

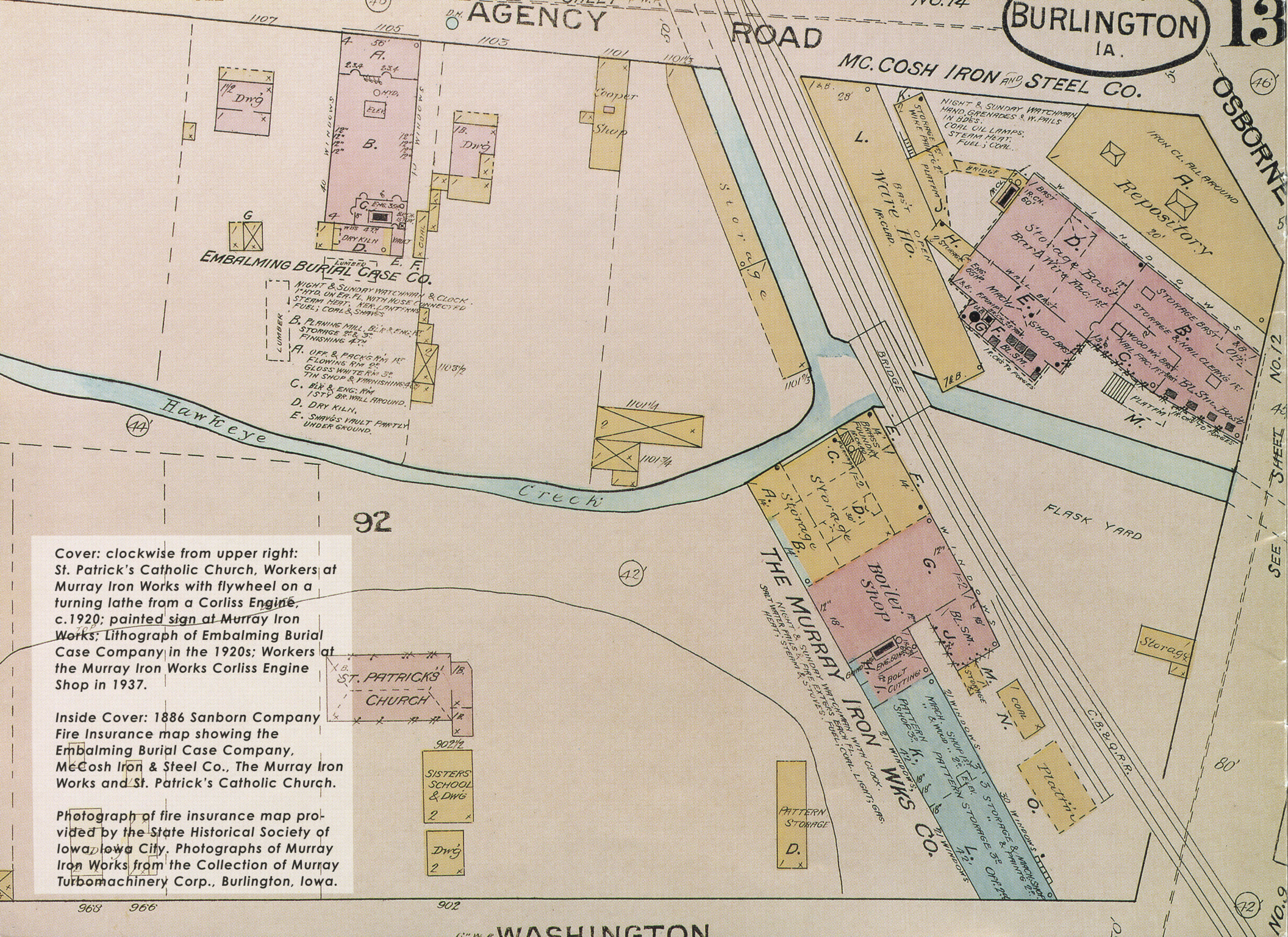


# HIBERNIA

An Irish Immigrant Neighborhood in Burlington, Iowa

*with special attention to*  
the story of St. Patrick's Parish, the Murray Iron Works,  
and the Embalming Burial Case Company

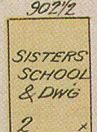
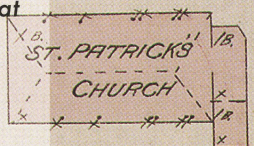




Cover: clockwise from upper right: St. Patrick's Catholic Church, Workers at Murray Iron Works with flywheel on a turning lathe from a Corliss Engine, c.1920; painted sign at Murray Iron Works; Lithograph of Embalming Burial Case Company in the 1920s; Workers at the Murray Iron Works Corliss Engine Shop in 1937.

Inside Cover: 1886 Sanborn Company Fire Insurance map showing the Embalming Burial Case Company, McCosh Iron & Steel Co., The Murray Iron Works and St. Patrick's Catholic Church.

Photograph of fire insurance map provided by the State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City. Photographs of Murray Iron Works from the Collection of Murray Turbomachinery Corp., Burlington, Iowa.



# HIBERNIA: An Irish Immigrant Neighborhood in Burlington

with special attention to

the story of St. Patrick's Parish, the Murray Iron Works,  
and the Embalming Burial Case Company

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Between the 1850s and 1880s, there arose in the City of Burlington a neighborhood composed largely of Irish immigrants. This neighborhood, known locally as "Hibernia," was primarily Catholic in religious focus. St. Patrick's Catholic Church, built in 1870 on the edge of a high bluff overlooking Hibernia, stood as a visible symbol of the neighborhood and served as the linchpin which held this Irish community together. The neighborhood was mainly concentrated within the Hawkeye Creek valley along both sides of Agency Road and extending east to Boundary Avenue (now Central Avenue), to Washington Street on the south, and Plank and Patterson streets on the north. The Irish were drawn to this area because of the employment opportunities in the booming river town of Burlington. Two important industries located within the Hibernia neighborhood were the Murray Iron Works established here in 1870 and the Embalming Burial Case Company which moved to this location in 1883. Smaller industries included the McCosh Iron and Steel Works and the Burlington

Vinegar and Pickle Works. In 1898 and again in the early 1900s, the City of Burlington considered construction of a viaduct to alleviate the congestion of traffic at the Hawkeye Creek railroad crossing. While the location of this viaduct was proposed at several locations, it was never built. Ironically, over 100 years later, it is the continued traffic bottle-neck at the railroad tracks that has prompted a new proposal for an overpass, this time on Central Avenue. This proposal prompted an archaeological and historical study under the National Historic Preservation Act to determine the impact of the project on the neighborhood's historical resources. Several significant architectural resources including the Murray Iron Works, St. Patrick's Catholic Church, and the Embalming Burial Case Company were identified and will be affected to varying degrees by the overpass construction. An agreement between concerned government agencies resulted in detailed studies of these historic properties and the Hibernia neighborhood. This booklet summarizes those findings.

## VALUABLE ASSISTANCE TO THIS PROJECT WAS PROVIDED BY THE FOLLOWING:

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## THE HIBERNIA NEIGHBORHOOD TODAY

**N**umerically, the Irish were significant but were not predominant in Burlington's immigrant population. The Germans were most numerous followed by smaller numbers of Irish and Swedes. But the Irish came to represent the second largest ethnic group in the city, with their settlement concentrating in the Hibernia neighborhood along Agency Street and its immediate vicinity. While the general perception of Hibernia is that it included a large portion of what later became variously known as the West Hill, Washington Heights, or Saunderson Heights neighborhood, population census data from the 1850s-1880s indicate that the main settlement of Irish immigrants was along both sides of Agency Street, parts of what was then North Boundary Avenue, and along Plank and Patterson streets north of Agency. This was the heart of the "Hibernia" neighborhood. In contrast, there were only a few scattered Irish households to the south along Washington, Jefferson, Gunnison, and Leebrick streets within the West Hill neighborhood proper. In reality, the hilltop area was more of a Swedish immigrant neighborhood. In addition to the concentration along Agency, Plank and Patterson streets, the next greatest concentration of Irish households was south of Market Street from South 9th to South 4th streets and along North Main Street.

