make Chicago a world center for the study of evolutionary biology. Perhaps we do more fieldwork in South and Central America than any other American institution. We are concerned with the ecology of the neotropics. That ecology directly affects the ecology of Iowa and Illinois. Indiscriminate cutting of tropical rain forests can adversely affect our rainfall, temperature, air, and bird life in the Middle West.

The Field Museum anthropological collections of over 600,000 objects tell us about the

A historical museum or society is more than a place filled with artifacts and a register of past events. It is my ancestral, cultural home.

indigenous people of the non-European world. In a shrinking world no longer dominated by Western Europe, we need to know more about others. In a changing Chicago where WASPs are a minority, I need to know more about others, about their roots. Several upcoming exhibits will give us this opportunity.

In November the Field Museum will open a new exhibit on a culture in which we all have roots. Ancient Egypt is the fount of all cultures. There were black pharaohs. There was Oriental trade on the silk route. Egypt was the source of Western, Middle Eastern, and African civilizations. Our Egyptian exhibit begins with a unique descent into the tomb of a king's son and next leads us on a tour of Egypt then and now. The exhibit deals with the lives of both nobility and commoners in the marketplace and the burial place.

In subsequent years, the Field Museum will use our extraordinary South Pacific ethnographic collections to examine how the physical environment affects the life of islanders. We will concentrate on how the islands were peopled by seafaring families. Indeed, we will confront the debate as to whether the various colorations of the Pacific people are due to the merging of races or due simply to the evolution of families in different places.

Later we will turn to the African-American community in Chicago and scholars from Africa to guide a remounting of our West African collection. Our purpose will be to relate the past and present culture of Africa to the culture of present-day African-Americans. Alex Haley vividly pointed out the transitional role of the slave culture between West Africa and contemporary America. Before him, W.E.B. DuBois, in his time, ranked black song and story a more significant contribution to the nation than black

toil. Denied the right to read and write and worship by slave owners, blacks turned to God and the oral tradition to nurture their roots. Many descendants of those slaves are now nurturing their roots in modern Chicago.

Approaching its centennial in 1993, the Field Museum came into being to carry forward the new field of anthropology generated as an essential ingredient of Chicago's World Columbian Exposition. The founders of our museum properly focused on the native peoples of the Americas. In the United States and Canada, the first people have been overwhelmed by later immigrants. In Meso- and South America, however, native people were able, by their larger numbers and civilizations, to have a greater impact on the changing cultures of their places. Indeed, Chicago's growing Hispanic population has deep native roots in the Americas south of our border. A new Field Museum resource center allows us all to learn about the roots of the first peoples of the Americas.

As I learn more about other peoples, I find I have much in common with them. We share the same values, the same aspirations, even the same God. Our similarities are greater than our differences. But differences exist, and I respect them. I can even learn from those differences. In doing so, I will be branded as a traitor to my culture by Secretary of Education William Bennett and by Allan Bloom, who in his recent best seller, *The Closing of the American Mind*, closed his own mind.

You can help me understand my heritage, my life, because you are keepers of our common traditions.

Messrs. Bennett and Bloom advise us to hold tight to Western culture, to eighteenth-century "enlightenment," and to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Without ever mentioning God, Bloom believes that not enough of the best students in the best universities are reading the Bible. Yet as a frequent taxi passenger, I am convinced that more taxi drivers per capita than WASPs are reading the Bible. Chicago cab drivers are either black Americans or new immigrants from the non-European world. Most of them have a Bible either on the front seat next to them or on the dashboard. The Muslims among them have the Koran. In either case, it is the same God who is everywhere.

The WASP tradition does not have a monopoly on wisdom. Indeed, with most Christians living in the Third World, we should see even more clearly the need to reject the bad news of bigotry and spread the good news of the Golden Rule.

Too often our own homogeneous culture limits our view. We become narrowly culture-bound and fearful of diversity and change.

We do not need a shared tradition to possess shared values. It is from shared values that a shared tradition emerges. *E Pluribus Unum.*

To have shared values, we must be open to others. We must respect each other. We can learn much from each other if we apply critical analysis without a double standard rooted in cultural bias. The WASP intellect in me tells me to be analytical about others. The Judeo-Christian ethic in me tells me to be open to others. Indeed as I wrote this conclusion on Sunday, May 29, 1988, the Daily Word told me to "open the windows of my mind and let in the fresh, new ideas."

