

Architects' Patrons in Early Twentieth-Century Iowa:

A Cautionary Tale—DRAFT 7/25/13

Daniel H. Kaiser

Surveying the patrons of the Prairie School architects who designed banks across the Midwest in the early twentieth century, Alan Lathrop argued that “there is no solid evidence to explain why their generally small town and rural-oriented, conservative clients were attracted to these men in particular.”¹ But Wim de Wit is more persuasive when he observed that “in every town where Sullivan built a bank, there was at least one person like Bennett [who was responsible for the Sullivan bank in Owatonna, Minnesota] whose educational background and progressive interests encouraged him to foster a special design for his new bank building.”² Riding a wave of prosperity driven by agriculture, Midwestern bankers of the early twentieth century were eager to shed the image that their predecessors had borne, and to present themselves as “progressive,” even as they maintained a political and financial conservatism. As de Wit phrased it, “the banker had to redefine his role in the community in which he worked.” More than that, “The bank...should have a central position in the community, make connections with all its inhabitants...and it should seek to influence all business dealings.” In short, bankers became much more visible in seeking “to do good for their community.”³

Of course, the economic well-being that affected banking throughout the heartland could hardly be confined to bankers alone. Industry, too, enjoyed the benefits of

¹ Alan K. Lathrop, “The Prairie School Bank: Patron and Architect,” in *Prairie School Architecture in Minnesota Iowa Wisconsin* (St. Paul, 1982), 55.

² Wim de Wit, “The Banks and the Image of Progressive Banking,” in *Louis Sullivan. The Function of Ornament*, ed. Wim de Wit (NY, 1986), 167.

³ *Ibid.*, 163-65.

the rising economy, and increased mechanization generated new industries across the Midwest. Even small towns experienced the boom, leading not only to the building of new banks and the emergence of more activist, progressive bankers, but also to a more progressive class of businessmen who, like the bankers, wanted to patronize a distinctly American, progressive architecture.

Grinnell, Iowa, was one of the small towns that experienced this economic boom. Claiming about 5,000 inhabitants at the turn of the twentieth century,⁴ it was more fortunate than many Midwestern towns because it was situated at the intersection of two busy railroad lines—the Rock Island and the Iowa Central (Minneapolis & St. Louis)—which in turn were connected to a dense network of railroads stretching across the country. According to published schedules, every day but Sunday eight trains passed through Grinnell heading east; another eight headed west; four trains headed south each day, and four more north toward Minneapolis.⁵ Four banks operated in town early in the century, although, like the nineteenth-century banks they succeeded, many continued to share quarters with dentists and doctors, commercial offices, and even apartments.⁶ The town was also home to several factories that capitalized on new technologies and

⁴ “Census Report Is Out at Last,” *Grinnell Herald* (hereafter *GH*), 12/22/1910, 3.

⁵ See the schedules published in the *GH* 9/28/1909. Writing about the north-south trains, Frank P. Donovan pointed out that passengers approaching Grinnell would be inventoried about their supper desires by a brakeman, who then wired the results ahead so that, when the train reached Grinnell, passengers could alight and cross the street to waiting, hot meals at the Hotel Monroe (“Passenger Trains of Yesteryear on the Minneapolis and St. Louis,” *Minnesota History* 30[1949]:240-41).

⁶ An early photo of Merchants National Bank, prior to its move to the site on which Sullivan installed his building, clearly shows a dentist’s office on the second floor. The Grinnell Savings Bank, ensconced in its neo-classical building erected at almost the same time as Louis Sullivan’s Merchants National Bank, retained the old organization of space with lawyers occupying the upper story. See Bill Menner, *Grinnell in Vintage Postcards* (Charleston, 2004), 19, 74.

“modern” domestic life. For example, the one-time buggy-maker, Spaulding Manufacturing, early in the twentieth century revised production to concentrate upon automobiles; Thompson Brothers, founded in Newton, Iowa but moved to Grinnell in 1910, was reconfigured as the Grinnell Washing Machine Company, which developed a successful electric washing machine that soon became a leader in the industry.⁷ By 1913 Grinnell could even boast of hosting an airplane manufacturer.⁸

Perhaps most distinctive was the presence of a college whose reputation reached across the country. An article in the 1913 *New York Times* described Grinnell College as “small...in the number of its students, but large in ideas and personalities.” The then-president of the College, John H. T. Main, emphasized the modern, progressive orientation of the college, remarking to the *Times* reporter that “Grinnell College is a democratic institution... What higher purpose,” he asked rhetorically, “can a college have than to be a school of citizenship?”⁹ Referencing this article, a Grinnell newspaper quoted the New York reporter as having characterized Grinnell “as the college of the new era... Grinnell, he thought, was leading in the things that are new and truly American.”¹⁰ In partial fulfillment of this ambition, the College regularly brought to town artists, scholars, and political activists whose presentations helped orient Grinnell toward all the important issues of the day. For example, in 1912, William Allen White, the “Sage of Emporia” and Middle America’s icon of progressivism, delivered the commencement address at the

⁷ “Thompson Bros. Co. Will be the Grinnell Washing Machine Co.,” *GH* 1/21/1910, 2. The Laundry Queen electric washer became the firm’s most famous product; see *Smith’s Directory of Grinnell and Poweshiek County* (Dorchester, MA, 2000), endpaper).

⁸ “Grinnell Aeroplane Company Formed,” *GH* 12/5/1913, 1; “Robinson Will Build Air Ships Here,” *Grinnell Register* (hereafter *GR*), 12/8/1913, 1.

⁹ “The Big Work That Is Done By a Small College,” *New York Times*, 11/30/1913.

¹⁰ “Grinnell Featured in New York Times,” *GH* 12/5/1913, 4.

College, urging graduates to apply their education to social justice; and in 1916 Emmeline Pankhurst came to town to argue for women's suffrage, yet another "modern" idea then still unfulfilled in America.¹¹ Indeed, life in Grinnell gave every evidence of embracing modernity. Reporting in 1910 on new sidewalks, a storm sewer project, street paving, and a host of new residences and factories, the newspaper described the town as "better, cleaner and more modern" in every respect.¹²

Among the men who benefitted from the economic burst and who also helped fashion Grinnell into a "progressive" town were B. J. Ricker and Jesse Fellows. Both graduated from Grinnell College, and both settled in Grinnell where they prospered tremendously in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Both fit the model of architecture patron that de Wit perceived in bankers: if conservative in business, they were nevertheless very active in community affairs and saw themselves as socially progressive. Advocates of modernity, including the automobile, the airplane, and paved roads, they were also captains of industry and land speculators. Occupying prominent social profiles, these men also set out to use architecture to color in their progressive credentials. Ricker, who played a key role in bringing Louis Sullivan to design Merchants National Bank and who also brought Walter Burley Griffin to town, seems to have had a firmer grasp on architecture's trajectory. Fellows, who worked alongside Ricker in many Grinnell organizations and whose own home rose almost directly across the street from Ricker's Griffin-designed home, was probably less sensitive to the changes that Sullivan and the Prairie school architects championed. As a result, the home that he had built

¹¹ "William Allen White Makes Fine Address," *GH* 6/14/1912, 1; "Grinnell Welcomes a Famous Woman," *GH* 5/19/1916, 1.

¹² "City Will Be Much Improved," *GH* 4/15/1910, 4.

owed more to the nineteenth century and to European architecture than to the distinctly American architecture evident in Griffin's Ricker house. Nevertheless, both were men of a new mold who used their wealth to attract prominent architects to design the houses that would confirm their patrons' standing in the modern world. But later, on the heels of a financial contraction not of their making, both men also suffered financial ruin in the 1920s. The crisis destroyed their wealth, dethroned them from the social prominence they had enjoyed, and finally deprived them of the architecturally distinctive homes that their wealth had purchased.

The Patrons

Benjamin Jewett Ricker, next-to-youngest of ten children in the household of Edward and Clara Swarthout Ricker, was born in Grinnell in 1868.¹³ He attended Grinnell schools, and then enrolled in Grinnell College, graduating in 1891.¹⁴ In late 1897 he married Mabel Tompkins, an Oak Park woman who had attended the Oberlin Academy and had taught at a Froebel kindergarten in Chicago.¹⁵ A few years earlier two of his brothers-in-law had acquired a portion of the Grinnell Glove Manufacturing Company, so that, upon graduation from college, young Ricker began working at the firm. By 1895 B. J. had risen to become part-owner, and, after enlarging his share ten

¹³ "The Updated Swartwout Chronicles," <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=ldygen&id=I00738> (accessed April 15, 2012).

¹⁴ Grinnell College Libraries, Special Collections, Biographical Files, 1800- , Box R, Folder 52, pR42b.

¹⁵ *General Catalogue of Oberlin College 1833-1908* (Oberlin, 1909), 983. Friedrich Froebel is usually credited with having invented kindergarten, and is perhaps best known through his influence on the young Frank Lloyd Wright. American reception of his play-oriented, regimented curriculum cooled early in the twentieth century. On these matters, see Norman Brosterman, *Inventing Kindergarten* (New York, 1997) and Michael Steven Shapiro, *Child's Garden: The Kindergarten Movement from Froebel to Dewey* (University Park, 1983).

years later, the firm was renamed after Ricker and his brother-in-law, David S. Morrison. With several patents in hand and benefiting from a prospering economy in the first years of the twentieth century, Morrison-Ricker did quite well; a 1906 addition more than doubled the size of the factory.¹⁶ Business success earned Ricker membership in the Poweshiek Club, a gathering of local movers and shakers, and Ricker seemed to have contacts throughout the town.¹⁷ Member of the Kiwanis Club, a Mason, and an important member of the Grinnell Congregational Church, Ricker therefore exerted considerable influence in town, a circumstance that brought him to the attention of the Grinnell College Board of Trustees.¹⁸ It was no surprise, then, that in 1910 he was elected a college trustee, occupying the spot vacated by one of Grinnell's most revered figures, Dr. E. W. Clark, who had died in February 1910.¹⁹

[Photo of Grinnell Glove Factory approximately here]

[Photo of B. J. Ricker approximately here]

In the first two decades of the century, Ricker proved himself a very visible and active participant in Grinnell's civic affairs. Elected alderman in 1905, Ricker played a large part in modernizing Grinnell's downtown, bringing sidewalks to the muddy

¹⁶ "A New Factory Building," *GH* 11/2/1906, 1. W. J. Nelson, "Morrison-Ricker Mfg. Co.," *GH* 1/2/1925. David Morrison had filed an early patent on glove design, and B. J. Ricker himself had filed additional patents in 1904, 1907, and finally in 1924. See http://www.statelibraryofiaowa.org/cgi-bin/patents/browse/patents.cgi?county_id=157&place_id=1486 (accessed May 6, 2012).