St. Patrick's Catholic Church, built in 1870 on the blufftop overlooking Hibernia, and its associated parochial school, built in 1915, still stand as monuments in the neighborhood even though the composition of the neighborhood has changed and the parish itself is now centered in West Burlington. In addition to the church and school, the industrial complexes of the Murray Iron Works and the Embalming Burial Case Company are still standing and still in use.

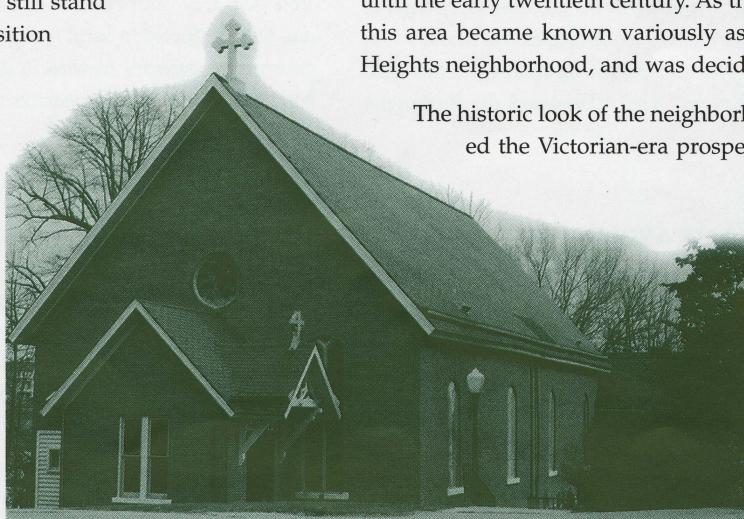
Hibernia has always been dominated by its landscape. The original town of Burlington was established in a basin effectively formed by the valley of Hawkeye Creek where it drained into the Mississippi River. While the creek floodplain became the main railroad corridor through Burlington, the natural basin formed by the creek valley provided a relatively level ground on which to build the city's main commercial district. This basin is ringed by steep bluffs and narrow ravines that provide a scenic setting but historically served as a barrier to westward

expansion of the city. The first expansion came in the early 1850s, with residential neighborhoods springing up on the surrounding hill tops. These early neighborhoods included Prospect or South Hill located south of South Street; West Hill located west of Boundary (now Central) Avenue; and North Hill due north of the central business district.

Once the railroad arrived in Burlington, with the construction of a bridge across the Mississippi River in 1868, the city's population experienced a dramatic surge from nearly 8,000 in 1865 to a whopping 25,000 by 1875. Such dramatic growth forced settlement to adapt to the difficulties of the surrounding terrain, and as a result, the hillsides became dotted with homes and the ravines began to fill with industries and transportation corridors.

The Hibernia neighborhood began its development in the 1850s with the spread of residential construction into the valley and up onto the hilltops. However, even then, settlement was sparse and it was not until the construction of the Murray Iron Works at the foot of the hill and St. Patrick's Catholic Church on the hilltop that the neighborhood became anchored and dwellings began to fill the empty lots. By the late 1870s, the neighborhood still showed empty lots to the west of St. Patrick's, with the densest construction fronting Boundary Avenue and along both sides of Agency Street where Hibernia proper was located. There were still only scattered dwellings on the hilltop. The hilltop development had advanced by the late 1880s but potential for growth still existed—a potential that was not fully realized until the early twentieth century. As the development of the hilltop grew and spread south, this area became known variously as the West Hill, Washington Heights, or Saunderson Heights neighborhood, and was decidedly more Swedish than Irish in composition.

The historic look of the neighborhood reflected its working-class roots but also reflected the Victorian-era prosperity of Burlington's general population and the success of the neighborhood's primary industries: the Murray Iron Works, the McCosh Iron and Steel Works, and the Embalming Burial Case Company. The houses were modest for the most part ranging from one to two stories in height. Most were vernacular in their architectural design but many exhibited details borrowed from the popular Late Victorian architectural styles of the day including Italianate, Second Empire, and Queen Anne. A few more elaborate homes could be found in the neighborhood reflecting the higher income levels of their occupants.



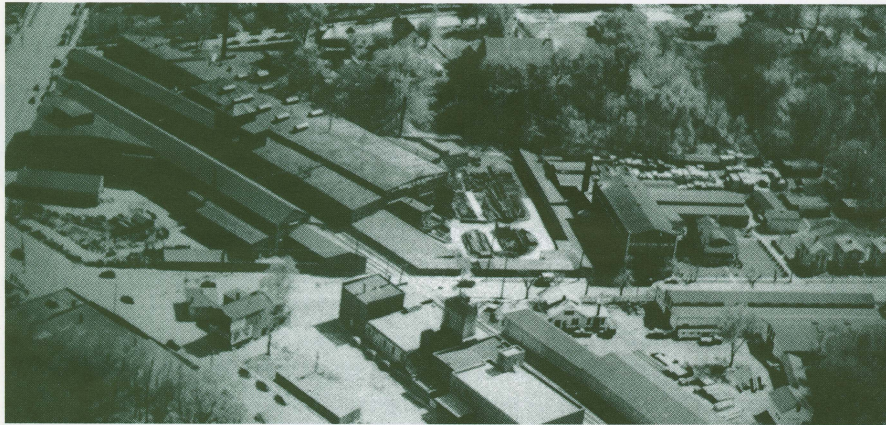
*St. Patrick's Catholic Church as it looks in the year 2000.*

**THEY CAME TO WORK: THE INDUSTRIAL GROWTH OF THE HIBERNIA NEIGHBORHOOD**

What drew the Irish and other immigrants to Burlington? Employment opportunities in the growing city were one draw; the topography of the city may have been another. The rolling hills of Burlington's setting have been said by some to be reminiscent of the rolling hills of Italy and Europe.

The Irish came to the United States in great numbers beginning in 1845 driven out of Ireland by the devastation of the potato blight and ensuing famine. Within six years, 1.5 million people had fled Ireland to escape this horror. Many of these first immigrants were peasants and poor laborers who settled in Boston, New York, and other cities of the eastern seaboard. However, the great need for labor in the newly developing mines, railroads and farmlands of the Iowa frontier began attracting a fair number of Irish to this state in the 1850s-1860s. The principal Irish settlements in Iowa were centered in Dubuque and Palo Alto counties. But the establishment of Catholic parishes in the larger cities and rural towns of Iowa attracted Irish settlement wherever there were employment opportunities. In many cases, one will find Irish settlements in counties and cities where German Catholics otherwise predominated. Such is the case in Burlington.

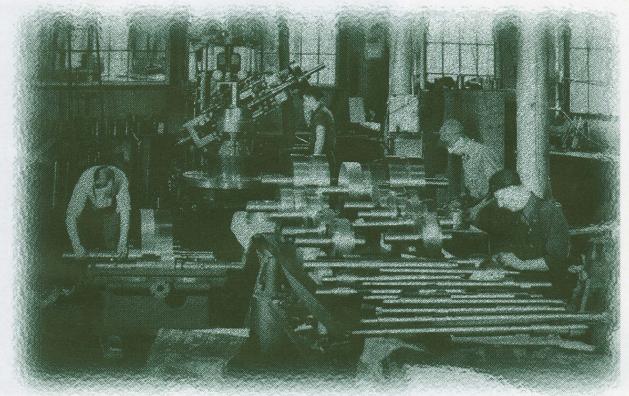
The 1860-1885 census data for the City of Burlington indicate that majority of the Irish heads-of-household were listed simply as "laborers," a catch-all term primarily used for manual-labor jobs in industry and some businesses. The percentage in 1860 was 63% of the workforce represented among Irish heads-of-household, dropping to 39% in 1870 and 41% in the 1880s. The drop reflects a diversification of job types held by Irish immigrants by the 1870s-1880s. In 1860, other jobs included draymen, blacksmiths, washerwomen and housekeepers (women heads-of-household), merchants, stonemasons, boilermakers, carpenters, teamsters, painters, tailors, grocers, and



