

11-1-1950

Some Contributions to Iowa

Mrs. S E. Lincoln

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest>

Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lincoln, Mrs. S E. "Some Contributions to Iowa." *The Palimpsest* 31 (1950), 437-450.

Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol31/iss11/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the State Historical Society of Iowa at Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Palimpsest by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

Some Contributions to Iowa

During the past half-century the Iowa Congress of Parents and Teachers has exhibited unusual imagination, enthusiasm, and energy. Its leadership at all levels has been stimulating, its program challenging to all who took a part in it. As a consequence its contributions to the state and local scene have been widespread and beneficial to a large cross-section of Iowa citizens.

The dynamic personality of Mrs. Isaac Lea Hillis was in evidence from the start. In order to acquaint the public with the work of the National Congress of Mothers and to lay a foundation for the organization of the Iowa Congress, Mrs. Hillis had promptly set up a headquarters tent at the 1899 State Fair for the exhibition of materials, and where women from all over Iowa could meet. Appointed state regent in April, Mrs. Hillis was authorized by the National Congress to find county regents, who in turn were to find sub-regents in every town to form mothers' clubs and parent-teacher unions.

State Fair Exhibits

After three months of labor in Iowa for the National Congress of Mothers, Mrs. Hillis rallied 200 socially prominent Des Moines women around

her to give out literature at the State Fair, to keep a book of registration, and to welcome out-of-town people interested in the work. In their tent, "beautifully decorated" with the organization's colors of pink and blue, they welcomed hundreds of Iowa women, thus stimulating interest in the Fourth National Congress of Mothers to be held at Des Moines in 1900.

The Iowa Congress maintained an exhibit booth almost annually at the State Fair until the advent of the Baby Health Contest in 1911. The following year Mrs. Walter S. Brown, chairman of the Child Hygiene Committee of the National Congress of Mothers and a past president of the Iowa Congress, arranged for a child welfare exhibit in a big tent next to the cottage where the Baby Health Contest was going on. Mrs. Brown had been inspired to attempt this project by a visit to the Chicago Child Welfare exhibit and had the cooperation of the State Fair Board, the State Board of Health, and the State Department of Public Instruction in carrying out her plans.

The 1912 exhibit was one of the most outstanding in the history of the Iowa Congress. In one booth a demonstration was given of the hygienic care of infants and the sterilization of milk. Another showed a model school with a water jar equipped with a faucet and individual drinking cups; dustless crayons and low blackboards to accommodate small scholars; a newly patented stove

to distribute heat evenly and improve ventilation; and a fireless cooker in which soup was provided for the children at noon. Mrs. H. L. Carrell explained the penny savings association whose work was done under the Iowa Congress; through ten years, children had deposited \$90,000 in savings. Mrs. George Cosson and Mrs. Florence McFarland gave information on Juvenile Courts, and Miss Florence Ward of Iowa State Teachers College gave demonstrations of kindergarten methods.

Through the efforts of Mrs. Charles Brenton and Mrs. H. G. Drake, the exhibits were housed in the Women and Children's Building when that structure was opened in 1914. Spot maps and scrap books showed the progress made. In 1927 an exhibit of the Summer Round-Up — an activity to send beginners to school free from remediable defects — was sent from the national office.

For two years the Iowa Congress, with several other organizations, placed an exhibit in a machinery building to demonstrate the need for one for educational purposes, and which was finally secured. In 1928 the Iowa Congress exhibit took first place in the Adult Education class. In 1950 there were two booths — one showing the schoolroom of fifty years ago and the other, the schoolroom of today.

Juvenile Court Law

Another contribution of the Iowa Congress was

the enactment of the Juvenile Court Law. The detention of delinquent children in one small room, boys with girls, where they slept on cots in cubbyholes, mingled together in the daytime, and shared their diet of black coffee, bread, and molasses, with soup added for dinner, so stirred Mrs. Hillis that she quickly started the promotion of a movement to secure adequate legislation. For some time she had been making a thorough study of Juvenile Court Laws in other states and had assembled a vast amount of material relating to such legislation.

In 1902 Mrs. Hillis began an active campaign and secured support for the Congress in its fight for the bill from many groups including mothers' clubs, women's clubs, civic organizations, reform groups, lawyers, and judges.

