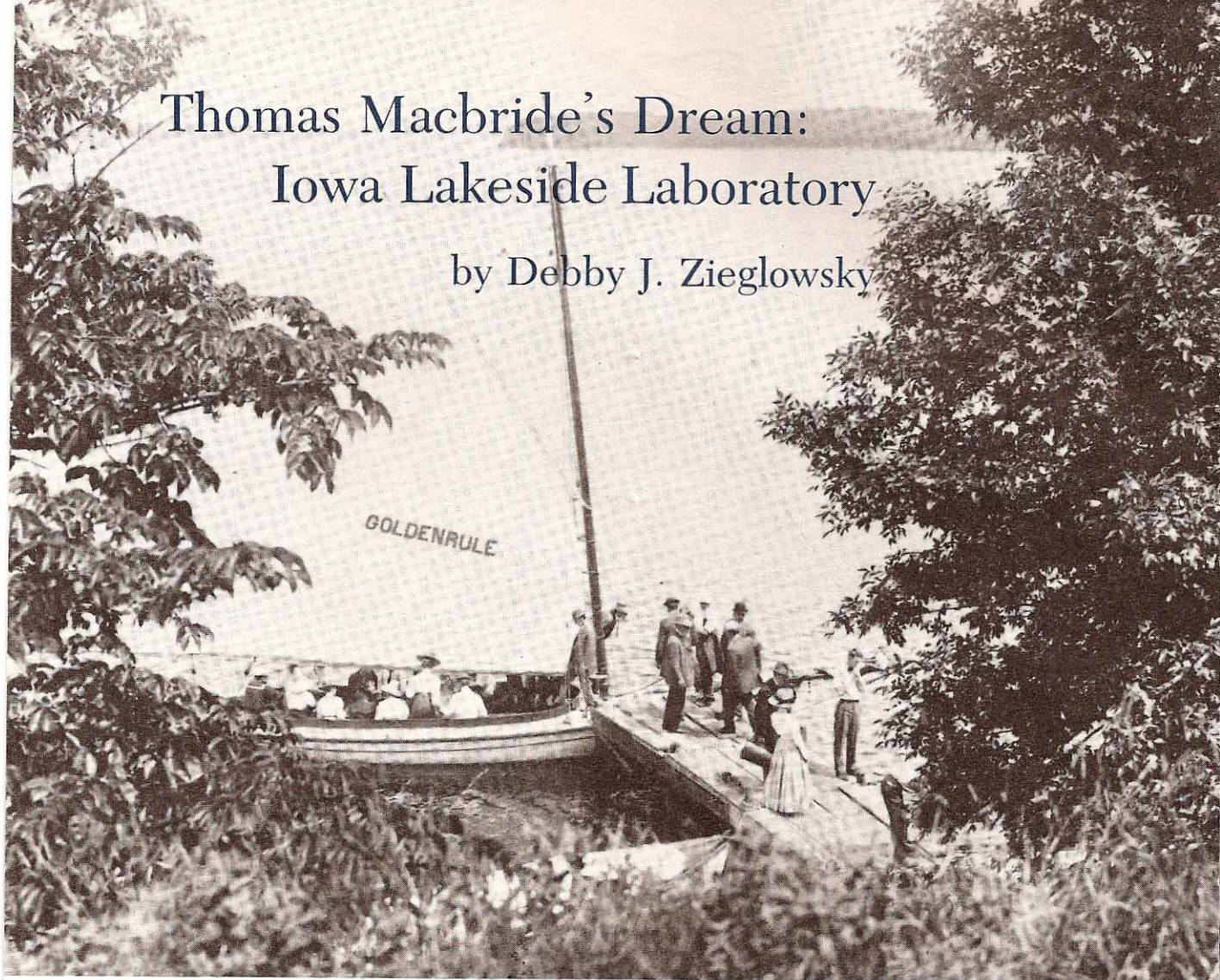


Thomas Macbride's Dream: Iowa Lakeside Laboratory

by Debby J. Zieglowsky



*Thomas H. Macbride, Samuel Calvin, and Robert B. Wylie arriving at the laboratory pier in 1909.
(courtesy Iowa Lakeside Laboratory)*

Along the shores of northwest Iowa's Lake Okoboji are set the vacation dream homes of thousands of Iowans. The homes range in size and style from elegant estates and modest family cottages to rustic resort structures and family campgrounds. Weekend water enthusiasts crowd the lake during each summer season, fishermen, sailors, skiers, and simple joyriders. Yet on the west side of the lake an entire bay appears little touched by human habitation. The shoreline of Miller's Bay is bordered

by lush forest, green marshes, and grassland rather than vacation dream homes. Only a scattering of small buildings offers any evidence of human activity.