¹⁷ See the 1913 photograph of the Poweshiek Club, Grinnell Historical Museum.

¹⁸ "Committees Named," *GH* 1/10/22, 1; "Grinnell Scottish Rite Masonic Club," *GH* 4/15/1924, 3; "Review Work of the Past Year," *GH* 1/8 /1924, 1.

¹⁹ "All Grinnell Mourns a Good Citizen," *GH* 2/18/1910, 1; Grinnell College Archives, RG-TR. Ser. 1.1. Trustees of Iowa College. Minutes of Meetings 1900-1911, 263. Newspaper reports concentrated attention upon the other new trustee, mentioning Ricker's election only as an aside: "Senator Cummins Elected Trustee," *GH* 6/14/1910, 2.

storefronts and arguing for graded roads, the better to keep the mud and runoff away from businesses.²⁰ The controversy that surrounded these actions may have persuaded Ricker to step down when his term expired in 1907, but by that time he was already an influential and well-known citizen of Grinnell.²¹ And his status showed. At the 1910 funeral of the town's most eminent citizen, Dr. Clark, Ricker served as pallbearer along with several local magnates, including banking associates of Clark, a long-time director and vice-president of Merchants National Bank.²² The preceding year Ricker himself was elected a director of Merchants National, and therefore participated directly in the bank's expansion in these years.²³ A report published in March 1909, for example, noted that the bank had passed the one-million-dollar mark in total assets.²⁴ Within a year the bank purchased a new home, the newspaper reporting that "the constantly increasing business of the bank is making larger quarters imperative." More than that, like many of their progressive parallels in the Midwest, directors of Merchants National felt the need for a building devoted exclusively to banking, "a modern and up-to-date banking room suitable to the growing town."²⁵

²⁰ "Republican Caucus," *GH* 3/14/1905, 3; "Republican City Ticket Wins," *GH* 3/21/1905, 2; "Mayor Coutts Inducted into Office," *GH* 4/4/1905, 1; "New City Council Meets and Organizes," *GH* ??:/1905, X; "An Explanation of Grinnell's Grading System," *GH* 10/13/1905, 2; "B. Schreiner Writes About the City Grade," *GH* 7/20/1906, 1; "Take a Junketing Trip," *GH* 7/27/1906, 2; "City Officers Visit Iowa City," *GH* 7/31/1906, 2.

²¹ "Election Proclamation," *GH* 3/15/1907, 2.

²² S. J. Pooley was a director and cashier of Grinnell Savings Bank; G. H. Hamlin held the same offices at Merchants National Bank.

²³ Ricker's name first appears in the bank's newspaper advertising in February, 1909, but I found no published report of his election, which must have happened in January, 1909; see *GH* 2/16/1909, 4.

²⁴ "Merchants National Passes Million Mark," *GH* 3/5/1909, 1.

²⁵ "Merchants Nat'l Buys Building," *GH* 2/1/1910, 2.

The association with Dr. Clark and the bank helped propel Ricker into the literal reconstruction of the town around this image of modernity. Within a month of Clark's death, a group of those "most intimately associated with Dr. Clark during his lifetime" gathered to commit to funding a memorial. At the head of the committee to determine a location and design of the memorial was B. J. Ricker.²⁶ By August the committee had not only decided upon a fountain as a suitable memorial, but had also selected an architect whom they brought to town to discuss siting and design: "Walter B. Griffin, the well-known landscape architect of Chicago."²⁷

[photo of Clark Fountain approximately here]

The fountain was completed by mid-summer 1911, having required three tons of cement and a total expenditure of about \$900.²⁸ Much more important, however, was Ricker's commissioning Griffin to design him a new home at the northern edge of Grinnell. By late summer, the Grinnell newspaper reported that Ricker had let contracts for the construction, which had already begun. "When finished," the article continued, Ricker's new home "will be one of the finest residences in the city, costing in the neighborhood of fifteen thousand dollars," a colossal sum in an age when most new houses in Grinnell cost no more than four thousand dollars.²⁹ Situated at the far northern edge of town in the still undeveloped Merrill's Third Addition, the new home distinguished itself not only by its location but also by its design. Ricker House exemplifies many of the outstanding features of Prairie School architecture—a brick and

²⁶ "Clark Memorial Is Given Start," *GH* 3/18/1910, 1.

²⁷ "Location of the Clark Memorial Fountain Decided," *GH* 8/16/1910, 1.

²⁸ "Clark Memorial Fountain in Place by November 10," *GH* 10/21/1910, 1; "Final Touch on Memorial Fountain," *GH* 6/23/1911, 1.

²⁹ "B. J. Ricker Will Build This Fall," *GH* 8/31/1911, 1.

concrete building with a distinctly horizontal orientation; long, overhanging eaves; “ribbons” of windows along both the first and second floors; and the trademark open design of the first-floor living space. If concrete piers at the corners firmly ground the house, brilliant Teco tiles decorate the exterior face and craftsman-inspired windows and sleeping porches embedded in the piers open the inhabitants to the natural world.³⁰

[photo of Ricker House approximately here]

[photo of Walter Burley Griffin approximately here]

It did not harm Ricker’s reputation at all that his architect gained international fame at almost the same moment as his house was completed. “W. B. Griffin is National Figure,” read the page-one headline in the *Grinnell Herald*, and the article easily joined Griffin’s newly-won fame with the hometown man who had had the vision to appoint Griffin to design his home. Noting that Griffin had been the guest of B. J. Ricker the previous week, the paper observed that Griffin had become “a man of international reputation by his success in the competition for a plan for the yet unborn capital city of Australia.” Borrowing from articles in several other publications, the Grinnell newspaper left little doubt that Ricker’s young architect was helping chart the course of the twentieth century. The house he had designed in Grinnell and the man who had commissioned it belonged to that same progressive wave of the future.³¹

Of course, Ricker’s prominence was noticeable even before his new home went up. When the Grinnell Club was founded in 1909, for example, Ricker was named a

³⁰ For a fuller analysis and history of the building, see Paul Kruty, “The Griffins in Grinnell,” in *Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin in Grinnell* (Grinnell, 2011), 21-35.

³¹ “W. B. Griffin Is National Figure,” *GH* 9/24/1912, 1.

trustee along with other Grinnell titans.³² The Grinnell Commercial Club had a longer history, but early in the twentieth century B. J. Ricker was one of its most prominent officers, helping direct the club's efforts in behalf of local commerce.³³ Before the automobile came to dominate traffic and while horse-drawn vehicles were still common, the Commercial Club advocated the liberal disposition around town of hitch racks, which the club—at Ricker's motion—ultimately funded.³⁴ Street paving proved even more important to Grinnell, and looked toward a town increasingly in the thrall of the automobile. Local businessmen took an activist stance on this matter as well, and again B. J. Ricker occupied a prominent position in the debate, being named chairman of the committee charged with examining paving alternatives.³⁵ Having recommended bitulithic paving, the committee saw its work rapidly accepted, and during the summer of 1910 paving the previously muddy Grinnell streets was well underway (including a large part of Broad Street along which Ricker would soon raise his own new home).³⁶ A logical outgrowth of paved streets was increased attention toward automobiles, and again Ricker was prominent among proponents. For example, when in late 1910 A. L. Westergarde

³² "Grinnell Club is Organized," *GH* 2/19/1909, 1.

³³ No later than 1909 Ricker was named a director, and was reelected in 1910: "Commercial Club Tuesday Evening," *GH* 2/25/1910, 1; "Commercial Club Boosts for Grinnell at Annual Meeting," *GH* 3/4/1910, 1. One of the club's 1909 meetings featured a talk by the recently-arrived businessman-booster, G. C. Janney, whose real estate speculation drew the attention of J. L. Fellows ("Corn Contest Next Week," *GH* 1/5/1909, 1).

³⁴ "Commercial Club in Busy Session," *GH* 4/1/1910, 1.

³⁵ Ricker also advocated installing a boulevard along the length of Broad Street, a plan justified as "beautification." But in the face of considerable opposition the City Council dropped the idea. "Ask for Boulevard on Broad Street," *GH* 7/6/1909, 1; "Wider Paving Granted; Boulevard is Killed," *GH* 7/13/1909, 1.

³⁶ "Paving Com. Went to St. Louis Yesterday," *GH* 4/9/1909, 4; "Bitulithic Paving is Recommended by the Business Men's Committee," *GH* 4/16/1909, 1; "Schedule for 4th Paving District," *GH* 7/13/1910, 1. An 1898 photo of Main Street spoofs the muddy streets by prohibiting duck hunting there (*Grinnell Then and Now* [Grinnell, 1994], 94).

drove into Grinnell as part of his effort to map a transcontinental automotive route for the Touring Club of America, B. J. Ricker, an early owner of his own automobile, was among those who greeted him and then drove out of town with him, accompanying him as far as Newton.³⁷ And when local businessmen incorporated a Grinnell business to produce airplanes (perhaps the best indicator of modernity) Ricker was part of the founding group.³⁸ Numerous other matters of civic interest involved Ricker, making him the man of influence and progress idealized as the modern banker.³⁹

[Photo of Grinnell Glove Co. Advertisement approximately here]

But as the Midwestern economy cooled after World War I, business began to flag for Ricker's glove factory, thanks in part to a loss of government military orders, but also because of the rise of the enclosed automobile.⁴⁰ Some of the best-selling items of the Morrison-Ricker Glove factory were the "Rist-Fit" gloves favored by those operating open automobiles or buggies, but the more protective cabins of new automobile design undercut business.⁴¹ Despite the slow-down, the company's public face remained determinedly upbeat. A Grinnell newspaper article from late 1923, for example, claimed that the "Glove Factory is Going Fine." According to the report (which seems to have

³⁷ "Transcontinental Road This Way," *GH* 11/1/1910, 1.