The Juvenile Court Bill as originally written was a collaboration by Mrs. Hillis and Judge Chester C. Cole of Des Moines, a former Chief Justice of the Iowa Supreme Court but at that time Dean of the Drake University Law School. This bill, somewhat modified "to make it a more popular measure," was passed by the Iowa legislature on April 8, 1904. In commenting editorially on the measure, a Des Moines newspaper declared "the greatest credit for the passage of the law is due to Mrs. Isaac Lea Hillis, president of the Iowa Congress of Mothers, whose untiring efforts in its behalf have at last been crowned with success."

The Baby Health Contest

As Child Health Chairman for the Iowa Congress, Mrs. Frank S. Watts of Audubon planned and carried out the first Baby Health Contest at the Iowa State Fair in August, 1911. "Why would not scientific care do for babies what it had done for the improvement of hogs and cattle?" When the Extension Department of Iowa State College asked the Iowa Congress to take over the Woman's Hour at the Fair, Mrs. Watts felt the time had come to make her dream a reality.

Six women physicians were secured to help Mrs. Watts. Three gave informal talks and three acted as judges. The score card used was prepared by Dr. Margaret Vaupel Clark of Waterloo. The card was based on a 100-point score, under the headings "Psychological," "Head," and "General Examination," with instructions for the judges and a table of measurements. A brief history of the child and his family was to be filled out on the front of the card. Serving as judges with "Dr. Margaret" were Dr. Lenna Meanes of Des Moines and Dr. Florence Brown Sherbon of Colfax. Informal talks on the proper care and feeding of children were given by Dr. Sophie Hinze Scott of Des Moines, Dr. Kate Harpel of Boone, and Dr. Jennie Ghrist of Ames.

The babies were examined in the "little slate-roofed kitchen" of the Iowa State College building. Statistics made from this first contest list the

entries as fifty, but forty-five were actually scored — twenty-seven boys and eighteen girls. The contest was limited to babies from twelve to thirty-six months.

Financial support was provided by Iowa State College, which furnished the building, and by the Iowa Congress, which gave the sum of \$25 for prizes. The two first prizes were provided by Miss Neale S. Knowles of the College Extension Department, who gave a five dollar gold piece for the best boy, and by Mrs. B. F. Carroll, president of the Iowa Congress and wife of Governor Carroll, who gave a handsome silver mug to the best girl. The total cost for the contest was only \$18.50, as the doctors, nurses, and the Iowa Congress ladies paid their own expenses.

Assisting Mrs. Watts were Mrs. Walter S. Brown of Des Moines, chairman of the Child Health Committee of the National Congress of Mothers; Mrs. A. O. Ruste of Charles City, chairman of the Education Committee of the Iowa Congress; Mrs. A. W. Slaughter of Ottumwa and Mrs. E. E. Sherman of Keosauqua, both the wives of doctors and both of whom later conducted similar contests at county fairs. Miss Catherine Earhart, R. N., and Miss Maude Sutton, R. N., both of Des Moines, assisted the judges with the examination.

Publicity of the Iowa baby health contest was nation-wide. The Philadelphia *North American*

for March 10, 1912, said: "One thing is certain, the Iowa Congress of Mothers is planning to besiege the Iowa legislature next winter to secure a substantial appropriation for the creation of a magnificent 'Baby Hall' which shall be a monument to the state's appreciation of motherhood and its interest in the development of its people."

The contest idea spread like wildfire. A Baby Contest Association was formed, with Mrs. Watts as president, and the Iowa Congress continued promoting it in county fairs and elsewhere. Mrs. Charles Brenton and Mrs. A. O. Ruste were especially active in this work.

The Iowa State Fair Board, which had previously refused to support the Baby Health Contest, appropriated \$280 for it in 1912 and offered a sweepstakes prize of \$50 each to the healthiest boy and girl. Mrs. Watts was superintendent of the contest. In 1914, when the contest was housed in the new Women and Children's Building, the Fair Board discontinued cash prizes and gave medals and trophies instead. During Mrs. Watts' administration, champion winners were driven in an open car along with the grand stock parade before the grandstand amphitheater.

About 1913 the interest of the American Medical Association was gained for the score card. In time, a more scientific card was prepared and copyrighted, also a book of instructions for the judges. The card used today has been revised to