This unusual area is the site of the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory. A quiet campus containing over one hundred thirty acres is the summer home of university professors and students conducting course work and research in biology. Lakeside Laboratory's dedicated band of scientists offers sharp contrast indeed to Okoboji's resort population. Why is it there? And how did it come to be where it is?

Thomas Huston Macbride of the State University of Iowa founded Iowa Lakeside Laboratory in 1909. It was Macbride, with his boundless energy and enthusiasm about the value and importance of studying nature, who gave this field station its special flavor.

Macbride joined the university faculty in 1878 as an assistant to Samuel Calvin, at that time the sole member of the department of natural science. Macbride's appointment represented a reunion of the two men and allowed the renewal of their friendship — a friendship begun when Macbride, as a young student at Lenox College in the mid-1860s, had taken course work from Calvin. As assistant professor of natural science, Macbride was charged with teaching courses in botany, systematic zoology, and biology.

In 1884 Macbride advanced to a full professorship in charge of botany, a position he held until his two-year term as university president between 1914 and 1916. Calvin focused on his specialties, geology and zoology. A masterful and enthusiastic teacher, Macbride attracted to his botany courses the largest number of students registering for any liberal arts course, class size being limited only by lecture hall capacity. Such was his popularity that it was a rare student at the State University of Iowa that did not enroll in at least one of Macbride's classes before graduation.

Students who scheduled to take a course in botany with Macbride soon realized that the subject was far more universal than they had imagined. The professor taught them the nature and structure of plants remarkably well. His own knowledge and precision commanded attention, for he seemed to know everything exactly. Moreover, he had an amazing faculty for making the most obtuse matter seem perfectly simple. But his botany was more than the study of plants: it was life and truth and beauty. To accept tutelage of

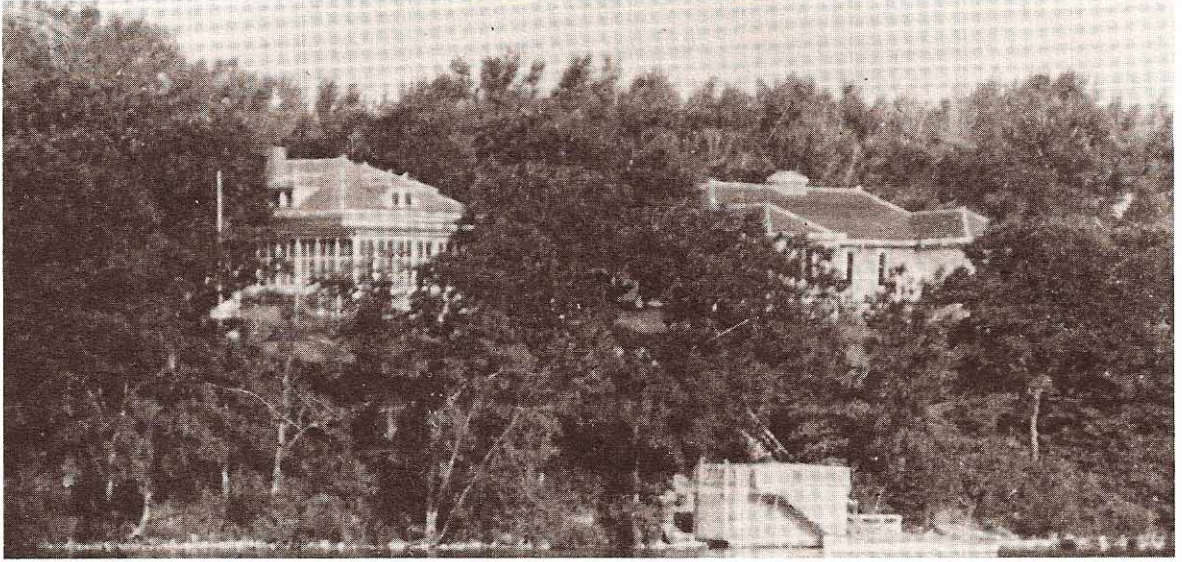
Professor Macbride was to learn to think, to appreciate scholarship, and to comprehend the meaning of wisdom.

