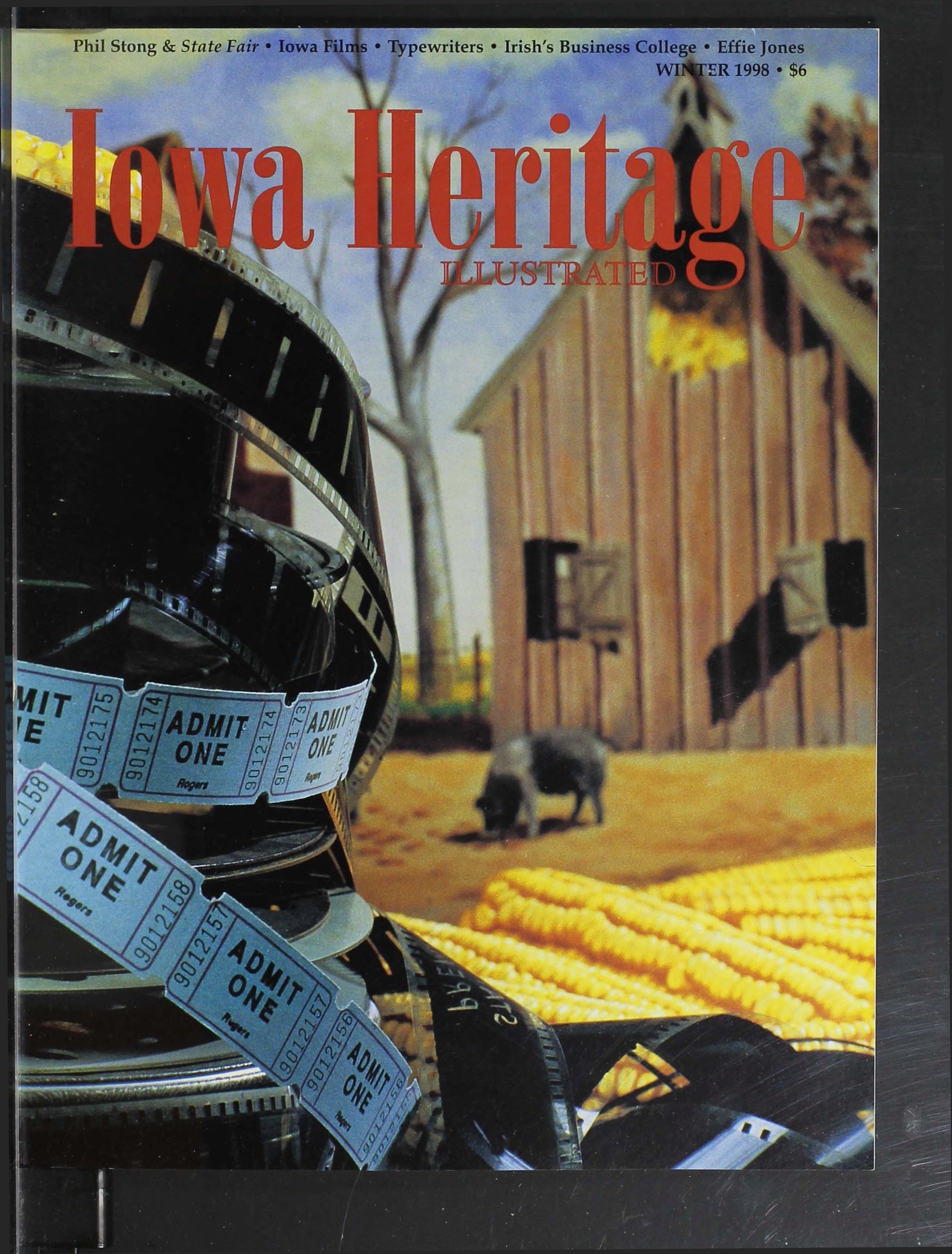


Phil Stong & State Fair • Iowa Films • Typewriters • Irish's Business College • Effie Jones
WINTER 1998 • \$6

Iowa Heritage

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Front Porch

Dear Readers,

What machines have you loved? For me, it was a blue Smith-Corona portable manual typewriter. I adored that little machine as some might love a first car. In high school I lugged it over to a friend's basement every other Sunday night, set it up next to hers, and until 4 a.m. she and I would heat up frozen eggrolls, drink pop, and type out headlines, editorials, and news stories for the school newspaper. By college, I had switched to jasmine tea and ginger-snaps, but the blue typewriter was still with me late into the night as I attempted to write the Great American Novel in a deserted dormitory lounge.

As I moved up the technology ladder—first to my husband's electric typewriter, and then to computers at home and at work—I didn't need "Old Blue" anymore. So I asked my colleagues in the State Historical Society museum if they needed any more typewriters for the collection. They said yes, and so one day I took it to Des Moines and turned it over to them.

But first I took a photo of it resting in its black case. I wanted to remember the odor of its inky ribbon and erasure "droppings," and the sheen of its blue metal housing and white concave keys. I was ready to give it up, but not to forget it.

Maybe that's why I connected personally with one of the scenes in the 1998 movie *Saving Private Ryan*. The captain (played by Tom Hanks) walks up to a covey of soldiers busily drawing maps and typing dispatches. From the group he "volunteers" a particular soldier who speaks French and German. The soldier is naive and bumbling, obviously not combat-ready, and he thinks that perhaps he should take his typewriter along on the assignment to find Private Ryan.

That reminded me of an article we had published in 1989, in which Iowan Clarence Andrews recalled the war's effects on Sheldon, Iowa. Typewriter repair shops from Sioux City and Sioux

Falls had eliminated their Sheldon route because of gas rationing, so in 1942 Andrews started his own local repair shop for typewriters and other office machines.

I read more about the war and typewriters in a book by typewriter historian Arthur Toye Foulke. Foulke writes that American citizens were urged to rent, sell, lend, or give their typewriters to businesses, so that newer models could be reserved for the war effort. Pennsylvania schools eliminated typing classes at the junior high level, leaving the instruction, and the typewriters, to business schools. The *Saturday Evening Post* patriotically reminded its readers that the US Army used typewriters "in every phase of its operations, in the field and behind the lines, for vital records, orders, dispatches and reports."

And who can forget the poignant scene in *Saving Private Ryan* in which one sharp-eyed clerical worker, in a sea of clattering typewriters, realizes she has typed yet another official letter of condolence to an Iowa family named Ryan.

This issue is filled with such connections. In one thought-provoking article, the authors discuss *Saving Private Ryan* and three dozen other Hollywood films with Iowa as a setting or Iowans as characters (and then throw the discussion open to you with the "If Iowans Made Movies About Iowa . . ." survey). Another article examines the writing career of Iowan Phil Stong, whose novel *State Fair* was the basis for two great blockbuster movies about Iowa. Another article profiles Elizabeth Irish (her business school taught typing, stenography, and bookkeeping for 40 years), followed by the vivid letters of Iowan Effie Jones, a clerical worker in the 1890s. Finally, this issue showcases five typewriters from the Society's museum collection. (No, my little blue Smith-Corona isn't one of the five, but it'll always occupy a place in my heart and its own little place in typewriter history.)

—The Editor

Letters from readers

Sharp dressers in Wilton

I was happy to see the picture [of the bobsled party of the M.E. Church of Wilton Junction] on the front of the Fall 1998 issue. I remember two of the ladies, Anna Riggenberg and Olga Smith Port. Olga lived to be 102 (or 101). She and her husband, Flavel Port, were two of the sharpest dressers in town (well into their eighties). Olga's father, Dr. Smith, a dentist, purchased a piano from Charles Gabriel in the 1890s. We have this piano in the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific depot here in Wilton (the depot is on the National Register of Historic Places). The piano is in good shape and is tuned on a yearly basis. The M.E. Church was new in 1902. It has since been replaced and the new one, the parsonage, and one more home are on the north edge of town in Cedar County. The rest of our fair village is in Muscatine County.

Alan Smith
Wilton, Iowa

Recalls bridges, bobsleds, penmanship

Regarding the Fall 1998 issue, we crossed one of the rainbow arch bridges at Kingsley, Iowa, many times a day en route to school as well as in our family dairy operations. The snow scenes prompted many memories for we frequently had to make our milk deliveries by bobsled. My father was a most excellent penman, trained in the old Palmer method of writing in the Sioux City Business School. How well I remember our penmanship drills at school and at home. The issue rang my bell as an old timer. Thanks for your creative workmanship.

Ralph D. Kitterman
Fort Dodge, Iowa

Come and converse on our front porch!

Share your thoughts with other readers here on the Front Porch page. Send your letters to Ginalie Swaim, editor, *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240-1806. Or by e-mail at: gswaim@blue.weeg.uiowa.edu. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

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In 1920, the State Historical Society of Iowa founded one of the nation's first popular history magazines—*The Palimpsest*. The magazine was renamed *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* in 1996, the year of Iowa's 150th anniversary of statehood.

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ter 1998, Vol. 79, No. 4

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's Dreamy Iowa"

bestselling novel *State Fair*
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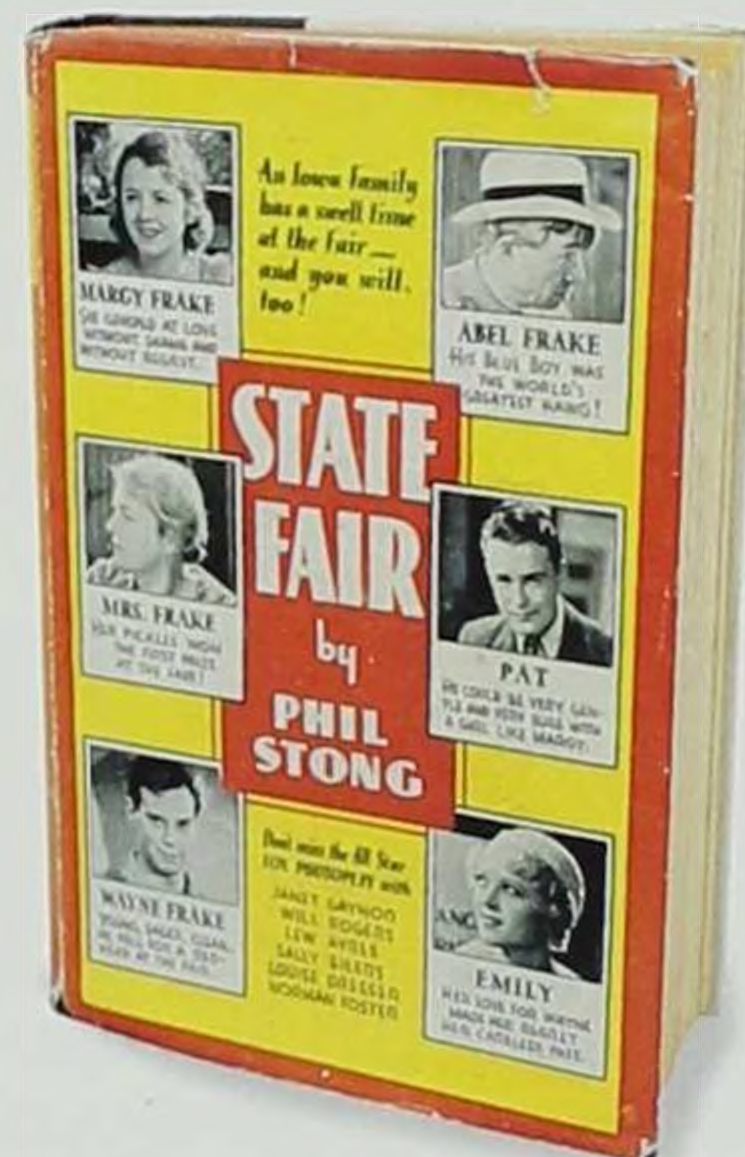
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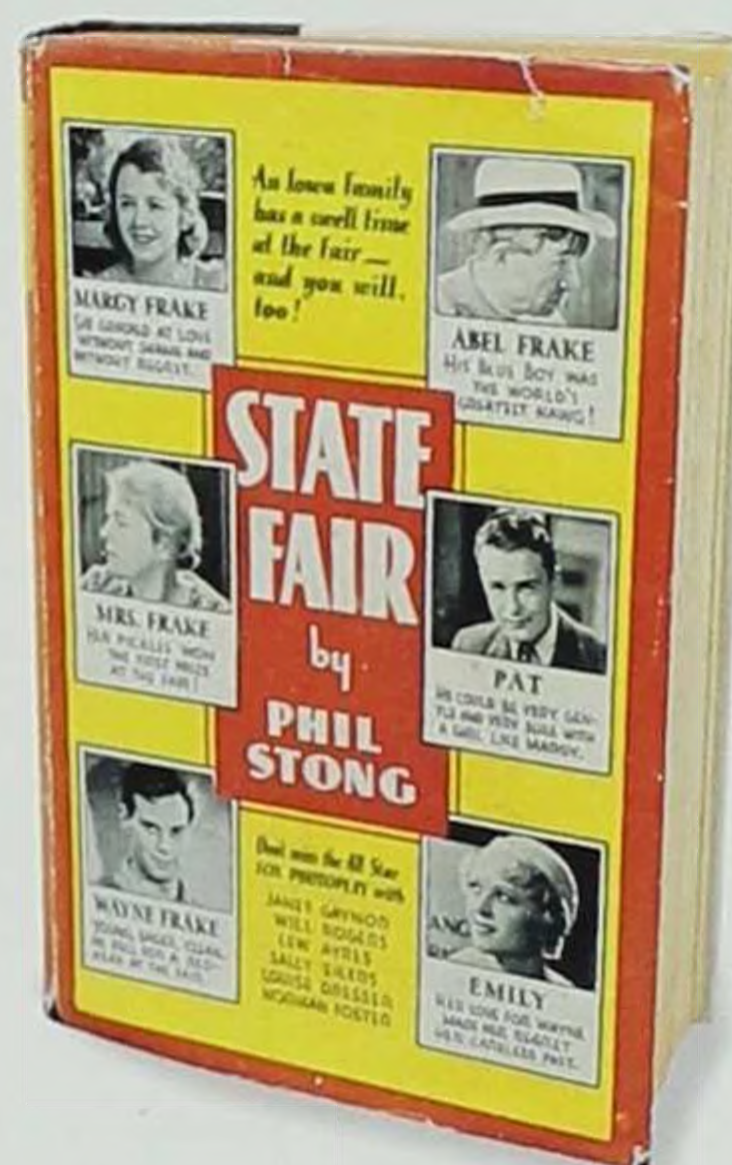
Formerly The Palimpsest

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"Mr. Stong's Dreamy Iowa"

Phil Stong's bestselling novel *State Fair* launched his career—and limited his career.
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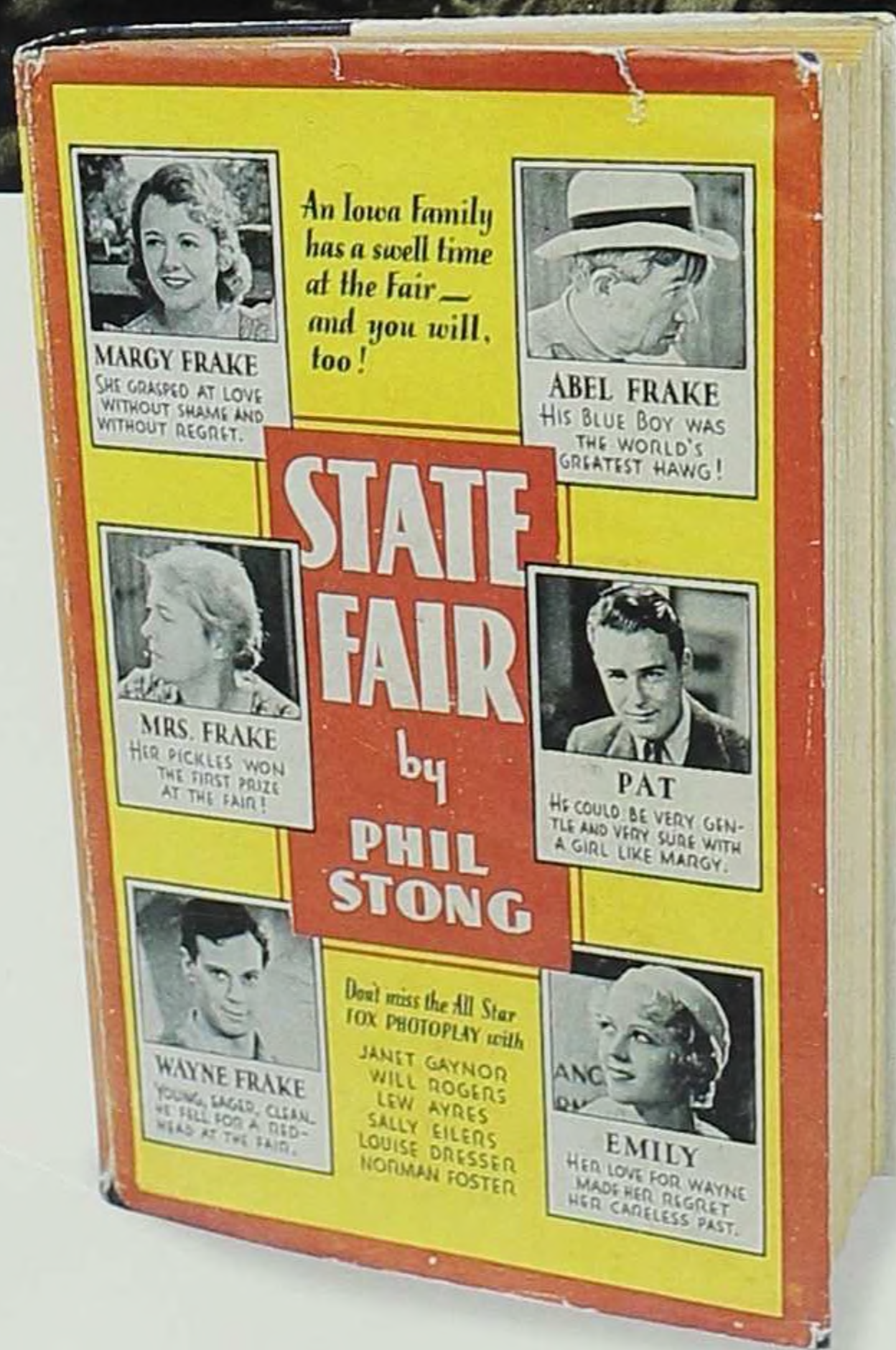
On the Cover

A farm scene forms the backdrop for icons of Iowa and Hollywood—ears of corn and reels of film. But how accurately has Hollywood captured the Iowa experience on celluloid? Inside, "Visions of Iowa in Hollywood Film" considers the question as it looks at dozens of movies about Iowa and Iowans. (The farm scene was painted by J. Noé and is part of the Society's collections. It is labeled: "Awarded to Superior Culture Club 1947 Art Div." of the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs.) Cover photo by Charles Scott.





BOOK COURTESY OF MARTY KNEPPER AND JOHN LAWRENCE. CROWD SCENE: FOX MOVIE/NEWS, INC.



“Mr. Stong’s Dreamy Iowa”

by Chris Rasmussen

The spotlight was on Iowa when Phil Stong’s bestselling novel, *State Fair*, was made into a Hollywood movie, first in 1933 and then in 1945. Above: Iowans throng downtown Des Moines for the premiere in August 1945.

The most popular state fair of the early 1930s was not to be found on a fairground, but in bookstores and movie theaters. In 1932, Iowan Phil Stong published his first novel, *State Fair*, which in turn became the basis for the successful Fox studio film of the same name in 1933. Ironically, state fairs, which in recent years had been threatened by the popularity of mass entertainments like motion pictures, now became the backdrop for one.

While farmers and fairs around the country struggled to weather the Great Depression, Stong and the Fox studio scored a hit with their idyllic depiction of farm life, in which hard times were virtually invisible. Stong's novel reassured Americans that the family farm and the farm family would endure forever. At the very depth of the Depression, while another native Iowan who had left the state for bigger and better things was being hounded out of the White House, Phil Stong offered Americans an archetypal, if not necessarily typical, midwestern farm family—cheerful, successful, and utterly content with farm life. Despite a few implacable critics, the popular response was overwhelming. Through the novel and film, "Iowa," like some brand-name product, was being packaged and marketed coast-to-coast to meet Americans' nearly insatiable demand for reassuring images of a bucolic, rural life seemingly impervious to urban problems or economic depression.

After helping to create the vogue for such light-hearted tales of rural America, Phil Stong soon became its captive. Although he aspired to write about other themes and locales, his publishers had quickly branded him a local colorist, whose sole function within the literary business was to produce innocuous stories about the Midwest. Eventually, Stong reconciled himself to this literary division of labor and ultimately published thousands of pages on his native state during his career.

Stong's roots in Iowa ran deep. His maternal grandfather, George C. Duffield, came to Iowa from Ohio as a boy in the 1830s, and eventually became one of the state's most prominent early settlers. He joined the California gold rush, and returned with enough wealth to establish himself as proprietor of Linwood, a sizable farm in Van Buren County. For nearly 20 years, Duffield served as a director of the Iowa State Agricultural Society, which ran the state fair from 1854 to 1900; in his later years, he boasted that he had attended more Iowa state fairs than anyone alive. Although Duffield died in 1908, when his grandson Phil was only nine, he cast an enduring influence over Phil Stong's life. Steeped in his family's past and the state's

past, Stong was often unable to distinguish between them when crafting his novels and chronicles of Iowa.

The Stongs were not farmers. Phil Stong's father, Ben, ran a reasonably prosperous dry goods store in Keosauqua, and sent his son to Drake University in Des Moines to prepare for a career in business or law. The younger Stong, however, encouraged by his professors at Drake, soon devised other plans, which he proclaimed to his father with that mixture of lofty purpose and righteous indignation that only an undergraduate can muster. "I am going to be a writer. . . . To write—that is all [I] hope for, that is all I work for, that is in my mind every minute. It is the salt on my food, and the balm on the petty bruises that the world occasionally gives me. . . . The fire is in my mind, and it will burn a way for me in the world, sometime."

Upon graduating from Drake in 1919, Stong taught high school, pursued a master's degree in English literature at Columbia University, then returned to Des Moines in 1924, where he soon landed a job writing for the *Des Moines Register*. Among the many stories that Stong covered for the newspaper was the state fair, which always received extensive space in the paper.

Dissatisfied with his journalistic career, Stong revived his literary aspirations. In 1925 he returned to New York, where he hoped to work at a newspaper "and hit the typewriter hard in my off time," he told his parents. He landed a job as a wire editor for the Associated Press, vowing "to write my books and get out." In November, he married Virginia Swain, a *Des Moines Register* reporter and aspiring novelist. She joined him in New York, where she wrote serials for newspaper syndication.

Over the next few years Stong held a series of journalistic jobs and pecked out stories and novels in his spare hours. Virginia had occasional successes, and Phil himself had a few nibbles. Despite his growing cynicism about the business of literature, Stong still aspired to be a serious writer, and regarded magazine fic-

SHSI (IOWA CITY)



Known best for his novel *State Fair*, Phil Stong was one of Iowa's most prolific writers. He was born in Van Buren County, Iowa, and 1999 marks the centennial of his birth.

tion only as a means to pay the rent. He confessed that most of his and Virginia's short stories were rubbish, but hoped for one big break, which would render him "independent of place and job," so he could devote himself to serious writing. "I hope that in spite of our pot-boilers," he wrote his parents in early 1927, "we may do some decent things before we have to be buried." In 1929 he declared that "I would rather do distinctive stuff and take my chances on starving to death. Not that I haven't written stuff to bring in the cash."

In 1931, Stong joined the advertising agency of Young and Rubicam. He had written twelve novels—all of which had wound up in the wastebasket. Stong's wife suggested that he write something about Iowa's state fair, and the idea appealed to him. A few days after he began, his literary agent, Ann Watkins, called to commiserate over the Depression's effect on publishing and to inquire whether he had written anything lately. According to Watkins, publishers were seeking "a Sinclair Lewis story more humorous and fairer to small town people than *Main Street*." Stong now shared the idea with Watkins: "I sketched my story 'State Fair,' and added that I had just finished 10,000 words of it over the week-end."

Encouraged by Watkins's enthusiastic response to his work-in-progress, Stong cranked out his new novel. He later recalled that he would come home after work, eat dinner, strip down to his shorts (it was summer, and the heat was intolerable), and begin writing. He wrote two thousand words each night while downing two quarts of stiff, Prohibition-era beer. By the middle of August he had finished one draft of *State Fair* and dozens of drafts delivered from Billy's, his neighborhood speakeasy. Thus was Phil Stong's tale of a farm family's week at the Iowa State Fair written in a Manhattan apartment.