And that is why every day you and I should bother with local history museums. That is why the citizens of other localities, whether in downstate Illinois or Chicago, Stockholm or Timbuktu, bother with their local history. Our culture is our shadow. It follows us. It changes with us as we change and diversify. Our museums help us understand where we are coming from and where we are going. We all need to bother with our local history. □

The Orphan Train Comes to Clarion

by Verlene McOllough

PHOTOGRAPH BY JACOB A. RIIS, JACOB A. RIIS COLLECTION, MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

The homeless in the nineteenth century, photographed by Jacob Riis ("Street Arabs in sleeping quarters at night").

DURING THE SUMMER of 1892 some unusual cargo began arriving at the railroad depot in Clarion, Iowa. Unlike the usual deliveries of hardware and merchandise, a few train cars carried children from the Children's Aid Society of New York City.

The events were anticipated by the townspeople with the excitement usually afforded the arrival of Ringling Brothers' Circus, and they were almost as well publicized. On June 22, 1892, the *Wright County Monitor* advised, "BE ON HAND: If you wish to adopt one or more children be at the Opera House to-morrow (Thursday) afternoon immediately after the eastern passenger train arrives. E.E. Trott, of New York City, will be here at the time with a company of boys from the Children's Aid Society, of that city."

A holiday atmosphere prevailed as train time approached and citizens hurried to the one-room, wood-frame depot of the Burlington, Cedar Rapids and Northern Railroad. Businessmen stood expectantly at their doors. At the sound of clatter and whistle, many more people gathered to watch the children disembark.

As the children climbed down, their faces wore various expressions of bewilderment, fright, or surprise as they looked up into the faces of the crowd. Some in the crowd had traveled as far as thirty-five miles in the hopes of taking home a child. The children, with the same hope, had traveled a thousand miles.

AT LEAST one match of New York City orphan and Clarion citizen was made from that June orphan train. The newspaper reported that a "bright, manly appearing lad" about fourteen was given "a good home and we hope the change will prove a beneficial one for him."

A beneficial change was the goal behind bringing destitute children to small towns — an idea that had been developed in the 1850s by a young minister/social worker named Charles Loring Brace. Brace had been shocked by the numbers of destitute children in New York City. By police estimates, at least ten thousand children in New York City were homeless. Youngsters slept in doorways and alleys and lived by their wits, which often meant begging and stealing — or worse. In 1852, four-fifths of the felony complaints were against minors. Too often, impoverished children ended up in overcrowded prisons, poorhouses, and other institutions that offered little correctional training.