The study of nature would hold Macbride's active research interest throughout his lifetime. The results of his scientific work — whether the results took the form of publications or lectures — gained for Macbride widespread respect among his scientific peers, his students, and the people of Iowa in general.

In 1874, when Samuel Calvin joined the university faculty, few materials existed to supplement textbook instruction in the natural sciences. Thus, the expanding science program needed both equipment (in the form of microscopes and laboratory apparatus) and material (in the form of collections and specimens) so that students might have the opportunity to directly observe their natural subjects.

Calvin and Macbride gradually remedied the material inadequacy through their own collecting expeditions. They often gathered specimens for the university museum and herbarium during vacation trips while extending their own knowledge of geology and botany. By 1880 the two men had gathered and prepared for classroom study over three hundred specimens of midwestern flora, representing over one hundred different species. Yet occasionally the results of their collecting trips were received only reluctantly by university officials, as the *Daily Iowan* noted with amusement in 1913:

Twenty years ago Doctor Macbride and the late Samuel Calvin were traveling through the Black hills of Dakota. While there they found some queer looking objects lying over the surface of the ground. The two men were attracted to these objects and after studying them carefully, they decided to bring them back to Iowa City.



What students saw when they arrived by lake steamer for the early summer sessions. The large building on the right was the laboratory, torn down in the 1930s. In the front, center, was the boathouse (which has been replaced by a modern laboratory for aquatic studies). On the left was the original cottage—the faculty cottage and reading room. The main cottage still stands and serves as a residence for faculty. (courtesy University of Iowa Archives, Iowa City)

The objects were therefore carefully packed away in large cases and shipped by freight from the wild and barren hills of South Dakota to the university. It was then after their arrival that the board of regents absolutely refused to pay the charges of transportation. The railroad company wanted the money and the university wanted the material, so Dr. Shaffer [sic], the president of the university, paid \$150 that these things might remain in the university.

The university has twenty-five of these objects and they are fossilized Cycad plant stems from the lower Cretaceous beds of the Black hills region of South Dakota. All the visible supply in the Dakotas was brought back to the university and now universities and museums all over the world are trying to obtain specimens of this rare and wonderful plant that grew with such profusion millions of years ago.

Both men also offered field expeditions for students in their laboratory courses. They believed that if certain kinds of materials could not be transported to the classroom for study, then students should be sent to observe them firsthand. As one student remembered, “One of the highlights of each year was that day on which Macbride took his classes to see the geological structure near Muscatine.”

Bohumil Shimek became a third member of this important group of early natural scientists at the university. A historian of the university, writing in 1945, described Shimek’s position relative to Calvin and Macbride:

As Socrates taught Plato, who in turn imparted his learning to Aristotle, so it was with Calvin, Macbride, and Shimek, three of the most important scientists in the history of the University of Iowa. Shimek (though a student) entered the University simultaneously with Macbride and for five years earned his tuition and

books collecting specimens for the two professors. . . . It was a common sight on Sunday afternoons to see the two distinguished gentlemen accompanied by a younger lad riding on the country lanes around Iowa City in a buggy filled with leafy branches and flowers. The work of Shimek was so promising that after graduation, he remained at the University and became Macbride's assistant and later his teaching associate.

In the late 1890s, the trio of naturalists, Macbride, Calvin, and Shimek (who had been appointed to an assistant professorship of botany in 1890), made several expeditions to the lake district of northwest Iowa to study the region's geology and flora, and to collect specimens for the university cabinet. So many diverse habitats combined in such proximity impressed the scientists, from the variety of lakes, marshes and fens, and hanging bogs to the region's unique glacial topography. As they walked through the prairies and forests, waded through the bogs and along the lakeshores, they dreamed of establishing a laboratory for research work in natural sciences there. Macbride believed it was a perfect location to teach Iowans about the state's natural beauty and the richness of its lake, forest, and prairie life. They recognized that establishing such a station might be difficult, but the dream took hold in each man. In 1900 Macbride argued that "Naturalists will find here exceptional advantages for the prosecution of their work, and summer schools of science might here flourish as in no other quarter of the state." Regular expeditions conducted by the men for the benefit of exposing their students to the unique area repeatedly underscored the need for the kind of organized field study that a research station would allow.