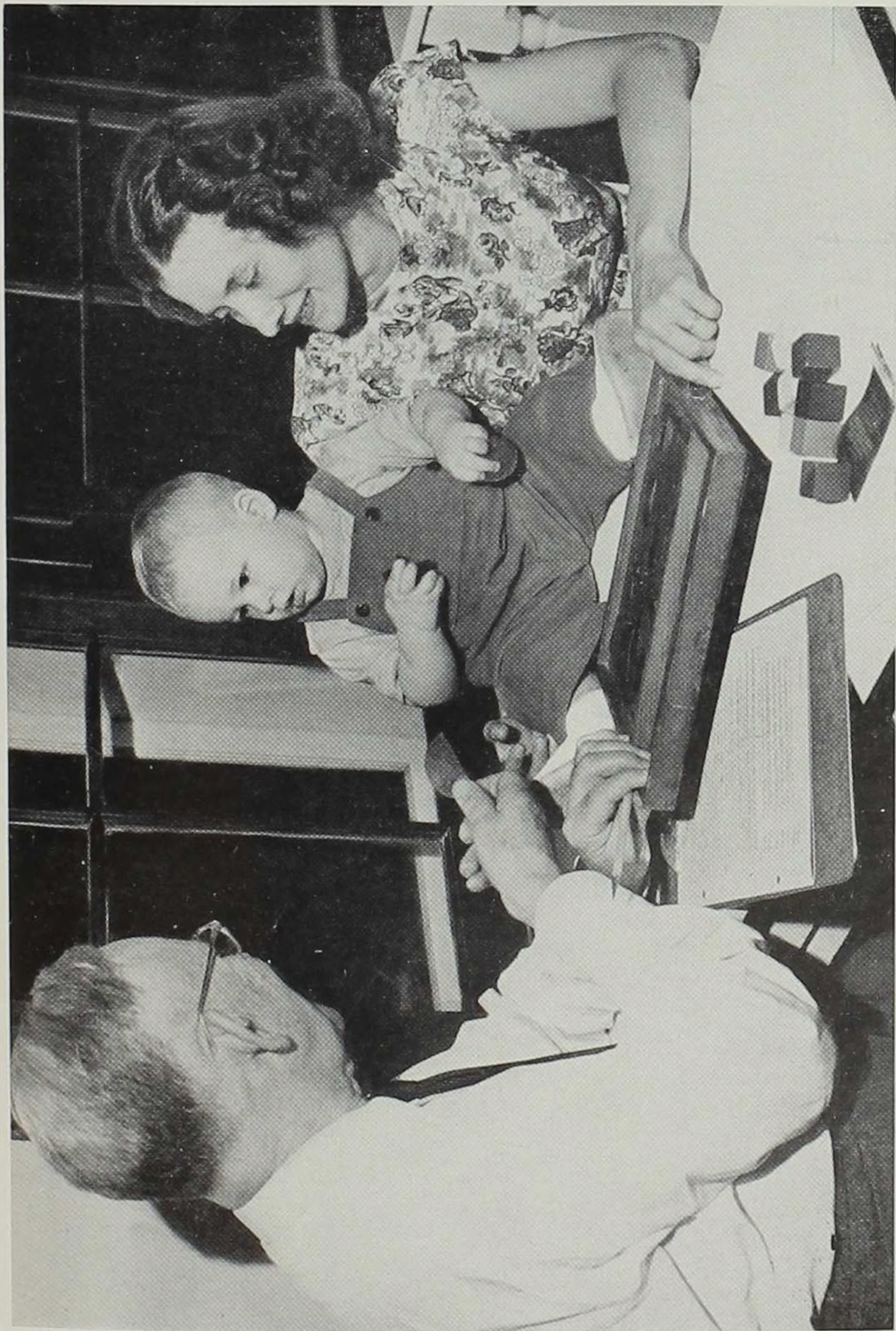
meet present day medical and psychological standards. The State Fair Board continues to appoint, as superintendent of the contest, a woman who is a leader in the work of the Iowa Congress.