The story begins as the Frakes, a farm family in southeastern Iowa, are preparing for their trip to the state fair in Des Moines. Abel is eager to show his Hampshire boar, "Blue Boy," which he fully expects to capture the fair's grand prize sweepstakes. Melissa pins her hopes on her pickles. Their children—Margy, 19, and Wayne, 18—are frustrated with their current romantic interests and are restless for adventure. That night, they all climb into their truck after carefully loading Blue Boy, the jars of pickles, and a week's worth of food.

In a few hours, the pickup rolls through the gates of the state fairgrounds, and the family pitches camp. Throughout the week, Melissa busies herself with cooking and mending, while Abel frets over Blue Boy

and the upcoming competition. On the midway, Wayne encounters an adventurous, pleasure-seeking woman named Emily, and Margy meets cosmopolitan, hedonistic newsman Pat Gilbert. As the week unfolds, both Wayne and Margy fall headlong into romantic affairs. Eventually realizing that she and Pat are incompatible, Margy refuses his proposal of marriage, though not his sexual advances. And Wayne, also the wiser after several evenings with Emily in a downtown hotel room, admits that he could never adapt to life off the farm, nor could she to life on the farm. This irreconcilability of urban and rural life is the crux of the novel.

At the fair's end, the Frakes drive back home. Proud and content, Abel has won the grand prize with Blue Boy, and Melissa has placed first with her pickles. The younger Frakes, however, slump in their seats, exhausted and despondent. Oblivious to their recent romances, Melissa attributes their sullen moods to the end of fair week, though she does remark, "My goodness, you don't seem to me like the same youngsters came up to the Fair with me." Although Abel and Melissa would doubtless be scandalized to learn of their children's sexual affairs during the fair, Wayne's and Margy's sudden coming-of-age only renders them more content with farm life, and each will reunite with a hometown sweetheart.

After a few revisions and publishers' rejections, the manuscript was accepted for publication by the Century Company of Philadelphia. Stong predicted a modest success for the book: "I don't think it has the stuff for a resounding success, but I think it will sell 10,000 copies, finally, get fairly good reviews and give me a small entrance to the literary field." At the same time, he was hopeful that his agent would be able to sell the novel to a Hollywood studio, because "if she can place it with the movies that means D-O-U-G-H Dough." Stong already had plans for this dough, should he come into it: he intended to purchase his grandfather's old farm, Linwood.

Published in May 1932, the novel rapidly exceeded Stong's expectations, climbing onto best-sellers' lists in New York, Chicago, Kansas City, St. Louis, and other cities. Several major newspapers published the novel as a serial. The book was chosen, along with John Dos Passos's *1919* and Willa Cather's *Shadows on the Rock*, as American entries in a Paris competition. The Literary Guild decided to publish the work as a Guild selection, assuring Stong a much

larger income from the book. As Stong excitedly noted, however, "it means more than that—it means that I can sell everything I write; it means a big sale to non-Guild buyers; it means almost certain movie sale; it means possible dramatization; it means that I'll be taken seriously by critics and readers right from the jump, instead of as fiction hack; and it means that I can kick this #\$\$\$#&~\$\$# [advertising] business in the pants and never do anything or go anywhere I don't want to again."

Elated by the popular response to *State Fair*, Stong now began to look forward to the almost inevitable movie sale, including a job as a screenwriter "at some kind of crazy salary." In early June, he wired home triumphantly, "State Fair sold fox fifteen thousand dollars twelve weeks Hollywood at three hundred dollars first six weeks three hundred fifty after stop option to be called prior to August plans for coming home depend on these arrangements love to all Phil."

At the very depth of the Depression, Phil Stong was suddenly wealthy enough to realize his dream of purchasing his grandfather Duffield's farm. Stong's desire to own the 400-acre Linwood was a mixture of sentiment, calculation, and, as he later told reporters, "faith in Iowa." He was earnestly devoted to his grandfather's memory, and proud to bring Linwood back into the family. Conveniently, of course, many farms, including Linwood, were for sale in 1932; it wasn't necessarily a good time to buy a farm, but it was a good time to buy one cheap. By late June, Stong, en route to Hollywood, had agreed to the terms of the sale and become proprietor of Linwood. The farm, which had fetched upwards of \$110,000 during the 1920s, had become his for only \$9,500. He delegated management of the operation to his father and his brother, Jo, and hired a tenant to farm the place. Stong was now owner and landlord of Linwood, the ancestral farm.

Meanwhile, the novel's reviewers were divided into two camps, those who found it a pleasant afternoon's diversion, and those who found its cheerful depiction of rural life disconcertingly divorced from the harsh economic conditions confronting many farmers in 1932.

"It is a crackerjack first novel, filled with folk customs and drolleries, two seductions, and a prize-winning Hampshire hog. A swell time . . . [with] more downright gayety and solid amusement than we have encountered in a novel in years," wrote novelist Laurence Stallings. "As for Abel, the bucolic farmer

who bred and raised Blue Boy, he seems to be just what he and his kind have been insisting for years they are—the backbone of the country."

Greater Iowa, published by the Iowa State Fair Board, recognized the novel's "freedom from the pessimistic point of view . . . so prevalent in novels dealing with the midwestern scene." The *Fairfield* [Iowa] *Ledger* ventured that "Stong evidently has the ability and the courage to write a good novel about farm life without trying to make the boisterous laugh at a single-gallus 'hayseed' or to encourage the cynical to use Millet's 'Man with the Hoe' for the frontispiece."

To Stong's annoyance, his old employer, the *Des Moines Register*, gave the book a chilly reception. *Register* reviewer Donald R. Murphy informed readers that "Phil Has Forgotten Some Things About State Fairs." Many of Murphy's complaints were quibbles over factual details in the novel—descriptions of the swine barn, the judging pavilion, and the like. But these errors of fact were trivial compared with the novel's love scenes. Murphy commented: "The State Fair Board may wish to point out to the parents among its patrons that the moral dangers of the fair are much less great than Mr. Stong indicates; and to the young among its patrons, that the amours of which Mr. Stong writes are far from typical. Most casual affairs of the kind are a good deal uglier and have worse results. The atmosphere of Stong's incidents is taken straight from continental fiction. Here in Iowa we take our seductions a good deal more seriously."

Murphy apparently had heard from enough readers who thought that "young people . . . must be protected from such books." M. L. Archer of Fort Dodge, for one, scolded the book in a brief reader's review on the *Register's* book page: "Is Iowa hog-minded? All the world will think so now. Abel stood by until the blue ribbon was pinned. Melissa worked hard at tent house keeping. Where were the two adolescent children? Loose. An American tragedy."

Murphy did acknowledge that Stong had captured the atmosphere of the fair, had crafted the Frakes's moonlit drive to Des Moines with "real poetic feeling as well as humor," and had treated "with respectful admiration, that modern wonder the Iowa state fair." He also applauded Stong's attempt to write "a moderately cheerful book" about midwestern farm life, as opposed to the grim view offered by realist writers.

It was Stong's cheerfulness, however, that landed him in trouble with other reviewers. "Happy nations, we have all heard, have no history," wrote Louis Kronenberger in the *New York Times*. Stong's Iowa was

such a land, one seemingly impervious to political strife and economic downturns. The novel was thus so devoid of realistic characters and significant conflicts that it "can—in a word—teach us nothing significant about life." Even more pointed criticism came from Robert Cantwell, writing in the *New Republic*, who observed dryly that "Mr. Stong's dreamy Iowa would seem an even more appealing land if we did not have so much evidence indicating quite clearly that it does not exist."

Critics of the novel were not mere killjoys. The years following the stock market crash of 1929 were extraordinarily troubled and uncertain times for America, as the 1920s already had been for its farmers. Published in 1932, *State Fair* makes little mention of the Depression, and few references to the ravaged farm economy. Besides one or two remarks about falling prices and banks, only one page hints of troubles ahead, suggesting that Stong had set the novel before the 1929 stock market crash. In a scene near the end of the novel, the Storekeeper comments: "I remember business in 1903 and 1910 and 1913 and 1920. I've let my stock get a way down. We're going to have a depression and a big one before another year's out." He advises Abel: "Don't buy anything till next winter. Business is too good. Whenever everybody spends a lot of money, then pretty soon they've haven't got any money to spend." Yet Stong's belief that farmers were prosperous and content never wavered, and he boasted that *State Fair* was a deliberate attempt to create an upbeat portrayal of midwestern farm life, as a self-styled "one-man revolt" against the dominant, bleak tradition of American rural fiction, stretching from Iowa novelist Hamlin Garland to southern writer Erskine Caldwell.

Now in Hollywood, Stong had loads of exciting news for the folks back home. Will Rogers had prevailed, landing the film's role of Abel Frake, and Janet Gaynor would play Margy. The supporting cast was also first-rate: Lew Ayres was cast as Pat, Sally Eilers as Emily, and Louise Dresser as Melissa. In a final casting decision, director Henry King decided to purchase the fair's champion Hampshire boar for the role of Blue Boy, and also decided to film background shots for the movie at the 1932 Iowa State Fair.

There was less cheerful news as well. Stong soon discovered that he did not care much for screenwriting or movie-making, especially under Henry King, whom he variously described as "an ass," "crazy," and

a "sap." King, apparently, did not think much of Stong, either. Although Stong had been hired by Fox to adapt the novel for screenplay, King eventually replaced him with experienced screenwriters and crafted a good deal of the script himself. In any case, Stong regarded himself as a serious novelist, not a screenwriter, and was anxious to return to New York to begin work on his second book. When Fox offered to retain him at \$500 a week, he declined.

Whatever their disagreements, no director was better suited to capture Stong's mythic farm story on celluloid. King had realized immediately that *State Fair* lent itself perfectly to his cinematic style, and urged Fox to purchase the rights to the story. King, not unlike Iowa painter Grant Wood, knew precisely how to evoke the archetypal farm family and the iconic appeal of the farmstead and fairgrounds. Plot and dialog, as King later recalled, were secondary: "The images came first and the sound supplemented them."

King's film made one major change to Stong's story: according to Hollywood's formula, *State Fair* had to have a happy ending, and so, after parting company at the fair, Margy Frake and Pat Gilbert are reunited in the film's closing scene. This bit of rewriting short-circuited Stong's message about the irreconcilability of rural and urban lives, and was one of the many disputes that soured his relationship with King.

After attending *State Fair*'s premiere in January 1933 at Radio City Music Hall, Stong wrote excitedly to his parents about box office grosses and his prospects for selling subsequent novels to Hollywood, but he neglected to mention whether he had liked the film. By mid-February, he had sold film rights to his second novel, *Stranger's Return*, to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (the film would be directed by King Vidor), and was receiving—and spurning—offers of \$1,000 per week to write screenplays. As bread lines lengthened and mortgages were foreclosed, Stong's stock was soaring: "Isn't the depression awful?" he joked.

Critics received the film *State Fair* somewhat more favorably than the novel, although they voiced similar complaints concerning the plausibility and morality of Wayne's and Margy's liaisons and the irrepressibly happy depiction of farm life. Some reviewers were untroubled by the implicit conservatism of the film's cheerful depiction of farmers. *Variety* declared the film "a winner all down the line," promising that "those who know their rural America will find it ringingly true." The *World-Telegram* admired its "charms and cozy truths," and *The American* called it "a romantic comedy-drama of rural America, rich as the soil itself, and 'homely' as the heart of the hinterlands." When

the film opened in Iowa in February, the *Register* pronounced it "an accurate presentation of its subject, with only a few exaggerations that would be noticed only in Iowa" but did not elaborate on those. Arthur R. Corey, secretary of the Iowa State Fair, commented, "Of course, the producers have taken the liberty reserved by all artists to modify or exaggerate certain scenes for the sake of effect," but he thought the essential story was "very interestingly portrayed."

Other critics, however, charged that both the author and the film studio had willfully overlooked the economic troubles that had befallen the American farmer. Leftist critic Dwight MacDonald managed to dig his fingernails into the armrests of his seat and resist the urge to stalk out of the theater, but afterward found it "hard to write with the proper critical restraint." "At a time when the American farmer is faced with ruin, when the whole Middle West is seething with bitterness and economic discontent, a movie like *State Fair* is an insulting 'let 'em eat cake' gesture," MacDonald fumed. "The vaudeville rusticity of Will Rogers, the 'cute' doll face of Janet Gaynor—thus Hollywood embodies the farmer! There was no excuse for the cheerfully trivial tone of the whole thing, the studied avoidance of anything more serious in the life of the farmer than whether his hog will win the state championship. And the slick, marshmallow sweet Hollywood photography was in itself just cause for a national farmers' strike. What a chance for a realistic documentary of American farm life in these times! And Hollywood gives us a movie about as earthy as the gingham overalls in a musical comedy number."

Critics notwithstanding, the film was tremendously successful at the box office, and impressed enough people within the movie industry to be nominated for the 1932/33 Academy Award for Best Picture. Indeed, *State Fair* and Noel Coward's *Cavalcade* (which in the end captured the Oscar for Best Picture) rescued Fox from the brink of bankruptcy. There were individual triumphs as well: *State Fair* was arguably the pinnacle of Will Rogers's screen career and a last hurrah for Janet Gaynor, whose star began to fade afterward. Even Blue Boy became a star in his own right,



Although Stong was pleased that Will Rogers and Janet Gaynor (above) would star in the 1933 Fox film *State Fair*, critic Dwight MacDonald felt differently. In his mind, Rogers's "vaudeville rusticity" and Gaynor's "doll face" did no justice to farmers in the Thirties, "seething with bitterness and economic discontent."

stealing several scenes with his wry, grunted observations. When the celebrity porker met an untimely death in early 1934, he was accorded an obituary in *Time*: "Died. 'Blue Boy,' prize hog, film actor, star of the Phil Stong-Will Rogers cinema *State Fair* . . . of overeating and overgrooming; in Hollywood."

Basking in the success of the novel and film, Stong seemed to have launched a promising literary career. He conceded that *State Fair* was not exactly *The Great Gatsby*, but felt confident that his best work was yet to come. Unfortunately, both the dictates of the publishing business and Stong's own talents confined him to the style and material he had employed in his first novel. Within the publishing trade, Stong had already been typecast as a local colorist. Before *State Fair* had even been published, his editor had urged him to follow it with "another farm novel" and his agent had suggested that he write an entire novel about the Storekeeper, one of the more intriguing characters in *State Fair*.

Although he aspired to write about other themes and locales, Stong was willing to exploit the niche he had carved for himself for all it was worth. His second

novel, *Stranger's Return*, reiterated many of the themes of *State Fair*, and similarly incorporated autobiographical details from Stong's life. A few miles down the road from the Frake farmstead, Grandpa Storr's farm, Storrhaven, has become the scene of family wrangling. His granddaughter, Louise, who is Grandpa's only surviving lineal descendant, has suddenly arrived at Storrhaven, seeking refuge after ending an unhappy marriage to an East Coast newspaperman. Although Louise has never before been to Iowa, she immediately feels at home upon her "return" to the ancestral estate. Meanwhile, Grandpa's conniving stepdaughter Thelma and niece-in-law Beatrice, who currently stand to inherit Storrhaven, fear that he will deed his estate to Louise; they conspire to swindle the farm from the old man before he dies. Ultimately, the wily Grandpa thwarts his scheming would-be heirs, announces that Louise will inherit the farm, and sends Beatrice and Thelma packing. Days later, he dies. Just as Phil Stong had recently gained ownership of his ancestral home, Louise Storr rescues Storrhaven from the clutches of Thelma and Beatrice.

Stong next sought to write a sophisticated novel, one that did not shy away from serious problems. The result, *Village Tale*, published in 1934, offers a relentlessly unflattering portrait of the Frakes's hometown and of small-town life generally. The novel revolves around a feud between Slaughter Somerville, scion of the county's wealthiest family, and Drury Stevensen, descendant of a long line of failed farmers. By the novel's end, Slaughter has savagely beaten Drury, caused his wrongful arrest for murdering Somerville's hired hand, Bolly (who actually committed suicide), and stolen a neighbor woman away from her eminently dislikable husband. Stong, who had been castigated for his sugary depiction of farm life, had now concocted an unpalatably bitter version of rural America. As an attack on the proverbial conformity of small-town life, *Village Tale* hardly suggested an appealing alternative.

When *Village Tale* rolled off the press, Stong

boasted that "I can say, without vanity or exaggeration, [that it] gives me a place among the important American writers of this time." Others disagreed. Louis Kronenberger of the *New York Times Book Review* savaged both the teller and the tale, conceding that Stong had a literary gift, but charging that he misused it in order to please both "discriminating and indiscriminating reader alike." Kronenberger labeled Stong "a realist who, at the decisive moment, runs away from the truth," warning that he "seems to be heading dangerously toward popular success."

With three novels to his credit, Stong was eager to leave rural Iowa behind and to write a story set in an entirely different locale. As he wrote to a friend in 1934, "Confidentially, I'm trying to get away from the pig and pickle and playboy stuff and see what I can do on my merits. In other words, I'm trying to write a book that will be sufficiently sound to make people forget that I wrote 'State Fair.' I'm not ashamed of the little story, but I'd hate to stand on it." Stong

was keenly aware that the vogue for stories set in rural America was already waning. Hollywood had expressed no interest in *Village Tale*, he claimed, because "so many studios tried poor imitations of *State Fair*, for flop after flop."

His attempt to break out of the mold of farm novelist, *Week-End*, takes place in Connecticut, where Stong had recently purchased an estate. Socialite Flora Baitzell has invited a few of her affluent friends to her country home to celebrate her 33rd birthday. As the weekend turns into drunken revelry, a tangle of crisscrossing sexual attractions and jealousies turns increasingly squalid. On Saturday, the four male guests drive to a nearby bootlegger's house to buy some apple jack, but an automobile accident on their return trip severely injures Flora's gigolo, and decapitates her stockbroker. In the aftermath, the stunned survivors contemplate life's brevity and resolve not to postpone happiness a moment further: by *Week-End's* end, each has paired off with a new lover. It was enough to make all but the most jaded reader homesick for the Frakes's Iowa farmstead.

Stong's escape from Iowa as literary material was brief. *Week-End's* reviews were almost unanimously

AUTOGRAPHED COPY FROM SHSI (IOWA CITY); PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHARLES SCOTT

Stong autographed this copy of his novel *Jessamy John*, warning: "Don't read this—it will put you in a frightful minority."



PHOTO BY CHARLES SCOTT; BOOKS FROM THE COLLECTIONS OF THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA (IOWA CITY)

unflattering. Disheartened when “the New York papers all said ‘back to the farm,’” Stong abandoned his more ambitious literary aspirations and reconciled himself to a career as a self-supporting but relatively unimportant author, retreating to the themes, characters, and locales developed in his first three novels. He also began to write children’s books, because, he said, “one of these kid books is as good as an annuity policy—they keep paying you all your life.”

Eventually, he produced eight more novels (all generally uninspired) set in southeast Iowa. In 1936 he published *Career*, the central character of which is another small-town storekeeper. *Time* magazine declared that the novel was final proof, if any were needed, that Stong had traded his serious literary ambitions for sales figures and movie rights. Unfortunately, *Career* did not move rapidly from booksellers’ shelves, prompting Stong to contemplate the sagging trajectory of his own career in a letter to his parents: “I suppose I’m a spoiled brat but I hoped that ‘Career’ would have a big circulation; several reviewers said it was better than ‘State Fair’ and I know it is a great deal better than ‘State Fair’ but it simply doesn’t seem to make an impression. Of course, ‘State Fair’ is more of a curse than a blessing by this time. It had some impact as a

Over three decades, Stong wrote more than 40 books—including eight novels set in southeastern Iowa and several children’s books. A chronological list appears below.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <i>Shake ‘em Up! A Practical Handbook of Polite Drinking</i> (coauthor, Virginia Elliott) (1930) | <i>Captain Kidd’s Cow</i> (1941) |
| <i>State Fair</i> (1932) | <i>The Princess</i> (1941) |
| <i>Stranger’s Return</i> (1933) | <i>One Destiny</i> (1942) |
| <i>Farm Boy: A Hunt for Indian Treasure</i> (1934) | <i>Way Down Cellar</i> (1942) |
| <i>Village Tale</i> (1934) | <i>Missouri Canary</i> (1943) |
| <i>Week-End</i> (1935) | <i>Censored, the Goat</i> (1945) |
| <i>The Farmer in the Dell</i> (1935) | <i>Marta of Muscovy; The Fabulous Life of Russia’s First Empress</i> (1945) |
| <i>Honk: The Moose</i> (1936) | <i>Jessamy John: A Novel of John Law and the Mississippi Bubble</i> (1947) |
| <i>Career</i> (1936) | <i>Positive Pete!</i> (1947) |
| <i>No-Sitch: The Hound</i> (1936) | <i>The Prince and the Porker</i> (1950) |
| <i>Buckskin Breeches</i> (1937) | <i>Hirum, the Hillbilly</i> (1951) |
| <i>High Water</i> (1937) | <i>Forty Pounds of Gold</i> (1951) |
| <i>The Rebellion of Lennie Barlow</i> (1937) | <i>Return in August</i> (1953) |
| <i>County Fair</i> (1938) | <i>Mississippi Pilot; With Mark Twain on the Great River</i> (1954) |
| <i>Edgar: The 7:58</i> (1938) | <i>Blizzard</i> (1955) |
| <i>Young Settler</i> (1938) | <i>A Beast Called an Elephant</i> (1955) |
| <i>Ivanhoe Keeler</i> (1939) | <i>The Adventure of “Horse” Barnsby</i> (1956) |
| <i>Horses and Americans</i> (1939) | <i>Mike; The Story of a Young Circus Acrobat</i> (1957) |
| <i>The Hired Man’s Elephant</i> (1939) | <i>Gold in Them Hills; Being an Irreverent History of the Great 1849 Gold Rush</i> (1957) |
| <i>The Long Lane</i> (1939) | |
| <i>Cowhand Goes to Town</i> (1939) | |
| <i>If School Keeps</i> (1940) | |
| <i>Hawkeyes: A Biography of the State of Iowa</i> (1940) | |

RETURN IN AUGUST

This book is probably not quite as bad as it first seems, let us hope. Let us hope. Obviously —

Phil Stong

AUTOGRAPHED COPIES FROM SHSI (IOWA CITY); PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHARLES SCOTT

Phil Stong
with apologies.

Stong autographed these copies of *Return in August* (his 1953 sequel to *State Fair*) and *Forty Pounds of Gold* (an Iowa farmer's gold rush adventures). Though its book jacket promises "action, earthy dialogue, and genuine humor," Stong autographed this copy, "With apologies."

good book, but more as a new way of looking at the Middle West. Now I have to live up to both things, when I've already exposed my notion that the people of the Middle West are darned good people."

After *Career's* disappointing reception, Stong began converting virtually every aspect of his family's and Iowa's history into published prose. He first turned his attention to a novel based on his grandfather Duffield's diaries of life in frontier Iowa. *Buckskin Breches*, like each of Stong's previous Iowa novels, scrambled history, autobiography, and fiction. Stong had a tremendous psychological investment in the work, and he fretted that it might exhaust the autobiographical wellspring from which he had drawn his novels. As he confided to his parents, "When I finish this book I will have used up a mighty big piece of my life and heritage."

Buckskin Breches, however, did not deplete Stong's reservoir. During much of 1939, Stong was at work on two books he considered "nonfiction," one an autobiography, *If School Keeps*, and the other the curiously titled *Hawkeyes: A Biography of the State of Iowa*, which was suffused with Stong's idiosyncratic sense of humor. His penchant for conflating aspects of his own life and the history of Iowa was never more apparent than in the nearly simultaneous publication of his life story and his history of Iowa.

Amid Stong's prolific output of novels and stories, his nostalgic evocations of fairs consistently engaged readers' interest. Trading on the success of his first novel, Stong wrote several magazine articles and other pieces on fairs throughout his career. In 1938, he published *County Fair*, ostensibly a work of nonfiction, lavishly illustrated with photographs by Josephine von Miklos and filled with Stong's glib observations on fairs and fairgoers. And in 1945, the enduring appeal of his story of the Frake family's week at the fair

was confirmed, when Fox released the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *State Fair*, also based on Stong's novel (though to his chagrin, Stong discovered that he would receive no royalties from Fox for this production because, in his own words, "they make their contracts too darn good"). Always a champion of the fair and its traditions, he was enlisted by a fellow Iowan in 1950 to help fight the fair board's decision to abandon horse racing. "Let us also abolish corn, hogs, cakes, pickles and everything else that has had a part in the greatness of Iowa," he responded sarcastically. "Next year I intend to enter some chow mein, borscht and a kangaroo."