Yet the dream languished for almost ten years as the scientists tried to figure out the logistics of implementing their plan for a natu-

ral science research station. Statutory provisions in the state constitution against establishing a "branch" of the university in any form at any location other than Iowa City stymied the men. However, when a five-acre tract of land located on the west shore of West Lake Okoboji appeared on the real estate market in 1908, Macbride secured the option to buy it without hesitation. He then set out to secure the funding necessary to complete the land purchase and to put into motion the great experiment. His plan for skirting the statutory provision was both novel and effective.

Macbride turned to the supporters of "Old Gold" — the members of the University of Iowa Alumni Association — to throw their financial support behind the project. The property could be privately purchased by university alumni and offered by them to the university's science departments for summer work. Rather than wasting summer vacations, Macbride suggested, biology students from all of Iowa's colleges and universities as well as high school biology teachers could study the Iowa beyond classrooms and books. It was, Macbride argued, too good an opportunity to be missed.

Macbride's arguments proved convincing and, toward the end of fund-raising for the purchase, the alumni organized a stock company to own and control the property. Trustees of the company agreed that the premises would be "maintained not for profit but as a Botanical and Biological Station for scientific research and instruction for the use of the faculty, students and alumni of the State University of Iowa, for summer classes, for reunions, and the like, including the advertising of the University, especially in the northwest." Shares of stock in the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory Association could be purchased for ten dollars each, although only alumni or persons who had at one time been students at the state university were allowed to invest in the project initially.

The five-acre property that Macbride had

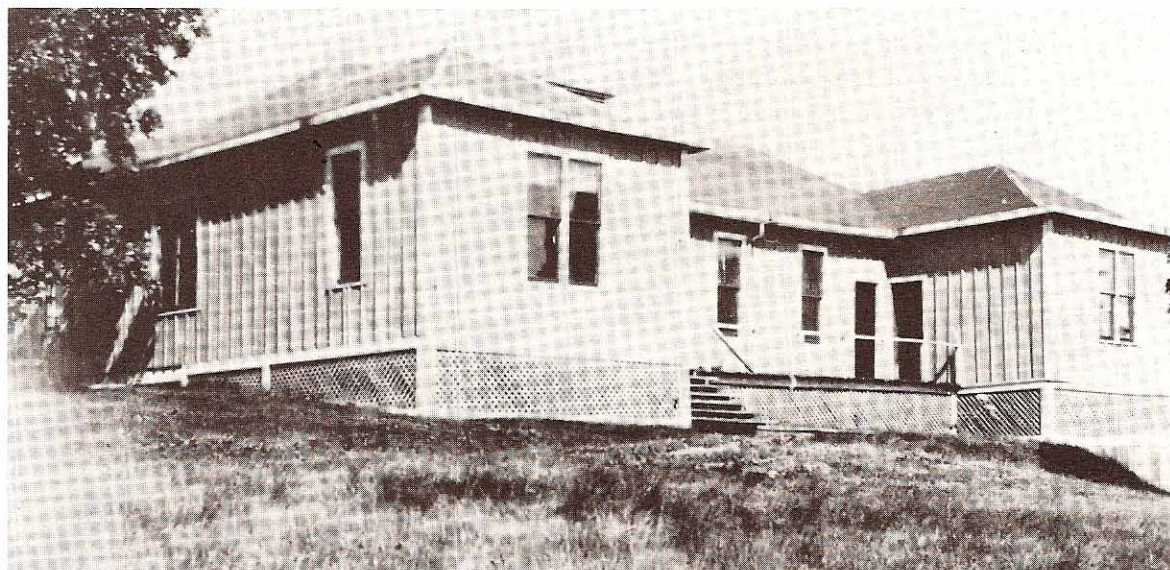
secured an option to buy — the E.B. Smith property — offered an ideal setting for a research station. Located on the west shore of Miller's Bay, it included five hundred feet of lake frontage and was partially covered with trees. The buildings included a well-built eight-room cottage, a two-room cottage, an ice-house or boathouse, an electric light plant, and a water pumping station.

The alumni association negotiator, Joseph J. McConnell, closed the deal on January 11, 1909, with little publicity or fanfare. The purchase agreement included: "What is known as the Unalaklick Cottage, and buildings, . . . comprising five acres and more particularly . . . 1 gasoline launch "Unalaklick," 1 sail boat "South Breeze," 1 rowboat with gasoline engine attachment; all tools in power house and gasoline storage house for the sum of six thousand five hundred dollars . . ."