The Women and Children's Building

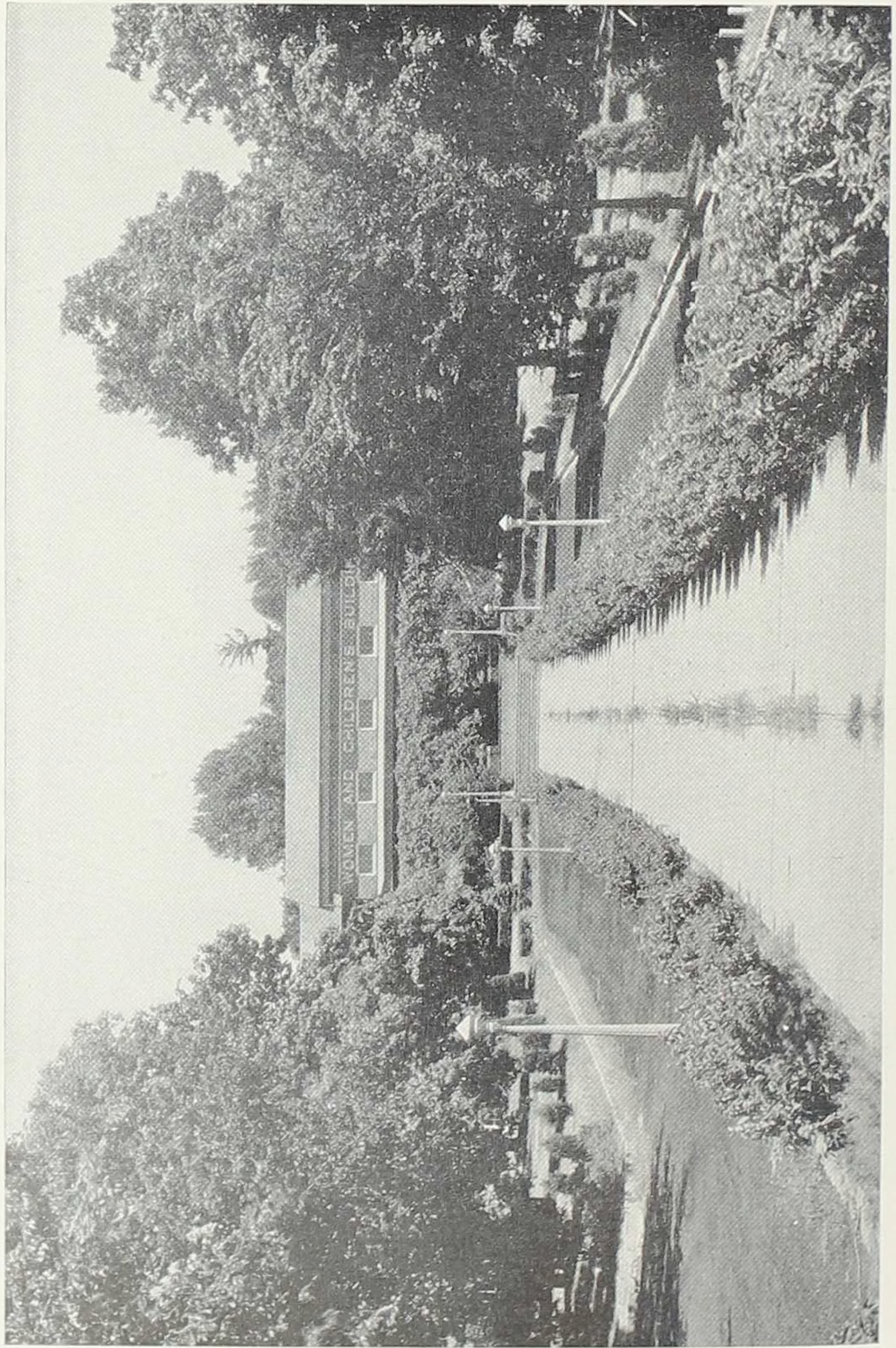
Among the women who had worked for long years in the Iowa Congress was Mrs. Charles Brenton of Dallas Center. After serving four years as recording secretary, she was elected president in 1912. While distributing literature from the booth or from flapping tents at the State Fair, sometimes in cold, rainy weather, Mrs. Brenton envisioned a building where women and children might rest while attending the Fair. Such a building, she thought, should house the Baby Health Contest and other child welfare activities and should afford not only a place to demonstrate home economics and art works, but also provide clean rest rooms and wide verandas for all.

Under Mrs. Brenton's direction, Mrs. A. E. Kepford, chairman of the hygiene committee, and Mrs. Walter S. Brown, legislative chairman, had architectural plans of the prospective Women and Children's Building drawn by Oliver O. Smith, senior member of Smith and Keffer, Des Moines architects. A profile picture was also prepared and printed on letterheads with an appeal to all women's clubs and other organizations in the state to work for this building on the State Fairgrounds.