³⁸ "Grinnell Aeroplane Company Formed," *GH* 12/5/1913, 1; "Robinson Will Build Air Ships Here," *GR* 12/8/1913, 1.

³⁹ In 1910 Ricker was named treasurer of the Charity Organization of Grinnell; in 1911 he was elected parks commissioner; in 1914 he was named a director of the Grinnell Country Club Company; and in 1918 he was a very public agitator in behalf of a municipal hospital ("Charity Association Elects Officers at Annual Meeting," *GH* 12/20/1910, 1; "Tickets Named For the City Election," *GH* 3/17/1911, 1; "A Holding Company Formed," *GR* 4/30/1914, 1; "Now Press Canvass," *GR* 8/2/1918, 1).

⁴⁰ Veta Smith, "The Glove Industry in Grinnell, Iowa, 1856-1974," unpublished paper dated July 1988, 13, available at Drake Community Library (Grinnell), Local History Room, Pamphlet file of "Morrison Glove Factory."

⁴¹ A reproduction of a 1909 ad for "Rist-Fit" gloves can be found at <http://www.american-automobiles.com/Carey.html> (accessed April 15, 2012).

depended upon someone inside the company), at that very moment the company was enjoying “one of the biggest rushes in its history,” so that, even if no new orders came in, the work force would be hard-put to fill by Christmas all orders now on the books.⁴²

Despite the brio, glove company officers had reason to be worried—business at the factory was far from “fine.” Already early in 1923 Ricker knew that the business was in trouble, and he set out to save it by absorbing another manufacturer who used hides. The idea was to build upon existing lines of supply and worker skill so as to expand product diversity. At the suggestion of one of his Chicago bankers, in spring of 1923 Ricker visited the Tullahoma, Tennessee headquarters of Lannom Manufacturing, a maker of baseballs. In exchange for acquiring the company and its assets, Ricker offered Lannom shares in the enlarged Morrison-Ricker firm. After confirming the financial well-being of the Grinnell business, Lannom signed on, and soon moved to Grinnell with his family. Some part of the Tullahoma production moved to Grinnell, although the Tennessee plant continued to operate.⁴³ Late in 1923 Morrison-Ricker modified its corporate charter to provide for a much larger capitalization, presumably to account for Lannom’s share.⁴⁴

But according to Lannom’s biographer, what Ricker did not disclose was that at the time Lannom entered the firm, Morrison-Ricker owed almost \$300,000 to the First National Bank of Chicago and owed the government more than \$90,000 in back taxes.⁴⁵ Evidence of the obligation to First National remains elusive, but a 1925 case from the

⁴² “Glove Factory is Going Fine,” *GR* 10/1/1923, 1.

⁴³ “Buys Big Business,” *GH* 5/29/1923, 1.

⁴⁴ “Legal Notices. Morrison-Ricker Mfg. Co. Notice of Amendment to Articles of Incorporation,” *GH* 1/4/1924, 7.

⁴⁵ Neil A. Hamilton, *Visions of Worth: The Life of G. S. Lannom, Jr., Independent Entrepreneur* (Solon, Iowa, 1988), 65-68.

Board of Tax Appeals confirmed the commissioner's judgment that Morrison-Ricker, thanks to some dubious accounting procedures, owed the federal government \$93,000.⁴⁶ Whatever the exact size of the company's indebtedness, it is clear that the business was in trouble. Lannom, placed in charge of manufacturing, set about a radical course of downsizing and re-negotiating outstanding debt, with the result that the firm was saved and enjoyed revived fortunes in the late 1920s.⁴⁷ Exactly what happened to Ricker is not evident; on the face of it, he owed Lannom a great deal, and might have extracted himself by yielding his shares of Morrison-Ricker. A 1929 article in the *Grinnell Herald*, attempting to explain the change of leadership in the company, could only say that, "A year or two following the combine [with Lannom Manufacturing], B. J. Ricker, unwilling to remain with the company under the poor business conditions, was forced to give up his interests."⁴⁸

At about the same time, another of Ricker's financial interests collapsed. In early 1924, the *Grinnell Herald* reported that Merchants National Bank had reelected its ten directors, among them B. J. Ricker.⁴⁹ Throughout the first three quarters of the year the bank reported its assets and liabilities as usual, without any hint of problem.⁵⁰ Rather

⁴⁶ Appeal of Morrison-Ricker Manufacturing Co., 2 B.T.A. 1008.

⁴⁷ Hamilton, *Visions*, 68-69; "Glove Factory Going Well," *GH* 4/30/1929, 1; in a 1992 interview, Dorothy Lannom put it more succinctly: "Mr. Lannom took over the glove factory and made a success of it" (Dorothy Lannom, oral interview, 3/5/1992, "Voices From the Past: The Depression and World War II Oral History Project," Valerie Vetter, Project Director, Drake Community Library, Grinnell, Iowa). On the firm's improved status in the late 1920s, see "Glove Company Gets Big Order from the Army," *GR* 4/14/1927, 1; "Glove Factory Sales Increase During Spring," *GR* 4/26/1928, 1; "Glove Factory Is Working on Government Contract," *GR* 5/31/1928, 1.

⁴⁸ "The Morrison-Ricker Factory," *GH* 11/19/1929, 2.

⁴⁹ "Nat'l Banks Hold Annual Meetings," *GH* 1/8/1924, 4.

⁵⁰ See the "Report on the Condition of the Merchants National Bank," *GH* 1/4/1924, 4; *GH* 10/14/1924, 4.

suddenly, however, on November first the bank failed, locking its doors to customers. Initial newspaper reports spoke hopefully of local attempts to revive the bank, but soon a federal receiver arrived to administer the closing and distribution of assets.⁵¹ In January 1925 yet another bank—Grinnell Savings Bank—went under, a victim of depositors’ anxiety in the wake of the failure of Merchants National.⁵² The bank closings were a disaster for the town, of course, and put a severe crimp in local commerce. Things got so bad that in mid-February 1925 the *Herald* sponsored a “Pay Your Bills Day,” hoping to put more money into circulation and avoid a deeper crisis.⁵³

Before the year was out, Grinnell Savings Bank was resurrected as Grinnell State Bank, but Merchants National never did recover, and the receiver began repaying depositors a small proportion of their losses.⁵⁴ The directors, however, who constituted major shareholders in the bank, enjoyed a less happy outcome, losing all their investment. Worse than that, in 1926 the receiver of Merchants National took the directors to court,

⁵¹ “Merchants Nat’l Bank Closed,” *GH* 11/4/1924, 1; “Hope to Reopen Merchants Nat’l,” *GH* 11/7/1924, 1; “Big Depositors’ Meeting at High School Saturday,” *GH* 12/2/1924, 1; “Stock in Proposed New Bank Went on Sale This Morning,” *GH* 12/26/1924, 1. The first payments to depositors did not occur until about a year after the bank folded; see “First Checks Ready to Hand Over,” *GH* 11/3/1925, 1.

⁵² “Grinnell Savings Bank is Closed,” *GH* 1/20/1925, 1; “To the People of Grinnell,” *GH* 1/16/25, 1. Citizens National Bank managed to survive the crisis, and in late 1925 purchased the Sullivan-designed building in which Merchants National had been housed, paying the bargain-basement price of \$25,000 (“Citizens National to Increase Capital Stock Fifty Per Cent,” *GH* 12/29/1925, 1).

⁵³ “Pay Your Bills Next Monday,” *GH* 2/13/1925, 1; “Pay Your Bills February 16,” *GH* 7; “Many Bills Were Paid Monday,” *GH* 2/20/1925, 1. The explosion of farm property values in the years before 1920 seems to explain much of the high rate of failure among Midwestern banks in these years. See Lee J. Alston, Wayne A. Grove, and David C. Wheelock, “Why Do Banks Fail? Evidence from the 1920s,” *Explorations in Economic History* 31(1994):409-31.

⁵⁴ “New Bank Has Great Opening,” *GH* 10/23/1925, 1; “First Checks Ready to Hand Over,” *GH* 11/3/1925, 1.

alleging that they had knowingly extended loans that violated banking regulations.⁵⁵

Strangely, Ricker's name does not appear among the directors finally held liable for some \$120,000; how Ricker escaped the suit is not known, but there is no doubt that by the time the bank failed he was no longer the rich man he once was.⁵⁶

For a time, Ricker continued to enjoy the confidence of those around him. In May, 1921, for instance, Ricker was reelected to a new six-year term on the Grinnell College's Board and he was reelected to the Board's Executive and Finance Committees, putting him at the heart of the college's business and investing him with the trustees' confidence.⁵⁷ Others in the community seem to have had the same view: in early 1924 the Congregational Church elected Ricker to a three-year term as trustee; the Commercial Club appointed Ricker to a committee intended to recruit new industries to town; and the newly-formed "Committee of Twenty," charged with helping Grinnell stave off

⁵⁵ "Bank Case Is Now On Trial," *GH* 3/15/29, 1; "Bank Directors Must Defend Suit," *GH* 10/29/1926, 4; D. H. Thomas, Receiver Merchants National Bank of Grinnell, Iowa v. Fred E. Spaulding et al., Equity no. 4346, U. S. District Court for the Central (Des Moines) Division of the Southern District of Iowa, RG 21, NARA—Central Plains Region (Kansas City).