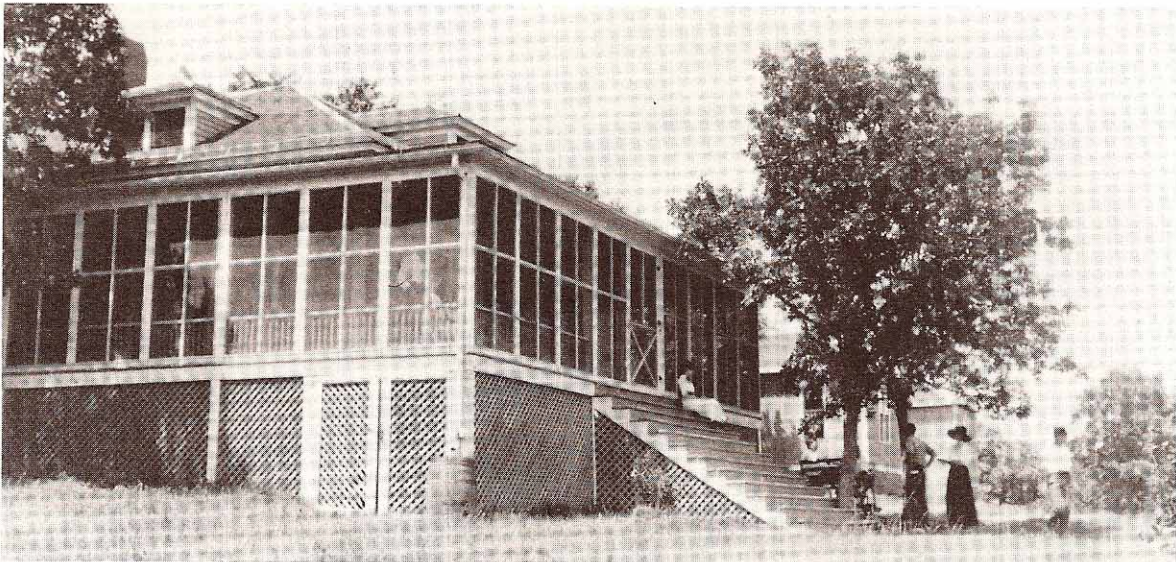
In addition to raising the necessary funds for the land purchase, the alumni corporation's executive committee raised roughly \$1000 for the construction of a multi-purpose building. Plans for the H-shaped building included a large lecture hall that would seat one hundred and twenty-five people, faculty offices, labora-

tories, research rooms, and a library room. The building would be designed for "electric lighting, electrically heated water baths, and [would] be supplied with running water, tanks, sinks, and all the necessary laboratory furniture." The building would be constructed primarily in Iowa City and shipped to its Okoboji site in time for the first summer session, scheduled for June 1909. The dream was coming true.

A bulletin announcing the creation of the lakeside laboratory and describing its mission was printed and distributed by the university in early 1909. The curriculum to be offered during the first summer season was carefully outlined and included courses "along the general lines of botany, geology, and zoology." Macbride would teach mycology, Calvin would teach Iowa physiography, and Shimek would teach both field ecology and plant taxonomy. Another University of Iowa botanist, Robert B. Wylie, offered to teach aquatic plant biology and plant physiology. Calvin's colleague in the geology department, George F. Kay, would teach elementary mineralogy and petrology. Coe College professor Bert H. Bailey offered to



The H-shaped laboratory building. (courtesy University of Iowa Archives, Iowa City)



The main cottage, with the laboratory building in the background. (courtesy University of Iowa Archives, Iowa City)