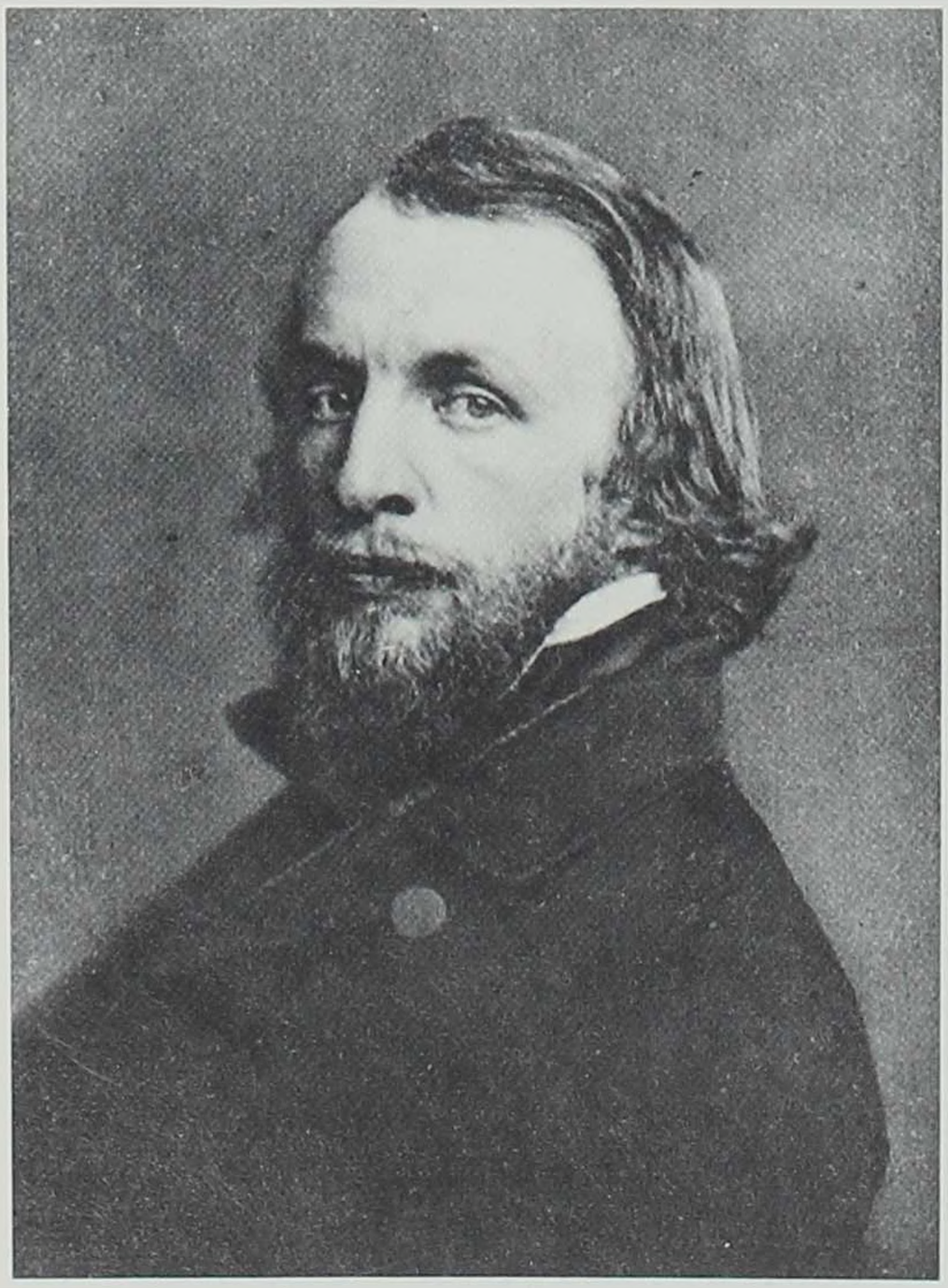
In 1853 Brace founded the Children's Aid Society to help such children through schooling, jobs, and religious training. He established lodging houses and trade schools. Yet perhaps his most innovative approach was the large-scale "placing out program," which sent children west in orphan trains to small towns where they might find foster families.

Loring believed that through a wholesome environment and love, a child could be reclaimed, and that rural America could provide such homes. "For an outcast or homeless or orphan child, not tainted with bad habits," the *Annual Report* of the society maintained, "the best possible place of shelter and education, better than any prison or public institution, was the farmer's home." The orphan trains that stopped in Clarion in 1892 were among the hundreds that steamed into small midwestern communities beginning in 1854. (The earliest arrivals came in freight cars.) Eventually the Children's Aid Society placed out 100,000 children by way of orphan trains, and other child

welfare agencies in eastern cities sent another 50,000.

Willing families would sign placing-out agreements guaranteeing the child the same food, lodging, and education children born to them would receive. In return the child would become part of the family, which in the nineteenth century generally meant taking on a sizable share of the work. At any time, the agreement could be ended by parent or child.

Despite the name, children who rode the trains west were not all orphans. Many had one or both parents still living. But as the Children's Aid Society ferreted out neglected children from the poorer districts, they convinced many impoverished parents that a child's best chance lay in permitting the society to find the child a new home far beyond the urban slums and its miseries. The society obtained written consent from the parents, promising them that they could keep in touch with their child. (Unless the child was formally adopted, the society or biological parents were guardians. Biological parents could reclaim their children.) Police and welfare workers also directed needy children to the society, as did orphanages and juvenile correctional institutions, eager to reduce their populations.



COURTESY OF AUTHOR AND CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY

Charles Loring Brace founded the Children's Aid Society, which placed out thousands of destitute youth from the urban East Coast to rural homes farther west.

Meanwhile the society sent agents to small midwestern towns. Announcements were published in the newspapers, and local committees of community leaders were appointed to advertise for potential parents and to arrange temporary lodging for the children who were not chosen. As Clarion committee members, minister John E. Rowen (a state senator in 1894 and 1896) and attorney (and later mayor) James A. Rogers also screened local applicants and forwarded requests for children.

Apparently in June 1892 more children had been requested than arrived. The July 13 *Wright County Monitor* reported, "We hear that quite a number of our citizens who desired adopting one or more children from among the number sent here by the Children's Aid Society of New York City last month were disappointed, there not being a sufficient number to meet the demand. The agent of the society, E. Trott, Esq., desires us to say that if those who still wish to adopt children will leave their names at this office stating the number desired, age, sex, nationality, etc. he will do the best he can toward supplying the want, provided there are a sufficient number desired to justify him in making another trip to this place. If you wish to adopt one or more children please act upon the suggestions above outlined, furnishing us with the information called for on or before August 1st, which date the list will be forwarded to Mr. Trott."