*Aerial photograph of Hibernia in 1940s-1950s. Complex of Murray Iron Works is on the left, that of the Embalming Burial Case Company on the right, with St. Patrick's Church in the upper center. (Collection of Murray Turbomachinery Corp., Burlington, Iowa.)*

As time progressed in Hibernia, the Catholic Church began to attract not only Irish immigrants but German Catholics and others as well. By the early twentieth century, the neighborhood served by St. Patrick's had so changed that the name "Hibernia" became little used and "Washington Heights" became more common. The Catholic congregation also shifted with time, with most of the mid- to late twentieth century parishioners living in West Burlington than in the old Hibernia neighborhood. In 1969 St. Patrick's school closed and the neighborhood became less recognizable as an ethnic enclave and more of an economically depressed area where properties are now a mixture of owner-occupied and rental housing. The Embalming Burial Case Company closed for good in 1972 taking more of the work force out of the neighborhood, while the Murray Iron Works moved part of its operations to West Burlington in its later incarnation as the Murray Turbomachinery division of the Tuthill Corporation. As a result of the neighborhood's decline, buildings have begun to fall to the wrecking ball or are suffering from neglect.

Interestingly, one thing in the Hibernia neighborhood that is beginning to look more historic is the valley of Hawkeye Creek where the slopes are once again becoming densely wooded and areas on the valley floor are becoming more park-like as decrepit buildings are cleared away. The creek itself, however, has long been routed underground and will likely never be seen above ground again.



*Workers at Murray Iron Works in 1930s-1940s. (Collection of Murray Turbomachinery Corp., Burlington, Iowa.)*

# HIBERNIA

contractors, among others. By 1870, railroad laborers had been added to the list composing 7% of the total Irish heads-of-household, with draymen, blacksmiths, teamsters, and housekeepers representing between 4-9%. Some of the new jobs listed were machinists, newspaper, land broker, farmers, mill workers, quarrymen, and salesmen/peddlers. The 1885 census still showed higher percentages of laborers, blacksmiths, railroad laborers, and housekeepers but had added physician, priest, department manager, cashiers, insurance agents, constable, civil engineer, lumber foreman, and cigar manufacturer to the more manual labor-oriented jobs listed throughout this period. By 1885, the Irish immigrant population was becoming more settled and more successful as they assimilated into Burlington business and society.

The idea that most of the Irish immigrants came to Burlington in 1868 to work on the construction of the railroad bridge appears to be a false one. There were already 63 Irish immigrant households in Burlington by the time of the 1850 census, with 155 enumerated in the 1860 census—all coming here long before the railroad crossed the river. Household numbers increased to around 230 by the 1870 and 1880-1885 censuses. However, even then, the number of Irish immigrant heads-of-household that worked as railroad laborers never numbered more than 16, representing only 7% of the Irish households in the 1870 census. Therefore, the theory that the Irish came to Burlington to work on the railroad is not supported by the census data.

Further examining these data for Irish immigrant heads-of-household specifically within the Hibernia neighborhood<sup>1</sup> show that in 1870 they were primarily laborers, followed by railroad laborers (actual number was seven), teamsters, draymen, and one each of housekeeper, carpenter, foreman, quarryman, city contractor, dressmaker, stone mason, grain dealer, dry goods merchant, farmer, painter, and blacksmith. By 1880-1885, Irish heads-of-household in Hibernia were still predominated by laborers, followed by housekeepers, blacksmiths, stonemasons, teamsters, railroad laborers (only two households), and one each of engineer, department manager, machinist, tailor, and dealer. It is likely many of the laborers, teamsters, foremen, machinists, and blacksmiths worked at the Murray Iron Works and the McCosh Iron and Steel Works, both located in this neighborhood.

## The Murray Iron Works

Employment opportunities abounded in the fledgling city in the 1850s-1860s. After the railroad arrived, those opportunities grew even greater. One of the major industries in the early years of the Hibernia neighborhood was the Murray Iron Works, a major metal fabricating firm that served regional, national, and international markets. The original stone building of the Murray Iron Works still stands at the corner of Washington Street and Central Avenue. Built in 1872, this building now serves as the main office of Murray Turbomachinery, a division of the Tuthill Corporation—the most recent incarnation of the historic Murray Iron Works.

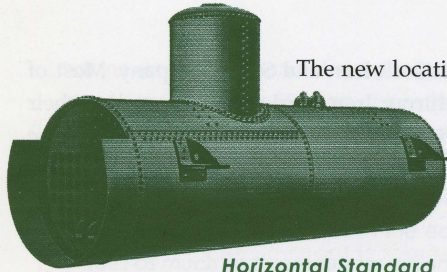
The Murray Iron Works was born in the foundry of Charles Sowden, a native of Leeds, England, who immigrated to Burlington in 1845 and found work as a machinist in the foundry and shops of Charles Hendrie. In 1852, Charles Sowden opened his own foundry and machine shop at the corner of Main and Elm streets. The Murray Iron Works Company was incorporated on February 1, 1870, and on March 11, 1870, the newly formed company purchased Sowden's foundry with plans to enlarge it. However, by March 29, 1870, the firm had decided instead to build their new iron works in the western part of the city in the Hibernia neighborhood. The new location at the corner of Washington and Boundary was better suited because it provided more room to grow and was bisected by the main railroad line through Burlington providing direct access to rail transportation.

No one remembers why the company was named "Murray." It was certainly not named after

any of the original stockholders and officers, who were president C.L. Rice, a Chicago millionaire; director Francis Howland, a wealthy mercantile owner from New York City; secretary/treasurer Samuel R. Bartlett of the Detroit Locomotive Works; and "other prominent capitalists of the east."<sup>2</sup> Charles Sowden joined the new firm as a stockholder and as Mechanical Superintendent. Three of Sowden's sons, Robert, Harry, and William, would later work at the iron works. Charles Thomas served as foreman of the iron and brass foundries. The firm was to manufacture "heavy machinery of all kinds, iron and brass castings and to keep on sale iron and wood working machinery, railway, mill and machinists' supplies."<sup>3</sup>



*The Murray Iron Works c.1910.  
St. Patrick's Church is visible in the upper left.  
(Collection of Murray Turbomachinery Corp., Burlington, Iowa.)*



**Horizontal Standard Tubular Boiler. Product of the Murray Iron Works.**  
(Collection of Murray Turbomachinery Corp., Burlington, Iowa.)

The new location for the Murray Iron Works had been occupied by a hame and stirrup factory that had recently burned, another likely reason for the selection of the new site—there was a newly empty lot on which to build. By April 1870 the iron works was up and running, and in May they were soliciting capital for investment in large railroad car shops. However, by early summer the company was reportedly in dire financial straits. It was then that a new arrival to the city, Colonel

George H. Higbee, took an interest in the struggling business and decided to retire from his successful military career to try his hand in the civilian business world. Higbee arranged for capital and credit for the Murray Iron Works and, more importantly, “secured the patronage of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad,”<sup>4</sup> for which the Murray Iron Works would make most of the railroad’s iron castings. Thus secured, the Murray Iron Works never looked back and became one of the leading industries of Burlington and the State of Iowa.

Higbee began with the firm as secretary/treasurer but within a few years had risen to the company presidency. This was a position he was to hold until his retirement in 1911. In addition to salvaging the Murray Iron Works from financial ruin in 1870, Col. Higbee was well known in Burlington for his other business and civic pursuits. Notable among his achievements was the construction of the Young Men’s Christian Association, which was presented to the City of Burlington in memory of his two deceased sons, John A. and Howell N. Higbee.