⁵⁶ The *Chicago Tribune* once called Ricker a "millionaire" and "fabulously rich." See "'Perfect' Twins Find Fairyland," *Chicago Tribune* 1/29/1919, 1, 7. Among the bank's ten directors, only Ricker and J. C. Manly were not named in the suit. Inasmuch as the directors seem to have appointed subcommittees of directors to oversee bank activity, it is conceivable that Ricker and Manly did not serve in that function over the several years that the suit concerned, and therefore escaped culpability for the bad loans. However, in an earlier suit filed against the bank by Poweshiek County, complaining about mismanagement of county deposits, Ricker's name appears in the list of directors. See D. H. Thomas, Receiver Merchants National Bank of Grinnell, Iowa v. Poweshiek County, Equity no. 4337, U.S. District Court for the Central (Des Moines) Division of the Southern District of Iowa, RG 21, NARA—Central Plains Region (Kansas City).

⁵⁷ Grinnell College Archives, Minutes of Grinnell College Board of Trustees, 1911-1928, 75.

impending crisis, included Ricker among its members.⁵⁸ On the face of it, therefore, Ricker carried on as before.

Beneath this placid surface, serious financial storms were brewing. Well before the bank collapse, the Grinnell College Board of Trustees first learned of Ricker's troubles. At the May 27, 1922 meeting of the Board's Finance Committee trustees heard about one of Ricker's problems: "Mr. Ricker stated that he had an 80 acre farm, improved and in crop in Idaho, on which he wished a loan of \$4000 to pay off a loan of similar amount." The minutes reveal little about the context, and merely report that the motion for a five-year loan at 7% was approved.⁵⁹ Despite the apparently routine approval, trustees might have wondered why Ricker, a director of one of Grinnell's own banks and to this point among the Board's most generous supporters, had applied to the Board to help fund a private holding. If this question had arisen, the answer was soon only too apparent. In November 1924 Merchants National Bank, of which Ricker was a long-time director, failed, and with the bank's failure the college lost an unspecified sum. Trustee minutes report only that the Executive Committee agreed to sign the depositors' agreement requested by the bank's receiver and advertised in Grinnell newspapers. When the bank failed to recover, the board wrote off the stock lost through Merchants National collapse.⁶⁰

Worse news soon confronted trustees. When they authorized a capital campaign in 1919, trustees had agreed to underwrite the campaign themselves with personal

⁵⁸ "Review Work of the Past Year," *GH* 1/8/1924, 1; "Commercial Club Plans for Year," *GH* 2/8/1924, 1; and "Committee of Twenty to Meet," *GH* 1/11/1924, 1.

⁵⁹ Grinnell College Archives, Minutes of the Grinnell College Board of Trustees, Executive Committee Minutes 1911-1928, 435.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 489, 108. Initially trustees had agreed to pay the assessment imposed upon the bank's shareholders and announced in the newspaper (*GH* 12/5/1924, 5).

pledges that totaled \$42,000. Ricker was one of four who pledged the largest sum—\$5000.⁶¹ At its meeting on May 4, 1925, however, the Board’s Executive Committee heard the treasurer read a proposal that could only have confirmed growing suspicions about Ricker’s situation. In exchange for the college surrendering to him his \$5000 pledge to the 1919 Endowment Fund, Ricker proposed to deed to the college a Poweshiek County farm that he owned. The terse language of the minutes covers what was likely an awkward discussion: “The farm being considerably encumbered it was voted to ask the Treasurer to look up the deal further and report.”⁶² The requested report never appeared in the minutes, presumably because at the June 8, 1925 meeting of the full board, Ricker resigned.⁶³ Although painful, the decision to quit must have seemed inescapable, especially since Ricker was already liable to the college for monies loaned him previously. Perhaps speaking precisely to this point, at the next-to-last Board meeting that Ricker attended, trustees approved a resolution “that henceforth no loans of any kind or character be made of the funds of the College to any member of its Board of Trustees nor to any officers of the Board.” The text went on to call on those—like Ricker—who had such loans to pay them off “at the earliest convenient moment.”⁶⁴ As became plain soon enough, Ricker was quite simply unable to repay the loan; when the Board’s Finance

⁶¹ Minutes of the Grinnell College Board of Trustees, 1911-1928, 61. Ricker was not always a generous donor to the college. In the year prior to his appointment to the Board of Trustees, alumnus Ricker donated only \$600 whereas trustees like Dr. E. W. Clark (\$5000), H. W. Spaulding (\$13,000), and James Smith (\$25,000) gave much more. Even his fellow-alumnus, Jesse Fellows, gave more generously (\$2000) (“Givers to Iowa College Endowment,” *GH* 6/1/1909, 4).

⁶² Grinnell College Archives, Minutes of the Grinnell College Board of Trustees, Dec. 1928-Jan. 1944; Executive Committee Minutes, July 1928-Feb. 1944, 494. The farm was located northeast of town, according to a brief 1923 newspaper notice that reported that Ricker’s renter was leaving for another farm (*GH* 2/9/1923, 8).

⁶³ Minutes of the Grinnell College Board of Trustees, 1911-1928, 116.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 105.

Committee convened in May 1932 to review the college's financial health, Ricker's 1922 loan for \$4000 remained on the books, still unpaid.⁶⁵

Other evidence of Ricker's troubles connects directly with the Griffin-designed home on North Broad Street. When the Grinnell newspaper in November 1925 published the Delinquent Tax List, B. J. Ricker shared the shame with many others.⁶⁶ The next year Ricker's name appeared again, evidently at least in part a consequence of difficulties he had clearing title to all three lots on which Ricker House stood.⁶⁷ The abstract of title indicates that in 1912 Benjamin and Mabel Ricker took out a \$6000 mortgage for lot 2, Merrill's Third Addition, the site on which their new home was built. In 1922, just as hard times began to affect the local economy (and the same year he obtained a loan from the college for his Idaho property), Ricker negotiated a five-year extension on the mortgage; full payment was due August 1, 1927.⁶⁸

Meanwhile, Ricker attempted to sell the house. But with the local economy in the doldrums, selling a high-end property was not easy, forcing Ricker to seek income from renting. Lannom's biographer contends that Ricker offered to sell Lannom the house for \$8500, but that, when Lannom refused, he rented it to him instead (for \$50 a month).⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Minutes of Grinnell College Board of Trustees. Dec. 1928-Jan. 1944, 27. Ricker finally deeded this property over to the college August 20, 1934. In his original request, Ricker assessed the 83-acre farm, complete with a frame bungalow, a 24x32 barn, a 12x20 hen house, and a 400-bushel granary, as being worth \$14,800. But the Idaho bank cut his estimate by two-thirds (Grinnell College Archives, RG-DEV Ser. 5.2, Wills and Trusts, Ricker, B. J.).

⁶⁶ "Delinquent Tax List," *GH* 11/13/1925, 7.

⁶⁷ "Delinquent Tax List," *GH* 11/26/1926, 6.

⁶⁸ Abstract of Title to 1510 Broad Street, paragraph 12, dated August 1, 1922; filed August 7, 1922. My thanks to the Grinnell College Treasurer's Office for permitting me to consult the title abstract.

⁶⁹ In the 1915 Iowa State Census, Ricker valued his home at \$14,000, and acknowledged an "incumbrance" of \$6000, which must have been the original mortgage (microfilm of

Only in June 1926, about a year after Ricker fled Grinnell, did he sell the house (situated mostly on lot 2) to Harold L. Beyer, “except existing mortgages of record.”⁷⁰ Even then, the sale was not complete. As the 1922 fire insurance map demonstrates, parts of the house stretched out into lots one and three on either side of the main structure, but Ricker had never paid off the loan for these lots.⁷¹

The abstract of title reports that in December 1929 the executor of the G. W. Merrill estate announced a forfeiture of contract

entered into between G. W. Merrill and his wife and B. J. Ricker, 3 February 1909, under the terms of which contract the said B. J. Ricker was to receive title to Lots One (1) and Three (3) of Block One (1) of Merrill’s Third Addition to Grinnell...upon payment by him of the purchase price, Twenty-nine hundred dollars with interest thereon at six per cent per annum, payable annually from the date of said contract...That according

Iowa State Census, Roll IA1915_427, Line B284). To judge from Grinnell telephone books, however, the first renter was not Lannom but a certain T. B. Turner, who is listed in the 1927 book as residing at 1510 Broad Street. Lannom did live in the house, but apparently only after Beyer bought it; the 1930, 1931, 1932, and 1933 directories all list Lannom as residing in Ricker House.

⁷⁰ Abstract of Title to 1510 Broad Street, paragraph 13, dated June 30, 1926; filed July 10, 1926. Beyer and Ricker were good friends as well as fellow tennis enthusiasts. In 1911, for example, Mr. and Mrs. Beyer joined the Rickers for several days in Chicago (*GR* 3/23/1911, 4), and in summer 1914 Beyer and Ricker often played tennis in behalf of Grinnell, at least once “on Ricker’s and Beyer’s courts,” both located on the east side of Broad Street and separated by less than a block (*GR* 8/24/1914, 1). Inasmuch as Beyer himself left Grinnell in 1925 for Chicago, his purchase of Ricker’s home may have been as much an expression of friendship as anything else.