Back in New York, the Children's Aid Society screened out children with certain physical or mental handicaps or serious crime records. Bathed, clothed, and given Bibles, they were loaded onto specific train cars with a Children's Aid Society agent as escort.

Although some children might have seen the train ride as an exciting adventure, it was hardly that for the agent who had to care for, keep track of, and find homes for a group of perhaps fifty children ranging from infancy to age fourteen — and making up to a dozen such trips a year. Aptly named Trott, the agent who

TERMS ON WHICH BOYS ARE PLACED IN HOMES.

ALL APPLICANTS MUST BE ENDORSED BY THE COMMITTEE

Boys fifteen years old are expected to work till they are eighteen for their board and clothes. At the end of that time they are at liberty to make their own arrangements.

Boys between twelve and fifteen are expected to work for their board and clothes till they are eighteen, but must be sent to school a part of each year, after that it is expected that they receive wages.

Boys under twelve are expected to remain till they are eighteen, and must be treated by the applicants as one of their own children in matters of schooling, clothing and training.

Should a removal be necessary it can be arranged through the committee or by writing to the Agent.

The Society reserves the right of removing a boy at any time for just cause.

We desire to hear from every child twice a year.

All Expenses of Transportation are Paid by the Society.

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY.
24 ST. MARKS PLACE, N.Y.

E. TROTT, AGENT.

With the help of community leaders, Children's Aid Society agents announced their arrivals through newspapers.

served Clarion and other midwestern towns announced through the August 17 *Monitor* that "another 'invoice' of children from the New York Aid Society will arrive here about the 15th of September. Those wishing to adopt one or more are requested to leave word with either J.E. Rowen or J.A. Rogers, of this place."

THE TENACIOUS LITTLE TROUPE that arrived in Clarion September 15 was herded north from the depot up the dirt and planking of the broad main street, past clapboard store fronts and gilt-lettered bank windows. They stopped at the wood-frame skating rink and opera house (also used by the Presbyterians as a meeting place).

Here they lined up on the wide porch. Agent Trott stepped forward and told about the work of the society and a little about each child, urging takers. Prospective parents walked among the children. The women talked to them as their skeptical farmer-husbands felt young muscles and checked the size of arms and legs. Some were hoping for a child to love, and some wanted free farm labor. A few just wanted to see the goings-on. A few more wiped eyes bright with tears.

In the line-up stood six-year-old Joe Wall, sobbing. A little girl named Emma was there, too, probably a less-desirable candidate for placing out due to a lame leg. Ten-year-old Charles Merkle maintained a protective air as he stood with his three sisters, Lizzie, nine, Mary, six, and Minnie, four.

Minnie Ketchum, now 100, is the only Clarion arrival alive today, and one of only a few hundred still living who traveled the orphan trains in America. The following excerpts from a recent oral history interview yield a child's reaction to being part of the orphan-train phenomenon.

Ketchum's memory of early family life in New York City is hazy and relies somewhat on her oldest sister's memories: "Lizzie said she remembered our father bringing his shining tools home. He was a machinist and they carried their tools with them in those days. He

would put them down by the door instructing her to 'not touch them' and Lizzie said we never did." The father worked on ships and the children ran down to the docks every night to meet him.

Ketchum continues, "Lizzie said we lived not far from the Statue of Liberty. She said we played around the statue. My mother died when I was a year old. And that's when we were put into the Children's Home.

"There was a man who came to see us [at the children's home] before we left to go away to Iowa," Ketchum recalls. "I suppose it was my father. I thought I'd sat on Jesus' lap. I suppose we had had lessons on the Bible and my father probably had a beard.

"When we came on the train west we were in separate cars. One car for the boys and one for the girls," she says. "I remember one thing about the ride. Someone brought a tray of food into our car. There were two children on one bench and two on the other facing each other. The tray sat in the middle of us. I remember that because I suppose I was hungry."

Children and foster parents were not matched up before the arrival. "I think we just came," Ketchum says. "They dumped us out here. One child would step up and whoever wanted him took him.

"A family took me at first. . . . They didn't have any children and [the wife] wanted me but the husband didn't.