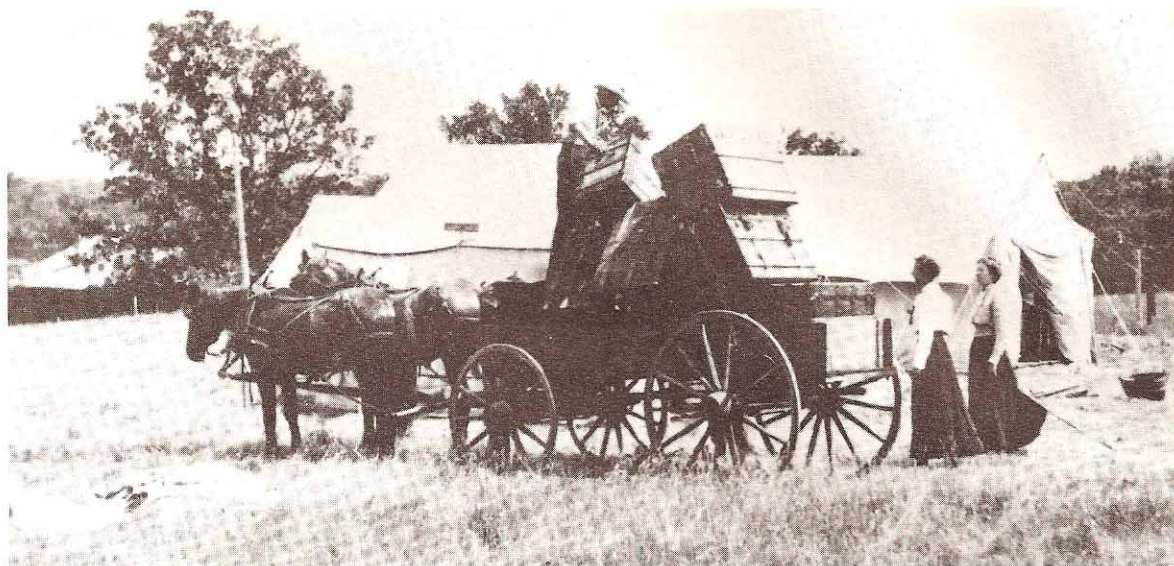
teach zoology, both general and advanced, as well as ornithology. Students would receive university credit for their work just as if they were taking courses in a standard university setting.

One of Macbride's chief goals as director of the laboratory was to make it an IOWA laboratory, where representatives from a variety of educational institutions in the state might work side by side, developing a spirit of intercollegiate friendliness and cooperation. Thus, all of the recognized colleges in Iowa were invited to send representatives to study at the laboratory. The invitation was backed by special scholarships, funded in part by the state board of education. Many institutions responded in the first year, including: Buena Vista College, Coe College, Cornell College, Drake University, Highland Park College, Iowa State College, Iowa Wesleyan University, Lenox College, Morningside College, Parsons College, Simpson Centenary, the State University of Iowa, Tabor College, and Upper Iowa University. Twenty-six students, including both men and women, attended Iowa Lakeside Laboratory's first summer session.

The summer session was divided into two terms of work, one six-week period with a tuition fee of \$15 and one four-week period with a tuition fee of \$10. Payment of tuition fees entitled a student to use of the laboratory facilities and to free admittance to a lecture series offered by members of the laboratory staff one or two evenings each week during the summer season.

To reach Iowa Lakeside Laboratory, students were advised to take the train to West Okoboji on the Rock Island line or Arnolds Park on the Milwaukee line. They could then travel by any of the regular lake steamers to the laboratory's pier on Miller's Bay.

Living conditions were primitive in the early years of the laboratory's existence, and the fledgling research station operated on a shoe-string budget. Water had to be hauled from a well. Meals were cooked on wood-burning stoves. The students cultivated their own vegetable garden to reduce food expenses. Generally, \$4 per week covered the cost of board. Meals were furnished on a cooperative cost basis, their preparation supervised by the "matron of the Cottage," and served in a dining



Students' luggage was hauled to the laboratory from one of the nearby railroad towns, c. 1911. (courtesy Iowa Lakeside Laboratory)

tent. Most students lived in large sturdy tents, three students to a tent, and paid a nominal rental fee of \$1.50 for the session. A 1912 summer bulletin for the laboratory described the features of tent accommodations: "A tent is provided with a wooden floor and covered with a fly, and contains individual cots with mattresses, a pail, wash basin, and chairs. Students will bring their own bedding, towels, and soap." Students also had the option of boarding at a local hotel or with nearby farm families. When the long hours of each day's teaching and research were finished, water still had to be hauled, wood cut, and the garden weeded before the evening sing-along on the porch of the Main Cottage, which also served as the campus library.

There were other hardships. Equipment and reference materials were meager during the early years. As Macbride reported to Shimek on one occasion:

We have comparatively few reference texts here on morphology. . . . I was just in Professor Wylie's room; most of the books he has are his own. Probably we are

short on books . . . perhaps you should order a few . . .