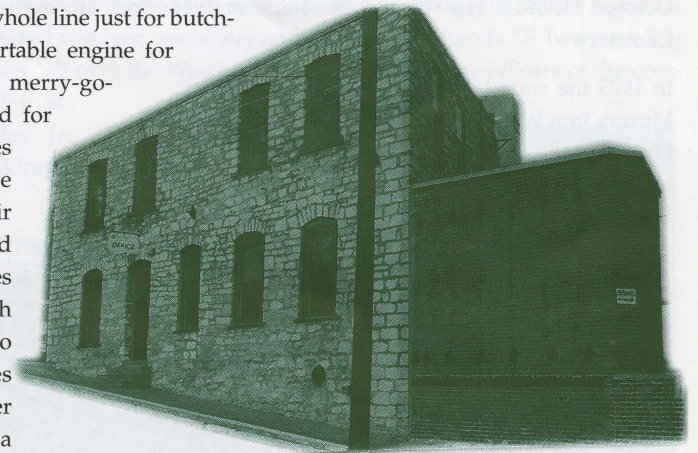
The original plant of the Murray Iron Works consisted of the iron and brass foundry. To this was added a machine shop and a boiler division by the end of 1870. Still later an engine works was added to the operation. By 1872, a frame building had been erected behind the iron works to store patterns, which were the templates for the company’s engine and boiler designs. By that time, the Murray Iron Works was advertising that they owned “all the patterns of the Hendrie and Burlington Iron Works foundries”<sup>5</sup> indicating that that competition in town was falling away. In 1872, the Murray Iron Works built a three-story, 80 by 30-foot limestone building banked into the hillside. This building, which fronts Washington Street, served as the company office and for “fire-proof” pattern storage. It still serves as the main office for Murray Turbomachinery.

The 1886 fire insurance map for this property shows the stone building being used for pat-

tern manufacture and storage and as the machine shop for the iron works. The company office was located at the front of the building. The stone building was attached to a larger building to the rear that served as the boiler shop and blacksmith shop, with the brass foundry to the rear of that building next to other storage areas. Another frame building on the hillslope to the west of the stone building was also used for pattern storage. The map shows Hawkeye Creek flowing west to east through the property and along the north end of the boiler shop. The railroad tracks paralleled the iron works and crossed the creek over a small bridge. Both the railroad tracks and the creek separated the Murray Iron Works from the McCosh Iron and Steel Company, which was then located at the intersection of Agency, Osborne, and Boundary streets.

In the 1880s, the iron works established a larger foundry at Lefflers Station on the western outskirts of town nearer the Burlington Railroad’s machine shops. This is where the majority of the railroad work of the company was done.

The boiler division of the Murray Iron Works was started in 1870, with the standard Vertical Fire Tube boiler being its main product. Over time, the Horizontal Return Tubular, Firebox, and Scotch Marine boilers were put into production. By the 1880s, the company was manufacturing a wide variety of boilers, steam engines, and iron work. Their products included everything from architectural iron work, such as fencing, railings, and columns; to all manner of hand-operated household and small business equipment including a whole line just for butcher shops; to a small portable engine for operating “well drills, merry-go-rounds, wood saws, and for any purpose that requires portability;”<sup>6</sup> to large bridge castings; to their main line of standard and large-scale steam engines and fire tube boilers, both horizontal and vertical, to power other industries and businesses all over the country. It was a diverse operation to say the least!



**Original office building of the Murray Iron Works built in 1872. Still in use as the office of the Murray Turbomachinery Corp., in the year 2000.**



By 1882, the company's specialty was the "Howard Automatic Cut-Off Engine." In 1896, in a major expansion move, the Murray Iron Works acquired the Sioux City Engine Works, which held a patent on the Corliss steam engine. The Murray Iron Works soon became world-famous for their "Murray-Corliss Engines" shipped all over the country and many parts of the world. To accommodate this new production line, the firm built a whole new building on the east side of the railroad tracks and fronting Boundary Avenue specifically for their Corliss Engine Shop. This steel frame and brick wall construction is still in use as the engine shop. A railroad track extended directly into this building to facilitate shipment.

In 1896 the buildings of the Murray Iron Works included the stone building, several two-story brick buildings, and "an iron building containing a ten-ton traveling crane," with side tracks entering this building.<sup>7</sup> The equipment of the machine shops included 22 lathes, three planers, ten drill presses, one milling machine, three boring mills, two shapers, and several pneumatic hoists. There was also a complete wood working shop, a smith shop with steam hammer, and a brass foundry.

By the turn-of-the-century, the officers of the Murray Iron Works included president, George H. Higbee and secretary/treasurer, F.A. Millard. J.B. Ramp supervised the foundry, with J. Van Cott in charge of the machine shops, P.W. Grechy heading the boiler shops, and C.H. Schroder serving as head bookkeeper. Higbee retired from the company in 1911, with his son, George G. Higbee succeeding him to the presidency. Col. Higbee passed away on October 11, 1918. His son would follow in 1944. Both are buried in Burlington's Aspen Cemetery.

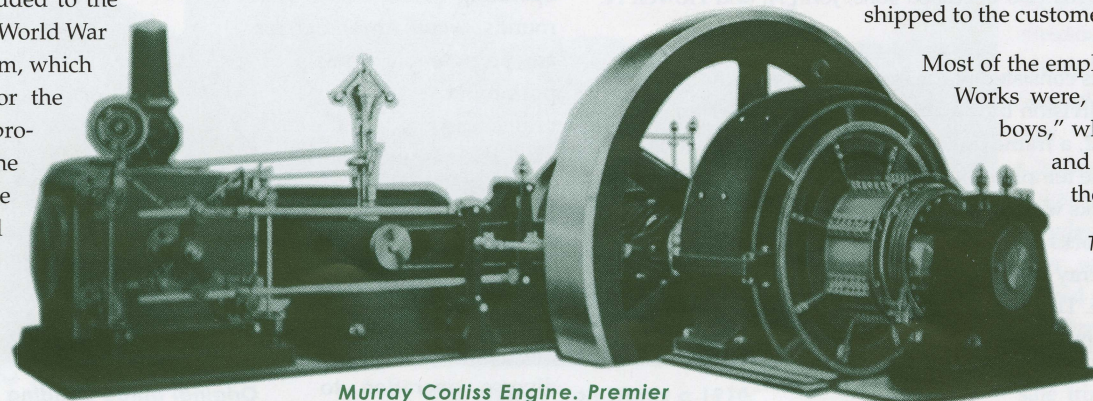
In 1905 the watertube boiler was added to the Murray Iron Works production line. World War I brought another new line to the firm, which began to turn out 9-inch shells for the British war effort and then began production of boilers and engines for the United States when we entered the war. The company again assisted during World War II producing engines, boilers and auxiliary marine equipment for the war effort.

In 1914 the Murray Iron Works expanded by purchasing the adjacent

Burlington Vinegar and Pickle Works—the old McCosh Iron and Steel Company. Most of the older buildings were torn down, with the Murray Iron Works then expanding their Corliss Engine Shop into this lot. A small part of the pickle works was still standing into the early 1930s but was being used only for storage. That building was later torn down and replaced with a tile block building that in 1952 was shown as a carpentry shop on the Murray Iron Works property.

The next big expansion for the Murray Iron Works came in 1927 with the purchase of the Standard Turbine Corporation of New York. All the machinery, patterns, tools and other equipment from that company were moved to the Burlington factory where steam-operated Standard Turbines were added to the product line. In 1947 the first steam turbine used as a direct drive for a sugar cane mill was delivered by the Murray Iron Works "thus starting a whole new era of economical and efficient operation for the cane sugar industry."<sup>8</sup> In 1951, the first generator to develop electric power from atomic energy was driven by a Murray Turbine. The steam turbine gradually replaced the steam engine to the point that the Murray Iron Works dropped steam engines from their production line. Murray turbines grew from "primitive 100-horsepower affairs to monsters capable of delivering 7,000-horsepower."<sup>9</sup>

In 1946, the Murray Iron Works began production of the packaged watertube boiler, with packaged boiler designs becoming the mainstay of the Murray boiler division through the end of this century. A package-type boiler is built and assembled at the local plant and then shipped to the customer for installation and immediate use. This was a great innovation over the old method where the boiler was built at the plant and then shipped to the customer where a furnace was then built around it.