"There was a Dr. Merrietta [Marietta?] who was there that day and saw [that the family had brought me back] and he went over to Herbert Aldrich's at Galt and told Mrs. Aldrich, 'There's a little girl in Clarion who came in on the train. She looks like you. You ought to have her.'"

The Aldriches already had two boys. But they wanted a daughter, too, so they traveled to Clarion. Ketchum remembers sitting on Herbert Aldrich's lap, looking up into his face, and telling him, "You look just like my father." "And that did it," she says. "I guess I was a schemer."

Her eyes shine: "My [adoptive] brothers spoiled me. I couldn't even walk to school [because] my older brother, Ben, always carried me. We lived across the road from the church in Galt and Ben carried me over there

The frontispiece of the 1886 *Annual Report* of the Children's Aid Society depicts the transformation of an urban waif into a happy, productive member of a rural family through the society's placing-out system.

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too, every Sunday. My brothers worshipped me. There wasn't anything I wanted that I didn't get."

As she grew up, Minnie Ketchum apparently forgot her father in New York amidst the love of her new family. "I didn't know I was adopted til I was about twelve years old," she says. "I found out when some kids got mad at me at school and one girl said, 'Well, blood is thicker than water.' I went home and asked my mother what she meant and my mother told me. I cried. It was a shock. It just didn't seem right."

Not all orphan-train children found homes as permanent and loving as Minnie Ketchum's. Sometimes the parents asked the Children's Aid Society to remove the child, who might then be placed in several different families before an appropriate one was found. Some youths claimed that society agents never made the yearly follow-up visits required. Occasionally a child would run away, only to be brought back and punished. Stories of abuse or ill treatment reached society headquarters.

Ketchum notes, "My brothers and sisters didn't get into such good homes. When Charles stepped out on the platform a family took him for a while. He stayed with them seven months when [the foster mother] wrote to the society requesting that he be removed at once. I don't know why." He was then placed with a Grundy County family. "The man who took my brother took him to work. That was all he wanted him for. The father wasn't good to him but the mother was." When Charles was eighteen he left home and worked in various states as a carpenter.

The oldest Merkle daughter, Lizzie, was taken by a family from Goodell who reportedly did not offer her the love and warmth Minnie received. Ketchum says, "They had a family of several children of their own. The other kids teased her except for one boy. He liked her and was good to her. He looked out for her and took her side."

Mary Merkle was taken by a Clarion family. She died of tuberculosis shortly after her high


RESCUED
HOMELESS.
OFF FOR THE WEST.
THE YOUNG FARMER.
ADOPTED.

school graduation. Emma, the physically handicapped child, was taken by a local family. Joe Wall was the last child to be chosen in the September line-up. Joe was thin and thought to be slow of mind. Finally a farming couple took him. Folks who remember say he was treated well. When his parents moved to Emmetsburg to dairy farm he moved with them. After the parents retired, Joe came back to Clarion and worked for various farmers.

A WEEK BEFORE Minnie, her siblings, Joe Wall, and Emma had found homes in Clarion, a child from an earlier train lost his. "One of the New York children, a little boy, died at the home of his adopted parents, Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Robson, on Friday evening of diphtheria," reported the September 7 *Monitor*. "Burial took place a short time after and the premises were thoroughly disinfected. A little granddaughter of the parties named also died from the same complaint on Sunday night. As soon as the nature of the disease was known a quarantine was promptly established and every effort possible taken to prevent the dread malady from spreading, hence it is not probable there will be any new cases."

When the September 15 train arrived agent Trott had said that he would be back with another group in four weeks. Yet no reports of other orphan arrivals were found in the 1892 *Monitor*. Perhaps fear of diphtheria or caution toward the approaching winter weather played some part. Perhaps no other parents requested children.

Nevertheless the Children's Aid Society continued to send orphan trains to the Midwest and West until 1929. As social welfare philosophy changed, so did the attitudes towards the practice of placing out, used by Charles Loring Brace and his successors at the Children's Aid Society and a handful of other eastern juvenile welfare institutions.

Welfare workers who favored institutionalization criticized placing out. At the 1882 National Conference of Charities and Corrections in Madison, Wisconsin, some delegates accused the Children's Aid Society of shipping "thieves, liars and vagabonds" and thereby menacing western society. Some claimed that local screening committees hesitated to reject foster-parent applicants for fear of miffing their small-town neighbors and associates, and that faulty screening of families sometimes brought harm to the children. The society investigated such charges and stated in its annual reports that few children had turned out for the worse and that cases of abuse were rare. A survey in 1900 of all children placed out since 1854 found that 87 percent were "doing well."