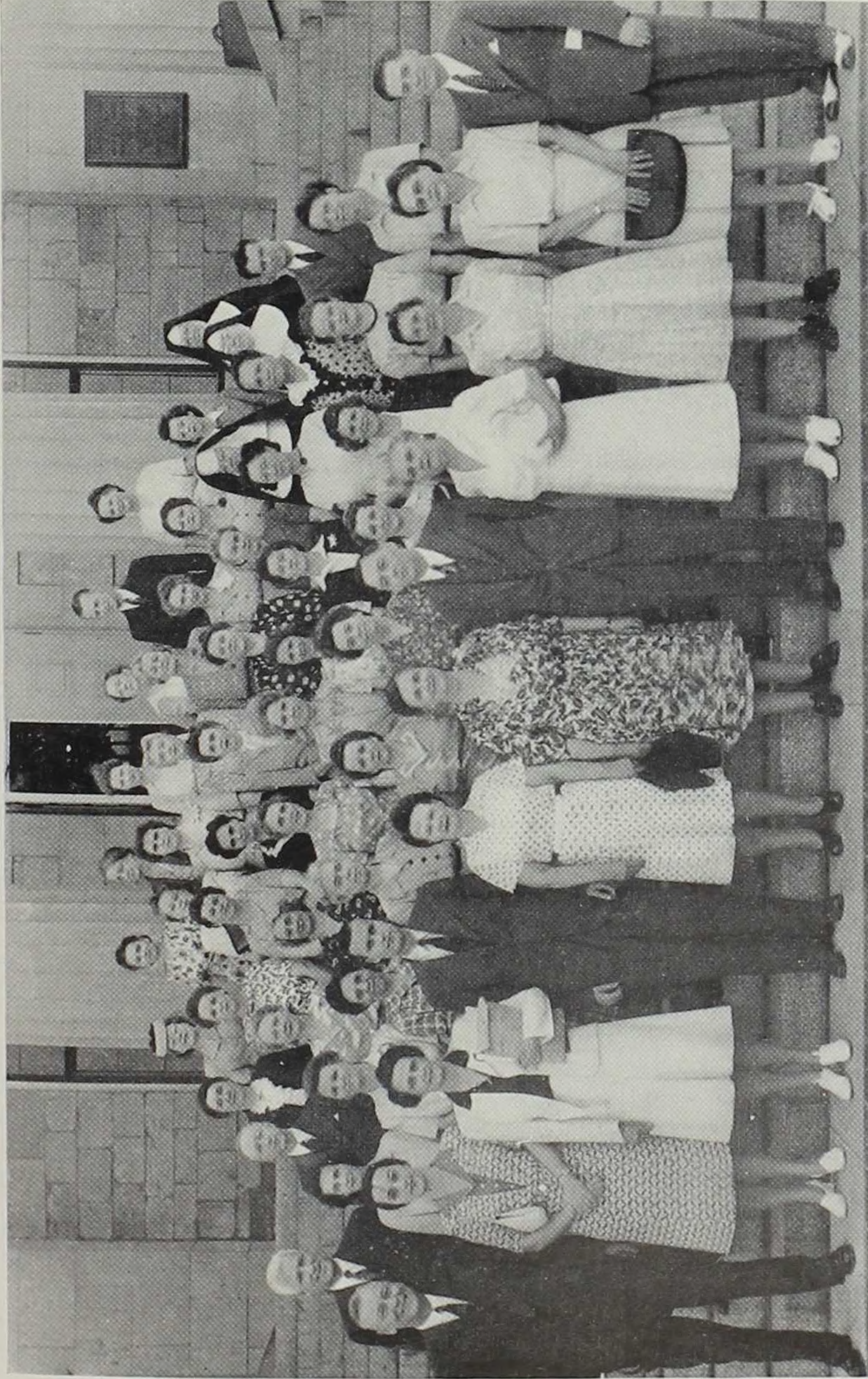
It should be recalled that the Iowa Congress



First "Man" Up in Baby Health Contest at State Fair — 1948.



Women and Children's Building on State Fair Grounds.



Summer Workshop on Home-School Cooperation at State University in 1945.