In 1952, two decades after he had made his publishing debut with *State Fair*, a novel whose success he could not duplicate and whose themes he could not escape, Phil Stong was typing its sequel, which became the basis for a novel, *Return in August* (published in 1953). Reporter Pat Gilbert has proved unable to confine himself to one place, but has held a series of jobs at newspapers and magazines. Now based in New York, he roams the globe as a feature writer for *Lark*, "the Illustrated Magazine of the American Scene." His latest assignment, one which he accepts with considerable apprehension, is to cover a cattle-rustling trial at a county courthouse in southeastern Iowa. In addition, Gilbert's editor suggests that he take advantage of his trip to the Midwest to write a piece on "The Fair Revisited," since he had covered the Iowa State Fair as a journalist some 20 years earlier.

Meanwhile in Iowa, the lives of the Frakes have changed little during the intervening decades. Blue Boy has long since been ground into "weenie wurst," of course, but Abel and Melissa are still thriving on their farm. Wayne has married Eleanor, his high school sweetheart, and they have settled into an amicable, if unexciting, life together. Margy had been similarly content, if hardly passionate, in her marriage to hometown beau Harry Ware, right up to the day his

tractor overturned, crushing the hapless farmer to death. Truth be told, Margy has not felt true love since that week, now 20 years past, when she toured the state fair with a restless young reporter named Pat Gilbert.

As in most of Stong's fiction, everything turns out neatly. At the close of the story, Pat and Margy are reunited, with no further separations in sight. Two decades later, Stong had rewritten his tale with a happy ending, just as Hollywood had.

In April 1957, Stong suffered a fatal heart attack. Even in his obituaries, Stong's critics would not relent. The *New York Times* credited him with seeking "industriously but vainly" for 25 years to duplicate the success of *State Fair*, but minced no words about the result: "Although he was a popular writer, he disappointed serious-minded admirers and critics. Those who had hoped that he might contribute more profoundly to American literature felt that he had betrayed his talents."

The *Des Moines Tribune* was more charitable. The newspaper declined to pass judgment on Stong's literary talents, noting instead that, despite his long residence in New York and Connecticut, he "never had ceased to belong to Iowa and to be claimed by this state as a favorite native son." Whatever his shortcomings as a writer, Stong was a local boy made good, and so earned the admiration of many Iowans.

State Fair enjoyed a life of its own after Stong's death. In 1962, Fox released another version of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, starring Pat Boone as Wayne Frake and Ann-Margret as Emily. Studio executives, fearing that Iowa would no longer entice moviegoers, transplanted the Frakes and the fair to Texas. In 1996, the musical was produced on Broadway, where it received generous, if not ecstatic, reviews.

The phenomenal success of the novel *State Fair* in 1932 had led Phil Stong and some literary critics to believe that he was on the cusp of a significant literary career. Unfortunately, he was hemmed in not only by his own limited talents and experiences, but also by the vogue for rural fiction that he had helped to create. Although he wrote with genuine fondness and affection for his native state, he banged out novel after novel about Iowa because neither his abilities nor the dictates of the publishing trade would permit him to do otherwise. Despite his valiant effort to escape, Phil Stong was effectively kept down on the farm.

Nonetheless, Stong's contribution to the Midwest's cultural heritage is mixed. He strove to write tales of rural America that were immediately familiar and appealing to a mass readership. America's rapid urbanization and industrialization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries had led many citizens to question the virtues, even the continued existence, of farm life, as many farm families seemed almost eager to forsake the land to enjoy the amenities of city life. To Stong's credit, he depicted farm families that were not ignorant and disgruntled, but intelligent, likable, and reasonably contented with rural life. However, in creating characters and stories that would have broad appeal, he was sometimes inattentive to the specificities of midwestern life—to the everyday language and concerns of farmers during the Depression—to an extent that left his novels curiously devoid of much that was identifiably midwestern. Beginning with *State Fair* in 1932, Stong churned out a prodigious supply of novels, depicting a dreamy vision of midwestern life designed to reassure Americans everywhere that the family farm, long regarded the wellspring of the nation's virtue, had not yet run dry. ❖

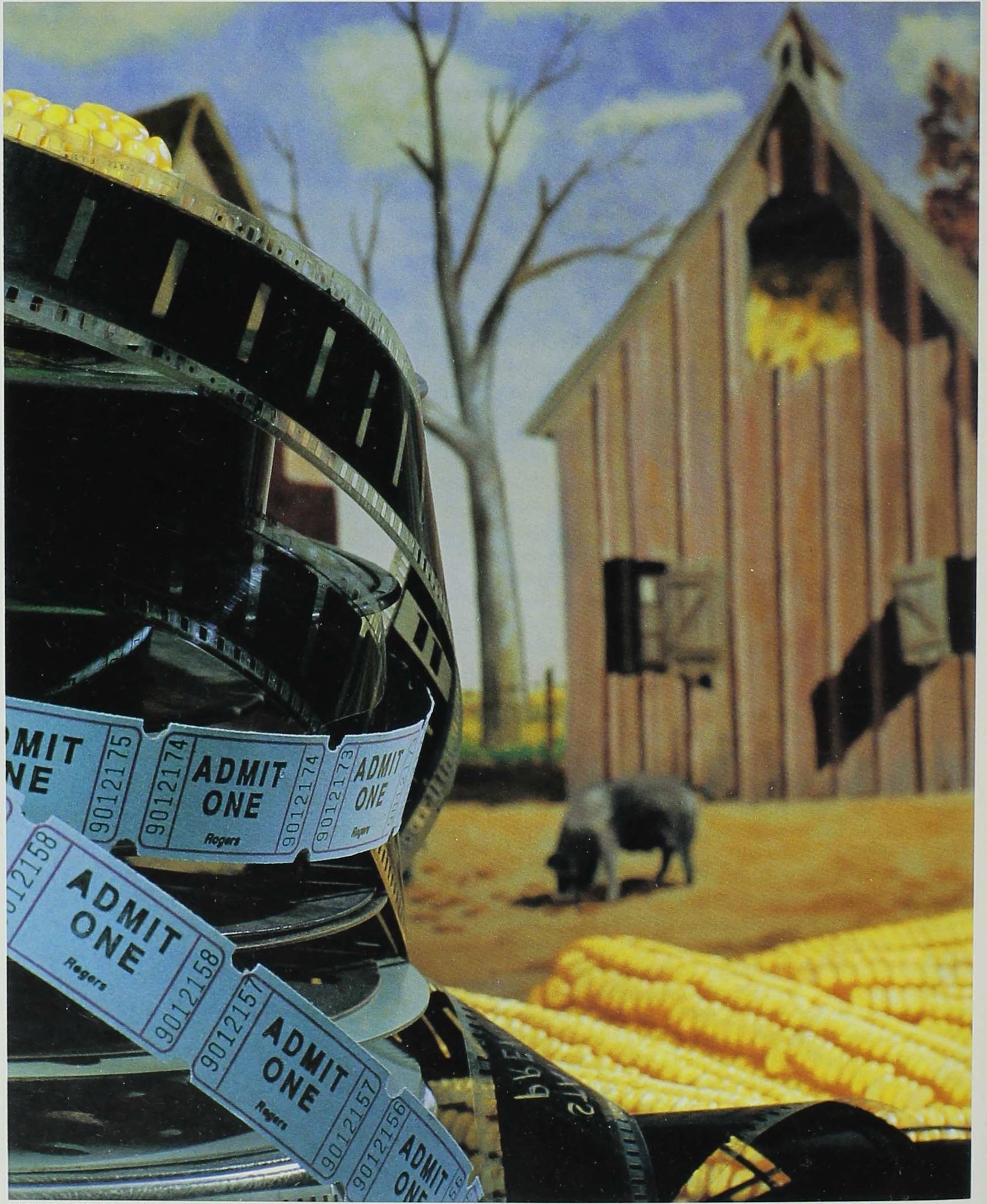
The author, an Iowa native, is now assistant professor of history at University of Nevada, Las Vegas. His dissertation on the Iowa State Fair will be published by Johns Hopkins University Press.

NOTE ON SOURCES

The Philip D. Stong Papers are held in the Archives, Cowles Library, Drake University, Des Moines. Additional Stong correspondence is at Special Collections, University of Iowa Libraries, University of Iowa, Iowa City. Major secondary sources on Stong and his writing include: Clarence A. Andrews, *A Literary History of Iowa* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1972); Emily Stong, "Philip Duffield Stong, (1899-1957): 'Novelist Laureate of Iowa,'" MA thesis, Adelphi University, 1974 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms); Roy W. Meyer, *The Middle-Western Farm Novel in the Twentieth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965); John T. Frederick, "The Farm in Iowa Fiction," *Palimpsest* 32 (1951), 121-52; and John T. Frederick, "Iowa's Phil Stong," and William J. Petersen, "Phil Stong in Retrospect," *Palimpsest* 38 (1957), 520-30.

Coverage of *State Fair's* publication appeared in the *Des Moines Register*, May 8, 15, 22, 1932; and in *Greater Iowa* (Iowa State Fair Board, Iowa Dept. of Agriculture), 18:2 (June-July 1932). For reviews of Stong's work, see Louis Kronenberger, "The Brighter Side of Farm Life," *New York Times Book Review* (May 8, 1932), 6; and Robert Cantwell, "This Side of Paradise," *New Republic* 71 (July 6, 1932), 215-16. On the movie's premiere, see *Des Moines Register*, February 18 and 19, 1933; *Des Moines Register* and *Des Moines Tribune*, August 29, 1945; and the August 1945 script for radio announcer Ted Malone, Special Collections, State Historical Society of Iowa (Des Moines center). The most thorough analysis of Henry King's film *State Fair* is in Walter Coppedge, *Henry King's America* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1986), 72-91. See also: Henry King, oral history, Directors Guild of America, "State Fair" folder, Film Studies Dept., Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Annotations to this article are in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files, State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City). The editor thanks Craig Kohl, University of Iowa Photo Service, for his expertise in photographing individual frames from the 1945 Fox Movietone News film (reproduced on pages 146 and 149).



PAINTING IN BACKGROUND, BY J. NOÉ, 1947, FROM SHSI (IOWA CITY). PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHARLES SCOTT



VISIONS OF IOWA IN HOLLYWOOD FILM

by Marty S. Knepper and John S. Lawrence

Over the past sixty years Hollywood has made more than three dozen feature films showing Iowa as a distinctive place, way of life, or state of mind. Two dozen of them have been made in the 1980s and 1990s alone. *The Bridges of Madison County* (released in 1995) and *Field of Dreams* (1989) are the most famous of these recent films. Steven Spielberg's 1998 blockbuster, *Saving Private Ryan*, will remind older film viewers of a cluster of World War II-era films about self-sacrificing Iowa heroes. A far more cheerful strain runs through the earlier, well-known Iowa musicals *State Fair* (1945) and *The Music Man* (1962).

Considered as a group, films about Iowa raise questions about their meaning as portrayals of our state and its residents. Why has Hollywood made so many? Are there consistent images, positive and negative, that Hollywood uses when it depicts Iowa culture? Should Iowans feel demeaned, flattered, or both, by the attention? Do these films have implications for our ability to attract and maintain our economic and population base? And, finally, what might the success or failure of an individual film tell us about what version of Iowa Hollywood can sell?

The films discussed here, and those listed in the concluding "filmography," all have Iowa settings or Iowans as characters. Although they represent several cinematic genres—comedies, romances, dramas, satires, musicals, thrillers, and documentaries—what these movies have in common, almost without exception, is their representation of Iowa as an "old-fashioned" state full of farms and small towns. Thus, even

though film is an art and technology developed in the 20th century, Hollywood filmmakers have drawn upon an artistic and cultural convention that dates back to antiquity—pastoralism.

Pastoralism reveres a rustic rural life characterized by nature's abundance, innocent pleasures, and social harmony. It often emerges in literature, art, music, or popular culture as society's reaction to the stresses and corruption of urban life.

This idealization of rural life first developed in the Western world during the classical era. Writing poems and prose for other urbanites who were beginning to feel civilization's discontents, Virgil, Longus, Theocritus, and other sophisticated city writers established pastoralism's narrative conventions and imagery (for instance, an image of a shepherd piping sweetly on his flute). Over the centuries, variations on the pastoral theme have emerged, highlighting various cultural tensions: innocence versus worldliness, nature versus culture, freedom versus restriction, and safety versus danger—tensions that in this century weave themselves through Hollywood films about Iowa.

In the United States, American pastoralism evolved from several strands in the nation's cultural history: New England Puritanism's righteousness, work ethic, and utopian dreams; Thomas Jefferson's concept of American democracy rooted in agrarian life; the transformation of the frontier from wilderness to settlement; 19th-century romantic writers' ecstasies about the freedom, beauty, and fertility of the prairies; and the Midwest's emergence as a great cultivated "garden of Eden" capable of feeding the nation. As a

result of these influences, American pastoralism is more austere than classical pastoralism and often implies that rural life builds moral character.

Pastoralism looms large in Americans' perceptions of the Midwest, argues cultural geographer James Shortridge, who has explored shifts in how and why the nation perceives the Midwest in certain ways. Despite the region's urban and industrial development, the national mind associates the Midwest almost exclusively with agriculture, a basic element of pastoralism, and consistently identifies Iowa as the most representative midwestern state. Admiration for the Midwest reached its highest between 1912 and 1920, Shortridge says, when it was viewed as superior to both the decaying East and the untamed West. But since the 1920s, he says, the Midwest tends to be ignored or portrayed as a cultural backwater—unless Americans are disenchanted with urban life or are facing some great external challenge such as war. Then Iowa and the Midwest are nostalgically idealized as a rural paradise or America's patriotic heartland.

Hollywood films tend to reflect and refuel these national perceptions about Iowa and the Midwest. Through standard settings, characters, and plots, filmmakers nearly always use Iowa and Iowans as a sort of metaphor or shorthand to convey an idyllic, pastoral view of rural and small-town life. Cinematic settings, for instance, often resemble Grant Wood's landscapes of fertile, orderly fields and tidy, scattered farmsteads, showing Iowa as a peaceful land of plenty. To depict Iowa's small towns, Hollywood filmmakers invariably use old-fashioned white houses with porch swings, shady streets, water towers, aging courthouses with flags flying, and pickup trucks parked diagonally in front of mom-and-pop cafés and grocery stores. Almost never does Hollywood show an Iowa with interstate highways, computer technology, cities, suburbs, malls, and modern architecture.

The film *Sleeping with the Enemy* (1991) illustrates the surprising durability of idyllic rural and small-town Iowa as it establishes its setting of contemporary Cedar Falls. Laura (played by Julia Roberts) has left her abusive husband and seeks refuge in Iowa. As she approaches Cedar Falls on a Greyhound bus, she sees a welcome sign decorated with an ear of corn. She bursts into a smile when she sees the center of town bustling with small local businesses, children splashing happily in a public fountain, a dog chasing a boy on a bike, and a man in overalls and straw hat watch-

ing a police officer raise a flag. Some Cedar Falls residents have found this scene laughably inaccurate, but such visual images, or icons, reinforce the film's key idea that Iowa is a pastoral haven for tormented outsiders like Laura.

Just as Hollywood filmmakers often rely on stock pastoral settings of Iowa—prosperous farms and pristine small towns—they often rely on these stock characterizations of Iowans: the farm family, the unsung prairie hero, and the naive but good-hearted innocent abroad.

The 1933 *State Fair* popularized, and the 1945 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical reinforced, the image of the Iowa farm family. As the movie begins, farmer Abel Frake is obsessed with his hog "Blue Boy." His wife, Melissa, works in the kitchen to prepare for the family's upcoming trip to the Iowa State Fair. Margy, 19, and Wayne, 18, are dissatisfied and restless. Pretty, lively Margy, bored with her hometown fiancé, craves romance. Handsome, earnest Wayne seeks adventure. After an eventful week at the fair, the Frakes return to their rural home and roles. Abel and Melissa are elated by prizes won for pigs and mincemeat and by a welcome escape from daily drudgery. The teens are sadder but wiser after exciting but troubling romances at the fair. All except Margy, who will marry the newspaper reporter she met at the fair and move away, will carry on as before. The implication is strong that Wayne will settle down with his hometown girl and raise his own Blue Boys in the future.

Several World War II-era films set in Iowa employ another stock character, the unsung hero who sacrifices comfort and dreams, and sometimes life and limb, to uphold the ideals of democracy, family, and moral living. Strong, personal values of the unsung heroes, these films suggest, are shaped by their upbringing in the character-building pastoral setting of rural and small-town Iowa.

One of these unsung hero films is *Cheers for Miss Bishop* (1941), adapted from Bess Streeter Aldrich's novel *Miss Bishop*. The film celebrates the life of an unmarried teacher at Midwestern College, based on Iowa State Teachers College (now the University of Northern Iowa). As a young woman in the late 19th century, Ella Bishop is a sprightly, idealistic college graduate who dreams of romance and travel. Instead, she devotes her life to educating immigrant settlers and setting them off in pursuit of the American Dream. Ironically, her own dedication to family, students, community, and conventional morality keeps her from accepting opportunities for love and adventure. Her whole life is spent in one small midwestern



COURTESY THE AUTHORS



SHS (IOWA CITY)

In two films titled *State Fair*, Hollywood popularized the image of the Iowa farm family. The first was released in 1933, as America faced the Depression; the second, in 1945, as World War II ended.

Above: Stills from the 1933 film were splashed on the back of the book jacket of Phil Stong's novel *State Fair* (the basis of the film). And in a scene from the 1945 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *State Fair*, Dick Haymes, Fay Bainter, Jeanne Crain, and Charles Winninger, as the Frake family, beam proudly at their prize-winning Hampshire boar "Blue Boy."



PHOTOS ABOVE AND BELOW: FOX MOVIE TONE NEWS, INC.

Left and below: Twentieth Century-Fox produced a six-minute "Movietone News" feature on *State Fair's* world premiere in Des Moines, August 29, 1945. In two scenes from this rare nitrate film, Iowa governor Robert D. Blue presents a porker to *State Fair's* songster Dick Haymes; and 20,000 Iowans flood downtown Des Moines for the festivities. Beauty queens, WACs, Shriners, and 4-H clubs paraded before dignitaries, and George Jessel, Carole Landis, Faye Marlow, and other Hollywood stars added to the hoopla.



Former war correspondent Ted Malone covered the premiere on the radio, reminding his war-weary listeners that state fairs are "part of America." "Next year they'll be back again," he said. "Let's not take it for granted."

The film was shown that evening in both the Paramount and the Des Moines Theaters, and then in other theaters around the state (see back cover). "Twentieth Century-Fox has taken the Iowa state fair, trimmed it down to 99 minutes, pepped it up with delightful music, dolled it out in dazzling color and in the entire process overlooked but one thing," the *Des Moines Register* noted. "There's not a drop of rain in the picture."

town. Like George Bailey in *It's a Wonderful Life*, she sometimes fumes bitterly at the personal cost of her commitment to serving her community. At the end of this sentimental film, however, as family, loyal friends, and grateful students cheer her dedication and self-sacrifice, she seems to accept her role.

The unsung hero also appears in other 1940s Hollywood films about Iowa. *One Foot in Heaven* (1941) is based on Iowan Hartzell Spence's autobiographical book about his self-sacrificing father, who gave up medical studies and became, instead, a poorly paid Methodist minister. *The Fighting Sullivans* (1944) is based on the true story of five rowdy, fiercely loyal Irish Catholic brothers from Waterloo, Iowa, who died when their ship, the USS *Juneau*, sank in the Solomon Islands in 1943. Sacrifice is also the central theme in *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), which traces the homecoming of three veterans who return to once-pastoral Boone City, now swept up in postwar materialism, secularism, and Cold War paranoia.

The self-sacrificing, idealistic unsung hero reappears in the 1998 World War II film *Saving Private Ryan*. The film is built around a young Iowa soldier's refusal to leave his unit and go home, even when he learns that his three brothers have all been killed. The United States War Department wants to avoid another Sullivan brothers' tragedy in Iowa, but Private Ryan believes that even his heartbroken Iowa mother will understand why he must stay and help his comrades defend a strategic bridge.

A third stock character, also arising from the pastoral tradition, is the innocent abroad. Several Iowa films, mostly comedies, show naive, good-hearted Iowans, often from rural backgrounds, triumphing in sophisticated places because of their "Iowa qualities." In *Joe's Apartment* (1996), Joe's farm background—specifically, his knowledge of manure—improbably leads to his romantic success. In *Fraternity Vacation* (1995), Wendell, the son of a hog farmer (and described as "Iowa's #1 Nerd" in the movie's promotional material), wins a California beauty thanks to his Iowa niceness.

Pastoral literature celebrates love, and so do the many Iowa films that pair an Iowan and a non-Iowan as romantic partners. In these cinematic plots, the Iowan is usually a woman—principled and tied to her community and family but wistful and bored. The outsider is usually a man—an attractive, worldly loner, cynical and a little dangerous. For instance, in *The Bridges of Madison County*,

SHSI (IOWA CITY)



Iowa farm wife Francesca Johnson (Meryl Streep) and *National Geographic* photographer Robert Kincaid (Clint Eastwood) are swept up in a four-day affair. Ultimately, however, Francesca denies Kincaid's pleas to leave her family and Iowa.

Another insider/outsider romance film is *The Pajama Game* (1957), which has an unusual setting, a factory. (The original source is the novel *7½ Cents* by Iowan Richard Bissell, whose family operated a Dubuque factory that manufactured shirts, sportswear, and pajamas.) But the film is completely conventional in pairing an insider, Iowa tomboy and head of the Grievance Committee Babe Williams, with an outsider, Chicagoan Sid Sorokin, the new factory superintendent.

In *The Music Man* (1962), the outsider is traveling salesman and phony bandleader Harold Hill, a wanderer, con artist, and charmer. The insider is River City's librarian and music teacher, Marian Paroo, a young, unmarried woman impatient with the town's low cultural level, but loyal to her widowed mother and her sad little brother, Winthrop. She dreams of a



SHSI (IOWA CITY); WARNER BROS., COURTESY PYRAMID BOOKS

In *The Music Man*, traveling salesman Harold Hill steps off the train in River City, Iowa (above), sweeps the librarian off her feet in an insider/outsider romance (left), and dupes the citizens, despite the mayor's best efforts (right) to expose him as a con man.



SHSI (IOWA CITY)

white knight with whom she can settle down "somewhere in the state of Iowa." As they fall in love, Harold helps Marian see the joy and beauty in her surroundings (she sings, "There were bells on the hill but I never heard them ringing"), and, in turn, Marian opens his heart to true love. Despite her high principles, when the townspeople discover his scam, Marian reminds them that he has also brought camaraderie, pride, and much-needed fun to River City. Marian's public defense of Harold, though she knows he's a fraud, inspires him to abandon his profitable scam and, it is implied, stay with her in River City. The lovers' remaining together in small-town Iowa is an unusual ending for an insider/outsider romance, since typically one or both of the pair leaves.

The Music Man is based on Iowan Meredith Willson's memories of his Mason City childhood, and it gently satirizes an Iowa small town of 1912 and its characteristic Iowa blending of pastoralism, Puritanism, and patriotism. The overwhelming popularity and success of both the film (1962) and the earlier Broadway musical (1957) harken back to the appeal of pastoralism as an escape from the increasingly complex and frustrating problems of urban life. James Shortridge explains how America's nostalgia in the 1950s and 1960s for the pastoral Midwest led to the success of *The Music Man*. "Being behind the times was

gradually transformed from a negative into a somewhat regional positive," he writes. "*The Music Man* was the most obvious sign of this movement around 1960. Author Meredith Willson drew inspiration from what he called the 'innocent Iowa' of his youth, and this quality was seen as the key to the play's success by most reviewers." Shortridge quotes the *Time* reviewer who remarked in 1958, "In a fat Broadway season whose successes deal so clinically with such subjects as marital frustration, alcoholism, dope addiction, juvenile delinquency and abortion, *The Music Man* is a monument to golden unpretentiousness and wholesome fun." If not quite utopian, life in pastoral River City, Iowa, must have seemed better than life in New York City.

Fans of *The Music Man* will remember the songs "Pick-A-Little, Talk-A-Little" and "Iowa Stubborn," in which River City citizens reveal tendencies toward gossip and stubbornness. The major production number "All I Owe Ioway," from Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical *State Fair*, suggests that ambitious people, though fond of Iowa's "ham and her beef and her lamb and her strawberry

jam—and her pie,” nevertheless leave the state. Both films handle with light humor a theme that appears in several Hollywood films about Iowa—the decidedly anti-pastoral notion that Iowans are narrow-minded and intolerant of new ideas or opposing values. Other films present this notion more darkly. In *Field of Dreams*, for example, citizens at a mean-spirited school board meeting demand a book banning. In *The Bridges of Madison County*, Italian-born Francesca chafes at her local community’s cultural indifference and moral rigidity. Norman Lear’s wickedly satiric film *Cold Turkey* (1971) points a finger at the laziness and hypocrisy of the city’s leaders, including the minister and his wife, as it tells the story of a dying Iowa town that takes a hefty bribe to stop smoking. In *The Last Supper* (1997), an ironic parable set in Iowa, conservatives are graciously invited to dinner by a group of liberal graduate students, and then calmly murdered. All of these examples remind filmgoers that not every scene

in an “Iowa film,” and not every Hollywood filmmaker, presents a pastoral view of Iowa and Iowans, or its conventional stereotypes.