The plan of the station provided that "while a general equipment [would] be maintained at the Station, apparatus, books, etc., [would] be loaned by the State University of Iowa. Microscopes and other apparatus [would] be transported from the University to the Laboratory at the opening of the session." Although the apparatus provided was sufficient for general course work, students conducting advanced research that required special apparatus or supplies were advised to furnish their own. As a general rule, students were advised to bring their own microscopes and reference books. Students were also warned to bring the necessary supplies if they planned to collect material for their own use: "Boxes, bottles, and preserving fluids for the care of such materials, and paper for plant-presses are especially in demand [at the lake]. Mason fruit-jars may be purchased at the local stores, but other supplies of this kind should be brought by the students who expect to use them."

The information published preparatory to

each summer session at the station emphasized both the research and recreational opportunities available at the lakeside laboratory, but students hoping merely for a summer outing were not encouraged to apply. "It is the purpose of the Station to offer opportunities for serious work to students and lovers of Nature. Five days of the week will be given to the regular work, and Saturday will be a holiday, or will be given to field excursions." And yet all was not seriousness: "While mere pleasure will not be permitted to encroach upon the serious work of the Station, abundant opportunities will be offered after working hours for recreation, such as swimming, boating, etc. Instruction in swimming will be given to those who desire it. Row-boats for private use may be hired at the Hotel."

* * *

Macbride took great pride in the success of his first years at Iowa Lakeside Laboratory. In a letter to Bohumil Shimek twenty years later he recalled the hopes, dreams, and

goals of the laboratory:

In starting the Okoboji enterprise, Prof. Calvin, and you and I, you be it not forgotten had the first class at Okoboji, — we sought two or three things: a, To quicken our own intellectual life! to inspire some of our own pupils and promote science! but further b, to rouse the common people, to awaken in them interest in the natural world, and persuade them, if possible, to use it sensibly and rightly. . . . We taught our pupils anything they wanted to know: showed them something of the natural world, its richness and meaning: its moral purity and grandeur.

Students were encouraged to engage in independent research under the watchful eyes of their professors, a tradition that continues today. Each professor, when he was not teaching, pursued his own scientific research. In the early years of the laboratory's existence, much of the research conducted at the station centered on taxonomic descriptions of the many



Living conditions were primitive. Students and faculty lived in large, floored tents, hauled water, cut wood for the cookstoves, and cultivated a large vegetable garden to cut food expenses. This was the men's camp in 1911, conveniently located near the garden. (courtesy Iowa Lakeside Laboratory)



The interior of one of the tents in the women's camp in 1911. (courtesy Iowa Lakeside Laboratory)

diverse plants and animals living in the lakes area. But ecology, the study of the relationships between organisms and their environments, was also stressed. In the first decade alone, almost fifty research reports were published in such scholarly journals as *Science*, the *Botanical Gazette*, the *Wilson Bulletin*, and the *Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science*, all dealing with the biology of the lakes area.

Macbride declared the great experiment of a research station at Lake Okoboji to be a great success. And he saw tremendous potential for future development. In his report to the alumni association after the completion of the first summer session, he wrote:

The alumni are face to face with an opportunity of magnificent possibilities, to the University at large and to the great commonwealth; but we have just begun. . . . Permanent structures will someday crown the hilltop and pillars shine among

its trees, and all visitors to our lakes, and all residents by the shores, and all lovers of nature in our State, will find from year to year refreshment and solace and joy in the halls and libraries of the Lakeside Laboratory, founded by the alumni of the University of Iowa.

The dream was realized. The first summers at the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory were idyllic, despite some harshness of conditions and a continuing lack of funds to improve equipment and maintain buildings. Macbride served as director of the station through four of its first five years (1909, 1910, 1911, and 1913). When funds were short during the early summer sessions Macbride even paid the salaries of his laboratory colleagues from his own pocket.

But, inevitably, changes occurred. Samuel Calvin died in 1911, leaving Macbride and Shimek to carry on. Macbride assumed the presidency of the State University of Iowa in

1914, and the new administrative responsibilities seriously taxed the sixty-eight-year-old's time and his failing health. Finally, in 1916, Macbride retired from the university and left Iowa to join his family in Seattle, Washington. But greater changes occurred than just the introduction of new faces among the laboratory faculty. Some unforeseen challenges almost shattered the dream.