*Murray Corliss Engine. Premier product of the Murray Iron works after 1896. (Collection of Murray Turbomachinery Corp., Burlington, Iowa.)*

Most of the employees and later officers of the Murray Iron Works were, throughout the company's history, "local boys," who had been born and raised in Burlington and paid their dues as "office boys" working their way up in the firm.

*The Murray Iron Works has always been managed and operated by Burlington men. The three superintendents, Edward Denz of the engine shops, William Kehn of the foundry and J.A. Dailey of the boilers shops all learned their trades at "The Murray." The company*





has never had a financial reorganization and has continued to operate in much the same way for nearly 55 years. It is rather old-fashioned in respect to the fact that it has had no "works managers," "production managers," "sales executives," "purchasing executive," etc., etc. But it has managed to ship its products all over the world, from Kamchatka and Manchuria in the north, to South America, and South Africa and Australia in the south, Europe in the east and China in the west. And it has paid out in wages as much as three-quarter million dollars in one year.<sup>10</sup>

The number of employees at the Murray Iron Works went from 75 hands in 1872 to 150 by 1880 and up to 400 by the 1950s. From the 1970s-1990s, the numbers employed ranged from 125 to 270. The work has always been hard and demanding at "The Murray," but was particularly so in its early years.

*In those days all material was iron and small sheets. A sheet 30 inches wide and 60 inches long and five-sixteenths to three-eighths inch in thickness was considered a very large sheet. All work was done by hand. Riveters in those days were artists; two boilermakers would work in a gang with hand hammers. About 500 five-eighths inch rivets was a big 10 hours work. Sixty pounds was a high pressure boiler...*

*When there was a demand for higher pressures, the plates began to be heavier and the rivets were driven with a button set. A boilermaker held the set and two helpers with sledges drove the rivets. About 1888 when the plates were increasing in thickness the hydraulic riveting machine came into use.*

*In 1893 the pneumatic riveters and chippers were being introduced...The pneumatic tool has taken all the hard slugging out of the boiler making, but not the noise.<sup>11</sup>*

The pneumatic riveter was followed by the acetylene blow pipe, which was first introduced in 1904. It became the preferred method of boiler making and was used for cutting and welding up to around 1930 when arc welding became popular. By that time, boilers were being made up to 1,000 pounds of pressure. Today much of the hard work is done by precision machines, automated and computerized, but the final product still requires the skill of trained and experienced craftsmen.

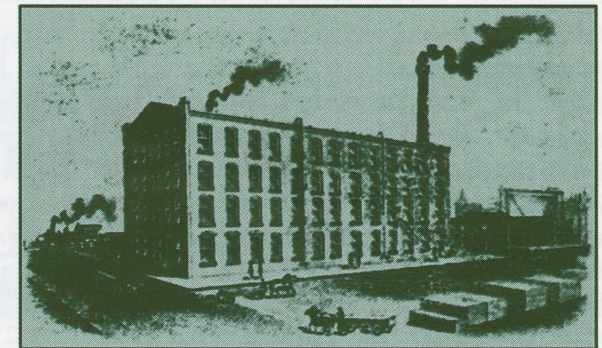
The Murray Iron Works continued to expand into the late twentieth century and, in 1971, was purchased by the Trane Company of LaCrosse, Wisconsin. The Murray Iron Works became the Murray Process Division of that corporation and continued to produce turbines and boilers. In 1974 the Trane Company built a new boiler plant in West Burlington that housed both the watertube and firetube boiler production lines, while the turbine operations remained in the old factory.

In 1984, the Murray-Trane division was purchased by the Coppus Engineering Corporation of Worcester, Massachusetts, with the Burlington division now becoming the Murray Turbomachinery Corporation. The plant on Washington Street continued to produce the firm's steam turbines. Then in 1993 the Murray Turbomachinery Corporation and Coppus Engineering were both purchased by the Tuthill Corporation of Hinsdale, Illinois. The Murray plant continued under the name of Murray Turbomachinery, and production of their world-famous line of boilers and turbines continues to the present day under the Tuthill banner. There was some discussion in the late 1990s of moving the company's operations out of the historic factory on Washington Street, but no action has been taken. The company did expand through the construction of a new manufacturing plant in the Flint Ridge Business Park in 1996. This plant was built to house new machinery too large to fit in the historic factory.

### *The Embalming Burial Case Company*

**A**nother important Hibernia industry was the Embalming Burial Case Company, one of a number of businesses that grew out of Burlington's early lumber industry. Lumber-related manufactories in the city turned out shingles, millwork, barrels, furniture and cabinets, and even burial caskets. The largest casket factory was the Embalming Burial Case Company, which organized in 1876 to manufacture metallic caskets and operated until 1972. The original 1876 factory was located on Front Street. By 1882, the company was located at 802-806 Jefferson in a massive stone building four stories high that was "fitted up with the latest and best machinery and employed 30 hands."<sup>12</sup> Two traveling salesmen sold burial cases "all over the West and South."<sup>13</sup> In 1882, the officers of the company were Horton Bailey, Sr., president; Horton Bailey, Jr., secretary; and A.F. Skinner, treasurer.

It is interesting that one year later, in 1883, the company built a brand new four-story factory building fronting Agency Street in the heart of the Hibernia neighborhood. The reason for the move is uncertain but better, more direct access to the rail line and



*Illustration of 1883 Embalming Burial Case Company factory. (Watkins, 1896)*



**Aerial photograph of the Embalming Burial Case Company in 1940s-mid 1950s. Note the rows of factory workers' houses and the cluster of duplexes along the right side of the photo. (Collection of Murray Turbomachinery Corp., Burlington, Iowa)**

more lot space on which to grow were likely reasons.

The 1883 factory building is still standing and is an impressive brick edifice four stories high. Other standing buildings include the brick mill/engine house, one of the lumber sheds, the company president's dwelling, two workers' duplexes,

and three workers' "factory houses." The mill/engine house was built between 1893-1900. The president's dwelling, located off the west side of the main factory building, was at this location as early as 1886; however, the extant house was built in the 1920s-1930s on the site of the older house. The first of the factory workers' dwellings was shown on the 1900 fire insurance map fronting Agency Street. The full row of four dwellings fronting Agency Street was built by 1903, with the duplexes added in the 1920s-30s. Non-extant buildings include several auto garages, one of the duplexes, the dry kilns, one of the factory houses fronting Agency Street, and the various lumber and casket box sheds once located at the rear of the complex.

In 1886, when then-president Dr. Horton Bailey passed away, Ulrich Ita rose to the presidency of the company. Swiss-born Ulrich Ita immigrated to Burlington in 1868 where he found work as a carpenter. He then worked as foreman of the Daniel Winters planing mill before becoming a partner in the Wolf & Ita furniture factory. His health deteriorated, however, and he sold out to Robert Wolf and returned to Switzerland where his health was fully restored. He returned to Burlington in 1881 and began his association with the Embalming Burial Case Company first as a stockholder and manager and then as president of the company. At least two generations of the Ita family worked at the Burial Case Company filling many different positions. All three of his sons, Arnold C., Godfrey J., and Walter H. Ita worked for the company, with Arnold eventually replacing his father as president upon the patriarch's retirement. Ulrich's brother, Conrad Ita, and Edward C. Ita (relation unknown)

also worked for the company. Through the years the Ita family members served as manager, treasurer, secretary, bookkeeper, packer, worker, and shipping clerk in the company. Ulrich Ita died in 1919, with Arnold C. Ita passing away in 1939. Brothers, Walter H. Ita and Godfrey J. Ita, passed away in 1926 and 1948, respectively.