A far different critical approach to Hollywood pastoralism is suggested by the satirical *Zadar! Cow from Hell* (1988). Created by Duck’s Breath Mystery Theatre (originally an Iowa City comedy group that moved to San Francisco), *Zadar!* directly addresses the issue of Iowa’s image. In the movie a Hollywood director returns to his tiny hometown of Howdy, Iowa, to create a film about a monster cow. He brings along a group of Hollywood professionals who repeatedly impose on the locals and ask stupid questions, like “Do they have lawyers in Iowa?” and “Do they have divorce in Iowa?” Outraged over their assigned roles, the locals boot out the Hollywood team and take charge of the filmmaking. Through humor and parody, the film exaggerates and ridicules the conventional stereotypes of Iowa and Iowans in film. Unfortunately, *Zadar!* was



An Iowa farm kitchen created for *The Bridges of Madison County* is the setting in which character Francesca Johnson searches her soul. Here, safe from the gaze of a judgmental community, she weighs romance and adventure in exotic locales against commitment and responsibility in rural Iowa.

doomed to be an insider joke; *Duck's Breath* could never get national distribution for the film.

Some Hollywood films completely puncture the idea of a pastoral, idyllic Iowa, immersing their audiences in the grim, complex problems of contemporary rural life. In recent years, three anti-pastoral films set in Iowa show us individuals who are overwhelmed in their struggles to maintain a decent existence in Iowa. Each film starred actors with great drawing power: Johnny Depp in *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*; Jessica Lange in *Country*; and Jessica Lange, Michelle Pfeiffer, and Jason Robards in *A Thousand Acres*. But even these big-name stars could not rescue the films from miserable fates at the box office.

What's Eating Gilbert Grape (1993) is an elegy for Iowa's dying small towns. Here, the pastoral image of heartland prosperity and fulfillment has soured. The film is set in a small Iowa town named "Endora" (perhaps a sly twist of Eldora, in Hardin County), where the franchised "Burger Barn" and "Foodland" are killing the local mom-and-pop café and grocery store. Gilbert Grape's mother, once spirited and attractive, has become after her farmer-husband's suicide an obese recluse. In the early days of prairie settlement, fat farmers symbolized an abundant heartland. In this film, Gilbert's mother's mammoth size symbolizes the burden of struggling for the viability of rural and small-town Iowa.

The central character, young Gilbert Grape (Johnny Depp), is forced into the paternal role for a very needy family. Everyone relies on him—his mom, whose obesity severely restricts her mobility; his brother, Arnie, who has a mental disability; his two restless sisters; his boss at the failing grocery store; and even a bored, lusty housewife to whom he delivers groceries. Arnie (Leonardo DiCaprio) especially warrants Gilbert's help. Arnie frequently escapes Gilbert's watchful eye and climbs the town's water tower to peer toward the horizon. Coaxing him down to safety, Gilbert gently reminds him, "We're not going anywhere." In the tradition of Iowa insider/outsider romances, Gilbert meets Becky, a stranger who has come through town in an Airstream trailer with her grandmother. She represents the temptation and promise of moving away from Endora.

The film treats all these characters lovingly and with dignity. The most touching scene occurs when Gilbert starts to flee Endora but returns, in the best self-sacrificial unsung hero tradition. Recognizing what it cost him to return, his mother calls him her

"knight in shining armor." That night she exerts herself to climb the stairs to her bedroom, where she dies, perhaps in a self-sacrificial act to free her children from the burden of caring for her. The next year when the Airstream trailers come past, Gilbert and Arnie leave with Becky. Gilbert's sisters have already moved on with their lives. The Grapes have all left Endora, Iowa.

Country (1984) had a timely release during the Iowa farm debt crisis in the 1980s. The film had a ripped-from-the-headlines quality that gave it a journalistic feel and led to actress Jessica Lange's congressional testimony on the farm crisis. The incidents in *Country* turn principally on farm foreclosures and focus on the Ivy family, with some attention to a neighboring farmer who commits suicide. The audience sees the realities of life on a family farm circa 1984: murderous storms, long hours, credit negotiations with bankers and merchants, heavy investment in equipment, and endless worry. The pressures and stress take their toll: in a once tight-knit family, Gil Ivy (Sam Shepard) has begun drinking heavily and fights with his son. His wife, Jewell Ivy (Jessica Lange), finally conks him on the head with a 2x4 and tells him to get out. He leaves in disgrace.

Jewell becomes a leader in the family and community, pressing for due process against foreclosure, heading off the bank's demand for a farm sale, and rallying her neighbors. Eventually the sale takes place, but because the neighbors refuse to bid on the equipment, the sale is stopped, to the bankers' chagrin. Gil returns at the moment of the sale, reconciles with his son, and admits, "I need this family." The happy ending here is that the family is reunited. The grinding demands of farm economics have not changed a bit.

The darkest of the anti-pastoral Iowa films is a tragedy adapted from Jane Smiley's Pulitzer prize-winning novel, *A Thousand Acres*, notable for reworking Shakespeare's *King Lear* plot. The central Lear-like figure in the film (1997) is successful farmer Larry Cook, a powerful, proud, and demanding man played by Jason Robards. His impulsive decision to divide his land among his daughters leads to quarrels, irreconcilable differences, and even death for angry son-in-law Pete. Measured against the pastoral tradition, Larry Cook has violated the sacred obligations of a farmer-patriarch: duty to family and duty to the land. His oldest daughters, Rose and Ginny (Michelle Pfeiffer and Jessica Lange), were victims of Larry's incest in earlier years. In recent years, Ginny has had a series of miscarriages, and Rose, two radical mastectomies, the implied result of living in a contemporary farm environ-

ment of toxic fertilizers and pesticides. The film has no happy ending, no reconciliation, and the truth is never fully told or believed.

A Thousand Acres did poorly at the box office, even in Iowa, where state pride or curiosity might have drawn large audiences. Critics had great difficulty with its grimly realistic message of wide-ranging moral sickness in the heartland. Others saw it as a male-bashing, feminist film, unfairly portraying men as predators. Still others condemned it as mere "soap opera," dubbing the film "As the Farm Turns" because of the illnesses, sins, deaths, and disasters. (One wonders whether an urban setting like Los Angeles would have provoked such accusations of excess.) Taking such complaints together, it appears that the brutal anti-pastoralism of *A Thousand Acres* defied too many popular expectations about Iowa to score at the box office.

The message here appears to be this: Hollywood filmmakers who want to picture Iowa accurately, who dare to challenge the pastoral myth of innocence and safety, who question traditional social roles and the sacredness of the family, or who choose to move beyond the more popular genres of comedy, romance, and sentimental drama should be prepared for small or often ungrateful audiences.

Pastoral treatments, on the other hand, promise to bring in the bucks.

Consider for a moment the hugely successful *Field of Dreams* (1989). Like *A Thousand Acres*, this film dealt with a farm family facing major debt and the loss of the farm, and it used sibling tensions and father-son alienation as minor themes. In *Field of Dreams* Ray Kinsella (Kevin Costner) finds himself far from his urban roots in New York City, his conservative, estranged father (now dead), and his radical undergraduate years at the University of California at Berkeley. He and his wife, a native Iowan, now own an Iowa farm.

One day, in response to voices only he hears, Ray begins to behave strangely. On good Iowa farm land, he plows up his corn crop and builds a baseball diamond. There, a group of ball players appear, among them long-dead "Shoeless Joe" Jackson and his White Sox teammates, before the Black Sox scandal ruined their lives. Driven by more voices, Ray heads out on a road trip and brings back two other baseball fans—Sixties writer Terrence Mann (James Earl Jones) and small-town physician Archie Graham (Burt Lancaster). All these men, and Ray's dead father, who

now appears as a young man, "ease their pain" by gathering at Ray's ball field. In magical Iowa, they recapture the joy they experienced as young men playing baseball. Ray makes peace with his father; the other men, with unfulfilled dreams.

The film ends as streams of cars head for Ray's farm, each car filled with unhappy people who will pay admission to watch baseball, "just like when they were kids," Mann says, "a long time ago." The implication is that this income will help ease the financial crisis Ray and Annie are facing with their farm, and that coming to the baseball field—returning to the innocence and safety of their youth—will heal the pilgrims.

Ironically, ever since *Field of Dreams* opened in 1989, streams of tourists have been coming to the Lansing family farm near Dyersville where the movie was shot—just as they come to Francesca's farmhouse and Roseman Bridge near Winterset, settings for *The Bridges of Madison County*. These tourism dollars have helped ease the financial crisis of Iowa's farms and small towns. Film fans seem to be looking to the film image of Iowa for the same reason humans have always looked to pastoral images—to seek refuge in beautiful, safe, seemingly uncomplicated places. In these film settings, they can enact their own fantasies of romance, reconciliation, lost youth, and a world without problems.

So does it really matter—either to Iowans or to the rest of the nation—how Iowans are portrayed in popular films? After all, much of the rest of Middle America gets similar treatment, as can be seen in *Fargo's* version of Minnesota and *In and Out's* version of small-town Indiana. At least the serene, magical scenes in *Field of Dreams* and *The Bridges of Madison County* have had a positive impact on tourism. Some newcomers confess that the pastoral imagery in films actually motivated their move to Iowa, and that they have since found enough truth to this image of the state to justify staying. Perhaps thoughtful Iowans will say to Hollywood, "Your pictures are not exactly our reality, but keep on making Iowa films!"

Stefanie Fuller, formerly of the Winterset Chamber of Commerce, comments that the fans of *The Bridges of Madison County* who come to Winterset from around the world expect "Hicksville, USA" and find instead "Hometown, USA." They admire Winterset's beauty, anticipate a simpler life in rural surroundings, and sense safety and moral character.

Ironically, Iowa's population growth is occurring in Iowa's cities and suburbs, not in the small towns and rural areas idealized by Hollywood's popular



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In the serene, magical Iowa countryside, *Field of Dreams* character Ray Kinsella makes peace with his past, saves the farm from foreclosure, and transforms a corner of his land into a mecca for modern-day pilgrims seeking to “ease the pain” of contemporary life. The pastoral qualities of the film paint rural Iowa as a land of simplicity, safety, innocence, and beauty. The site of the 1989 film, the Lansing family farm near Dyersville (above), continues to attract tourists.

pastoral films. This suggests that Hollywood’s dream-
scape caters to audience desires for only a temporary
journey. As scholar Renato Poggioli explains, the tra-
ditional motivation for pastoral fantasies “is a double
longing after innocence and happiness, to be recov-
ered not through conversion or regeneration but
merely through retreat.”

Interestingly, even though Iowans know that these
pastoral portrayals romanticize and idealize Iowa’s
landscape, people, and culture, sometimes beyond
recognition, movie ticket sales suggest that Iowans,
too, prefer their films about Iowa to be in the pastoral
mode. The state’s recent sesquicentennial produced a
wealth of products (books, films, and exhibits) that
mostly portray the traditional image of Iowa as a state

of farms and small towns, and that reflect the senti-
ments of the bumper sticker spouting the famous ex-
change from *Field of Dreams*:

“Is this Heaven?”

“No, it’s Iowa.”

Like all states, Iowa has produced its share of
unsung heroes like Private Ryan and Ella
Bishop. Like all states, it has been the back-
drop for insider/outsider romances, and has
sent its share of naive, unsophisticated individu-
als into the larger world. And certainly, farm families,
small towns, and lush, well-ordered countryside are
intrinsic to states like Iowa with a strong agricultural

base and a soft, rolling terrain. But Hollywood's pastoral treatment of Iowa hardly does justice to the rich complexities of Iowa and its people, yesterday or today.

Films about contemporary Iowa and historical Iowa could dramatize far more diverse experiences, but the nation does not seem to want to hear those stories. Iowa's public image seems trapped in a cinematic time capsule. Perhaps there is a danger that even we Iowans will cling to the popular pastoral myth, romanticizing our past, denying our problems, and disregarding our options. Perhaps we Iowans should use these Hollywood films as a spark for our own thoughtful discussions about Iowa's identity on the silver screen. ❖

Marty Knepper is professor of English and John Lawrence is emeritus professor of philosophy at Morningside College in Sioux City, where they have taught courses in American popular culture together. Both have written about popular culture and film and have participated in Humanities Iowa programs around the state.

NOTE ON SOURCES

The following books on Iowa and midwestern cultural history proved essential: Clarence Andrews, *A Literary History of Iowa* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1972); Emanuel Levy, *Small Town America in Film: The Decline and Fall of a Community* (New York: Continuum, 1991); Thomas Morain, ed., *Family Reunion: Essays on Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1995); Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996); and James R. Shortridge, *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989). Shortridge is also essential reading on midwestern pastoralism. For a broader discussion of pastoralism, see Renato Poggioli, *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975). Marty Knepper interviewed Stefanie Fuller, formerly of the Winterset Chamber of Commerce, on June 2, 1998.

MAKING FILMS IN IOWA

- Iowa Film Office, Iowa Department of Economic Development, Box 4784, Des Moines, Iowa 50309 OR www.state.ia.us/film (serves filmmakers' needs on projects ranging from local commercials to feature films).

- Iowa Motion Picture Association (IMPA), Box 4784, Des Moines, IA 50306 OR www.netins.net/showcase/impa (nonprofit group involved in financing, distributing, and promoting films and video productions).

- Iowa Scriptwriters Alliance (ISA), 3812 Ingersoll Avenue, #201, Des Moines, IA 50312 (develops regional talent for screenplay ideas, treatments, and scripts).

- Donna Reed Foundation for the Performing Arts, PO Box 122, Denison, IA 51442 OR www.frii.com/donna_reed/ (summer workshops on acting, screenwriting, scriptwriting, film critique, and more).

PRESERVING FILMS IN IOWA

The American Archives of the Factual Film (Special Collections, Iowa State University) is a research center for the preservation and study of 16mm non-theatrical film (business, educational, and documentary). Write: Special Collections Dept., 403 Parks Library, ISU, Ames, Iowa 50011-2140 or call 515-294-6672.

Special Collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa, in its Iowa City center, has a small collection of historical film and video related to Iowa, and serves as a clearinghouse for researchers who are trying to locate films. SHSI, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, IA 52240 or call 319-335-3916.

If Iowans made movies about Iowa...

Ever wish that you could be a film critic, a director, or a voting member of the Motion Picture Academy? Here's your chance to participate in a state-wide conversation about films and Iowa. Please enter our "If Iowans made movies about Iowa" survey.

—Marty S. Knepper and John S. Lawrence

1. In your opinion, what images are the most common and the least common in movies with an Iowa setting? To get you started, here are a few examples. What would you add to these lists?

Frequently seen images:

Hogs and cattle
John Deere tractors
Carnivals, parades, or fairs
Small-town or working-class bars
Men in seed corn hats
Women in aprons
Covered dishes and pies
Flowered wallpaper, wooden floors, and white lace curtains
Water towers

Seldom seen images:

Skyscrapers and traffic
Malls
National franchises
Computers
Casinos
Research universities
Art centers and artists
Shelves lined with books
Cutting-edge fashion
Suburbs

2. Of these films (*State Fair*, *The Music Man*, *Country*, *Field of Dreams*, *The Bridges of Madison County*, *A Thousand Acres*, or name your own), which gives the best portrayal of Iowa or Iowans, and why? Which do you like least?

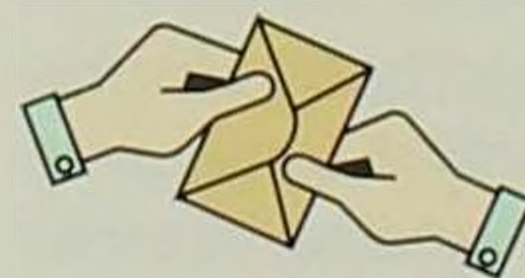


3. Now you're in the director's chair! Suppose you're a filmmaker with a huge budget and top-name stars. What would

your film portray about Iowa or Iowans? What actors would you choose? Or, if you had a chance to make a documentary, what would the topic be?

4. How does your experience with films about Iowa or Iowans affect your assessment of Hollywood's treatment of other regions of America (for example, New York, California, or Texas) or of historical events in America's past?

5. Do film images of Iowa really make a difference? Or, as they would say in Hollywood, is it just entertainment?



May I have the envelope, please?

For your convenience, these survey questions also appear on the ivory-colored mailing cover that accompanied this issue. Send your responses to any or all of the questions (along with your name, address, and daytime phone) to:

"If Iowans made movies about Iowa" survey
Attn: Editor, *Iowa Heritage Illustrated*
State Historical Society of Iowa
402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240-1806

or by email to: gswaim@blue.weeg.uiowa.edu

Watch for survey responses in an upcoming issue. —The Editor



Your Guide to Iowa Films

Want to have your very own Iowa film festival in your own living room? Use this guide to identify six decades of Iowa films.

Iowa and Iowans have appeared as setting and characters in more than three dozen popular films (that is, feature-length films made for movie theaters or television that attempt to reach a wide audience). For each of those films, this chronological filmography lists the director, studio, year of release, principal actors, Academy Awards and nominations, literary source, and a brief synopsis of the plot and pertinent Iowa themes. ("See article" means that the film's synopsis already appears in the preceding article.) Unless noted, all films are currently in a videocassette format, though not all are widely available.

By our criteria, films listed here must be at least partially set in Iowa (or in a setting that strongly hints at Iowa), or must have at least one Iowan as a significant character (in some cases, the Iowan is transported to a setting beyond Iowa). However, this list does not include films made in Iowa but not about Iowa (such as *Children of the Corn*), or films in which the Iowa setting is both incidental and insignificant (such as *Noises Off*).

Happy viewing!

—Marty S. Knepper and John S. Lawrence

State Fair. Dir. Henry King. A Fox Production, 1933. Principals: Lew Ayres, Frank Craven, Louise Dresser, Janet Gaynor, Victor Jory, Will Rogers. Academy Award Nominations: Picture, Writing. Literary Source: Phil Stong, *State Fair* (1932). See previous article for plot synopsis.

The Farmer in the Dell. Dir. Ben Holmes. RKO-Radio, 1936. Literary Source: Phil Stong, *The Farmer in the Dell* (1935). Not in video.

In this satire about an Iowa farm family that moves to Hollywood, the father improbably becomes a movie actor. The confrontation between Iowa character and Hollywood values is the focus of the plot.

One Foot in Heaven. Dir. Irving Rapper. Warner Brothers, 1941. Principals: Beulah Bondi, Elisabeth Fraser, Frederic March, Martha Scott, Frankie Thomas. Academy Award Nomination: Picture. Literary Source: Hartzell Spence, *One Foot in Heaven: The Life of a Practical Parson* (1940). Not in video. See article.

Cheers for Miss Bishop. Dir. Tay Garnett. United Artists, 1941. Principals: Mary Anderson, Sidney Blackmer, Donald Douglas, William Gargan, Edmund Gwenn, Martha Scott, Pierre Watkin. Academy Award Nomination: Music. Literary Source: Bess Streeter Aldrich, *Miss Bishop* (1933). See article.

The Major and the Minor. Dir. Billy Wilder. Paramount, 1942. Principals: Robert Benchley, Rita Johnson, Diana Lynn, Ginger Rogers, Ray

Milland. Literary Source: Edward Childs Carpenter's play *Connie Goes Home* (1934) and Fannie Kilbourne's *Saturday Evening Post* story "Sunny Goes Home" (1921).

Susan Applegate leaves Manhattan by train, posing as a child, to return home to Iowa. Comic confusion ensues when she meets a handsome, befuddled major.

Happy Land. Dir. Irving Pichel. Twentieth Century-Fox, 1943. Principals: Don Ameche, Harry Carey, Frances Dee, Ann Rutherford, Cara Williams. Literary Source: MacKinlay Kantor, *Happy Land* (1943). Not in video.

A small-town father grieves over his son's death in World War II. The ghost of his own father helps the man recall happier times in his son's life.

The Fighting Sullivans [also titled **The Sullivans**]. Dir. Lloyd Bacon. Realart, 1944. Principals: Anne Baxter, Ward Bond, Bobby Driscoll, Thomas Mitchell, Addison Richards, Selena Royle. Academy Award Nomination: Writing (Original Story). See article.



COURTESY THE AUTHORS

State Fair. Dir. Walter Lang. Twentieth Century-Fox, 1945. Principals: Dana Andrews, Fay Bainter, Vivian Blaine, Jeanne Crain, Dick

Haymes, Donald Meek, Charles Winninger. Academy Award: Song ("It Might As Well Be Spring"). Nomination: Scoring. Literary Source: Phil Stong, *State Fair* (1932). See article.

The Best Years of Our Lives. Dir. William Wyler. Goldwyn Productions, 1946. Principals: Dana Andrews, Hoagy Carmichael, Gladys George, Myrna Loy, Frederic March, Virginia Mayo, Harold Russell, Teresa Wright. Academy Awards: Picture, Director, Actor, Supporting Actor, Screenplay, Editing, Musical Score. Literary Source: MacKinlay Kantor, *Glory for Me* (1945). (Both film and book hint at Des Moines as the setting.) See article.

A Foreign Affair. Dir. Billy Wilder. Paramount, 1948. Principals: Jean Arthur, Marlene Dietrich, John Lund, Millard Mitchell. Academy Award Nominations: Screenplay, Cinematography. Not in video.

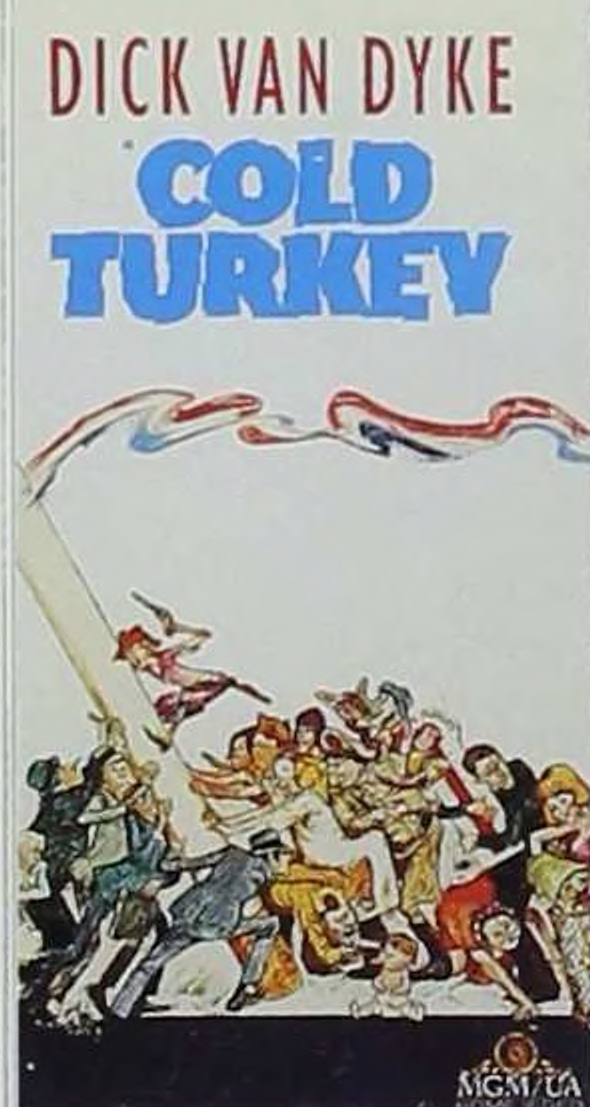
This film explores moral customs in post-World War II Germany. Congresswoman Phoebe Frost from Iowa investigates the lives of U.S. occupation forces and is shocked by the practices she finds. Her sexual conservatism is juxtaposed against the overt eroticism of Erika von Schluetow, played by Marlene Dietrich. In the end, Phoebe learns the limits of her own impulse control.

The Pajama Game. Dir. George Abbott and Stanley Donen. Warner Brothers, 1957. Principals: Doris Day, Ralph Dunn, Eddie Foy, Jr., Franklin Fox, Carol Haney, John Raitt, Reta Shaw, Jack Straw. Literary Source: Richard P. Bissell, *7 1/2 Cents* (1953). See article.

The Tarnished Angels. Dir. Douglas Sirk. Universal, 1957. Principals: Jack Carson, Rock Hudson, Dorothy Malone, Robert Middleton, Robert Stack. Literary Source: William Faulkner, *Pylon* (1935).

A restless Iowa teen in the 1920s, attractive LaVerne runs off with a World War I flying ace turned carnival stunt man. During the Depression, LaVerne discovers that doing parachute stunts, rearing a son, constantly traveling, and living with a self-destructive pilot is no picnic. A paternalistic reporter insists she and her son return to Iowa, where they can have a more normal life.