⁷¹ *Grinnell, Iowa, Poweshiek County* (New York, 1922).

to the terms of said contract, the entire indebtedness has long since been due, and no interest paid thereon since February 3, 1923.⁷²

Ricker, by then living in Chico, California, was served with this notice, but allowed the loan to remain unpaid, so that in May 1933 the executor of Merrill's estate claimed ownership to the two lots (on one of which now stood the Ricker House garage), and sought permission to sell the property. Appraisals and sale were authorized, so that only in June 1933 did Harold Beyer gain title to the two additional lots, all this a consequence of Beyer's own effort to sell Ricker House that June. Consequently, Ricker extricated himself from debts against his Broad Street home only in the summer of 1933.⁷³

By this time, the Rickers had long left Grinnell. In June 1925 the *Grinnell Herald* reported that B. J. Ricker had left for California to explore new business possibilities. By late July both local newspapers confirmed that Mrs. Ricker and the twins would move to Los Angeles to join B. J., who evidently never returned to Grinnell. "Mr. Ricker," the *Grinnell Register* announced, "has allied himself with the Lincoln Life Insurance Co., and will have charge of a special department there. It is a good position as the company is a strong one and Mr. Ricker's department is one of importance."⁷⁴ Before long, Ricker wrote the *Grinnell Herald* to report that the family was living in a typical southern California bungalow, that the children were settled in a good school, and that recently they had all enjoyed an excursion to see the wonders of the La Brea tar pits.⁷⁵

⁷² Abstract of Title to 1510 Broad Street, paragraph 32, dated December 14, 1929; filed June 26, 1933.

⁷³ Ibid., paragraphs 33-40, dated between May 1 and July 21, 1933, and filed between June 20 and August 15, 1933.

⁷⁴ "B. J. Ricker Family Will Move to California," *GH* 7/28/1925, 1; "Rickers Will Make Home in Los Angeles," *GR* 7/30/1925, 1.

⁷⁵ "B. J. Ricker Writes Interesting Letter," *GH* 9/25/1925, 1.

Readers of the *Grinnell Register* may well have wondered why Ricker, whom the paper called “one of [Grinnell’s] most prominent and active businessmen,” left town so abruptly, and why he headed for California, of all places.⁷⁶ In February 1924, at a time when Grinnell’s economy was experiencing precipitous decline, the *Grinnell Herald* published a fairly long article about the disappointment that would meet anyone fleeing to California in search of better jobs. According to the newspaper (which admitted having cribbed its information from the Buffalo *Labor Journal*), “a rush of workers westward, coming by train and automobile in a never ending stream” found, instead of a plentiful jobs, “three hundred men camped on the trail of every job.” Cataloging the situation in various fields of employment, the paper observed that “All is Not Roses and Sunshine” in California.⁷⁷

Despite warnings like this, Ricker decided to try his luck in California. Exactly how he justified the decision will probably never be known, but the delays that attached to cleaning up debts he left behind confirm that no financial boon attended the move to California. How did Ricker deal with all this? Nothing so far discovered proves the point, but it is easy to believe that B. J. Ricker, having ridden the crest of monetary success and social prominence in the first two decades of the twentieth century, felt disappointed at having been driven from these elevated positions by the vagaries of the business cycle. Ricker, a thoroughly modern, progressive man—successful businessman and banker, partisan of the automobile and paved streets, activist in behalf of community progress, and patron of modern architecture—had to reconcile himself to a distinctly less happy fate in his last years.

⁷⁶ “Rickers Will Make Home in Los Angeles,” *GR* 7/30/1925, 1.

⁷⁷ “300 Men For Every Job in California,” *GH* 2/19/1924, 10.

Small wonder, then, that Ricker and his wife continued to look back on their Broad Street home with fond memories. In 1932, Ricker wrote from Chico, California to a Sullivan biographer, disabusing him of the suspicion that Sullivan was responsible for his Grinnell home, emphasizing the fame of Walter Burley Griffin, the actual architect.⁷⁸ When an Australian relation visited San Francisco in 1943, the Rickers—then living in a modest, 27-apartment building on Dwight Way in Berkeley—welcomed the guest to their apartment, and enthused not about their present quarters, but about the Grinnell house they had deserted some twenty years earlier. According to the visitor’s diary, “Mrs. Ricker could not refrain from remarking about the wonderful home they had had before the depression. . . , designed, so we were proudly told, by Griffiths [sic]—the man who planned Canberra.”⁷⁹ As late as 1954 while living as a widow in Berkeley, California, Mrs. Ricker continued to identify strongly with her Grinnell home, and took the time to write to the Grinnell newspaper to correct some information about local architecture. Then eighty years of age, Mrs. Ricker wrote to point out that the Rickers’ former home on North Broad Street was the design of Walter Burley Griffin, the architect made famous by his design for a new Australian capital.⁸⁰ Consequently, despite all the intervening events in their lives, many of them disappointing and burnished with little of the wealth and fame that they had earlier enjoyed, the one-time Grinnell patrons remained proud of their Griffin-designed home, and looked back on that home with perceptible longing.

⁷⁸ Kruty, “The Griffins in Grinnell,” 22.

⁷⁹ “Ocean Odyssey,” 14, in Claude William Oscar Rosier, “Papers 1926-1993,” National Library of Australia, MS 6863.

⁸⁰ “About Architects,” *Grinnell Herald-Register* (hereafter *GHR*), 6/28/1954, 2.

[photo of Jesse Fellows approximately here]

Unlike Ricker, Jesse Linus Fellows was not born in Grinnell, and enjoyed a much smaller family than had Ricker. Born in 1878 in Vinton, Iowa, Jesse was the youngest child of Elihu and Charlotte Wilder Fellows.⁸¹ The senior Fellows was a photographer in Vinton, but, after moving to Grinnell in 1889, Fellows abandoned photography, ending up as a school custodian instead.⁸² Jesse completed his schooling in Grinnell, and then, like Ricker, enrolled in Grinnell College. Although he left college for a year to fight in the Spanish-American war, Fellows returned to Grinnell and graduated with the class of 1901.⁸³ After receiving his degree, he moved to North Dakota where he got his start in business, unlike his two older siblings, both of whom were educators.⁸⁴ In 1905 he married another Grinnell graduate, Maude Young, and in 1907 they returned to Grinnell, Jesse having purchased a share in what became known as Clark and Fellows lumber yard.⁸⁵ By 1910 he and Maude were living in a fine, frame home at 932 East Street, and very soon Fellows found himself in the company of Grinnell's richest and most powerful

⁸¹ Mark Decatur Fellows, *The Descendants of William Fellows of Ipswich, Massachusetts*, 1635, 99, available at: <http://familytreemaker.genealogy.com/users/f/e/l/Mark-D-Fellows/BOOK-0001/0003-0096.html#IND2044REF87> (accessed April 7, 2012); Drake Community Library Obituary Database, available at <http://grinnell.lib.ia.us/local/obituary-database/> (accessed April 7, 2012).

⁸² *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880. Schedule 1. Inhabitants*. Iowa, Benton County, Taylor Township, Enumeration District 38, page 11.

⁸³ Jesse Fellows, "A Letter from Cuba," *Scarlet and Black*, 1/7/1899.

⁸⁴ The 1900 U.S. census identified brother Ernest as "principle [sic] of high school" and sister Bessie as "teacher" (*Twelfth Census of the United States, Schedule No. 1—Population*. Iowa, Poweshiek County, Grinnell Township, Enumeration District 100, sheet 7B).

⁸⁵ "Married," *GH* 6/30/1905, 2.

men.⁸⁶ Like B. J. Ricker, Fellows was a proponent of modernity. According to an early biographical sketch, Jesse Fellows was “interested in everything that pertains to the welfare and progress of his town....”⁸⁷

Also like Ricker, Jesse Fellows benefited nicely from the economic expansion that enriched the Midwest in the first decades of the twentieth century. Even as a very young man, Fellows was an active investor, a reflection, perhaps, of a time when every initiative seemed to yield money. One early project drew his attention to the north edge of Grinnell where an Ottumwa businessman by the name of G. C. Janney had acquired and platted a block of land known as Janney Addition.⁸⁸ At meetings around town and in interviews with the newspaper, Janney bubbled with enthusiasm for Grinnell’s future. Advertising “Choice Building Lots in the Janney Addition,” the Ottumwa man claimed that they would double in value in two years.⁸⁹ At a meeting with Grinnell businessmen in City Hall in early January, 1909, Janney provided details about the 57 lots he was marketing, and according to the newspaper some of those present immediately purchased lots.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ *Directory of City of Grinnell 1910* (Grinnell, 1910), 21. Surviving records reveal relatively little about Maude Fellows; she was active in various Grinnell clubs and presided over several; she also represented the American Red Cross in Grinnell, and, to judge by the purchase of the property on which their new house was built (see below), she had considerable resources of her own.

⁸⁷ L. F. Parker, “Jesse L. Fellows,” in Parker, *History of Poweshiek County Iowa* (Chicago, 1911), 145.

⁸⁸ “G. Campbell Janney,” in S. B. Evans, *A History of Wapello County, Iowa and Representative Citizens* (Chicago, 1901), 658-59.

⁸⁹ As an example, see the ad in the *GH* 8/6/1909, 4; “Interview Column,” *GH* 1/8/1909, 1.

⁹⁰ “Janney Addition Lots for Sale,” *ibid.*; “Seven Janney Addition Lots Already Sold,” *ibid.*, 2; “Map of Janney’s Addition,” *ibid.*, 4.

If any Grinnell investors were suspicious of all the lather emanating from the newcomer, they soon found themselves justified. In late 1909 Janney was indicted for having secured a bank loan under false pretenses.⁹¹ Meanwhile, two Grinnell banks brought suit against Janney, aiming for a declaration of involuntary bankruptcy. Janney's resistance proved fruitless, and in late November Janney's firm, Grinnell Pad and Blanket, was declared bankrupt, and Janney disappeared from the project to which he had so recently devoted so much enthusiasm.⁹²

However, almost from the moment that Janney appeared in Grinnell, Jesse Fellows and E. W. Clark, Jr. associated themselves with him and his project.⁹³ Early in January 1909 a brief newspaper article observed that Clark and Fellows "have entered into an arrangement with Mr. G. C. Janney to help him dispose of the lots..." and they gave Janney space at their business where, as the occasional newspaper advertisements reported, Janney could be reached.⁹⁴ After Janney's disgrace, Clark and Fellows took possession of the remaining lots, and, after young Clark's death from typhoid fever in

⁹¹ "G. C. Janney is Now Under Indictment," *GH* 9/24/1909, 2. Some years later the criminal charges against were dropped: "Criminal Action Against G. C. Janney Has Been Dismissed," *GH* 12/2/1913, 1.