When the Embalming Burial Case Company was first established it was based on the production of a patented metallic casket. In 1880, "the company broadened the scope of its activities by beginning the manufacture of all kinds of undertaker's supplies" in addition to the casket line.<sup>14</sup> The company had "enjoyed a very substantial and gratifying growth" by the early twentieth century.<sup>15</sup>

*The firm [in 1915] employs about fifty people, all skilled workmen, and they also have a number of traveling salesmen upon the road. The factory has a frontage of two hundred feet at No. 1105 Agency street. There is a four-story brick warehouse fifty by one hundred and twenty feet, a brick machinery building and engine room one hundred and sixty by sixty feet, a frame drying house eighteen by forty feet, and a lumber shed fifty by sixty feet. Steam power is used and the company specializes in cypress caskets of high quality. They are also jobbers for steel vaults and other undertakers' supplies and their goods are sold between Wyoming and Ohio, six traveling salesmen caring for the trade. This is regarded as one of the substantial firms of the state.<sup>16</sup>*

Ulrich Ita is credited with expansion of the company facilities in the early twentieth century. To the main factory building, he added the mill/engine house, a frame drying shed, and a lumber shed. As the factory continued to grow, a complex developed. A circa 1920s idealized lithograph of this complex shows the main factory building at 1105 Agency Street, the company president's house at 1107 Agency Street, the mill perpendicular to the factory, a row of four two-story, front-gabled houses labeled as "factory homes" that were built by 1903. By the 1930s three duplexes had been added to the workers' housing.

The presence of company housing is most interesting. These houses could never have housed the entire workforce, but were definitely used to house workers and their families in the early twentieth century. Surprisingly, these houses were not just for the officers and foremen of the company but were also occupied by average laborers in the factory, such as shipping clerks, upholsters, trimmers and teamsters. What criteria were used for awarding occupancy of the factory-built houses and duplexes is not known. How unusual the Embalming Burial Case Company complex is within the context of Burlington's historic industries is also not known, but it could be unique in this regard. A 1931 newspaper article noted that the company then employed 50 men, many of whom lived "in houses owned by the organization and located adjacent to the plant."<sup>17</sup> In the 1920s-1930s, the company



was competing with a second casket factory in town called the "Burlington Casket Company." This competition might have spurred the need to provide incentives to keep skilled workers at the Embalming Burial Case Company. Providing company housing near the plant would certainly have been viewed as a plus by most factory workers particularly during the Great Depression.

At its peak, the Embalming Burial Case Company expanded once again by the construction of a second building, designated as "Plant No. 2," along what became Highway 34 in Burlington. The complex on Agency Street was then known as "Plant No. 1," a designation that lives on in a painted sign on the side of the main factory. This sign also notes that the company did wood working and finishing in addition to the manufacture of caskets and burial vaults. Plant No. 2 is no longer standing.

By the 1930s, the Embalming Burial Case Company was under the presidency of Arnold C. Ita, with Frank A. Denz as vice-president and superintendent, and Paul Dustman as secretary-treasurer and manager. Paul Dustman eventually rose to the presidency and was the last to serve the company in its final incarnation in as EBC Co. Inc., when it was purchased by the Murray Division of the Trane Company in 1971. EBC Co, Inc., closed its doors in Burlington one year later when it consolidated with its then parent company located in Des Moines. The historic factory building is now owned and occupied by Flexible Industries.

### *The McCosh Iron and Steel Company*

The Murray Iron Works was not the only metal manufactory located in the Hibernia neighborhood. In the 1880s-1890s, the McCosh Iron and Steel Company shared the lot space fronting Boundary Avenue with the Murray Iron Works. The McCosh Company, sited at the corner of Boundary and Agency, was shown at this location on the 1886 and 1892 Sanborn fire insurance maps. These maps show a factory somewhat smaller than the Murray Iron Works and physically separated from Murray by railroad tracks and by the channel of Hawkeye Creek, which at that time was an above-ground stream. In 1886, the buildings of the McCosh Iron and Steel Company included a repository, a warehouse with a spur track along its west side, and a main factory building that housed a barbed wire and nail factory along with a blacksmith and machine shop on the main floor. By 1892 the repository building had become a wire mill, with the main factory enlarged and still used for the manufacture of barbed wire and nails.

It appears that the McCosh Iron and Steel Company had its origins in the

partnership of Robert Donahue and Thompson McCosh, who started a wholesale business in Burlington in 1857 that dealt in iron, heavy hardware, and wagon, carriage, and plow goods. Their wholesale dealership was in a five-story building at the corner of Third and Market streets. Sometime between 1882 and 1886, McCosh branched out into the manufacturing end of the business and opened his steel and iron works in Hibernia. This company made nails, nail kegs, barbed wire, nuts and bolts, single-trees, double-trees, neck-yokes, reels for barbed wire, and metal items for carriages and buggies. In 1888 it was described as "one of the most important institutions in Burlington;"<sup>18</sup> however, ten years later this factory was either out of business or had moved to another location. In 1898 the Burlington Vinegar and Pickle Works took over the McCosh factory thus starting a new chapter in Hibernia's industrial history.

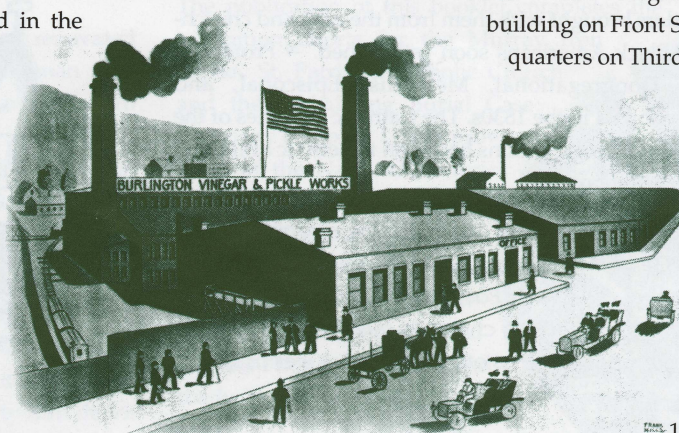
### *The Burlington Vinegar and Pickle Works*

The Burlington Vinegar and Pickle Works was a notable addition to the Hibernia neighborhood and showed the growing influence of the German immigrant presence in Burlington. When it took over the McCosh factory buildings in 1898, the Burlington Vinegar and Pickle Works was already a well-established and prosperous industry in the City of Burlington. Established in 1876 by German immigrant, Herman Weinrich, and incorporated in 1881, with F.A. Smith as president and Weinrich as secretary and general manager, this business was the "first to manufacture pickles in a commercial way in the

State."<sup>19</sup> The vinegar and pickle works was first housed in a building on Front Street. It later moved to more commodious quarters on Third Street before taking over the McCosh factory building in June of 1898.

By 1905, the Burlington Vinegar and Pickle Works was one of the largest such factories in the United States employing 50 workmen and 12 traveling salesmen. Branch factories, salting houses, and growing plants were opened elsewhere in Iowa, Minnesota, Michigan, and Missouri.

The company was re-incorporated in 1904 with Herman Weinrich as president, Carl Weinrich secretary/treasurer, H.R. and O.L. Weinrich and P. Richards as directors. The



*Illustration of the Burlington Vinegar & Pickle Works in 1909. (Commercial History of the State of Iowa, Traveler's Protective Association of America)*

# HIBERNIA

business was truly a family affair since Carl, Herman R., and Oscar L. Weinrich were Herman's sons. Another son, August F. Weinrich, was involved with the company until the 1920s when he moved to California and started his own canning and pickle business.

The Burlington Vinegar and Pickle Works produced a remarkable array of products far beyond the vinegar and pickles in the company title including sauerkraut, sweet cider, preserves, jellies, apple butter, mincemeat, chow-chow, Holland onions, mustard, catsup, Spanish olives, horseradish, pepper-sauce, and Worcestershire sauce. These products were shipped to markets in the Midwest and Western states including Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Colorado.

The pickle works moved out of their location at Agency and Central in 1914 after purchasing the Boeck Packing Plant at the corner of Iowa and Gnahn streets. The Murray Iron Works then bought the former vinegar and pickle works buildings in a major expansion of their facilities. By 1931 most of the former McCosh Iron and Steel/Burlington Vinegar and Pickle Works buildings had been torn down. For a time a gas station occupied the northeast corner of the lot. However, by the 1950s all of the former buildings and the gas station had been removed and new buildings and parking lots for the Murray Iron Works had been built in their place.