The Music Man. Dir. Morton Da Costa. Warner Brothers, 1962. Principals: Paul Ford, Hermione Gingold, Buddy Hackett, Ronny Howard, Shirley Jones, Robert Preston. Academy Award: Music. Nominations: Picture, Artistic Direction, Costume Design, Film Editing. Literary Source: Meredith Willson, *The Music Man* (1958). See article.



Cold Turkey. Dir: Norman Lear. Tandem-DFI, 1971. Principals: Bob and Ray, Dick Van Dyke, Edward Everett Horton, Bob Newhart, Pippa Scott, Tom Poston. Literary Source: Mac Hammond, *Cold Turkey* (1969). See article.

Ice Castles. Dir: Donald Wrye. Columbia, 1978. Principals: Robby Benson, Colleen Dewhurst, Lynn-Holly Johnson, Tom Skerritt. Academy Award Nomination: Best Song ("Theme from *Ice Castles*: 'Through the Eyes of Love'").

An earnest teen couple from Waverly, Iowa, Lexie and Nick share skating ambitions, but her figure skating brings more success than his ice hockey, leading to estrangement. When Lexie becomes blind, Nick helps her skate again. This tear-jerker affirms "Iowa values" of courage, hard work, and family, but it also shows that it is too easy to drop out, stop trying, and live depressed in a small Iowa town. Waverly residents won't recognize this tiny, desolate place as their town.

Friendly Fire. Dir: David Greene. Marble Arch Productions, 1979. Principals: Ned Beatty, Carol Burnett, Timothy Hutton, Sam Waterston. Literary Source: C. D. B. Bryan, *Friendly Fire* (1976).

An Iowa farm couple loses their son in a "friendly fire" incident in Vietnam. Angry at the Pentagon's treatment of them, they become a national symbol of ordinary citizens in a crusade for the truth. Their quest creates family conflict as well as a window to the world outside Iowa. The film is based on the experiences of Gene and Peg Mullen of La Porte City.

Take This Job and Shove It. Dir: Gus Trikonis. Cinema Group, 1981. Principals: Eddie Albert, Art Carney, Robert Hays, Barbara Hershey, David Keith, Martin Mull, Tim Thomerson.

Set in the working-class culture of Dubuque, Iowa, the film shows successful young preppe Frank Macklin returning to his hometown to run a brewery for his corporate boss. He is torn between urban prosperity and corporate politics, and his hard-drinking, good-hearted former friends and brewery employees who enjoy football, mudwrestling, big wheel truck competitions, and other good ol' boy pursuits.

Heat and Dust. Dir: James Ivory. Universal,

1983. Principals: Christopher Cazenove, Julie Christie, Nikolas Grace, Zakir Hussain, Shashi Kapoor, Charles McCaughan, Greta Scacchi. Literary Source: Ruth Praver Jhabvala, *Heat and Dust* (1975).

Anne travels to India to investigate the fate of a great aunt who left her husband for a local Indian prince in 1923. She encounters Chid, a spiritual seeker with roots in Iowa who has abandoned his name and all previous identity. Pathetically ridiculous, he tries to be more Indian than native Indians and to seduce Anne. Chid eventually must return to his aunt's clean house in Washington, Iowa, because Indian food has destroyed his health. (A comment on Iowa's bland food?) Clean, green Iowa seems to be set up as the antithesis of dusty, exotic India.

Terms of Endearment. Dir: James L. Brooks. Paramount, 1983. Principals: Jeff Daniels, John Lithgow, Jack Nicholson, Shirley MacLaine, Debra Winger. Academy Awards: Picture, Director, Actress, Supporting Actor, Screenplay from Another Medium. Nominations: Actress, Supporting Actor, Art Director, Sound, Editing, Musical Score. Literary Source: Larry McMurtry, *Terms of Endearment* (1975).

The middle of this two-hankie mother-daughter film is set in Des Moines, where Texan Emma Horton moves with her children and husband, who can't get a teaching job elsewhere. Free-spirited earth mother Emma has a tender affair with a kindly, grateful banker. The film contrasts an emotionally inhibited but wholesome Midwest with a wilder Texas and a coldly uncivil Manhattan.

Country. Dir: Richard Pearce. Touchstone, 1984. Principals: Wilford Brimley, Levi L. Knebel, Jessica Lange, Sam Shepard. Academy Award Nomination: Actress. See article.

Fraternity Vacation. Dir: James Frawley. New World Pictures, 1985. Principals: Cameron Dye, Stephen Geoffreys, Leigh McCloskey, Tim Robbins, Sheree J. Wilson. See article.

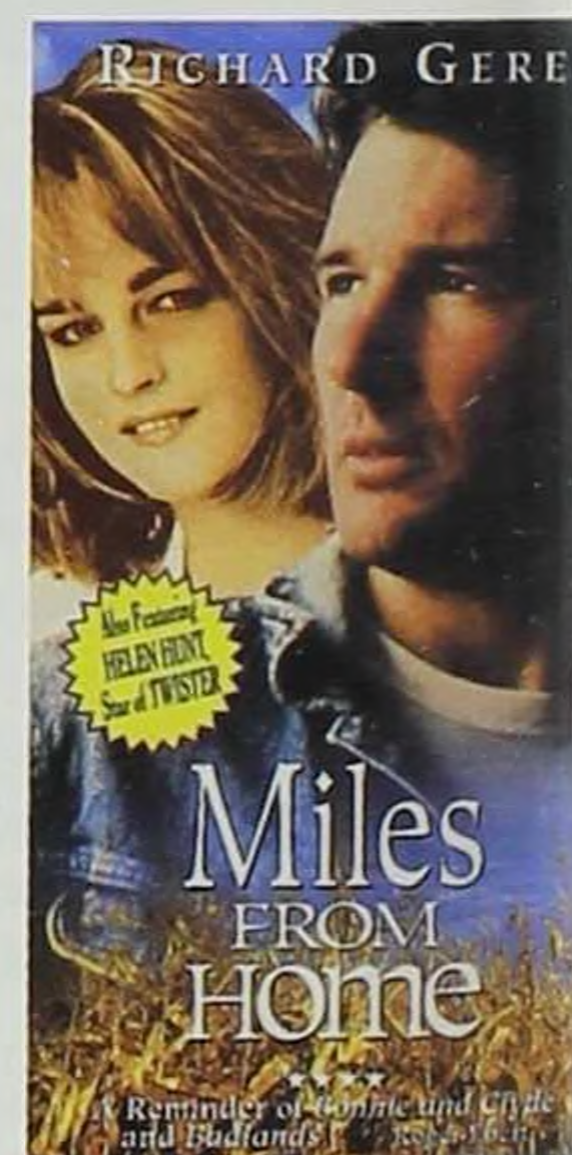
Out of Bounds. Dir: Richard Tuggle. RCA/Columbia Pictures, 1986. Principals: Raymond J. Barry, Anthony Michael Hall, Jeff Kober, Meatloaf, Glynn Turman, Jenny Wright.

This film contrasts rural De Witt, Iowa, and central Los Angeles. A depressed Daryl Cage leaves his parents, who are separating because of farm stress, to visit his successful brother in L.A. A bag mixup at the airport leaves Daryl holding a supply of heroin. After his brother's murder, he links up with a street-smart waitress to thwart both hostile police and drug dealers. Initially calling him

"Iowa" and "Farm Boy," the waitress transforms Daryl's look, which seems to give him lethal urban survival skills. Iowa niceness wins romance in L.A., and toughness and integrity allow the farm boy to triumph.

Miles from Home. Dir: Gary Sinise. Cinecom Entertainment, 1988. Principals: Kevin Anderson, Brian Dennehy, Richard Gere, Moira Harris, Helen Hunt, Judith Ivey, John Malkovich, Laurie Metcalf, Penelope Ann Miller.

Though they are sons of an award-winning farmer, two brothers lose the family farm to the local bank. They burn the farmstead, hit the road, and become outlaw celebrities. The film shows the frustrations of those trying to keep farms economically viable.



Zadar! Cow From Hell. Dir: Robert C. Hughes. Stone Peach Films, 1988. Principals: Bill Allard, Dan Coffey, Merle Kessler, Leon Martell, Jim Turner. Not in video. See article.

Field of Dreams. Dir: Phil Alden Robinson. Universal, 1989. Principals: Kevin Costner, James Earl Jones, Burt Lancaster, Ray Liotta, Amy Madigan. Academy Award Nominations: Picture, Adapted Screenplay, Musical Score. Literary Source: W. P. Kinsella, *Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa* (1980). See article.

Sleeping With the Enemy. Dir: Joseph Ruben. Fox, 1991. Principals: Kevin Anderson, Patrick Bergin, Julia Roberts. Literary Source: Nancy Price, *Sleeping With the Enemy* (1987). See article.

Taking Back My Life: The Nancy Ziegenmeyer Story. Dir: Harry Winer. Lyttle-Heshty Production, 1992. Principals: Eileen Brennan, Ellen Burstyn, Joanna Cassidy, Shelley Hack, Stephen Lang, Patricia Wettig. Not in video.

The true story of a Grinnell woman, this film is based on a series of articles in the *Des Moines Register*. After she is raped in a Des Moines parking lot, Nancy decides to go public with her story, a decision that complicates her life by making her a celebrity but ultimately helps her work through the trauma of rape. A realistic film about courage and contemporary problems in Iowa.

Crash Landing: The Rescue of Flight 232.

Released as videocassette in 1994 as **A**

Thousand Heroes. Dir. Lamont Johnson.

1992. Helios Productions. Principals: James Coburn, Charlton Heston, Richard Thomas.

Dedicated, well-prepared citizens of Sioux City, Iowa, work together in a crisis to save survivors of the United 232 plane crash.

Married to It. Dir. Arthur Hiller. Orion,

1993. Principals: Beau Bridges, Stockard Channing, Robert Sean Leonard, Mary Stuart Masterson, Cybill Shepherd, Ron Silver.

Two graduates from Iowa State University attempt to shed their wholesome Iowa background and become successful and sophisticated professionals in New York City. Their Iowa roots make them vulnerable to manipulative New Yorkers and make it hard for them to talk over their problems. Two New York City couples befriend them and provide a cultural contrast.

What's Eating Gilbert Grape. Dir. Lasse

Hallstrom. Paramount, 1993. Principals: Darlene Cates, Johnny Depp, Leonardo DiCaprio, Juliette Lewis, Mary Steenburgen. Academy Award Nomination: Supporting Actor. Literary Source: Peter Hedges, *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* (1991). See article.

The Puppet Masters. Dir. Stuart Orme.

Hollywood Pictures, released by Buena Vista Pictures, 1994. Principals: Richard Belzer, Keith David, Yaphet Kotto, Will Patton, Eric Thal, Julie Warner. Literary Source: Robert Heinlein, *The Puppet Masters* (1951).

In a plot resembling *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, an alien craft lands in fictional Ambrose, Iowa, and releases a vicious super-parasite that rapidly converts the entire population into obedient zombies. The action culminates in Des Moines's City Hall. Slick urban outsiders from Washington, D.C., kill dozens of parasite-infested Iowans before finally conquering the aliens that threaten America's heartland.

Sioux City. Dir. Lou Diamond Phillips. IRS

Releasing, 1994. Principals: Bill Allen, Apesanahkwat, Lise Cutter, Gary Farmer, Leah Goldman, Lou Diamond Phillips, Salli Richardson, Adam Roarke, Ralph Waite.

This geographically mistitled film has only one scene in Sioux City, Iowa. Born on a reservation south of South Sioux City, Nebraska, physician Jesse Goldman, a Lakota Sioux, was adopted and raised by an affluent Los Angeles Jewish family. He returns to investigate his roots, his mother's murder, and his true parentage. The film reveals that hidden under the myth of midwestern

neighborliness lies the reality of racism that can poison romance and family life.

The Bridges of Madison County. Dir. Clint

Eastwood. Time Warner, 1995. Principals: Clint Eastwood, Meryl Streep. Academy Award Nominations: Actor, Actress. Literary Source: Robert James Waller, *The Bridges of Madison County* (1992). See article.

The Last Supper. Dir. Stacy Title. The Vault,

1995. Principals: Cameron Diaz, Ron Eldard, Annabeth Gish, Jonathan Penner, Ron Perlman, Courtney B. Vance. See article.



Troublesome Creek: A Midwestern.

Dir. Jeanne Jordan and Steve Ascher. West City Films, 1995. Academy Award Nomination: Documentary.

This documentary about Russel and Mary Jane Jordan of Wiota, Iowa, was lovingly made by

a daughter and son-in-law. The film narrates with poignancy and humor the crisis that develops when bankers become aggressive about forcing payback of delinquent loans. The family teeters on the brink of disaster but pulls through with luck, timing, and family cooperation. The film is a "midwestern," a contrast to the westerns that Russel loves.

Joe's Apartment. Dir. John Payson. Geffen

Pictures & MTV/Warner Brothers, 1996. Principals: Don Ho, Jerry O'Connell, Robert Vaughn, Megan Ward. See article.

Michael. Dir. Nora Ephron. Turner Pictures,

1996. Principals: Teri Garr, Bob Hoskins, William Hurt, Andie MacDowell, Robert Pastorelli, Jean Stapleton, John Travolta.

A grubby angel named Michael appears in mythical Stubbs, Iowa, to help Pansy Milbanke save her Milk Bottle Motel. On a road trip to Chicago, Michael teaches cynical tabloid journalists how to enjoy simple pleasures. As they reach Chicago, Michael sheds his feathers and dies, suggesting that the prairie is heaven, and the city is not.

A Thousand Acres. Dir. Jocelyn Moorhouse. Propaganda Films/Buena Vista Pictures, 1997.

Principals: Kevin Anderson, Keith Carradine, Colin Firth, Pat Hingle, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Jessica Lange, Michelle Pfeiffer, Jason Robards. Literary Source: Jane Smiley, *A Thousand Acres* (1991). See article.

The Big One. Dir. Michael Moore. Miramax,

1998. Principals: Garrison Keillor, Phil Knight, Michael Moore, Rick Nielsen, Studs Terkel.

This humorous, heart-breaking documentary chronicles a cross-country book promotion tour by corporation foe Michael Moore. He interviews an Iowa woman who must work two jobs to provide food for her family—in a state that produces food. He attends a secret meeting of West Des Moines Borders Bookstore employees who eventually unionize because they are forced to pay for health care they can't get in the Des Moines area. Moore shows that Iowans, like other Americans, suffer from the effects of U.S. corporate greed.

Saving Private Ryan. Dir. Steven Spielberg.

Dreamworks Pictures and Paramount Pictures, 1998. Principals: Edward Burns, Matt Damon, Adam Goldberg, Tom Hanks, Tom Sizemore. Academy Awards: Director, Cinematography, Film Editing, Sound, Sound Effects Editing. Nominations: Picture, Actor, Original Screenplay, Original Dramatic Score, Makeup, Art Direction. See article.

Alkali, Iowa. Dir. Mark Christopher. Principals:

J. D. Cerna, Marybeth Hurt. Master's thesis project at Columbia University (1995). Distributed by Strand Releasing, 1998, as segment of *Boys Life 2*.

A young farmer, Jack Gudmanson, gradually deduces that his father had hidden his gay identity from his children. Jack's mother and grandfather fiercely attempt to re-bury the secret. As Jack explores his father's past, he begins to acknowledge his own attraction to men. A coming-out story with an Iowa setting and glimpses of a rural gay culture.

Yidl in the Middle. Dir. Marlene Booth.

Principals: Marlene Booth and family members. New Day Films, 1999. Not on video.

Currently residing in Cambridge, Massachusetts, filmmaker Marlene Booth found herself constantly explaining to skeptics that—no kidding—she was a Jewish Iowan. So she compiled snapshots, home movies, and interviews to chronicle her family's history in Iowa and her happy childhood in Des Moines in the 1950s and 1960s. The documentary reveals what it means to be both native Iowan and cultural outsider.

A Century of Typewriters



The typewriter, now rapidly disappearing from business, school, and home, was once a familiar part of American life. Particularly in the last half of this century, we have often taken it for granted, forgetting that it had once been a technological innovation. The typewriter as we think of it today emerged from a period of varying designs and mechanical processes. These five models, all from the museum collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa, attest to inventors' various attempts to make a better typewriter.

—by Jack Lufkin, museum curator
State Historical Society of Iowa
(Photos by Chuck Greiner)

Quite rare today, this model became the first commercially successful typewriter. Invented by Christopher Sholes and Carlos Glidden, it was manufactured and marketed in 1874 by E. Remington & Sons, a gunsmith and sewing machine manufacturer. The machine was mounted on a sewing machine stand; pressing the foot treadle activated the carriage return. Soon renamed the Remington, the Sholes and Glidden model only typed in capital letters.



Double-keyboard typewriters like this one had separate keys for upper-case and lower-case letters. Patented by George A. Jewett, this model was first manufactured in Des Moines in 1892. Double keyboards, however, did not become the industry standard; instead, adding a shift key allowed for both upper- and lower-case letters. The Jewett Typewriter Company closed in 1910.



Index typewriters, like this Odell Model #4, operated by moving the linear type slide over the desired letter and pressing it to print. Levi Judson Odell of Chicago was granted the patent design in 1887; this machine appeared in 1904. Despite its low price, it was slow and soon vanished from the marketplace.



Because many early typewriters were large and heavy, some inventors worked to produce lightweight models. Charles Bennett introduced this typewriter in 1910. Tucked into its 11"x5" case and often made of aluminum, the Bennett weighed only a few pounds and could easily be carried in a briefcase or satchel.



By the 1950s, most typewriter manufacturers marketed a portable model. The lightweight Smith-Corona Skyriter, a favorite for travelers and reporters, was produced between 1949 and 1962. This Skyriter was used by Willis Garner "Sec" Taylor, sports editor and columnist for the *Des Moines Register* from 1914 to 1965.



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TYPING

ELIZABETH IRISH'S SCHOOL & SHORTHAND & TYPEWRITING.



OFFICE
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129 1/2

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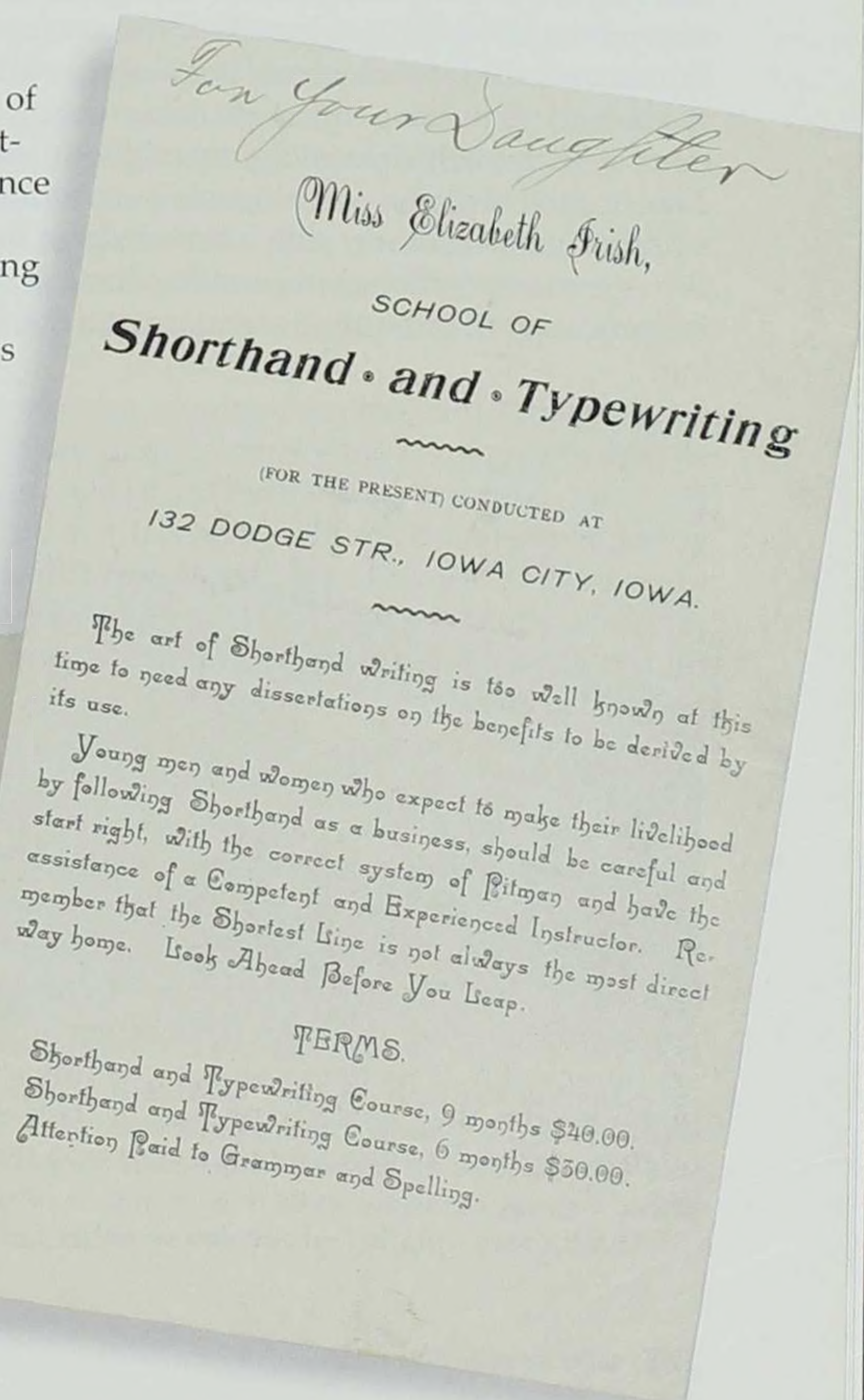
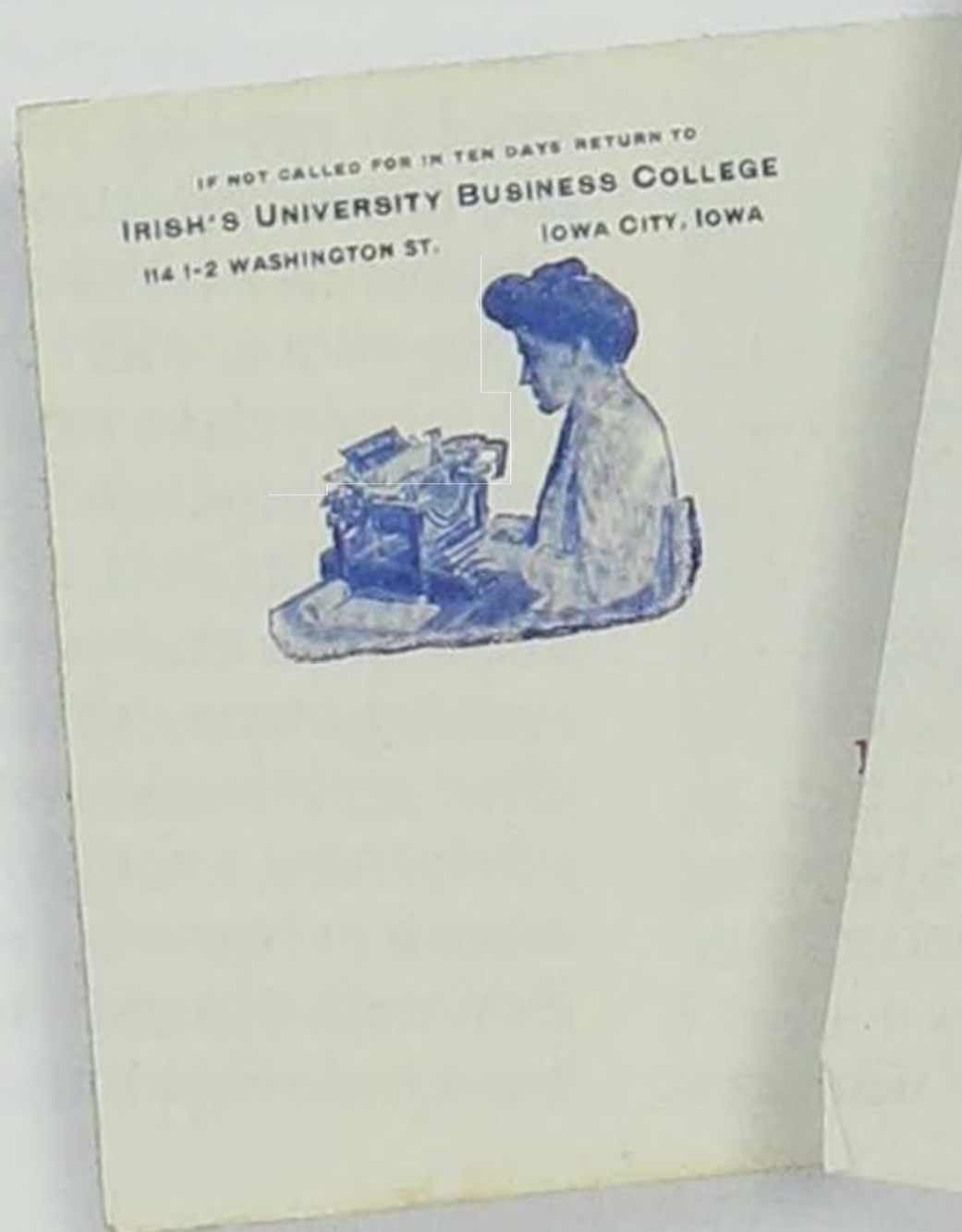
A Look at the History of Commercial Education in Iowa

by Anne Beiser Allen

In early 1895, Miss Elizabeth Irish addressed a stack of printed announcements of her new "School of Shorthand and Typewriting" in Iowa City. Not one to mince words, she got right to the point: "Young men and women who expect to make their livelihood by following Shorthand as a business, should be careful and start right. . . . Remember that the Shortest Line is not always the most direct way home. Look Ahead Before You Leap." She sent the announcements to her acquaintances in Iowa City.