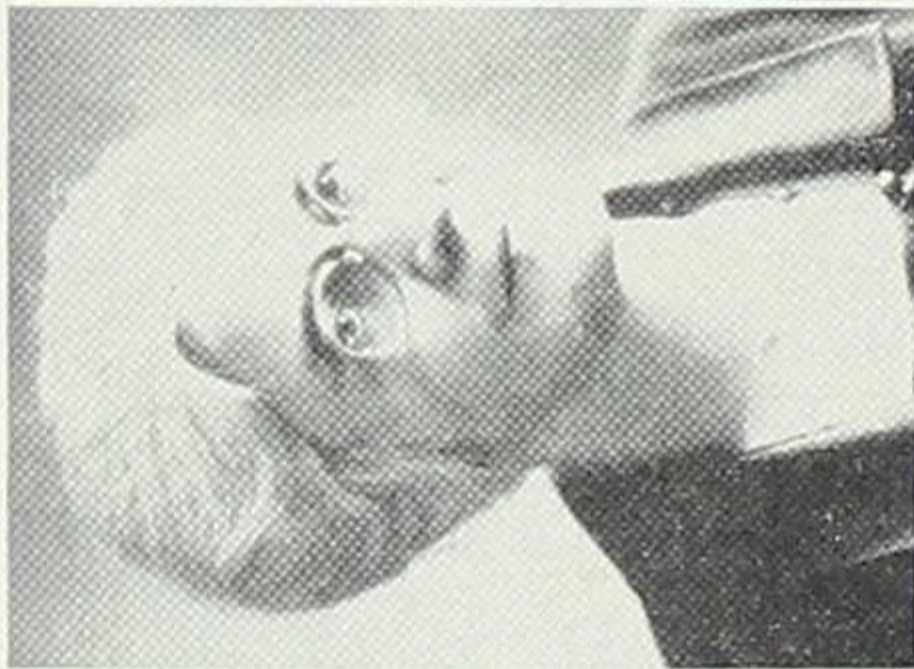
PRESIDENTS, IOWA CONGRESS OF PARENTS
AND TEACHERS, 1900-25



Mrs. I. L. Hillis
Des Moines, 1900-06



Mrs. W. S. Brown
Des Moines, 1906-08



Mrs. F. S. Watts
Audubon, 1908-10



Mrs. B. F. Carroll
Des Moines, 1910-12



Mrs. C. R. Brenton
Dallas Center, 1912-15



Mrs. A. O. Ruste
Charles City, 1915-19



Miss C. E. Forgrave
Perry, 1919-23



Mrs. F. W. Beckman
Ames, 1923-25

MRS. C. R. BRENTON
Dallas Center, 1912-15
MRS. A. KUSIE
Charles City, 1915-19
MISS C. E. FORBANE
Perry, 1919-23
MRS. F. WALKERMAN
Ames, 1923-25

PRESIDENTS, IOWA CONGRESS OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS, 1925-50



MRS. B. C. HOPKINS
Des Moines, 1925-29



MRS. M. P. SUMMERS
Sioux City, 1929-33



MRS. C. F. PYE
Des Moines, 1933-37



MRS. C. C. COLLESTER
Spencer, 1937-39



MRS. S. E. LINCOLN
Des Moines, 1939-41



MRS. F. R. KENISON
Madrid, 1941-44



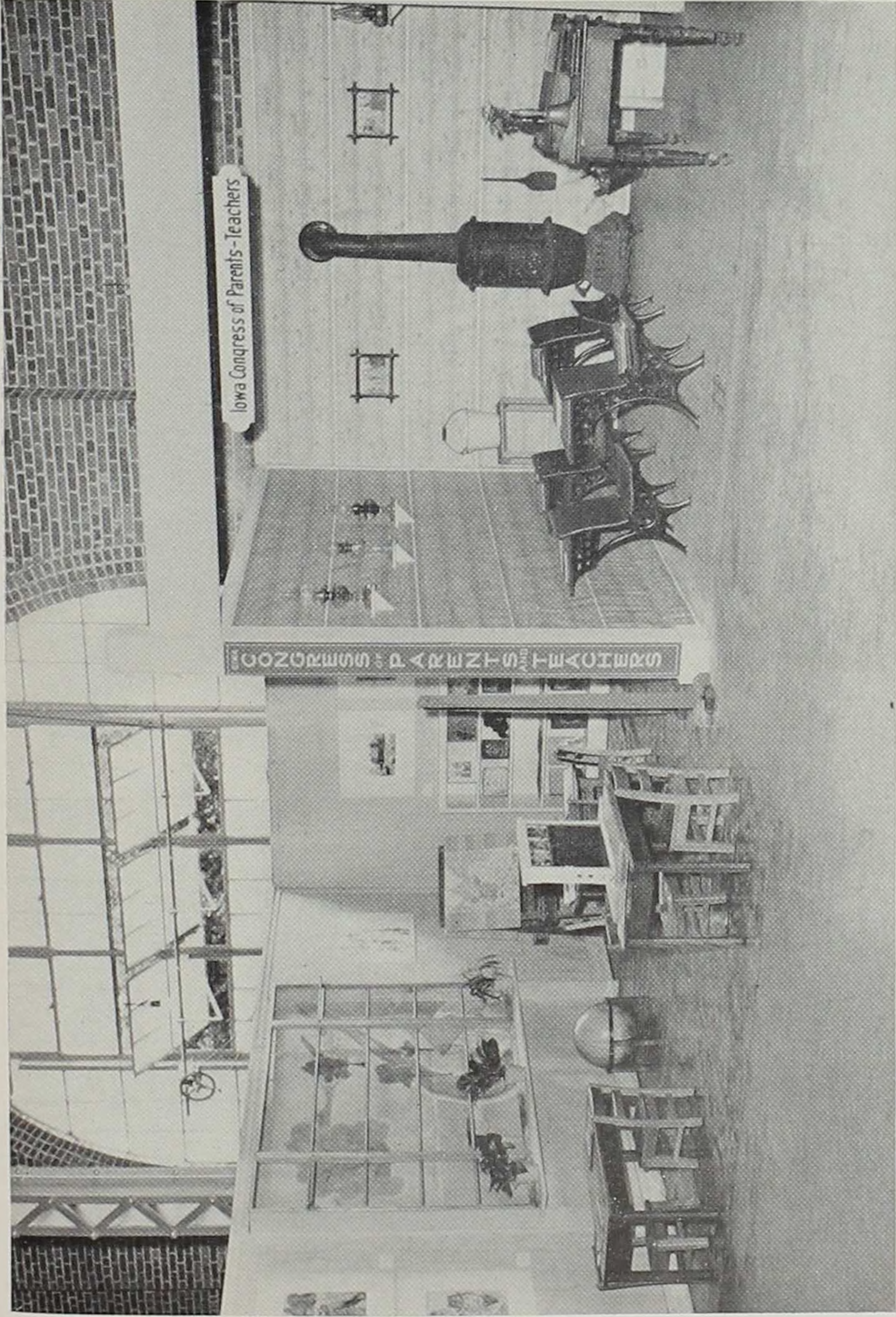
MRS. L. S. MUMFORD
Council Bluffs, 1944-47