## RELIGION AND CULTURE OF THE HIBERNIA NEIGHBORHOOD

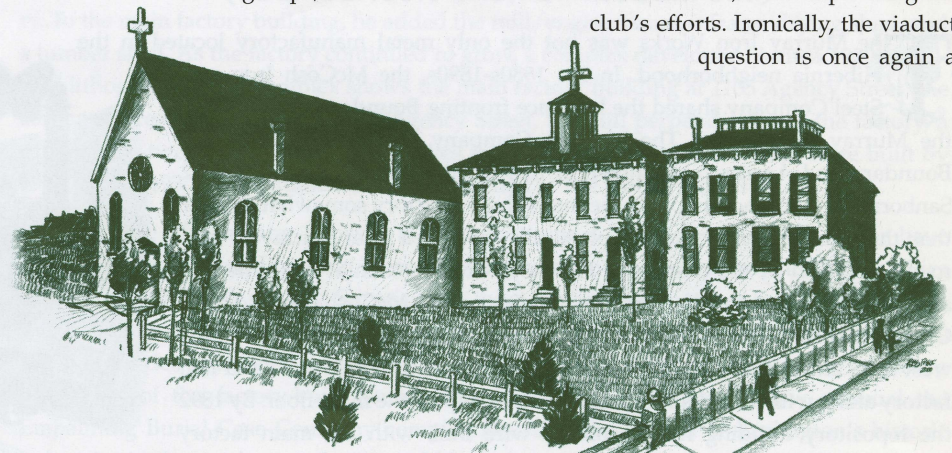
The religious development of Burlington "revolved around both old line Protestant and Catholic preferences which settlers brought with them from the east, and churches that European immigrants and Black Americans soon established."<sup>20</sup> Protestant congregations included Episcopalian, Congregational, Methodist Episcopal, and Presbyterian churches, with the earliest organized in the 1830s. The Catholic churches of the community were often separated into different congregations based on the ethnic affiliation of the immigrants who settled a particular neighborhood.

*St. Paul's Church, an English speaking congregation, was the first to be established in 1840. By the 1850s the need arose for a German speaking church. St. John's, formed in 1854, contained 50 German speaking families. By 1870, St. Paul's had grown so large that St. Patrick's was established as a second English speaking church to serve the Irish community. All three churches continued to grow and thrive as ethnic centers as well as spiritual conservators.<sup>21</sup>*

The Irish community was closely tied to St. Patrick's Catholic Church which located in 1870 on the blufftop overlooking the Hibernia neighborhood. "The neighborhood elementary school also reflected ethnic ties with its name—Hibernia School."<sup>22</sup> This school was located

south of Agency Street along Curran Street. Irish identity was further demonstrated by the formation of chapters of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Hibernia Benevolent Society, and the Irish Literary Union as well as the organization of the annual Saint Patrick's Day parades that wound their way from St. Patrick's to St. Paul's.

Another neighborhood group associated with Hibernia was the "West End Improvement Club," which was "originally the Washington Heights Improvement Association and was credited as the first 'social center' in the United States."<sup>23</sup> While the membership included many of the Irish residents of Hibernia, it was not an exclusively Irish organization counting among its members Germans from the nearby "Dutchtown" neighborhood centered along Mt. Pleasant Street north of Hibernia. The West End Improvement Club was formed on April 19, 1907, with John Walz, a neighborhood grocery store owner, serving as the first president. The club was formed out of a growing frustration that the "West End" was "not getting a fair shake in public improvements."<sup>24</sup> A particular sore point was the decrepit state of the old Hibernia School, which residents considered "inferior to school buildings in other parts of Burlington."<sup>25</sup> Interest in the club waxed and waned through its 14 years, with one of the club's final issues being the need for a viaduct over the railroad tracks to improve street traffic and to encourage the extension of the streetcar system into this neighborhood. The physical and financial obstacles to its construction proved to be insurmountable, and the matter eventually died of "sheer exhaustion."<sup>26</sup> The club disbanded in 1921 because other groups, such as the Parent Teachers Association, were duplicating the club's efforts. Ironically, the viaduct question is once again a



*Illustration of St. Patrick's Church, School, and Rectory c.1878.  
(Drawing by Russ Fagle, Riverstone, Inc.  
after original illustration as printed in *The Burlington Gazette*, Oct. 25, 1930.)*



major issue in Burlington, the proposed construction of which prompted the current historic study.

St. Patrick's was the smallest Catholic Church in the city but was the only one with a large Irish constituency. Its establishment helped ease the congestion of the growing Catholic congregation in the community. Boundary Street was selected as the new parish dividing line, with St. Paul's overseeing the area east of Boundary Street and St. Patrick's having the area west of this line. By the 1880s, St. Patrick's congregation numbered over 1,500.

In September 1870, the congregation purchased a site for a new church on the hill above the Murray Iron Works along Washington Street. By October, a foundation for a combination church and school had been laid at the rear of the lot along the very edge of the bluffline. Reportedly, the reason for its dramatic siting was that this building would become the school, with a church to be built later on the front of the lot. By the winter of 1871, the building was in use as a church, with the school opening in the basement in 1873. The following year a frame convent and school was built on the front of the lot, where the church had originally been intended. It is suspected that once the original church was built, funds were too limited to consider building a larger church any time soon. As the years wore on, the church remained in the old building, with funds expended instead to build a larger new school building in 1915. The new school was built across Washington Street southwest of the church. The school was enlarged in 1955. It remains standing but no longer serves as a school.

In 1903 the church was damaged by a fire but was repaired. The interior was renovated again in the 1920s when Father Brady was sent to Burlington by Bishop Rohlman with instructions to make St. Patrick's "look like a house of God."<sup>27</sup> Florentine artist, Faliero Buonaguide, was commissioned to redecorate the interior of the church. He removed the ceiling entirely "rebuilding it in severe panel effect of early Irish church design," and finishing it with early Christian symbolism drawn from "the very catacombs of the First Century A.D."<sup>28</sup> Years later the interior was again redecorated, this time by Martin Brothers, who left the basic sanctuary design in place along with the life-like statuary and the altar-piece, which was "the first liturgical altar" in the city.<sup>29</sup>

In 1901 the Sisters of Mercy, then teaching at the St. Patrick's school, purchased the Peasley home at 209 N. Marshall and established Saint Cecelia Academy as "a cultural center and convent."<sup>30</sup> The frame building of the old convent and school was subsequently torn down although remnants of its foundations as well as artifacts discarded in the vicinity were encountered during the recent archaeological investigation of this lot.<sup>31</sup>

By the 1930s, the Irish ethnicity of the St. Patrick's parish and of the Hibernia neighborhood had diminished to the point that the neighborhood had become better known as "Washington Heights." The congregation had changed as well, with "more German than Irish names on the roster" by that time.<sup>32</sup> As time wore on, the congregation gradually shifted to West Burlington, further changing the nature of the old neighborhood. Today, while the church is still in use, the parish is no longer centered in Hibernia.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HIBERNIA NEIGHBORHOOD

**T**he Hibernia neighborhood is mostly a memory; however, the standing remnants of its houses and buildings can serve as guideposts to its past and help illuminate the rich history of this Irish immigrant and industrial neighborhood. The most prominent guidepost is, of course, St. Patrick's Church, which stands a beacon looking over the neighborhood and reflecting its Catholic and Irish heritage. Another guidepost is the Murray Iron Works, the original stone building of which serves as a reminder not only of the industrial foundation of this neighborhood but also the birth of one of the City's great industrial enterprises. Of particular significance is the fact that the Murray Iron Works is still in operation even though its name and its owners have changed through the years. Further guideposts include the remnants of the Embalming Burial Case Company factory complex, with its workers' housing reflecting an aspect of employee relations during the Great Depression that was rare for its time and even rarer in its survival to the present day.