Although Elizabeth Irish was starting small (she intended to hold the school "for the present" in her home at 132 Dodge Street) her idea was not

Elizabeth Irish (inset left) positioned herself into the new realm of commercial education in 1895. She opened a business school in Iowa City and marketed its services and its graduates to the local business and university community. Left: One of the school's early downtown locations was above a College Street grocer.





SHS (IOWA CITY); INSET, FLYER, AND ENVELOPE FROM IRISH-PRESTON COLLECTION

Miss Elizabeth Irish's University Business College

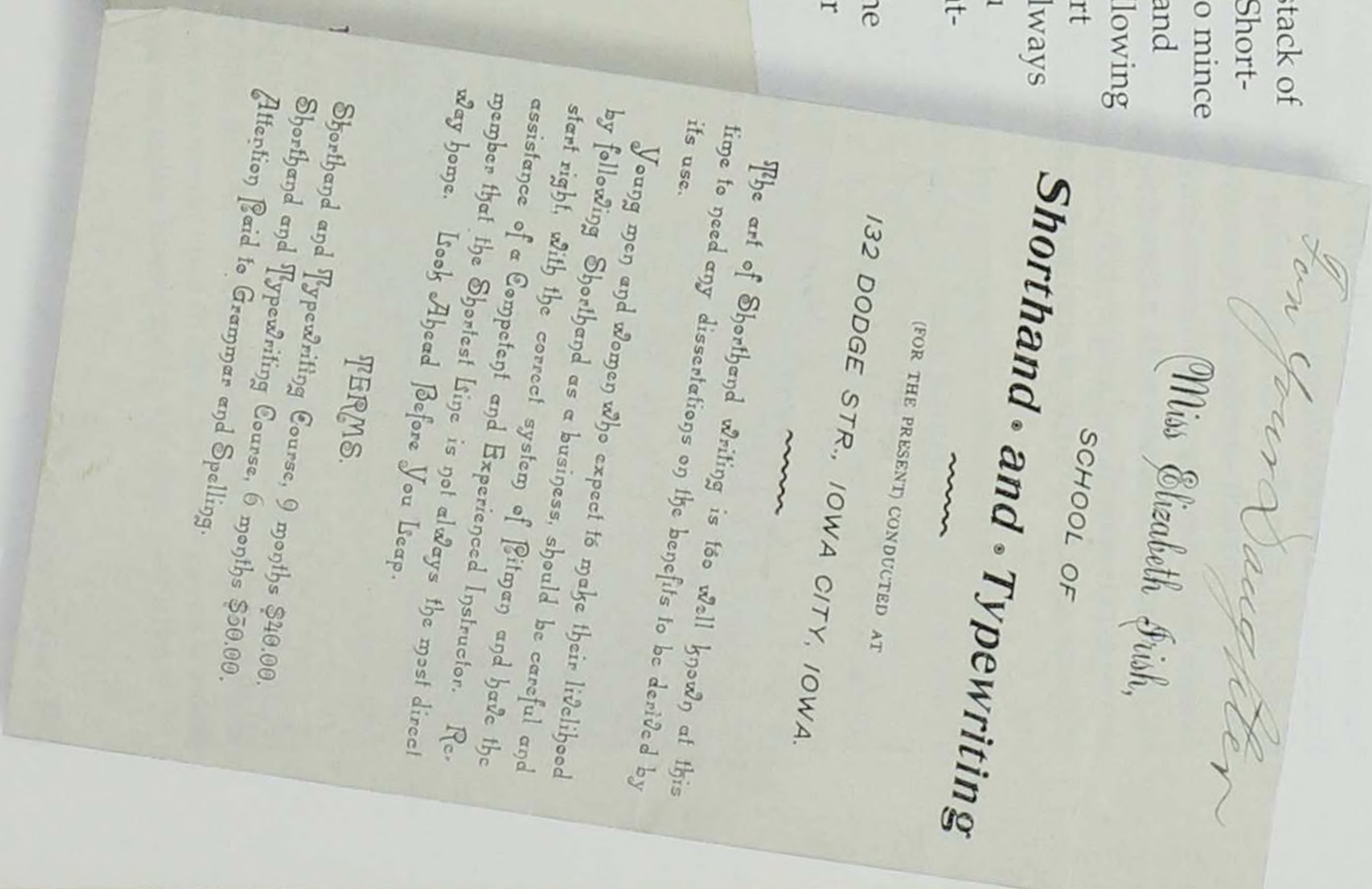
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SCHOOL OF
Shorthand and Typewriting

(FOR THE PRESENT) CONDUCTED AT
132 DODGE STR., IOWA CITY, IOWA.

The art of Shorthand writing is so well known at this time to need any dissertations on the benefits to be derived by its use.
Young men and women who expect to make their livelihood by following Shorthand as a business, should be careful and start right. With the correct system, should be careful and assistance of a Competent and Experienced Instructor. Remember that the Shortest Line is not always the most direct way home. Look Ahead Before You Leap.

TERMS.

Shorthand and Typewriting Course, 9 months \$10.00.
Shorthand and Typewriting Course, 6 months \$50.00.
Attention Paid to Grammar and Spelling.



ALL THREE: SHSI (IOWA CITY)

By 1895, some 20 business schools in Iowa trained young men and women for careers in business. Here, from left: Muscatine Business College; Capital City Commercial College and School of Shorthand (Des Moines); and Brown's Business College (Sioux City).

a particularly new one. Since 1830, when the first shorthand school opened in Philadelphia, private business schools had been established in growing numbers throughout the country as the development of large-scale corporations changed the way businesses operated. The old-fashioned office portrayed in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, occupied by the owner and his partner, with a clerk or two to copy letters neatly and run errands for the boss, was on its way out by the second half of the 19th century in Great Britain and the United States. Beginning with the railroads and spreading through other major corporations with branch operations throughout the nation, American companies were developing a multi-tiered management structure, with a broad range of middle-management positions, and standardized recordkeeping processes that required standardized clerical training.

Although the earliest business schools were designed to prepare young men to take their places in the new corporate structure, a certain number of young women also enrolled, especially in the years after the Civil War. The federal government, hard-pressed during the war to find young male clerks to fill positions in the Treasury, had hired young women, and had been amazed to find that the women were not only able to do the work, but did it quite as well as the men.

Private businesses soon began experimenting with hiring young women as copyists and as bookkeepers (a role that complemented their experience in keeping household accounts). The introduction of the typewriter in 1874 increased the opportunities for young middle-class women. Typewriter manufacturers observed that women's slim, agile fingers and the piano lessons they received as part of their education often gave them an advantage over young men in typing.

Businesses quickly discovered other advantages

in hiring young women for clerical positions (it was mostly young single women who applied for these jobs, rather than older, married women). For one thing, they could be paid less, as it was assumed that they were not likely to be supporting anyone but themselves—and might, indeed, have a father or other male relative who provided them with food and shelter. Second, they were less impatient to begin climbing a corporate ladder, whose upper reaches were seldom open to them anyway. And, reinforcing these two advantages, they were likely to marry within a few years and withdraw from the business world—allowing the business to hire again, at starting wages.

None of this distressed most young women, who looked on clerical work as a desirable option for an educated girl with no desire or opportunity to teach school, the other "genteel" occupation of the time. Because more girls than boys graduated from high school at that time (boys often left before graduation to take jobs), there was a surplus of well-educated young women. Teaching could only absorb so many of them. Middle-class women (who made up the vast majority of early clerical workers) found that clerical work gave them another opportunity to use their education, as employers required a high level of competence in spelling and grammar. For many women, it also offered an attractive alternative to domestic work, whether as a hired domestic worker or as a housewife in her own home.

Lower-class women, whose job options were limited to household service, factory work, or home-based piecework, also aspired to clerical jobs, to raise their status and perhaps to increase their chances of meeting men with more lucrative futures than their fathers and brothers had. If they could stay in high school long enough to graduate, and find the money to take at least six months of business school classes, they might qualify for clerical jobs. Often their families encouraged these aspirations, hoping that the

YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN
WANTED.

WE HAVE calls for stenographers almost continually that we cannot supply. Young people of both sexes with a fair English education will find shorthand and typewriting a most excellent profession. The salaries are better than those of the average teacher, and the labor is pleasanter and less exhaustive.

THE CAPITAL CITY COMMERCIAL COLLEGE
AND THE CAPITAL CITY SCHOOL OF SHORTHAND

Y. M. C. A. Building, Des Moines, Iowa, are the leading training schools of business in this country. Send for their catalogue to

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DES MOINES, IOWA.



daughter's relatively high wages would benefit the whole family.

To meet the demand for such training, business schools like Elizabeth Irish's sprang up across the country. In Iowa, the first business school to open was Duff's College, established by L. H. Dalhoff in Burlington in 1854. Duff's didn't last long, but other more successful schools soon followed. In 1855 W. V. Barr opened Barr's Commercial College in Davenport, which continued under a series of proprietors to the end of the century. Bayless Business College in Dubuque, founded in 1858 by Aaron Bayless, was one of the most long-lived business schools, not closing its doors until 1969. By 1895, when Elizabeth Irish entered the field, there were more than 20 business schools operating in Iowa—at least one in every large city, as well as some in such relatively small communities as Nora Springs and Perry.

Before opening her school, Elizabeth Irish had pursued a career in the business world for 20 years. Born in Iowa City on February 22, 1856, she was named Hannah Elizabeth after her two grandmothers (though her family usually called her Lizzie). Her father, Charles Wood Irish, was the eldest son of Captain Frederick M. Irish, one of Iowa City's more colorful "Old Settlers." After careers in whaling and steel-implement manufacturing, Frederick Irish came to Iowa City in 1839, purchased a farm on the edge of town, and quickly became involved in local politics and land dealing. His son Charles, who was born in Indiana in 1834, trained as a civil engineer. Unable at first to find work in his field, Charles taught for a short time in 1854 at a rural school five miles north of Iowa City. One of his pupils was 17-year-old Susannah Abigail Yarbrough, whose extended family had come to Iowa by covered wagon from North Carolina eight years earlier. Charles Irish and Abbie Yarbrough were married in 1855, and soon

had two daughters, Elizabeth (1856) and Ruth (1859).

The family moved to Tama in 1857, when Elizabeth was a year old, but returned to Iowa City in 1866. For the next 20 years, Charles traveled with the railroads, building rail lines and roads in Iowa, Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. Abbie visited him frequently, but maintained the family home with her two daughters in Iowa City.

Elizabeth attended St. Agatha's Seminary, a local girls' school run by St. Mary's Catholic Church but not restricted to Catholics. The curriculum included not only basic reading, writing, and arithmetic (including algebra and bookkeeping), but also music, painting, and needlework. Elizabeth was a lively girl, whom one of her relatives once described as resembling "a small hurricane." Although the Irishes were a respected family, money was tight, due to the expenses



Girls' schools in the 1870s (like St. Agatha's Seminary in Iowa City, above) considered music, painting, and needlework part of a female's education. Business schools, like the one Elizabeth Irish would open in 1895, prepared young women for jobs in the business world.

involved in operating two separate households. When Elizabeth left St. Agatha's, she decided to seek employment. Not interested in becoming a teacher, she enrolled in the Iowa City Commercial College (founded in 1865 by William McClain), where she studied bookkeeping.

In 1875, Elizabeth's uncle, John Powell Irish, then editor of the *Iowa City Daily Press* and a leading figure in the state Democratic Party, hired her as his bookkeeper. Elizabeth kept the books for the paper until 1882, when her uncle decided to sell it and move to Oakland, California, where he had purchased another newspaper, the *Oakland Times*. Elizabeth went with him, and after some delay while the offices were remodeled, she joined J. B. Wyman, the paper's business manager, as assistant bookkeeper and cashier.

Elizabeth wrote her sister, Ruth (who was then teaching at Iowa City's Third Ward School), exuberantly describing her new office: "We have a large counting room, the floor covered with oil cloth, back

SHSI (IOWA CITY)-IRISH-PRESTON COLLECTION



Ruth Irish Preston
(Elizabeth's sister).

of the counter, in the centre of the room is a great large desk with a platform all around it for us to stand on while justing our books (I wish you could see the immense Ledger and Journal I have it is no play bookkeep, but real double entry and I am getting along nicely) and a place cut in the platform for our stools, then under the desk is a case to keep our books, at my back is a stove, at my left a large safe and to my right Mr. Wyman's desk one or two chairs and some hooks to hang our things on. . . . back of the counting room is the composing and Job room (during the day only girls set type, under a man foreman, the girls all look up to me as a sort of Queen among them). . . . Upstairs is the Editorial and Reporters rooms, they are carpeted and contain desks and chairs."

Elizabeth Irish was by this time 27 years old. She lived with her uncle's family and kept up a busy social life during her free hours. She described for Ruth her visits with friends and trips to nearby places like San Francisco (where, she reported, she had seen Professor Theodore Parvin, one of Iowa City's leading Masons, at a Masonic parade). She was far too busy, she told Ruth, to do "fancy work" or her own sewing.

Her friends were both male and female, her letters reveal, but none of the men appealed to her romantically. Her standard for matrimony was quite high. "I for one will dig & work through this world, before I will marry a man because he preffesses [sic] he loves me & does not express it by making a home & getting into a paying business so we could have something to live on besides love," she wrote Ruth. She had rejected a proposal from "a young man at White River Wash Territory [who] said he contemplated settling on a nice farm in the mtns & wanted to know if I would lend him a helping hand, etc. I responded tis Leap Year, I stand a better opportunity. Ha! Ha!"

In 1884, she spent the summer at a resort in Sonoma County called Skagg's Hot Springs, supporting herself by working as the resort's bookkeeper, assistant postmistress, and Wells Fargo agent. When her uncle sold the *Oakland Times* in late 1885 and purchased the *Alta California*, headquartered in San Francisco and the oldest newspaper on the Pacific Coast, Elizabeth was made its bookkeeper and cashier. But she was eager to move on to a more independent post. In early 1886, she was hired by the US Mint in San Francisco.

Although her clerical skills were by now quite professional, it is possible that her uncle's political connections played a role in her acquisition of this job. The Democratic Party had just elected its first president since the Civil War, and John Irish was working hard to secure some of the benefits of the Cleveland administration's patronage for his family. He wrote to the Department of the Interior, soliciting a position for his brother Charles, and at last succeeded in getting him appointed Surveyor General for Nevada. Charles Irish took the post in April 1887 and sent for his daughter Elizabeth to be his chief clerk, stenographer, and bookkeeper. Abbie Irish closed the house in Iowa City and joined her husband and elder daughter in Reno.

Elizabeth remained in Reno for the next several years, acquiring additional skills and job experience. Around 1890, she took a course in shorthand (possibly by correspondence) from Eldon Moran of St. Louis, who taught an adaptation of the widely accepted Pitman system. She also learned to use the typewriter. In 1893, when Charles Irish was appointed Chief of the Bureau of Irrigation in the second Cleveland administration, Elizabeth once again served as his secretary, accompanying him on a tour of the Southwest to study irrigation needs. The following year she returned to Oakland (where her uncle John had become Customs Officer) and spent several months as receiv-



Twenty-eight students from the Irish school's shorthand department pose for the 1902 catalog. Though recognizing that several systems of shorthand (or "phonography") existed, Elizabeth preferred Moran's method of the Pitman system, based on recognizing vocal sounds. As her catalog notes sternly: "Time spent in memorizing mere characters is worse than wasted."

SHSI (IOWA CITY)

ing and paying teller of the money order department of the Oakland Post Office.

Now in her 38th year, Elizabeth Irish began to consider a more independent career. She had begun to develop her own theories of business education, and was eager to put them into effect. As she later told a reporter, she had noticed that "many young people . . . failed through lack of thorough training in their line of work." She also believed that the proper training could give young people the "power of application and self-reliance and also that high moral standard which should obtain in business as in other relations of life." In 1894 she returned to Reno, where she attempted to start a business school. But the business climate in Nevada was not right for such a venture; in fact, no business school would become firmly established in that state until well into the next century.

So Elizabeth went back to Iowa City. Although the nation was still feeling the effects of the economic depression that began with the failure of several major banks in 1893 (the worst depression the country had yet suffered), Elizabeth had reason to believe that her new school would succeed in Iowa City. To begin with, the Irish name was still respected in the town. Although Frederick Irish had died in 1875, his son Gilbert still operated the family farm at Rose Hill and was a highly respected horti-

culturist. People still remembered John Irish as well, though he had been out of the state for twelve years. Elizabeth had no doubt of her ability to make useful contacts in the community.

More important, as a university town Iowa City had a large population of young people, some of whom might find the full university course too long or too expensive to complete. Certainly her old alma mater—and now her competitor—was attracting students. The Iowa City Commercial College's five instructors were currently teaching 94 students (21 of them women).

Elizabeth began by advertising her new school among her friends and acquaintances, and soon had ten students signed up for her classes. Instead of holding the school in her family's home as first planned, she rented rooms in Norwood Clark's commercial building in downtown Iowa City. A few months later, she moved her school to larger quarters (on the second floor of the Lovelace Building). With this move, she printed a new flyer, listing 35 references on the back page, ranging from university president Charles Schaeffer, to the rector of the Episcopal Church, to a number of local business leaders. Her curriculum now offered four options: shorthand and typing, 9 months for \$40; shorthand and typing, 6 months for \$30; typing alone, 3 months for \$10.50; and shorthand alone for \$5 per month. She taught Moran's version of the Pitman shorthand system, and sold Remington type-

writers and Moran's shorthand notebooks on the side.

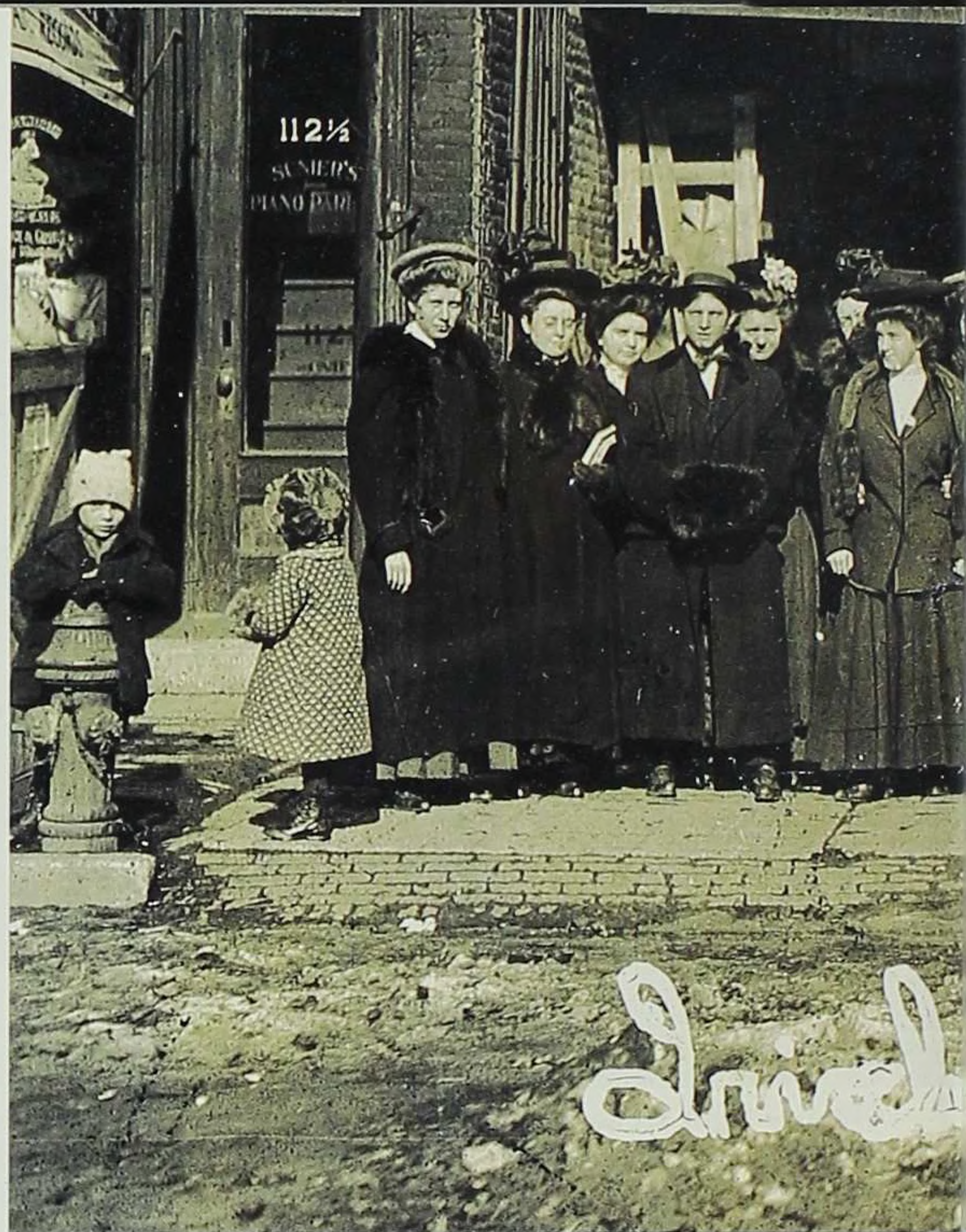
The new flyer also listed her niece, Jane T. Irish, daughter of her uncle Gilbert, as one of two assistants. Then still in her teens, Jane Irish was probably among Elizabeth's first students. Until 1915, when their relationship ended abruptly, for reasons still unclear, Jane would be Elizabeth's closest associate in the school.

Elizabeth appears to have seen much of herself in her young niece, and by the turn of the century, she entrusted the school's operation to Jane when she traveled. Jane's frequent letters to Elizabeth are warm and friendly, more like those between sisters than women 26 years apart in age. Jane teased Elizabeth about her love life, shared local gossip, and exhibited competence in the management of the business they shared until 1915.

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(The implied connection with the university was sheer public relations, not based in fact.) Elizabeth employed four instructors and had expanded her curriculum to include a full business course, including business office practice, commercial law, banking, bookkeeping, and penmanship, as well as shorthand and typing. She set up a model business office and a model bank, to give her students practical experience in the working world. She recruited instructors from the business community to assist her in training young people, and raised her rates accordingly. A ten-month course in bookkeeping, including "commercial branches," now cost \$75; six months of shorthand, typing, and use of mimeograph machines cost \$50; three months of either course cost \$35. She also operated a placement service for her graduates. By 1908, she had 80 students enrolled in her classes, about half of whom were women.

Elizabeth Irish owed her success, in part, to being a single woman. Although some women continued to work after marriage, being a successful businesswoman generally meant that a woman had to forgo domestic life. (Elizabeth's sister, Ruth, who had been first a teacher and then a principal in Iowa City, had left the teaching profession when she married Dr. Charles Preston in 1887 and thereafter de-



SHSI (IOWA CITY)

Elizabeth Irish saw to it that her school and students stayed in the public eye. Above, the student body, circa 1900. Below: Vincent Zmunt, Elizabeth's colleague and close friend, taught penmanship and commercial law.



SHSI (IOWA CITY): IRISH COLLEGE CATALOG, 1902

voted herself to raising their three children and keeping house in Davenport.) Although Elizabeth was devoted to her business school, she had no objection to marriage, could she have found the right man. Around 1902, when she was 46, she met one who might have become her husband, had he been so inclined.

Among the local businessmen she induced to teach at her school was the former county attorney, Vincent Zmunt. Zmunt, who taught penmanship and commercial law, was the son of a Bohemian immigrant, and eleven years younger than Elizabeth.