Following the move to professionalize social work, the society initiated inspection of foster homes and more follow-up supervision by the turn of the century. It established a farm school where boys could first find out whether farm work was for them. Babies were adopted directly from the society's New York nursery rather than being shipped west.

The turn of the century also brought slum clearance, stricter child labor laws, and compulsory school attendance in the urban East. In the West there was less need for farm workers. Social legislation and new policies by government and private agencies emphasized keeping families together. The Children's Aid Society modified its own program to endorse services aimed at improving the quality of life in their homes.

Brace's idea to place out children by the orphan trains was not the perfect solution, but it was a bold, large-scale step towards resolving the plight of enormous numbers of homeless children in the East. In the peak years of the 1870s and 1880s, three to four thousand children a year were placed in new homes far beyond the poverty and crime in which they had been born. Minnie Ketchum has no regrets. "I couldn't have had a better family if I'd been born into it," she says. "They took me because they wanted me." □

NOTE ON SOURCES

Wright County histories and the *Wright County Monitor* yielded valuable information, as did interviews with Minnie Merkle Aldrich Ketchum and others familiar with Clarion orphan-train children. Secondary sources include Donald Dale Jackson, "It took trains to put street kids on the right track out of the slums," *Smithsonian* (Aug. 1986), 95-102; and Leslie Wheeler, "Orphan Trains," *American History Illustrated* (Dec. 1983), 10-23. The author thanks Anne Hines, Clarion, for her help in newspaper research.

One Boy's Search for His Roots

by Verlene McOllough

Editor's note: Enormous and sometimes emotionally risky obstacles to genealogical research may await those individuals who were separated from their biological families during childhood. The following is one account of an individual's attempt to uncover his past, despite family ties severed at an early age.

IN FEBRUARY 1896, a father put his small son on a train, with a name tag pinned to his coat collar. Thus prepared for his future, five-year-old Ira Carrell was sent from Charleston, Illinois, to a Chicago orphanage.

The boy lived in the orphanage for ten months, and later claimed it was the happiest time of his childhood. On January 12, 1897, Ira was "placed out" to Mr. and Mrs. William Tressider, farmers, of White Oak Springs, Wisconsin. The couple had earlier lost three of the children born to them. They immediately renamed their new foster son Howard Edward.

"They just got me to work," he later said. He recollected that any complaint was taken by William Tressider as a refusal to obey and drew swift physical punishment. "When we went to church my father said if anyone asked about my bruises to say I'd fallen down the steps."

The boy liked school but was allowed to attend only when there was no farm work to do. At school the other kids taunted him about his oversized boots: "Old Billy Kazoots/got stuck in his boots."

With no affection extended at home, he was eager to leave and make his own way. He possessed an innate gift for humor and

Ira Carrell

made friends quickly. He felt pride in doing hard work for a wage. In farmer Joe Blackbourn, he found a job and an ally. Quick to learn, he took refuge in books.

In 1913, at a tent meeting in Dunbarton, Wisconsin, Howard Tressider met Ethel Matson, the preacher's daughter. Three days before Ethel was eighteen the two were married despite the objection of Reverend Matson, who said to his only daughter, "What do you really *know* about this boy?"

The couple started up farming near Rowan, Iowa, with little money and a lot of self-reliance. Howard made their furniture and rigged up a homemade washing machine. Ethel gardened and canned and Howard picked corn all winter by hand. Before long two daughters were born. With a sharp eye for opportunity, he took the civil service test for rural mail carrier. "I just wanted to see if I was smart enough to pass it." He did, and the family moved to nearby Clarion.

Recurring flashbacks continued to disburb him. He remembered, as if it were a foggily recalled dream, a feeling of desolation as a train clattered along the countryside, images of women in white, and acts of kindness from a farmer who gave apples to him and other children. He had been called Howard as far back as he could remember but somehow he thought he had had another name. The feeling would not leave.

As a child he had doubted that the Tressiders were his real parents. But the Tressiders insisted that he was their child and that early incidents he recalled were all his imagination.

Then fate took a hand. After Martha Tressider's death, Howard found a placing-out agreement from an orphanage. The document disclosed two important facts: his first name was Ira (no last name given), and the orphanage was the Methodist Deaconess, 114 Dearborn, Chicago.

Ira wrote to the address only to learn that the institution had long ago relocated to Lake Bluff, Illinois. Ira drove to the Lake Bluff orphanage. Superintendent Lucy Judson searched her records finding no account of Ira ever having been admitted to the institution. The placing-out agreement, however, could not be ignored. When he left Lake Bluff it was with Judson's promise to investigate further.