The publication of this booklet completes the mitigation efforts for the Murray Iron Works, St. Patrick's Catholic Church and the Embalming Burial Case Company complex. Under provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act, the marginal and direct impacts to these historic properties have now been mitigated and the construction of the long-proposed Central Avenue overpass and roadway can now begin.

**Section of 1889 Panorama Map showing the Hibernia Neighborhood. (Copy courtesy of Friends of the Burlington Public Library.)**



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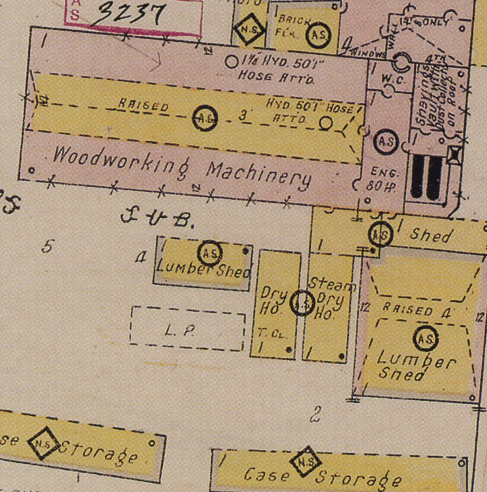
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- Additional articles about the Murray Iron Works and the Embalming Burial Case Company in the Burlington newspapers dating from: March 29, 1870; May 7, 1872; October 26, 1888; March 13, 1914; December 12, 1927; January 30, 1928; October 6, 1943
- that "Hibernia" reflects addresses in the vicinity of Agency, Patterson and Plank streets.
- 2 *Burlington Hawk-Eye* 1870 (March 11)
  - 3 *Burlington Hawk-Eye* 1870 (March 11)
  - 4 Antrobus 1915:14-15
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  - 6 Scrapbook of Murray Iron Works Catalogues, Murray Turbomachinery Inc., Burlington, Iowa
  - 7 Watkins 1896:70
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  - 10 *Burlington Hawk-Eye Gazette* n.d., copy in Murray Iron Works File, Burlington Public Library
  - 11 Dailey 1938
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  - 13 *ibid.*
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  - 26 *ibid.*:18
  - 27 McPartland 1970a:29-30
  - 28 *ibid.*
  - 29 *ibid.*
  - 30 McPartland 1970b
  - 31 Rogers 1999b
  - 32 *The Burlington Gazette* 1930 (October 25)

## FOOTNOTES

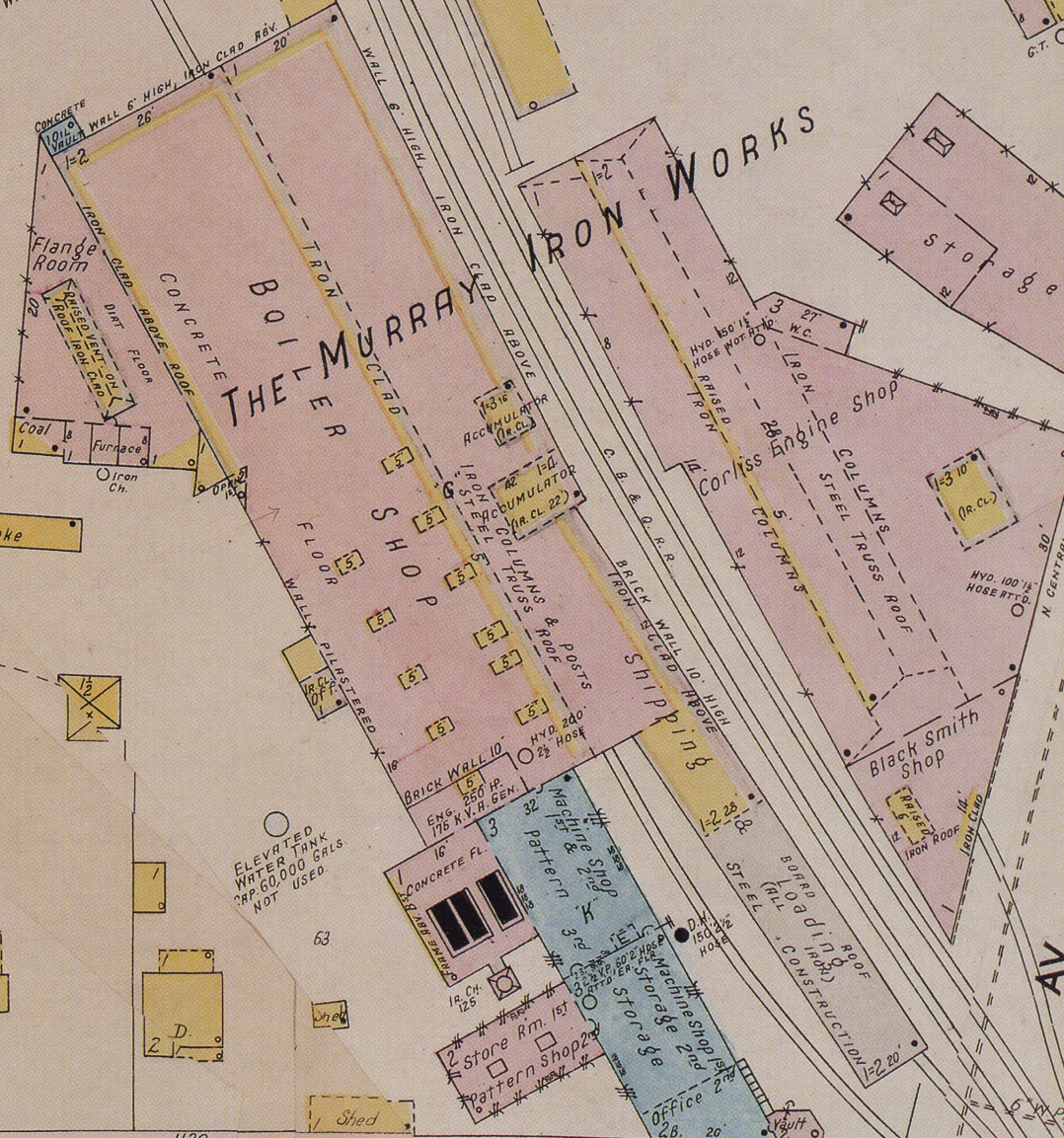
- 1 For this study, the Hibernia neighborhood was delineated by the concentration of Irish immigrants listed as living on Agency, Patterson, Plank, Pond, Boundary, Washington, and Gunnison streets along with those whose address was simply listed as "Hibernia" in the 1870, 1880 and 1885 population census data. It is assumed

**EMBALMING BURIAL CASE CO.**



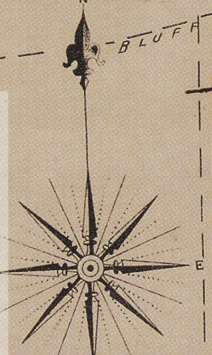
2 NIGHT & SUNDAY WATCHMAN, APPROVED CLOCK HEAT, STEAM, LIGHTS, ELECTRIC POWER, COAL, & ELECTRIC (I.E.P.) FUEL HOSE AS OUT-SIDE HYDRANTS WITH HOSE AS SHOWN. WATER BARRELS & PAILS.

**THE MURRAY IRON WORKS**



NIGHT AND SUNDAY WATCHMAN, APPROVED CLOCK HEAT, STEAM, LIGHTS, ELECTRIC (I.E.P.) FUEL HOSE AS OUT-SIDE HYDRANTS WITH HOSE AS SHOWN. WATER BARRELS & PAILS.

Back Inside Cover: 1931 Sanborn Company Fire Insurance map showing Embalming Burial Case Company, Murray Iron Works, and St. Patrick's Catholic Church. Pink=brick buildings Yellow=frame Blue=stone building Photograph of map provided by the State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City.



**St. Patrick's Church**  
HEAT AND LIGHTS