Handsome and witty, he became quite fond of Elizabeth, whom he called Betsy, or sometimes "the general." When she was out of town, he wrote her charming letters, often illus-



SHSI (IOWA CITY): SHAMBAUGH COLLECTION

Jane Irish, Elizabeth's niece and assistant.



trated with humorous pen-and-ink sketches, and signed them "love and kisses." Elizabeth apparently reciprocated. But there was something elusive about Vincent, and their relationship never progressed beyond a delightful friendship. Her niece Jane composed a humorous poem to Elizabeth on the subject in 1902, saying in part:

*Elizabeth has been fishing for many a day
To catch one fishy and he always swims away
...And when she returns to the old business college
I hope she will have gained of fish sufficient knowledge
To enable her to land, in her large glass dish
The fish she most desires to catch, this large Zmunt fish.*

Vincent Zmunt left Iowa City around 1910, still unmarried.

For some years, Elizabeth had been sharing the family home on Dodge Street with her mother, Abbie Irish. (Charles Irish had died in 1904 in Gold Creek, Nevada, where he had been employed by a mining firm.) Abbie became more and more eccentric in her later years; once she burned all the mattresses in the house because she believed they were infested with bugs. Living with Abbie must have become a significant worry and responsibility for a busy professional woman like Elizabeth. In 1920, she offered a young cousin room and board at her home while at-

tending the business school, in return for her help in keeping an eye on Abbie. Abbie died in 1925, at the age of 88.

Meanwhile, the Irish school was thriving, and the local community frequently looked to the school for clerical workers. "Dr. Littig also wants a stenographer," Jane wrote to Elizabeth in 1904. "He says she must be neat and of nice plain appearance and must be at least 25 years old." And in another letter from Jane: "Dr. Albert of the University came down here for a stenographer who was quick and who had had two or three years experience and I recommended Gertie to him and he has hired her for as long as she will stay. His office will be in the new Medical Building and I guess it is a very nice position. Gertie is tickled to death."

That same year, Elizabeth's old competitor, John Williams, decided to sell his Iowa City Commercial College and move to Missouri. While Elizabeth was out of town that summer, Jane kept her updated. In one letter in June, Jane wrote: "There has been no notice of the other school in the papers as yet, only the little clipping which I sent you. . . . Zmunt says we had better save our shot and powder for the battle in the fall and not waste any now as long as they are quiet." The Commercial College continued to function until 1912 under the ownership of William Willis of the



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SPHS IOWA CITY, SHAWNAUGH COLLECTION

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SPHS IOWA CITY

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SPHS IOWA CITY, IREISH COLLECTION, CARLSON, 1902

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**Irish's
University
Business
College
in New
and
Up-to-date
Quarters**
Iowa City,
Iowa



SCHOOL SUPPLIES
FOR SALE AT
BUSINESS OFFICE

GREGG
SHORTHAND

PITMAN
SHORTHAND

KINAESTHETIC
TOUCH METHOD of
TYPEWRITING
LETTER PRESS and
MIMEOGRAPH
WORK

DICTAPHONE
COURSE

BURROUGHS
ADDING COURSE

COMMERCIAL
BRANCHES and
BOOKKEEPING

SPECIAL
COURSES in
BANKING
AUTOMOBILE and
RADIO
BOOKKEEPING

"Y & E"
FILING CABINETS
FOR GIVING
SPECIAL
FILING COURSE

SCHOOL PHONE
42

Employment Bureau
Free to Either Employer
or Employee

When in Need of a
Stenographer or
Bookkeeper Telephone 42
or Call at Office

Irish's Business College

IOWA
CITY,
IOWA



205 1/2 EAST WASHINGTON STREET
MORRISON BUILDING

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

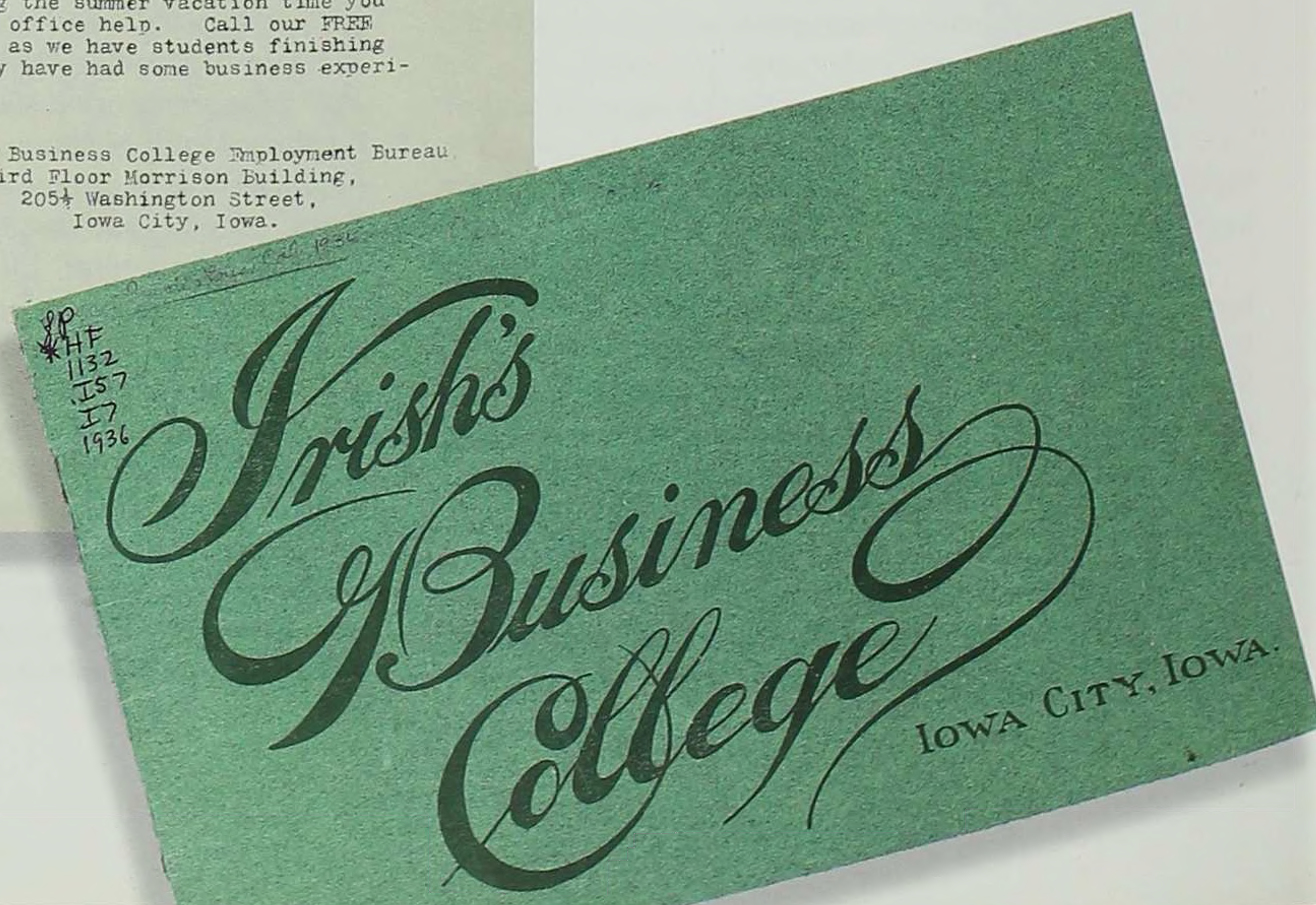
Does this circular find you in need of COMMERCIAL HELP? If so, it will interest you to know that not all of our best bookkeepers, stenographers and clerks have contracted for the coming year, we still have available, some excellent young men and women.

Personally, I hope that you have the success of the young people at heart, as the thoughtful pioneer business man had of you, when you launched your ABILITY on the waves of the busy world, so much so that you will help the boys and girls of today, who have prepared themselves to enter business offices to get a start in their chosen vocation, by employing them in your office.

If you are not in need of help at the present time perhaps during the summer vacation time you may need temporary office help. Call our FREE EMPLOYMENT BUREAU, as we have students finishing every week and they have had some business experience.

ADDRESS:
Irish's Business College Employment Bureau,
Third Floor Morrison Building,
205 1/2 Washington Street,
Iowa City, Iowa.

Elizabeth Irish was an aggressive and tireless promoter of her school. Clockwise, from top left: She placed ads in high school and college yearbooks. She rode in local parades (the horse's banner announces the "University Business College"). In her ads and catalogs, she announced new courses and training as business practices changed, while reassuring students (and probably their parents) that her school was "commodious, convenient and cheerful" and close to the streetcar system, four churches, and the State University of Iowa campus. On her letterhead, she advertised her "employment bureau," which provided temporary office help and typing services, and promoted "kinaesthetic" touch typing (dramatically demonstrated by typing with a paper bag over one's head).



Iowa City Academy, but it lost much of its direction, as Willis preferred to concentrate on his own field of college preparation. That left Irish's University Business College virtually without competition for the next two decades.

Throughout those years the demand for business school graduates steadily increased. The number of stenographers and typists in Iowa, for example, increased fivefold from 1900 to 1920, from about 2,000 to more than 10,000. In 1917/18, at least 21 private commercial and business schools met this increasing demand for clerical workers in Iowa. Elizabeth's school in Iowa City now had 6 instructors and 166 students on its rolls. There were 50 students (32 male and 18 female) in the commercial course, and 116 students (10 male and 106 female) in the stenographic course.

For a young woman, classes in a business school were especially attractive; they were cheaper than a college degree and more practical, in that they prepared her for the workplace. Businesses looking for

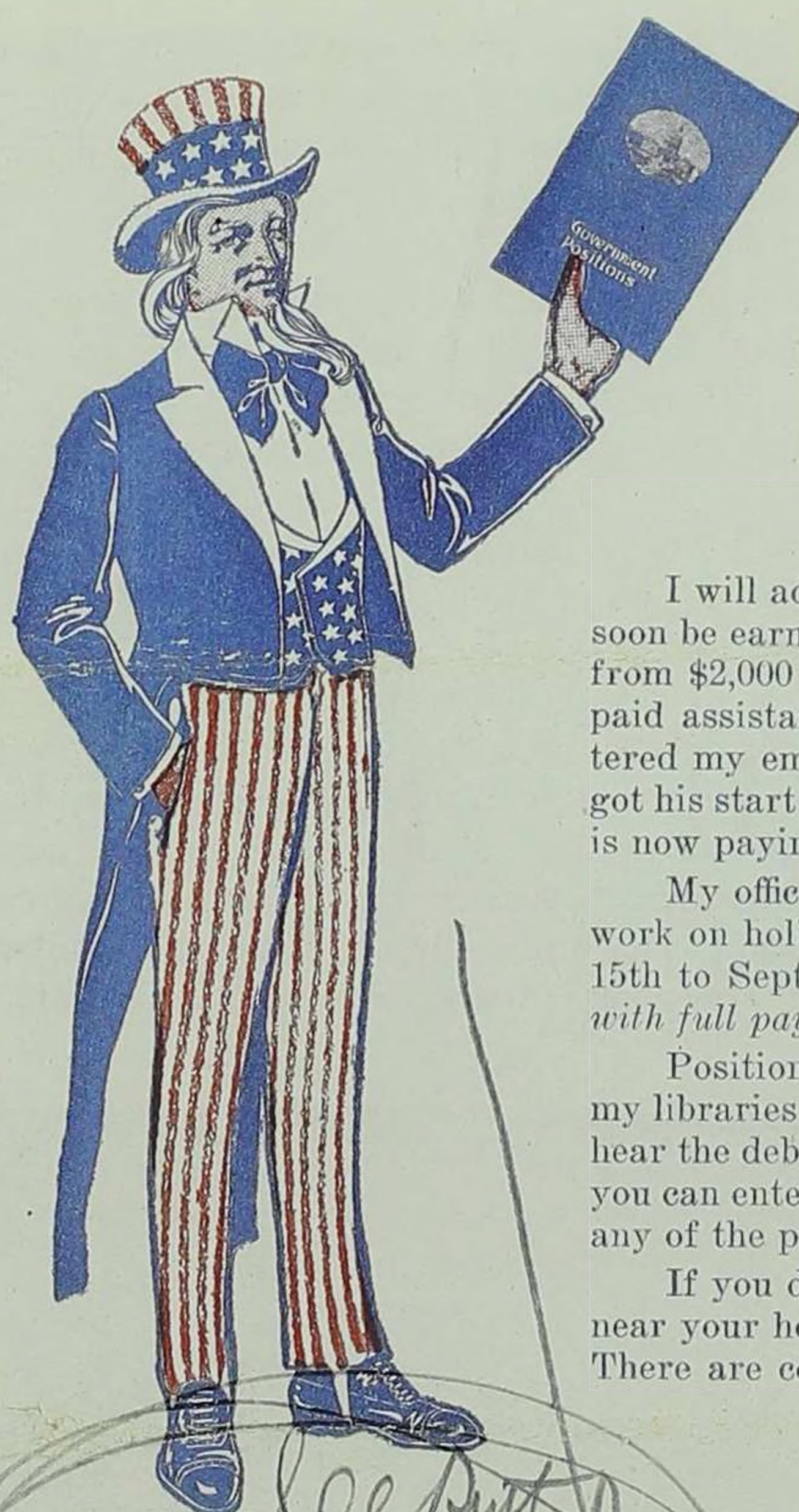
clerical workers often checked with the business schools first, so finding a job after graduation was often relatively easy. Irish was particularly successful in placing her graduates, and they were highly esteemed by those who employed them. They came to hold positions of responsibility both in the local business community and at the State University of Iowa. Long after they had retired from active work, these women retained their mastery of shorthand and typing. At 92, Della Grizel (a 1909 graduate of Irish's school) still typed her own letters.

But clouds were appearing on the horizon for private business schools. Already by the turn of the century, businesses had been looking to university graduates for their upper-level management positions, and universities were quick to respond. The University of Chicago established the first university-connected business school in 1897,

SHSI (IOWA CITY)



Irish's Business College in 1937: Although the women students' clothing has changed remarkably since the turn of the century, their job training still centers around typing and dictation. In the back, two male students work adding machines.



I MUST HAVE THOUSANDS OF STENOGRAPHERS

to assist with the vast amount of clerical work necessitated by the war. Come and work for me. Help win the war. I will pay you a BEGINNING SALARY of from \$1,100 to \$1,200 a year. The War Department stenographers will be started at not less than \$1,100 and promoted to \$1,200 at the end of three months of satisfactory service. More appointments are made in the War Department than in any other single Department.

I will advance you on merit alone. If you are capable, you should soon be earning from \$1,200 to \$1,800. Many of my employees are paid from \$2,000 to \$5,000 a year. Some of my most valuable and highly paid assistants started as stenographers. One stenographer who entered my employ at \$900 advanced rapidly to an \$8,000 position. He got his start with me—my training paved the way and a big corporation is now paying him \$100,000 each year.

My office hours are from 9 a. m. to 4:30 p. m. I do not ask you to work on holidays. I will give you Saturday afternoons off from June 15th to September 15th. I will give you 30 days' vacation each year *with full pay*, and, when necessary, 30 days' sick leave *with full pay*.

Positions in my employ open up vast possibilities. You can visit my libraries and museums, come in contact with the big men of the day, hear the debates in Congress, etc. Then, too, my hours are so short that you can enter one of the universities and study law, dentistry, music, or any of the professions and at the same time earn a splendid salary.

If you do not care to come to Washington, I have a place for you near your home. I employ stenographers in every state in the Union. There are countless opportunities open to you. I NEED YOU!

UNCLE SAM

To Patriotic Men and Women:

Here is a most desirable field that offers exceptionally attractive opportunities.

There is a position on Uncle Sam's payroll for YOU—one that will pay you well—one that will give you steady work—one that will afford a chance to advance to highly paid positions of trust.

The war is necessitating thousands of clerical appointments. The United States Civil Service Commission is advising that a great number of persons start the study of shorthand and typewriting with the view of entering the Government Service. Men exempted from military service and women not otherwise aiding the Government in this hour of its trial will find here an opportunity to help in a practical way and at the same time gain a special training which will always be valuable.

We give a most thorough course of training in shorthand and typewriting and fortify this with special preparation for the Civil Service examinations which lead to good paying Government positions.

If you'd like to know more about Government Stenographic positions and how you can secure one of them, call at our office or write for further information.

PLEASE POST CONSPICUOUSLY.

Elizabeth Irish
Principal.

The 1940s brought more jobs and training opportunities. The circular (left) announces that Uncle Sam wants clerical works, especially "necessitated by the war," and advises "that a great number of persons start the study of shorthand and typing with the view of entering the Government Service." Right: Carol McClintic and Hazel Falk practice their typing skills at the Des Moines YWCA in 1949.



SHSI (DES MOINES). DES MOINES REGISTER AND TRIBUNE, JUNE 28, 1949

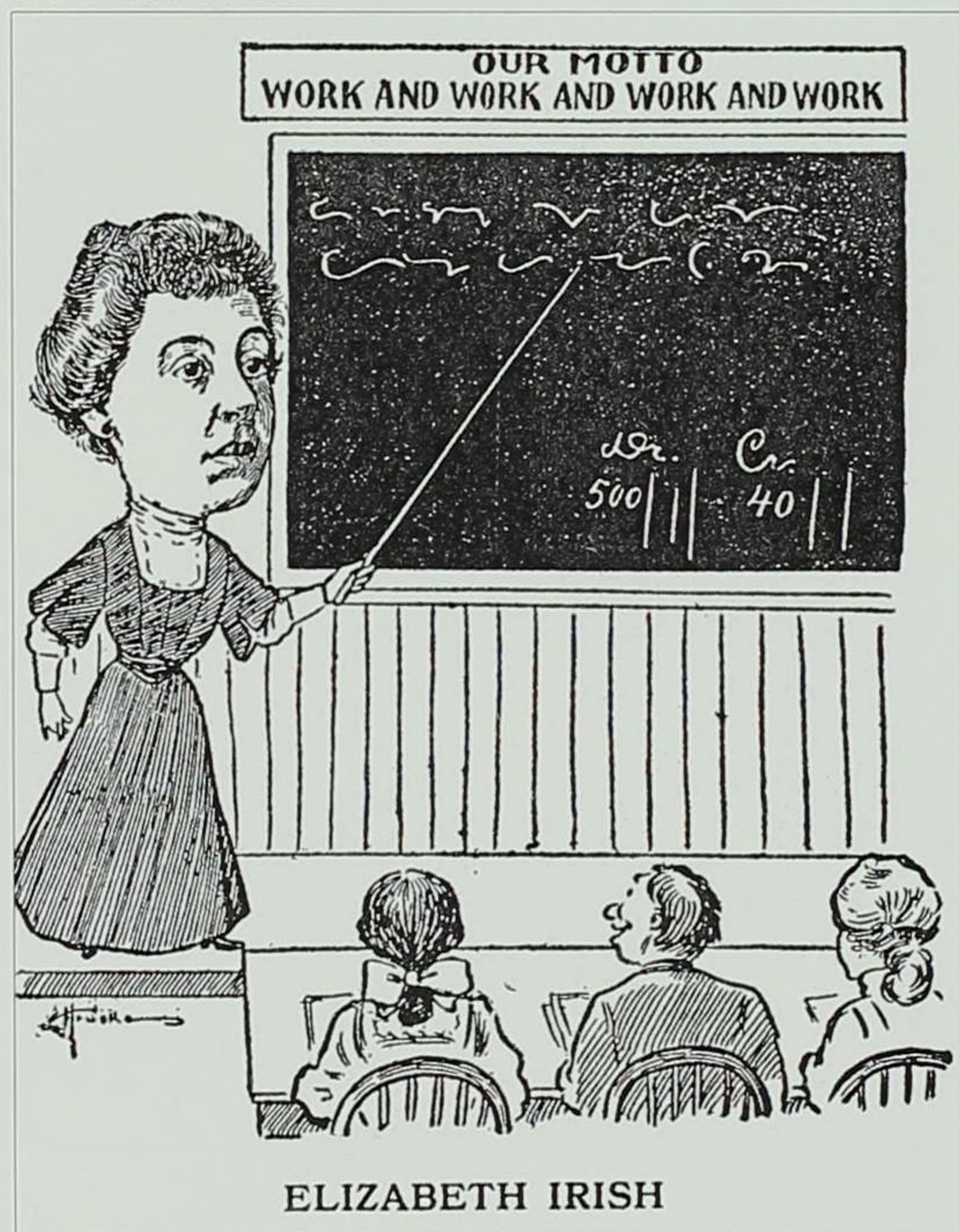
patterned after the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce. In 1914, the State University of Iowa opened its own School of Commerce. A large percentage of young men, who had previously outnumbered young women in the business schools, now took their business training at the universities.

At the other end of the business-training spectrum, the success of private business school courses had attracted the notice of public school educators. High schools began to add shorthand and typing to their curricula. By 1916/17 the public schools had captured much of the private business schools' trade in these areas of expertise; in that school year 5,142 students enrolled in business courses in public high schools in Iowa, compared to 6,100 in private business schools. The trend was nationwide. By 1924, almost four times as many American students took commercial courses from public high schools as from private business schools. Iowa City, which already had added bookkeeping to its high school mathematics curriculum around 1908, added shorthand and typing in 1921.

To counteract this competition, Elizabeth Irish developed an aggressive advertising program. She ad-

vertised regularly in local high school yearbooks. In the 1930s, her yearbook ads described her classes as "finishing courses" for those who had taken shorthand and typing in high school. She was also quick to adopt and promote the latest office practices and equipment. When the Gregg shorthand system came out, she added it to her curriculum. She had a 12-year-old girl demonstrate the simplicity and effectiveness of the "touch system" typing program in 1918. She maintained a booth at the annual county fair, where she entertained crowds with such gimmicks as a typist working with a paper bag over her head (to promote the touch system) and typists performing to music.

Elizabeth Irish also kept her social and professional networks intact. She was one of the early members of the Iowa City Commercial Club—and for many years was its only female member. She belonged to several professional associations, including the Central Commercial Teachers' Association (at its sixth annual convention in 1907 in Cedar Rapids



ELIZABETH IRISH

In 1907, the *Iowa City Daily Republican* published a series of caricatures of “men who made and are making Iowa City.” Among these 43 “bulwarks of Iowa City’s prosperity,” Elizabeth Irish was the only woman included. Her approach to teaching (hard work and no nonsense) appears frequently in the school’s promotional materials.

she presented a paper on “Requirements for Graduation in Shorthand”). She was also active in her church, the Iowa League of Women Voters, Carnation Rebekah Lodge, and the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Elizabeth’s school and students, however, remained her chief interest. A combination of “thorough, painstaking training” with an encouragement of individual initiative was the basis of her educational philosophy. “The good student,” she said “is the one who will without prodding search out facts and principles for himself.”

As the years passed, Elizabeth Irish, in her conservative long-skirted dresses, continued to be a familiar figure in downtown Iowa City. She was a small woman, with a trim figure, her long hair worn up in a bun. Her hairdresser recalled her as a very private person, not given to idle chatter. She had a rather abrupt

and always very businesslike manner. Her students remembered her as “nice, but also strict.” If her expectations were not met, one student recalled, “she could dress you down like nobody’s business.”

Despite the pressure of competition from public schools and universities, the continuing demand for well-trained secretarial staff was strong enough to keep private schools like Elizabeth’s afloat. Even the smallest business now felt the need for a secretary to handle its correspondence and files. When the Great Depression swept across the nation, making post-high school education a luxury most young people could not afford, business schools (with their shorter course requirements and emphasis on practical skills) again became a popular, low-cost alternative to college.

By the late 1930s, Elizabeth’s enrollment averaged between 25 and 30 students, most of them women, down from 166 in 1917/18. Most of the classes were now taught by Grace Hinrichs, who also served as the school secretary, although Elizabeth was always present and still taught some classes herself. Another woman taught business English and spelling, and Arthur Leff, a local attorney, taught commercial law. The school still maintained its high reputation in the community.

But by 1940, Elizabeth was 84. On December 31, she retired and closed her school, leaving the field to Brown’s Business Institute (which had opened in 1928 and was now owned by Nora Francis and Mabel McCabe). Eventually she moved in with her sister, Ruth, in Davenport. She spent the last months of her life with her twin nieces, Ella and Abigail Preston, in Davenport, where she died on March 11, 1952. She was 96 years old.

For three decades after the Irish school closed in 1940, private business schools continued to serve as a major gateway to employment, especially for young women, in the business world. Thousands of returning veterans attended business schools under the GI Bill. Business schools also offered training in new technologies, as the typewriter gave way to the computer, the adding machine to the calculator, and the steno pad to the tape recorder.