Judson soon sent word that the first record book used at the Chicago location had been found. (A fire had destroyed many

records, and others had been tucked away and forgotten.) The record revealed that Ira's father's name was Sherman Carrell and that he was alive when Ira was admitted to the orphanage. With the help of two Clarion friends, attorney L. N. Archerd and postmaster D. H. Eyler, Ira learned that Sherman Carrell was now living in Effingham, Illinois. Ira wrote to his father, introducing himself and requesting a meeting with him.

In August 1923 the reunion took place. Ira's brother-in-law, Leslie Matson, accompanied him to Effingham. "I knew they were a match when I watched the two men walk away from the station side-by-side," Matson recalled. "The father was tall and Ira was short but they both had the same gait."

Later at Sherman's home Ira's questions were answered. The pieces were beginning to fit. Ira learned that his mother, Sara, had died when he was three. His father had remarried, apparently hoping to provide him a real home. His second wife already had two daughters and two more children were born to the couple. Ira recalled repeated incidents of harsh punishment by the stepmother.

Sherman, fearing for his son's welfare, had sought help from a lawyer-friend who had advised sending the boy to an orphanage, explaining that thousands of children were being shipped all over the country on "orphan trains." He had assured Sherman that his son could be returned to him whenever he chose. (Apparently the father had never intended for Ira to be given to another family. Sherman's later inquiries to the orphanage had disclosed that although they remembered the boy, they had no record of what had happened to him.)

The same year Ira Carrell (left) was reunited with his father, he had this family portrait taken with his wife and two young daughters.

Ira also learned that he had lost an inheritance. His grandfather had named Ira heir to his estate. Advertisements had been placed in area newspapers to locate the whereabouts of Ira Carrell, "the little brownie from the Deaconess Orphanage," but the attempts had been futile. The legal time period in which to claim the inheritance had lapsed.

Later on the night of the reunion, Sherman entered his son's bedroom to cover him up. Ira pretended to be asleep. He was thirty-three years old.

The reunion was too late. The emotional cost had been too high. The men were strangers. Ira returned home to Clarion and settled into quiet living with his wife and daughters. He clung to them and to his religion, drawing upon them as antidotes to his bitterness. Ira now realized that the ten months in the orphanage had been the happiest time of his childhood.

After Ira's death in 1950 his daughter Ruth found a tin box among the few belongings he had kept. Inside were letters (one from Sherman, written in 1923) and a threadbare lady's glove.

There are old-timers in Clarion who will remember "Iry," as people used to call him. "He was that friendly mail carrier," some say. A few who weren't privy to his identity search remember him as Howard Tressider. Some wonder why he had two names.

As his daughter, I wrote this story to explain why. □

CONTRIBUTORS

Lawrence I. Berkove is professor of English and director of American Studies at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. He has published widely on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American literature, especially on authors Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, and Dan De Quille. Among his publications are his books *Skepticism and Dissent* (an edition of Bierce's journalism, 1898–1901), and Dan De Quille's *Dives and Lazarus* (an edition with a biographical introduction of De Quille's hitherto unpublished novella).

Willard L. Boyd was the president of the University of Iowa from 1969 to 1981. During that time he helped guide the restoration of the Old Capitol in Iowa City. Since 1981 he has served as president of the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago.