MRS. H. C. BRECKENRIDGE
Charles City, 1947-50



Des Moines Schools Display of Relief Work.



Schoolrooms of 1900 and 1950 Exhibited at State Fair.



Osceola PTA Father Singers.



Des Moines PTA Mother Singers.

was still a women's organization, and that many of its associations paid dues to the State Federation of Women's Clubs. It took some years for it to evolve into the organization it is today.

The Iowa Congress drew up a bill for the new building, to be presented to the General Assembly. As Mrs. Brenton lived in Dallas Center, she was able to discuss it with Senator A. B. McCall and Representative Henry Brady, both of Dallas County. When the bill, which called for an appropriation of \$75,000 for this building, was up for consideration, a letter was prepared by the Iowa Congress setting forth the need for such a building and a copy placed on the desk of each legislator. The increase in entries in the Baby Health Contest from 50 in 1911 to 275 in 1912 was a powerful argument. Mrs. Brenton was encouraged in working for the building by her husband, Charles R. Brenton, then a member of the State Board of Education. As Mrs. Z. C. Thornburg said, in her memorial to Mrs. Brenton: "Hers was the hard pioneering, the moulding of public sentiment, a task far harder than the laying of brick and stone. It is true that after the fallow ground was broken by Mrs. Brenton, many other women helped and worked; but the dream child came to her, first, as well as the first discouraging work. To me, the Women and Children's Building is but the lengthened shadow of Mrs. Brenton."

Original bids were double the appropriation of \$75,000, as made by the legislature in 1913, but the plans were modified and new bids sought. The contract was finally let to J. E. Lovejoy of Des Moines. It was formally opened on August 28, 1914, by Mrs. Charles Brenton of Dallas Center, president of the Iowa Congress of Mothers. According to the Des Moines *Register and Leader*, the new Women and Children's Building was "erected and furnished at a cost of \$80,000." The speaker representing the women of Iowa was Mrs. George W. Clarke, wife of the governor. As designed, the building had spacious porches on all sides and an auditorium centrally located on the main floor. The Baby Contest was housed in the southeast wing on the main floor where a sloping amphitheater, seating 350, enabled the public to watch the judging. There were day-nursery rooms, rest rooms, and rooms for domestic science demonstrations for Iowa State College.

Dr. M. N. Voldeng of Cherokee was the first superintendent. Mrs. F. S. Watts was superintendent of the Baby Health Contest, and Mrs. A. M. Deyoe, wife of the state superintendent of public instruction, was in charge of the rural school department. Mrs. Charles Brenton was in charge of the child welfare exhibit.

The crowds found in the Women and Children's Building at all hours of the day are evidence of public appreciation. At the 1914 Fair, it was

the most popular building on the Fairgrounds.