⁹² "G. C. Janney Case is Continued," *GH* 11/16/1909, 1; "City's Motion in the Wisecarver Case Overruled by the Court," *GH* 11/26/1909, 3; "Grinnell Pad and Blanket Company is Adjudged Bankrupt," *GH* 11/30/1909, 2.

⁹³ Elbert W. Clark, Jr. was the son of Grinnell's long-time doctor, state senator, and Grinnell College trustee. Like Fellows, Elbert Clark, Jr. was a graduate of Grinnell College, graduating with honors in 1900. He and Fellows formed their lumber partnership in 1907 by buying out W. J. Carney and E. B. Brande. Fellows remained part of this business until February, 1909. See Parker, *History of Poweshiek County*, 32-33.

⁹⁴ "Clark & Fellows to Boost New Addition," *GH* 1/12/1909, 3; "Notice," *GH* 1/26/1909, 1. By the time the agreement with Clark & Fellows was filed at the Poweshiek County Courthouse (March 8, 1911), the Pad & Blanket Company had gone broke, and trustees represented what had been Janney's business. See Poweshiek County Courthouse, Recorder, Village Deed Record Book No. 121, 5.

1913, Clark's widow and Fellows continued to sell lots in the Addition through at least 1915.⁹⁵

More importantly, perhaps, the Janney Addition project drew the attention of Walter Burley Griffin, probably when he came to Grinnell in 1910 to plan the memorial for Clark's father, Dr. E. W. Clark. Exactly who asked Griffin to revise the initial plat remains unknown. It is reasonable to assume that the younger Clark, whose name appears on the published version of the plat, commissioned the plan, but that does not exclude Fellows, who might also have tried to interest Griffin in the project. Because both Fellows and B. J. Ricker were members of many of the same clubs in town and were also neighbors—before and after they raised their new houses in north Grinnell—Fellows was sure to have heard from Ricker about Griffin and his visits when planning for the Clark Fountain and later when Griffin designed Ricker's new home.⁹⁶ Unfortunately, Griffin's report on his plat does not reveal who asked him to undertake the project, but he does indicate that the project collapsed because of the difficulty of purchasing back the first eight lots already sold. Since the newspaper reported in early January 1909 that seven lots were sold, it seems likely that Griffin came into contact with Clark and Fellows already during the architect's first visit to Grinnell in 1910 when he discussed the Clark Fountain project. Griffin proposed a radically different plat intended both to save the developers money as well as bring the homes built there into a natural harmony with the

⁹⁵ "Obituary. Elbert W. Clark," *GH* 10/28/1913, 2. On the history of lot sales, see Poweshiek County Courthouse, Auditor's Office, Transfer Book for Janney's Addition, 182-84.

⁹⁶ According to Grinnell city directories, in 1908, Jesse Fellows was living at 928 High Street, while B. J. Ricker, who had lived at 931 and 933 High Street earlier in the century, had moved to 1030 High Street. By 1910, Fellows was living at 932 East Street, one block further away. For the 1913 junior Clark's funeral, J. L. Fellows was one of the pallbearers and B. J. Ricker an usher. "Obituary," 2.

landscape.⁹⁷ As pleasing as this might have been, Griffin's plan was never adopted, although his encounter with Janney Addition investors confirms their interest in progressive architecture, and may have encouraged Jesse Fellows to employ Griffin for his own home.

[photo of Griffin's plat of Janney subdivision approximately here]

Newspapers reported that Griffin was the guest of B. J. Ricker for several days in September, 1912, and that Griffin gave a presentation to the Poweshiek Club, to which both Ricker and Fellows belonged.⁹⁸ Consequently, Fellows had every opportunity and reason to seek a house design from Griffin, especially since in August, 1912 Fellows had acquired the lots on North Broad on which he later raised his new home.⁹⁹ By fall 1912, however, Griffin was contemplating travel to Australia, and in August 1913, when construction on Fellows house was scheduled to begin, Griffin arrived in Sydney.¹⁰⁰ Consequently, even if Fellows had asked Griffin to design his new home, circumstances made this plan unworkable, and Fellows turned instead to a pair of Des Moines architects.

⁹⁷ Walter Burley Griffin, "Clark's Resubdivision of Addition to Grinnell, Iowa. Town Extension," *Western Architect* 19, no. 8 (August 1913):73-75. In the introduction to a reprinting of this text, Dustin Griffin remarks that the younger Clark met with Griffin, "perhaps as early as August 1910," when Griffin was in Grinnell to discuss the fountain he was designing to memorialize Clark's father, but offers no specific evidence (*The Writings of Walter Burley Griffin*, ed. Dustin Griffin [Melbourne, 2008], 198).

⁹⁸ *GH* 9/20/1912, 2.

⁹⁹ Poweshiek County Courthouse, Recorder, Village Deed Record Book No. 111, 416. Maude Fellows is listed as the actual purchaser, confirming, perhaps, that Maude was the source of the capital with which Jesse made his early investments.

¹⁰⁰ Griffin arrived in Sydney for his first look at Australia August 18, 1913, and on October 18 he signed a three-year contract as Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction. He obtained leave to visit Europe and the US, but returned to Sydney May 12, 1914 (Peter Harrison, *Walter Burley Griffin. Landscape Architect* [Canberra, 1995], 33, 37).

Ralph Sawyer and Charles Watrous had both attended MIT where they became friends. After working for a time in Sawyer's native Boston, Watrous returned to Des Moines where in 1905 he set up a partnership with his school chum, Ralph Sawyer. For a time Sawyer remained in Boston, doing most of the drawing and design; Watrous, on site in Iowa, apparently oversaw construction. As their business flourished, Sawyer ultimately moved to Des Moines where the firm succeeded in winning a series of important commissions.¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, it comes as a surprise to learn from the April, 1913 *American Contractor* that Sawyer and Watrous were designing a two-story residence for Mr. "J. E. Fellows" in Grinnell.¹⁰² Although Des Moines architects were responsible for many Grinnell homes, Sawyer and Watrous had not contributed any commercial or residential buildings to the town. Described as featuring "brick veneer on hollow tile, shingle roof, hardwood finish and floors, mosaic, gas and electric fixtures," the design was at first estimated to cost \$15,000, about the same price as Griffin's Ricker House had cost.¹⁰³

However, when bids were let that summer, the cost jumped dramatically. In July 1913 the *Grinnell Herald* reported that Fellows had let bids for "his fine new home on North Broad Street." According to the newspaper, the low bidder was Van Dyne of Des Moines, who agreed to build the house for \$28,650, a fabulous sum that was about twice the cost of Ricker's house.¹⁰⁴ Despite what the paper reported, work did not begin

¹⁰¹ "Sawyer & Watrous, Architects," *The Midwestern* 3, no. 2 (Oct. 1908):58-59; Wesley I. Shank, *Iowa's Historic Architects* (Iowa City, 1999), 146-47, 171-73.

¹⁰² *American Contractor* 34 (April 5, 1913), 101.

¹⁰³ *American Contractor* 34 (May 17, 1913), 96.

¹⁰⁴ *GH* 7/25/1913, 3. Other contractors estimated the costs more highly; R. G. Coutts, who did all the masonry construction for Griffin's Ricker House, came in highest at \$33,333.

immediately, and a later summary of all the new homes being built that summer did not include the Fellows residence.¹⁰⁵ Already in late August, an official announcement about the Fellows house (still citing a cost estimate of \$15,000) indicated that construction was “in abeyance until spring.”¹⁰⁶ Perhaps the prospective price was too much for Fellows, although the fact that other contractors submitted bids even higher than Van Dyne’s indicates that the bid was not unrealistic. In any case, this version of the house was never built, and the destiny of these plans remains unknown.¹⁰⁷

It was another architect—Seth Justin Temple—who ultimately designed the Fellows’s new home. By now deeply committed to his projects in Australia, Walter Burley Griffin might nevertheless have played a part in Temple’s selection, since Griffin and Temple were well-acquainted with one another. Walter Burley Griffin had been a student of Temple’s at the University of Illinois: Griffin entered the architecture program there in 1895, and Seth Temple accepted appointment at Illinois in 1896. As a result, Griffin took no fewer than five courses from Temple, receiving excellent grades in them all. Clearly the two men knew one another well.¹⁰⁸ By 1913 committed to the Australian project, Griffin had no time to design a home for Fellows. But if Griffin were asked, might he have mentioned Temple, his former instructor, who was then developing a

¹⁰⁵ “Many New Homes,” *GH* 8/29/1913, 2.

¹⁰⁶ *American Contractor* 34 (August 30, 1913), 76.

¹⁰⁷ A report published July 26, 1913 for a residence in Grinnell on Broad Street affirmed that “plans [were] completed” for Jesse L. Fellows, owner; a subsequent report, which confirmed that Van Dyne had won the contract for \$28,650 nevertheless places the work in “Marshalltown, Ia.” See *Construction News* 36 (July 26, 1913), 24; *ibid.*, (Aug. 2, 1913), 29.