It was the advent of junior colleges that finally killed off most of the small private business schools in Iowa. With commercial courses available at a reduced cost in most of the state’s larger communities, private business schools found it hard to compete. The Iowa City Business College, successor to Brown’s Business Institute, closed its doors in 1969. The same year saw

the demise of Bayless Business College in Dubuque, which had long billed itself as the oldest business school west of the Mississippi. Capital City Commercial College in Des Moines ended an 80-year career in 1961. The Cedar Rapids Business College, founded in 1880, closed in 1974. Today, the state boasts only six private business schools—the American Institute of Business and the Business and Banking Institute in Des Moines, the American Institute of Commerce in Cedar Falls and Davenport, and Hamilton Business College in Cedar Rapids and Mason City. The vast majority of their students are women.

Elizabeth Irish was not the first woman to operate a business school in Iowa. Mrs. J. H. Wyckoff had opened a school of shorthand, stenography, and typewriting in Dubuque in 1890, and sold it in 1895 to Mrs. A. B. Wilson, who ran it for another seven years. Mrs. Ida Cutler owned the Cutler School in the same city during the early years of the century. And certainly many women were instructors in business schools; at least a dozen women attended the

1907 convention of the Central Commercial College Teachers' Association in Cedar Rapids. But clearly, Elizabeth Irish was the most successful woman in her field in Iowa. Her school operated for 45 years and trained more than 12,000 students in the rudiments of business practices. In her own words, Irish's University Business College had helped "young men and women to make an honorable start on life's rugged highways, by preparing them to become at once self-sustaining, through being intelligent and skillful business assistants." Although she trained a large number of young men in business practices through the years, it was women whom Elizabeth Irish had in mind when she opened her school. And for half a century, she made it possible for young people—especially young women—who could not afford a college degree to acquire the proper training for gainful employment and greater financial independence. ❖

The author is a freelance writer in Iowa City who enjoys writing about underappreciated historical figures. She has recently written a history of Coralville, Iowa.



NOTE ON SOURCES

Primary sources consulted in preparing this article include: Irish-Preston Collection, Special Collections, State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City); US Bureau of Education Bulletins for various years; Reports of the US Commissioner of Education, 1870-1913; city directories for various Iowa communities, 1866-1975; US and Iowa censuses; Iowa City high school yearbooks, 1918-1949; Johnson County marriage records, 1848-1887; *Iowa City Press-Citizen* obituary (March 11, 1952); *College Blue Book*, Occupational Education (1993, 24th ed.); and interviews with former students and other local citizens who had known Elizabeth Irish.

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An annotated copy of this manuscript is held in the *Iowa Heritage Illustrated* production files in Iowa City.

10 p.m.
 Early 10-11-89

My dear Father,
 I arrived here
 yesterday and found you
 awaiting me. So
 away

CHAS. D. STONE & CO.,
 113 ADAMS STREET,
 CHAS. D. STONE. OSCAR F. KOSCHE.
 IMPORT AGENTS, INTER-STATE DESPATCH.
 AGENTS AT ALL PRINCIPAL PORTS IN THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE.

CABLE ADDRESS: "GRABSTONE."
 IN YOUR REPLY REFER TO _____
CUSTOMS AND FORWARDING AGENTS.

Chicago, Aug. 11, 1890.

Oliver & Showalter,

JOHN MILTON OLIVER
 JOHN W. SHOWALTER

Law Offices

84 & 86 La Salle Street

(OPPOSITE CITY HALL)

Chicago, 9/21/92

Dear Mama:-

I have tried in vain to write you since receiving your letter, but have been terribly rushed through the days, and so tired evenings that with one or two exceptions I was only too glad to write you.

Stenographers and Type-writers.



gh, Iowa.

few minutes to spare now, and I think I can em-
 ter manner than to tell you what I am now doing.
 ing, while the regular stenographer is away on his
 work Saturday morning, and will stay here two weeks
 can either go back to the college again, or take a
 get one, and I don't think I will have much trouble.
 World's Fair Commissioner from Minn. says he will
 allwood and myself a position as secretary to some of
 oners. I think that will be very nice, and it will
 here where I can see her.

nk here, I write about 25 letters a day, and address
 and that is all. The office boy folds and seals the
 ey look them over, and they do their own copying, so
 y position. They only pay me \$6.00 this week, but say
 e more next week if I suit them. So far I have made
 e, and that was in a proper name.
 ness is all new to me, and one-half of the letters they
 e Greek to me, and I can't tell for the life of me if
 ght or not. Then I had some trouble finding out how to
 one of the men wants words abbreviated, and the other
 tten out in full. Saturday I had no work to understand
 as they would dictate with a cigar in their mouth, and
 I do a great deal better today. They always had a man
 aid they did not know whether a lady would do or not, but
 I do just as well. One thing, I am afraid I will lose al
 they only dictate about 75 words a minute, and then stop
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 ot acquainted with them. The names of the French towns and
 the steamers, especially, are hard. The office is very
 right by the window. We are opposite
 20 to 5:30, and

Chicago Oct. 27, 1892

Dear Mama and "folks":-

I have been trying to write to you ever since I received a letter from Logan, but never in all my experience of working life have I been so rushed as since that time. Positively, I have not had time to breathe, much less to write letters, except at night, and my eyes and brain and everything else would be too tired then to do more than fool around in the parlor a little while, or take a little walk, and then go to bed, so as to be ready for the next day. Then last week we had two days of "wild gaiety" and that has piled more work into this week. I have been working from eight until the last elevator trip at six, every day, instead of from nine until five, as is usual, and today is the first time I have caught up with my work. I haven't touched a letter - my assistant attends to all of that - but I have gone from one room to another taking dictation, and never getting an opportunity to write it out. It was positively amusing: every desk in his office is connected with electric bells and speaking tubes with every other desk, and I would be in one room, writing away for dear life, and would hear my bell going. Then would come an ominous silence, then a head would be poked into the room where I was going to keep Miss Jones long?" "Yes, been waiting all day for her, and now I am going to finish this." "Well, Miss Jones, you come in to my room as soon as you are through there." and before I would finish there, I would have a date or two made in some of the other rooms. Tonight I am going home at five - you can write that in your hat."

So you are at last away from the little Arcadia in Iowa county. I have not heard from papa but once - he wrote just as he was leaving, and told me to write to him at Escondido. I did so and gave him a little good advice. As he always seems to think I am yet an infant, I suppose he will take the advice (?) for what it is worth. Uncle John came in the city last week, looking very thin and not at all well. He has gone to Milwaukee this week, I think - I haven't seen any of them since Sunday. He seems to have no idea of what he is going to do.

I wish you could have been in Chicago last week, all of you, and I could have seen you and talked to you and I am sure you would have

“Their business is all new to me”

Effie Jones describes her 1890s office jobs



There is no photograph of Effie Jones in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa, but there are four letters that begin to sketch a vivid portrait of a young, ambitious Iowa woman in the late 19th century. From what can be deduced from the letters, Effie Jones, like many young people at that time, was seeking a position as an office worker in the world of business, first in St. Paul and then in Chicago.

The letters give colorful details about her work life and social life, her friendships and flirtations. She sends news of fashion trends back to her mother, with advice on how to update her hats. And in late 1892, she is an astonished witness to a great international event, as Chicago extravagantly launches its first world's fair, the 1893 World Columbian Exposition.

The letters also reveal her gradual ascent in the 1890s world of office work. Her descriptions hint at changing duties, as well as growing confidence, responsibility, and supervisory authority.

Here then, are the four letters (slightly edited for publication) that Effie Jones wrote to her family back home in Iowa.

—The Editor



10 p.m.

Farley [Iowa] 10-11-89

My Dear Father,

I arrived here only yesterday, and found your letter awaiting me. So you have really been away down in New Mexico. Whither next? Yes, I had a good time in St. Paul, and my friends were very cordial. They all insisted on my staying two weeks longer but I thought it would be wiser to leave while they were

Effie Jones's four letters to her family in Iowa describe the world of business in the early 1890s—a time when many young men and women sought jobs as stenographers and “type-writers” (the word originally meant both the machine and the typist). The illustration is from the April 1890 *Business Woman's Journal*. The letters are in the William Griffith Jones Papers, State Historical Society of Iowa (Iowa City center).

not tired of me. . . . I am getting tired of Iowa, I guess. I saw a good many “wants” in the St. Paul papers for stenographers & type writers. I could have procured a position if I had known enough. Oh dear, isn't it an awful pity I don't know a little bit more? Say, papa, just before I went up to St. Paul, a gentleman here in Farley was so foolish as to ask me if I wouldn't marry him! I was kind of mad at him for daring to, as I had always avoided him. He was always bothering the life out of me, asking me to go places with him, and I never would accept his invitations when I could help it. I guess he is a good sort of fellow. He is the I.C. [Illinois Central?] telegraph operator. But he was always so, oh, soft. But he had no bad habits. I haven't seen him since then, and I don't want to, because it would be so uncomfortable. What in the world would I want to get married for, I wonder? I wouldn't marry him anyway because, (oh, whisper it low) his name is Smith! But, really, I had never even thought of such an event happening as that any of the men I know would think of marrying me, for the thought never entered my head in connection with them. And—why should it? I have about come to the conclusion, lately, that boys are a “nusence,” because most of them are not content to be friends. When they are, though, they make better ones than girls do. As a rule, the girls are so insincere, you can never tell whether they mean what they say or not, but boys are different. Now, today I noticed that the girls that I am most intimate with, would come in and kiss me, and ask a few questions, and say they were glad to see me, and were, really, entirely indifferent as to whether I ever came back or not. But about 4 or 5 of the boys were really glad to see me again, and put more warmth into a handshake, than there were in a dozen of the girls' kisses. I wonder what makes women kiss each other so much. I never think of kissing just every girl I know, when I don't like some of them at all, but they will just more than run up & kiss a girl, and the minute she turns away, will tell how “they just hate her, she thinks she is so smart,” ect. ect., I found everyone well when I returned. It's rain-

ing very hard this evening. The stores are to be closed at 8 after this, except during the holiday season, from Dec. 23 to Jan. 1st. That will be more pleasant for me. Give my love to the family, and to uncle John, and write soon to your affectionate daughter,

Effie.

What a foolish letter this is, all such utter nonsense.



*[Typed on letterhead of "Chas. D. Stone & Co.,
113 Adams Street . . . customs and forwarding agents"]
Chicago, Aug. 11, 1890.*

Dr. W. G. Jones
Williamsburgh, Iowa

Dear Papa:-

I have a few minutes to spare now, and I think I can employ them in no better manner than to tell you what I am now doing.

I am substituting, while the regular stenographer is away on his vacation. I began work Saturday morning, and will stay here two weeks anyway, and then I can either go back to the college again, or take a position if I can get one, and I don't think I will have much trouble.

Mr. Harrison, World's Fair Commissioner from Minn. says he will get both Agnes Smallwood and myself a position as secretary to some of the Fair commissioners. I think that will be very nice, and it will bring my old chum here where I can see her.

About my work here, I write about 25 letters a day, and address the envelopes, and that is all. The office boy folds and seals the letters after they look them over, and they do their own copying, so it is a very easy position. They only pay me \$6.00 this week,

I had to work to understand what they said as they would dictate with a cigar in their mouth and "mumbled so."

but say they will pay me more next week if I suit them. So far I have made only one mistake, and that was in a proper name.

Their business is all new to me, and one-half of the letters they dictate are like Greek to me, and I can't tell for the life of me if I have them right or not. Then I had some trouble finding out how to suit

them, as one of the men wants words abbreviated, and the other wants them written out in full. Saturday I had to work to understand what they said as they would dictate with a cigar in their mouth, and "mumbled so." I do a great deal better today. They always had a man before, and said they did not know whether a lady would do or not, but I think I will do just as well. One thing, I am afraid I will lose all my speed, as they only dictate about 75 words a minute, and then stop and think a long while what to say next. They spell almost all of the names out for me, and have me write them in long hand, and it is a very good plan, as no one ought to be expected to spell them correctly who is not acquainted with them. The names of the French towns and the names of the steamers, especially, are hard. The office is very nice, and I have a nice desk, right by the window. We are all opposite the P. O., and I amuse myself looking at the people who are always around there, when I am not busy. My hours are from 8:30 to 5:30, and an hour at noon. I suppose you will be in here before long. I have not heard from mamma for some time, but expect she is busy enjoying herself. Aunt Mary is quite well, and grandma says she feels a little better, but she says she grows weaker every day, and I am inclined to think so myself. The city was very gay all last week, with the Odd Fellows, but I never went down to see them at all, not even to the fireworks. Well, I can't write much more, as I don't know whether the "boss" will like it or not, so I will say "goodby" like the children. Give my love to uncle John, and write soon to

Your loving daughter
Effie.



*[Typed on letterhead of "Oliver & Showalter Law Offices,
84 & 86 La Salle Street (Opposite City Hall)"]
Chicago, 9/21/92*

Dear Mamma:-

I have tried in vain to write you since receiving your letter, but have been terribly rushed through the days, and so tired evenings that with one or two exceptions I was only too glad to pile off into bed as soon as dinner was over. Yesterday they got me an assistant for a couple of weeks, so that I have a little breathing spell for a moment or two. . . . I moved last Saturday evening, and like my new place very well. They have a piano, and we can use it as much as we please, and then my room is about four times as large

as my last one—board the same price. I have a large closet, too, and hot and cold water in the room. I will lose Miss Saeger this week, as she goes to Oskaloosa

I have had to put a stop to novel reading....Romance and Chicago business life do not go hand in hand.

to stay until Christmas, so will devote most of my evenings to her, I expect. I dread to have her go, for she is about the only girl I know in the city that I care anything about. There is a young lady boarding where I am, but she affects to be very intense, and enthuses over everything and everybody until I grow fatigued. The "boys" are nice enough—very much so, and I am in hopes they will prove what they say they will—a mine of pleasure this winter, as I cannot study much. . . .

. . . For the last week I have been getting Mecartney ready for the Supreme Court, two cases, and have spent two or three days over at the Law Institute looking up law in a presumption case. I had to hunt in English records, for there have been very few cases like it in this country, and found some as far back as Elizabeth's time, and plenty of them in the Georges. It is interesting work, but I could not stop for letters and small papers, so have another girl here to help me out on them.

You asked me, I believe, about hats. Well, as far as I can see, the hats this year are the craziest, brightest, "loudest" ones it has ever been my fortune to meet. Even the black ones are so covered with jet and rubber snakes, dragons, bugs, etc, that they look giddy. Miss S. is getting me up a brilliant red felt walking hat, trimmed in velvet same shade, but I could hardly advise you to get one like it. I think a felt "English walking hat" trimmed in stiff loops of ribbon and velvet would be about the thing. For a traveling hat, take off the trimming off that turban of yours, and have the felt cleaned, and trimmed with tall loops of velvet, wired to stand straight, and unhemmed. I talked with Miss S. about the hats, and she says that if you could get scarlet or yellow tips—three of them—and put on the front of the girls black beaver hats, they would be as stylish as anything you could possibly get them. I would like to go out and see what there is in town, but never have time except after half past five, and the stores all close at six. . . . I wish I did not have to pay for my board—it makes a

big hole in my salary to plank down six dollars a week. I am glad you like Dreams—I think they were charming. I have had to put a stop to novel reading—or "Dreamy" reading, as it takes my mind off my business and studies. Romance and Chicago business life do not go hand in hand, I find, and I am naturally inclined to be too impractical, anyway. Yes, they wear the long wristed gloves as much as ever, and the laced ones seem to hold their own. You remember the grey ones I had last winter? I wore them until April—got a black pair like them—wore them until last week, and have just bought a pair of English tan, which comes nearer being red than anything else, of the same kind. They are the only thing that is fit to wear for business. I like them because they are cheap, too, for they are only a dollar a pair.

By the way, I must tell you of the fun I have been having. You remember the first letter I wrote you after I came here? You remember I said there was a fellow on the floor above—across the court—who smiled on me? Well, he met me on the street a few days afterward and spoke—but I hadn't been introduced, so gave him the cut direct. A few days afterward he came into the office and had Mecartney introduce him. Since then he watches until I start out to

Every desk in this office is connected with electric bells and speaking tubes.

lunch, or to go home, and then goes down in the elevator with me, and walks as far as he can with me. He imagines he is more than "rushing a flirtation" but it will be sometime before I fall in love with him. I just happened to think of it, for he is sitting at the window watching me now.

Well, I hope you will forgive a short and tiresome letter, as I have not another minute's time. Give my love to all the folks, and write soon to

Yours lovingly

Effie.

701 W. Monroe St.



Chicago Oct. 27, 1892

Dear Mamma and "folks":-

I have been trying to write to you ever since I received a letter from Logan, but never in all my expe-

rience of working life have been so rushed as since that time. Positively, I have not had time to breathe, much less to write letters, except at night, and my eyes and brain and everything else would be too tired then to do more than fool around in the parlor a little while, or take a little walk, and then go to bed, so as to be ready for the next day. Then last week we had two days of "wild gaiety" and that has piled more work into this week. I have been working from eight until the last elevator trip at six, every day, instead of from nine until five, as is usual, and today is the first time I have caught up with my work. I haven't touched a letter—my assistant attends to all that—but I have gone from one room to another taking dictation, and never getting an opportunity to write it out. It was positively amusing: every desk in this office is connected with electric bells and speaking tubes with every other desk, and I would be in one room, writing away for dear life, and would hear my bell going. Then would come an ominous silence, then a head would be poked into the room where I was. "Going to keep Miss Jones long?" "Yes, been waiting all day for her, and now I am going to finish this." "Well, Miss Jones, you come in to my room as soon as you are through there." And before I would finish there, I would have a date or two made in some of the other rooms. Tonight I am going home at five—you can "write that in your hat."

So you are at last away from the little Arcadia in

The crowd was something dreadful. It is said that over one hundred thousand strangers came into the town on that one day.

Iowa County. I have not heard from papa but once—he wrote just as he was leaving, and told me to write to him at Escondido. I did so and gave him a little good advice. As he always seems to think I am yet an infant, I suppose he will take the advice (?) for what it is worth. . . .

I wish you could have been in Chicago last week, all of you, and if you were NOT as fond of excitement as I am, you would have enjoyed it. The decorations were simply immense. I stood on the corner of State and Madison streets and looked both ways, and I could hardly see the buildings. The City Hall—across the street—was decorated in the municipal colors—terra cotta and white, and the rows of massive pillars

on each side were wrapped in terra cotta. All the high office buildings, with their hundreds of windows, had flags in every window, and the effect was beautiful. Gallagher, the most noted florist and decorator in the city, had a contract for decorating the eleven bridges, and they were gay and festive. Seats along the line of march for both the civic parade and the military parade, were sold at enormous figures. A young gentleman friend of my landlady and myself got us seats directly opposite the reviewing stand for the civic parade (we found out at the office that they were eight dollars each, so you see how at the mercy of my friends I was), and from ten o'clock Thursday morning until half past three in the afternoon, we sat there and watched things. The crowd was something terrible. I could look eight down on the moving mass—no one person seemed to move, but the crowd went in waves—and I saw two or three women faint in the awful crush. . . . We were directly opposite the grand stand, where all the nobility were—watching the populace. . . . The cavalry and all the U.S.A. officers, in their uniforms, were there, and every state had a "box," and was represented. We had opera glasses, and discovered through the aid of them, that the "nobility" were very little better looking than the "populace." . . . Well, after all that looking, I came back to the office, and worked until seven, then some of the "gang" came after me, and we went over to Gunthers and had a swell little dinner—little neck clams, blue points fried with mushrooms, and several other things. We then "bummed" around town looking at the decorations and illuminations. The Inter Ocean Building was festooned with electric lights in red white and blue, and one store had an immense flag formed of electric lights, about sixty feet long. The crowd was something dreadful. It is said that over one hundred thousand strangers came into the town on that one day. When we started home, the cable had broken from the strain, and we walked. The next day I did not go to the office at all, but at seven o'clock we started for The Fair Grounds and that neighborhood, to see the military parade. We had lovely seats on the Midway Plaisance, where we were so close to the road that we could almost touch the carriages on that side. I must confess that I went perfectly wild. With all the rest of the crowd, I screamed myself perfectly hoarse, and waved my handkerchief until it was frightfully dirty. . . . How I enthused over each and every governor! Young and handsome Gov. Russell—only twenty-eight—of Mass. can have me. Or if he don't want me, the haughty and patrician governor of Kentucky can. McKinley was very af-

fable, and granted a special bow to me—oh I wish you could have seen him—his massive head and grand, intellectual face was enough to make the

**I think I will stay here—
unless I get sick, die, or
get married—until I can get
into newspaper work.**

crowd go wild, as it certainly did. . . . There were a few things about the holiday which I didn't especially care for—one was the number of pictures of Columbus. Bill Nye says Columbus died trying to look like his pictures, and that it seemed to be his favorite recreation—to have his photograph taken. Inasmuch as some of them have heavy beards, and some are smooth faced, I think he spent his time in trimming his beard in different ways, and having a snap shot taken of them. The other thing was that I expected Agnes Smallwood down Wednesday, and went to meet her. She didn't come, and like that pathetic dove in the song, I did mourn and mourn and mourn.

Mr. Oliver has returned from Nova Scotia—got back the first of last week. It is the first time I have had much of an opportunity to talk with him. He called me into his private office and interviewed me. Among other pertinent questions, he asked me if I had ever been on the stage! I asked King afterwards what Oliver meant, but he waxed complimentary, and I could get no satisfaction from him. But when he

**I have an assistant now—a
pale faced, gentle little
thing, who attends to all the
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volity of mankind in general.**

finished interrogating me, Oliver told me that I had a permanent position here, as long as I chose to remain. So, if that is the case, I think I will stay here—unless I get sick, die, or get married—until I can get into newspaper work. I have an assistant now—a pale faced, gentle little thing, who attends to all the corre-

spondence, and takes lessons from me in the frivolity of mankind in general. The boys in the office are inclined to flirt—like all young lawyers and every other kind of man—and she does not seem to know what it all means. My "worldly nature" therefore, has found an object suitable for its protection, and it sees that the aforesaid young lady is not inveigled into going out to too many lunches and dinners—and many is the little flirtation in a quiet corner that I deliberately interrupt.

. . . Well, I must close this somewhat lengthy epistle, and go to work. Wish I could take the trip with you to California. With much love to all, and a kiss for my "chillen" I am

Yours lovingly

Effie.

Write soon. 701 W. Monroe St.



What happened next to Effie Jones? The only other letter from her in the archival collection is dated 32 years later, on November 2, 1924, and is typed on letterhead that reads: "Mrs. John S. Brown, 5940 Erie Street, Chicago, Illinois."

The letter is addressed to her aunt Mary, and in it Effie [Jones] Brown describes her children's and husband's activities, and her new duties as president of an organization called the Ethical Society. She writes: "It takes a good deal of time, but I suppose I owe it to the society. For instance, this morning before I began on my own affairs, I telephoned two people on ethical business, wrote a note to one of the trustees who has just lost his mother, read a long report, wrote my vote about it, wrote to the New York Society on business—then felt free for the day."

She also exercises her new right to vote, commenting: "I suppose you will vote in California tomorrow. It looks as if Coolidge will have it all his own way. We are all voting for him, here. I like Davis, but he has no show."

She signs the letter as she had signed all the rest:

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Effie".

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Iowa Heritage Illustrated

compiled by Nicci Yang

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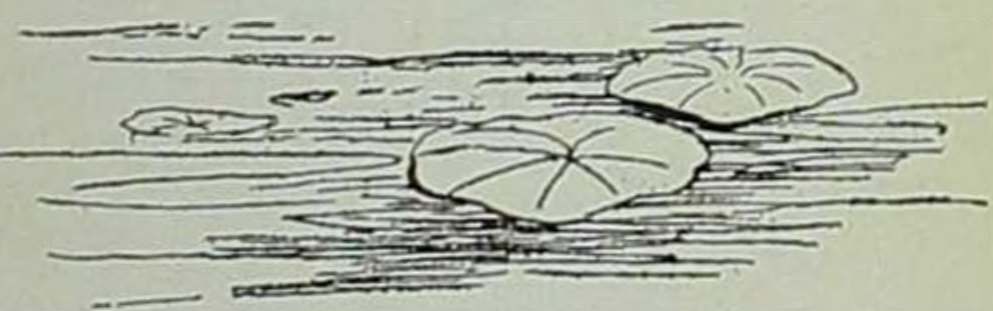
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PHIL STONG 原著

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太太巧製的鮮美泡菜。這些評判員只品慣了茶——而且是在歡呼觀衆之公開展覽中，最令人永遠垂涎的泡製品



PHIL STONG 原著
湯新楣 譯

SHSI (IOWA CITY); PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHARLES SCOTT

Among the millions of items in the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa is an autographed paperback of Phil Stong's novel *State Fair*—in Chinese. The paperback was published in Hong Kong in 1955, two decades after it became a bestseller in the United States.

Was the novel about a Van Buren County farm family going to the Iowa State Fair translatable into another language and culture? Apparently so, except for one line (*see left*) that reporter Pat Gilbert says to farm girl Margy Frake when he's teasing her about her mother's prize-winning pickles.

—The Editor