Pioneering in Child Welfare

Iowa truly was the state that pioneered in child welfare. It was the first to establish a station for research in the problems of the normal child. This program was the vision of Mrs. Isaac Lea Hillis, who interested Iowa parents in it.

Mrs. Hillis labored for sixteen years to convince political and educational leaders of the need for such a program. Between 1901 and 1914 she discussed her idea with administrative officers of the Iowa State College and the State University of Iowa. No concrete steps were taken until 1914 when President Thomas H. Macbride, believing something could and should be done at the State University, called in his professors to talk things over. Dean Carl E. Seashore of the Graduate College became interested, and President Macbride appointed a faculty child welfare committee.

A state committee formed of heads of women's organizations became, on January 5, 1915, the nucleus of the Iowa Child Welfare Association to promote the establishment of a Child Welfare Research Station. A bill was drawn up, but this failed to pass the House in 1915 by seven votes. A great deal of criticism was reflected in the press inasmuch as the General Assembly appropriated \$25,000 (the amount sought by the Welfare bill) to build a sheep barn on the Iowa Fairgrounds.

Efforts were renewed to secure the bill's pas-

sage at the next General Assembly in 1917. World War I was then in progress, and when the health record of Iowa's enlisted men was made public, the supporters of the bill, 300,000 strong, immediately used it as an argument in their favor. On April 21, 1917, the bill authorizing the establishment and maintenance of the station — the first in the nation — was signed by the Governor.

The act established the Child Welfare Research Station as an integral part of the State University, "having as its objects the investigation of the best scientific methods of conserving and developing the normal child, the dissemination of the information acquired by such investigation, and the training of students for work in such fields."

President Walter A. Jessup appointed the first University advisory board as specified in the act. Dr. Bird T. Baldwin was chosen as the first director, serving until his death in 1928. Dr. Baldwin, a pioneer in many aspects of child development, became the outstanding national leader in the application of modern science to child welfare. Dr. George D. Stoddard followed Dr. Baldwin.

In the first ten years of its history the Research Station was undertaking extensive investigations in the fields of nutrition, physical growth, child behavior, and childhood education, with emphasis on the normal child. At the beginning of the second decade, it received the first installment of a large ten-year grant from the Laura Spellman

Rockefeller Memorial in addition to the regular state support, making steady expansion possible.

Under the direction of Dr. Ralph H. Ojemann and his colleagues, the Research Station developed new services in the field of parent education. One of these was the organization of child study groups in 1924, with nineteen groups formed throughout the state under the direction of Mrs. May Pardee Youtz.

In 1926 the Iowa Council for Child Study and Parent Education was organized, with the Iowa Congress of Parents and Teachers as one of the members. The first Iowa Conference on Child Development and Parent Education was held in Iowa City in 1927. It has since met annually.

Radio was first used by the Research Station in 1925—1926. The Radio Child Study Club, sponsored by the Child Welfare Station, was the first of its kind in the United States. Since 1932, this feature has been carried on jointly with the Child Development Department of Iowa State College at Ames and is broadcast over WOI and WSUI. From its beginnings the Station has made an invaluable contribution to Iowa and the nation.

Establishment of Headquarters

Early in the 1920's the state executive committee of the Iowa Congress began to think about and plan for a state headquarters office. During this period membership had grown from 3,000 to nearly 20,000, under the leadership of Mrs. W. L.

Horter of Ames. Near the close of the second biennium of Miss Carolyn Forgrave's term of office (1921-1923), Mrs. H. G. Drake, finance chairman, recommended that a state headquarters be established with a part-time secretary in charge.

It was Mrs. Z. C. Thornburg who suggested that the Iowa State Teachers Association might have space available. Later, she and Miss Forgrave put the question to Charles F. Pye, executive secretary, and Miss Lucy Hobbs, president of the Iowa State Teachers Association, whose Executive Board voted that space be given the Iowa Congress in their offices at 504 Youngerman Building, Des Moines. With the funds saved through Miss Forgrave's efforts (she had paid expenses from her own pocket), it became possible to employ a part-time secretary, Mrs. Charles Pye. In 1926 the Iowa State Teachers Association moved to 415 Shops Building where the Iowa Parent-Teachers Association transferred its office. Mrs. Charles Pye was elected executive secretary of the Iowa Congress and served ten years. In 1941 headquarters were established at 317 Shops Building. A full-time secretary and part-time assistants now handle the various duties of a statewide organization serving 92,721 members and 678 Parent-Teacher Association units in 1950.

MRS. S. E. LINCOLN — MRS. CHARLES F. PYE