¹⁰⁸ University of Illinois Archives, Alumni and Faculty Biographical File, Walter Burley Griffin, “Graduate Record”; *ibid.*, RS 26/4/1, Seth Temple, “Faculty Record.” Also see Paul Kruty, “Walter Burley Griffin and the University of Illinois,” *Reflections*, no. 9 (Spring 1991), 32-35.

practice in Davenport but who then had no commissions in Iowa's interior? The link is impossible to prove, but the fact that in these years both Griffin and Temple became candidates to return to the University of Illinois to head the architecture department confirms that in some minds, at least, the two men were closely associated.¹⁰⁹

[photo of Seth Justin Temple approximately here]

At any rate, in spring 1914, newspapers in both Grinnell and Davenport—where the bids were opened at Temple's office—announced that “Arthur Errington of Des Moines has been awarded the contract for the modern residence which Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Fellows will erect on their property on North Broad Street.”¹¹⁰ As subsequently became clear, Errington's bid—\$18,868—was substantially lower than the 1913 low bid, providing indirect evidence that an entirely different plan had been imagined earlier. The notice to contractors, however, proposing a stucco exterior over hollow tile, offered slight evidence of change in quality.¹¹¹ According to a recent account, “Construction of the home began in 1914 and was completed in 1918.”¹¹² Few houses in Grinnell required that much time to build, but the explanation may lie with the builder. There can be no doubt that the plans were drawn no later than 1914 when Errington won the bid, but something clearly delayed completion of the project.¹¹³ The *Grinnell Herald* reported that in late January 1919 Fellows had won a judgment against “Arthur Errington and Maryland Casualty for breach of contract.” The newspaper did not describe the particulars, except

¹⁰⁹ University of Illinois Archives, Edmund James General Correspondence, RS 2/5/3, Box 32, folder “Walter B. Griffin”; *ibid.*, Faculty Correspondence, RS 2/5/6, Box 55, “Temple, Seth,” March 14-July 19, 1915.

¹¹⁰ *GH* 5/5/1914, 3; *Davenport Democrat and Leader*, 5/5/1914, 3.

¹¹¹ *American Contractor* 35 (May 9, 1914), 84.

¹¹² Dorothy W. Pinder, *In Old Grinnell* (Grinnell, 1995), 66.

¹¹³ The surviving blueprints are dated April 4, 1914, with an additional change sheet dated February 11, 1915 (photographs in the author's possession).

to say that Fellows would receive \$2,697.99.¹¹⁴ Litigation revealed that Errington, having contracted to finish the house no later than February 1, 1915, left the project unfinished and some bills unpaid.¹¹⁵ But, up to the last minute, Fellows thought that the project was on schedule, since he listed his East Street home for sale in January 1915.¹¹⁶

[photo of Fellows House approximately here]

The elegant new home on North Broad Street confirmed that Jesse Fellows was important and successful. But anyone attentive to the economic and social life of early twentieth-century Grinnell would have known about Fellows even without the house. In August 1909, for instance, the Grinnell newspaper reported that “a number of Grinnell capitalists” had traveled to British Columbia to investigate a large tract of timber on which the men had taken an option. Among the investors was Jesse Fellows.¹¹⁷ When local aviation pioneer Billy Robinson organized an airplane manufacturing company, Fellows was one of a half-dozen locals who incorporated the company.¹¹⁸ Likewise, Fellows was prominent among some forty automobile enthusiasts of Grinnell, and was elected the first president of the organization.¹¹⁹ Finally, when a group of Grinnell

¹¹⁴ “Fellows’ Case Affirmed,” *GH* 1/31/1919, 1. According to a survey of Grinnell building, already in October, 1914 the Fellows house was “well on toward completion” (A. L. Frisbie, “Grinnell Enjoys Its Greatest Building Boom in Years,” *Des Moines Sunday Register and Leader* 10/4/1914, magazine section, 1).

¹¹⁵ The court actually awarded Fellows \$2797.99 (*J. L. Fellows v. Arthur Errington et al.*, 186 Iowa 322; 170 N.W.545). Errington seems to have run into similar problems with other projects in these years. See, for example, “Appeal from Polk District Court, Lawrence DeGraff, Judge,” *The Northwestern Reporter* 167(1918):247-59.

¹¹⁶ “For Sale,” *GH* 1/29/1915, 3.

¹¹⁷ “Grinnell Men Are in Big Lumber Deal,” *GH* 8/24/1909, 2.

¹¹⁸ “Grinnell Aeroplane Company Formed,” *GH* 12/5/1913, 1; “Robinson Will Build Air Ships Here,” *GR* 12/8/1913, 1.

¹¹⁹ “Now It’s Auto and Good Roads Club,” *GH* 4/14/1911, 1. Fellows was owner of one of the few electric automobiles then in Grinnell, a Detroit Model D, which could reach a top speed of 25 mph and had a range of 125-150 miles on a single charge. According to

businessmen campaigned for having the annual convention of the Iowa State Manufacturer's Association meet in Grinnell in 1915, Fellows and Ricker constituted half the Grinnell delegation.¹²⁰

[Photo of Grinnell Washing Machine Company approximately here]

Despite all these endeavors, for most of his early years in Grinnell Fellows concentrated his attention upon what became known as the Grinnell Washing Machine Company. Having first invested in the company in 1908 while still affiliated with Elbert Clark in the lumber business, Fellows took an active part in administering the company beginning only in 1910.¹²¹ His efforts were rewarded by the increased reputation of the company. For example, a 1910 report that compared various washing machines then on the market opined that “there is no make of Washing Machine on the market today equal to those manufactured by the Grinnell Washing Machine Co. of Grinnell, Iowa.”¹²² The growing reputation, in turn, led to a fattened order book and a demand for more space for production. As a result, in August 1913 the company broke ground for an addition to the factory.¹²³ Another consequence of the firm's growing success was a series of suits against business rivals accused of patent infringement.¹²⁴ For these and other reasons,

newspaper reports, Fellows paid \$2500 for the car (“An Electric Car Has Been Added to Grinnell's List of Autos,” *GH* 7/22/1910, 1).

¹²⁰ “A Big Convention Secured for Grinnell,” *GR* 5/18/1914, 1.

¹²¹ Parker, “J. L. Fellows,” 144.

¹²² “Grinnell Washing Machines Endorsed,” *GH* 5/6/1910, 1.

¹²³ *GH* 8/19/1913, 3.

¹²⁴ See, for example, *Grinnell Washing Mach. Co. v. Woodrow et al.*, No. 107 – M, District Court, S. D. Iowa, C. D. 209 F. 621 (1913); *Grinnell Washing Mach. Co. v. Clarinda Lawn Mower Co.*, District Court, S. D. Iowa, C. D. 237 F. 98 (1916); *Grinnell Washing Machine Company v. E. E. Johnson Company*, Supreme Court of the United States, No. 272, 247 U.S. 426; 38 S. Ct. 547; 62 L. Ed. 1196 (1918). The Grinnell company won a similar suit against its nearby rival, the Newton Washing Machine Company (“Grinnell Washing Machine Co. Wins,” *GH* 6/5/1914, 1).

Fellows was often on the road in behalf of company interests. The Grinnell papers often reported that Fellows had traveled on business to Chicago, Kansas City, Davenport, Des Moines and other places.

In short, J. L. Fellows was enjoying what turned out to be the most prosperous, most successful period of his life. Not only did he own one of Grinnell's finest houses and a modern automobile in which he and Mrs. Fellows often traveled,¹²⁵ but they also continued their frequent vacation trips, including an annual trip to Los Angeles that usually lasted six to eight weeks.¹²⁶ Meanwhile, Fellows continued to collect a generous income. To the 1915 Iowa census inquiry about total 1914 earnings, Jesse simply responded, "No salary," but not because he had no money; the washing machine company's secretary/treasurer was suitably compensated out of company earnings, and other investments helped pad his bank account.¹²⁷

His financial well-being encouraged fellow Grinnell businessmen to see in him one of the community's outstanding leaders. Even as the local economy started to sour in the 1920s, Fellows remained visible and powerful. In 1922 he was elected the second president of the local Kiwanis club, of which he had been one of the founders the preceding year.¹²⁸ That same year he was elected president of the American Washing Machine Manufacturers Association, a national trade group. As the Grinnell newspaper asserted, Fellows's "success in the business and his pleasing personality combine to make

¹²⁵ The *Grinnell Herald* reported that Jesse Fellows had recently completed "an enjoyable auto run from Indianapolis" (7/7/1916, 3).

¹²⁶ *GH* 2/1/1916, 3; *ibid.*, 3/7/1916, 3.

¹²⁷ Iowa State Census of 1915, Grinnell, Poweshiek County, Card 524; roll IA915_427, line a524.

¹²⁸ "Committees Named," *GH* 1/10/1922, 2; "J. L. Fellows Dies After Long Illness," *GHR* 1/22/48, 1.

his selection fitting and popular.”¹²⁹ Later, as the Grinnell economy descended ever more sharply into crisis, Fellows was one of a “Committee of Twenty” whose aim was “the betterment and upbuilding of Grinnell.”¹³⁰

Although business had yet to hit bottom, crisis was apparent, even if the local newspapers sometimes pretended otherwise. For example, an article published a few months after the “Committee of Twenty” was organized proclaimed that “Washing Machines Are in Demand.” According to the report, the Grinnell Washing Machine Company was enjoying the “largest business they have had in two and a half years.” Furthermore, in one day the company processed an order for 107 new Laundry Queens, and sent out “two carloads of Machines” the preceding week.¹³¹ Perhaps these claims were justified; even if they were, however, the company was already experiencing difficulties, most of which remained out of the public eye.¹³²

[photo of Laundry Queen Advertisement approximately here]

Therefore, readers who opened the *Grinnell Herald* in late February 1925 might have been surprised to read that a “Complete Re-Organization Plan for Grinnell Washing Machine Co.” was in the works. The newspaper candidly admitted that “No effort has been made here to give all the details of the plan,” but the idea was to have stockholders turn in sufficient quantities of stock to permit it to be resold, thereby recapitalizing the

¹²⁹ “Fellows President,” *GH* 1/20/1922, 1.

¹³⁰ “Committee of Twenty to Meet,” *GH* 1/11/1924, 1.

¹³¹ “Washing Machines Are in Demand,” *GH* 3/24/1924, 1.