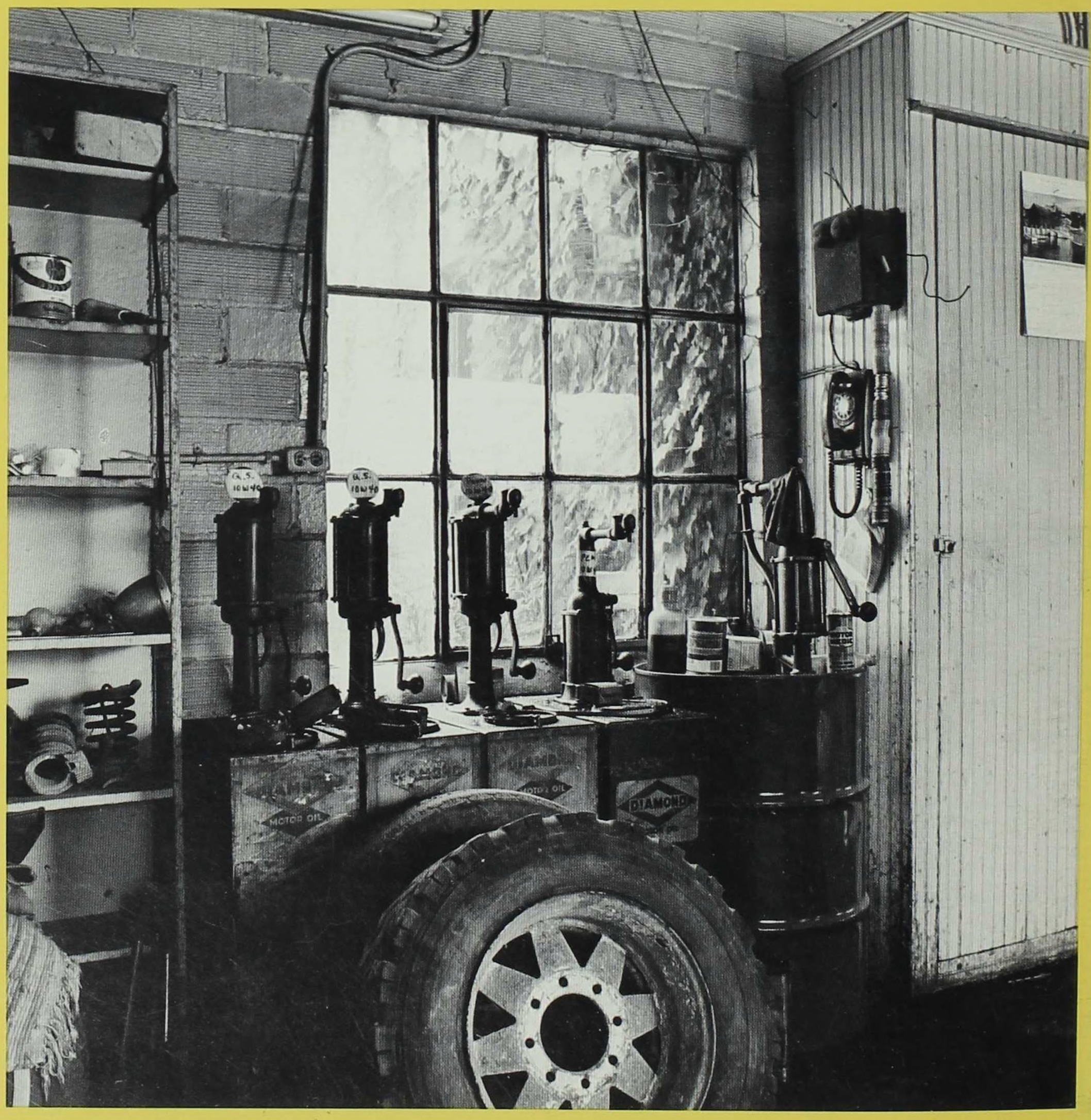
Katherine Jellison is a doctoral candidate in history at the University of Iowa. She is working on a dissertation about midwestern farm women and their use of modern technology. She would appreciate hearing from any *Palimpsest* readers who would consent to being interviewed about their experiences as farm women before 1963.

Verlene McOllough is an assistant librarian at the Clarion Public Library and treasurer for the restoration of Clarion's Rock Island depot. She has written for several Iowa newspapers on various topics, while maintaining a personal interest in the orphan trains. Restoration research revealed that several Clarion citizens whom she had known since childhood had come to Iowa on orphan trains, and this led her to write their story.

David Plowden's photographs have been exhibited nationally and published in several books. His newest book will be *A Sense of Place*, copublished by W. W. Norton and the State Historical Society of Iowa this November.

SUBMISSIONS

The editor welcomes manuscripts and edited documents on the history of Iowa and the Midwest that may interest a general reading audience. Submissions that focus on visual material (photographs, maps, drawings) or on material culture are also invited. Originality and significance of the topic, as well as the quality of research and writing, will determine acceptance for publication. Manuscripts should be typewritten, double-spaced, and follow *The Chicago Manual of Style* (13th edition). Standard length is within ten to twenty manuscript pages, but shorter or longer submissions will be considered. Include a list of sources used and a brief biographical sketch. Because illustrative material is integral to the *Palimpsest*, the editor encourages authors to include photographs and illustrations (or suggestions). Please send submissions or queries to Ginalie Swaim, Editor, *The Palimpsest*, State Historical Society of Iowa, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.



THE PALIMPSEST *(ISSN 0031-0360) is published quarterly 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.*