¹³² At about this time (May 1924), Fellows privately wrote to the Grinnell College president, proposing to trade his father’s house at 1128 East Street for the pledge of more than \$5000 made to the College’s endowment campaign. “This would be a great accommodation to us and it is the only possible way these pledges can be met for several years,” he wrote (Grinnell College Archives, RG-TR. Ser. 1.1, Trustees of Iowa College, Minutes of Meetings 1911-1928, 104). The trustees evidently took him up on the offer (“Fellows House on East to be Quad Infirmary,” *GH* 7/11/1924, 2).

company. Who contributed to this effort the newspaper did not say, but did point out that both common and preferred shares were to be included, and that a majority of common stock had already been turned in.¹³³ The group of local businessmen who headed this effort did not include any of the previous leadership of the company, perhaps because they had yielded their old shares.

Fellows himself began to appear in the local newspapers again in 1925 as head of the city's parks commission.¹³⁴ About a year later Fellows resigned from this position, "on account of his continued absence from the city"—although what necessitated this absence the newspaper did not specify.¹³⁵ Only a few days later did the paper reveal the reason, burying the explanation in the middle of a column of "Local News": "J. L. Fellows returned Saturday night from his rambles on the road for the Maytag Co., and has been kept busy ever since greeting his many friends."¹³⁶ In other words, Jesse Fellows, once a director of the Grinnell Washing Machine Company, had fallen so far that he felt obliged to take a job as a ordinary salesman for his long-time Newton competitor. As another article soon made clear, the new job not only required much of Jesse Fellows's time, but also forced him to leave the new home he had built at such expense on North Broad Street. Announcing that Fellows had rented out his home to someone else, the paper went on to say that "Mr. and Mrs. Fellows will be located for the

¹³³ "Complete Re-Organization Plan For Grinnell Washing Machine Co," *GH* 2/27/1925, 1.

¹³⁴ See, for example, "Park Commission Tells Why Work Must Stop," *GH* 10/20/1925, 3.

¹³⁵ "Resigns From Park Commission," *GH* 8/17/1926, 1.

¹³⁶ "Local News," *GH* 8/20/1926, 4.

present in Dayton, Ohio, where Mr. Fellows makes his headquarters while selling Maytag washers in that state.”¹³⁷

Grinnell Washing Machine continued to experience difficulties, even as it was temporarily revived. The original effort to recapitalize the company failed, so that in early 1926 the company went into receivership, and creditors were advised to file claims before February 25, 1926.¹³⁸ According to the press report, the company owed more than \$40,000 on its mortgage and another \$90,000 to bondholders.¹³⁹ By mid-April American Trust Company of Davenport, the original bondholder, had taken possession of all the equipment and real estate of the company; only a mortgage held by H. W. Spaulding remained.¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, for the moment all remained calm on the site of the former factory; even in early June local newspapermen could only express the hope that “Grinnell Washing Machine Co. May Reopen Soon.”¹⁴¹ Six weeks later a headline proclaimed that “Grinnell Washing Machine Factory Will Be Open for Business Next Monday,” although, the article observed, this “does not mean that [the factory] will begin the manufacture of washing machines” immediately. Having sat idle all this time, the factory did not possess all the needed materials, did not yet have a sales force, and had no product to ship. But the successful incorporation of the revived factory was a good sign, and the newspaper expressed the hope that “Grinnell will enjoy the benefits which come from the operation of another good factory in the community.”¹⁴²

¹³⁷ “Col. C. M. Harris Will Occupy Fellows Home,” *GH* 8/31/1926, 1.

¹³⁸ “Notice to Creditors To File Claims With Receiver,” *GH* 1/15/1926, 3.

¹³⁹ “About the Grinnell Washing Machine Company,” *GH* 1/8/1926, 5.

¹⁴⁰ “American Trust is Big Buyer,” *GH* 4/13/1926, 1.

¹⁴¹ “Grinnell Washing Machine Co. May Reopen Soon,” *GH* 6/4/1926, 1.

¹⁴² “Grinnell Washing Machine Factory Will Be Open For Business Next Monday,” *GH* 7/13/1926, 1.

None of this mattered much to Jesse Fellows. After a time working for Maytag, he returned to Grinnell in 1929 where he took employment with the College, directing buildings and grounds.¹⁴³ How or why he entered the college's employ is not known; his experience with the washing machine industry does not seem especially good preparation for his work at the college. Whatever the explanation, Fellows's name rarely appeared in the papers over the next several years. Then, under unclear circumstances, Fellows abruptly resigned in 1934; as the college newspaper remarked, his "immediate plans for the future have not been announced," perhaps an indication of how suddenly the decision had come.¹⁴⁴ About the same time, Fellows abandoned his fine residence on North Broad Street. In return for deeding the house over to Grinnell College (for a face value of \$13,500, less the \$6,612 remaining on the mortgage), Fellows secured a modest annuity. The house passed into college hands March 21, 1935, and for some years served as a student residence before the college resold the property in 1943.¹⁴⁵

According to the obituary, after selling his house to Grinnell College, Fellows took a job as superintendent of Waubonsie State Park in southwest Iowa.¹⁴⁶ Apparently

¹⁴³ The 1929 Grinnell telephone directory has no printed entry for Fellows, but someone has pasted onto the back of the front cover a notice from Grinnell College identifying how to reach college personnel over the summer. Among the listings is "Heating Plant (J. L. Fellows) 155" (Drake Community Library, Local History Room, Box 2-1, Grinnell Telephone Directories 1921-40).

¹⁴⁴ *Scarlet and Black* 1/6/1934, 1. The *Grinnell Herald* also offered no explanation, but did observe that Fellows had "effectively filled the position for the past five years" (1/9/1934, 6).

¹⁴⁵ Grinnell College Archives, RG-DEV, Development Office. Series 5.1. Wills and Trusts 1874-1991, "Maude and Jesse Fellows"; the newspaper reported that, in addition to the annuity, Fellows received some property southwest of Grinnell ("Grinnell College Purchases the J. L. Fellows Residence," *GH* 3/22/1925, 1).

¹⁴⁶ "J. L. Fellows Dies After Long Illness," *GHR* 1/22/48, 1. Waubonsie State Park opened in 1926 in the Loess hills of southwest Iowa, near the Missouri River. See

Maude did not accompany him, as the 1936 Grinnell directory lists her living at a Grinnell address, presumably by herself. Beginning in 1937, however, J. L. Fellows reappears in the telephone books, connected to the “suburban” rather than the in-town network. Only in 1943 did Mr. and Mrs. Fellows move back into town, occupying a modest two-story house at 512 Tenth Avenue.¹⁴⁷ Nothing like the fine home that they had occupied on North Broad Street, their new residence (whose street was still unpaved, unlike Broad Street where they had earlier lived) could not help but remind them of how their fortunes had turned. Jesse Fellows, who had once directed one of the country’s most successful businesses and who had enjoyed the confidence and respect of Grinnell’s richest and most successful men, spent his last eleven years as superintendent of the town’s cemetery.¹⁴⁸

Speaking at the 1912 Iowa State Manufacturers convention in Sioux City, B. J. Ricker, that year president of the association, called for a renewed emphasis upon industry in Iowa. With the aid of more intensive industrial education, better securities laws, tax statutes that assisted rather than mastered commerce, and several other measures, Ricker looked forward to a more prosperous Iowa that depended increasingly on industry rather than agriculture.¹⁴⁹ In light of subsequent developments, it is hard to know whether to

<http://www.iowadnr.gov/Destinations/StateParksRecAreas/IowasStateParks/ParkDetails.aspx?ParkID=610131&idAdminBoundary=219> (accessed May 6, 2012).

¹⁴⁷ In the 1936 directory (8), Mrs. Fellows is listed as living at 1032 Chatterton; the 1943 directory (8) is the first to show them at 512 Tenth, where Maude Fellows remained after Jesse’s death. She last appeared in the 1952 directory (7), and died October 5, 1961 (“Maude Fellows, Former Resident, Dies At Ft. Dodge,” *GHR* 10/9/61).

¹⁴⁸ “J. L. Fellows Dies,” 1-2.

¹⁴⁹ “Manufacturers in Fine Convention,” *GH* 5/14/1912, 1; “Iowa’s Future Is In Factories Says A Speaker,” *Sioux City Tribune* 5/8/12, 1, 7.

emphasize the prescience or irony of Ricker's remarks. Had Iowa industry developed more aggressively in the decade after this convention, it might have blunted the agricultural depression that torpedoed Ricker's bank and business. At the same time, Ricker's plea for more aid to industry, loosed from the growing thicket of regulation that the progressive era helped install, demonstrates the fairly naïve view of the economy that the easy money of these years encouraged. Of course, Ricker had no way of knowing about the economic collapse that would drag under both him and Jesse Fellows. In the second decade of the twentieth century, both men were enjoying uncommon financial and social success. Having encountered no real hardships, they could only expect continued prosperity. In that spirit of optimism they both built themselves splendid new homes to confirm their prominence as well as their orientation toward the future.

All the harder, therefore, was the fall that came with the crisis of the 1920s, leading both men to desert their distinctive homes and to try to reconstruct their worlds in a vastly changed environment. Ricker, by fleeing to California, not only left his debts behind, but also, by anticipating the great wave of migration that would come in the late 1940s, tried to reinvent himself elsewhere, without having to face the shame of earlier failures. Fellows could not so easily escape, although for a time he, too, labored far from the eyes of Grinnell friends. When he returned to Grinnell, he tried to resume his former style, occupying his Broad Street home. But when the Depression arrived in earnest, Fellows was obliged to sell his home, and to take what must have been a lonely job in a distant, unpopulated state park. Perhaps this was too high a price to pay, justifying his return to Grinnell where Fellows ended his days employed among the city's dead,

separated from the from the home with which he had marked his social ascent and from the centers of power and decision-making that had once been his milieu.