Summer enrollment at the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory during the first ten years of classes averaged about thirty students, but World War I affected these figures dramatically. Most of the male students accepted for work at the station for the 1918 summer session received their draft notices one week before the session started. Only twelve students completed the session.

Faculty members were also occupied with the war effort. Bohumil Shimek, with other Czech nationalists, viewed the war as an opportunity for the Czechs to gain independence from Austrian rule. He spearheaded a drive to raise money for the resistance army, and suc-

ceeded in raising \$100,000 in Iowa alone. Shimek also distributed literature in support of the Czech cause and addressed groups in all parts of the country, all without payment and with significant cost to his health. From Seattle, Macbride conveyed his support of the Czech cause and Shimek's war work in May 1918, when he wrote:

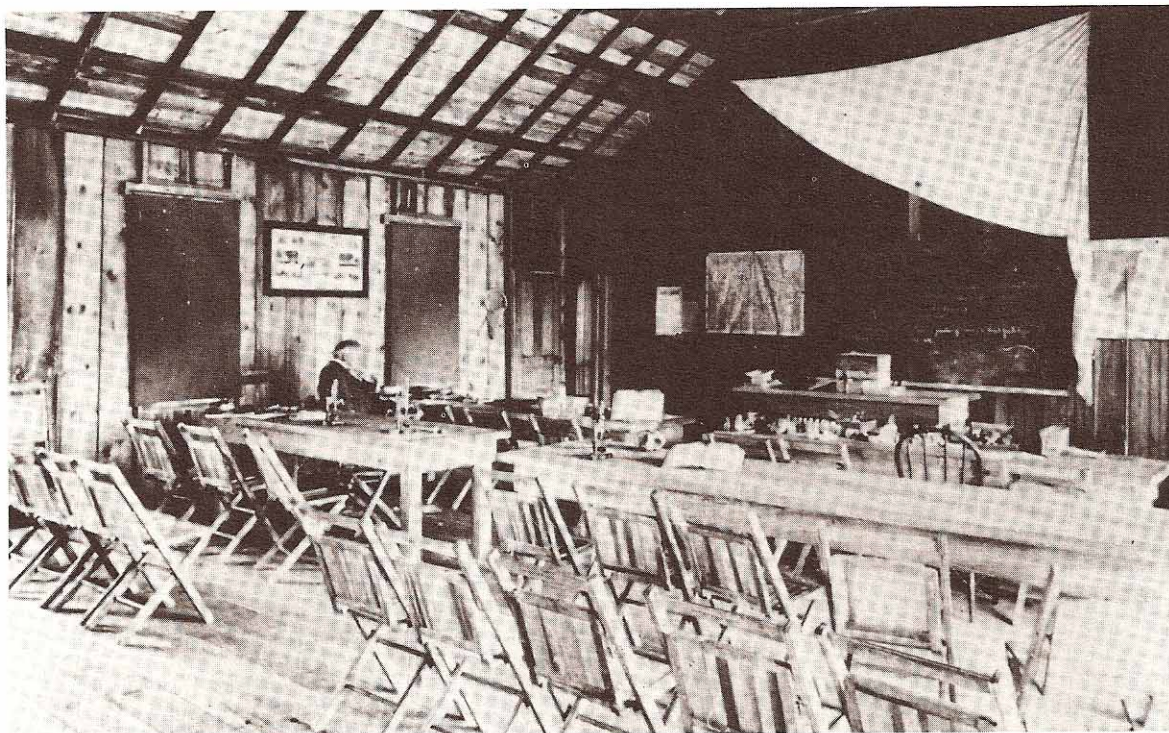
There is but one thing now for us all to consider; "How may this war be won and the world delivered?" — I rejoice in what you are doing; you will smile when I tell you that I am "on the reserve list."

In a letter written later that same month, Macbride tried to calm Shimek's worries about the laboratory during the coming session:

Do not let anything prevent your most praiseworthy efforts to keep our people up to the proper spirit in winning this war. We've got to win it, and I am rejoicing in you as in a son!



The mess hall and kitchen during the early years of the laboratory's operation. (courtesy Iowa Lakeside Laboratory)



Dr. Macbride in the spacious lecture hall. Public lectures on a wide variety of topics were held weekly, a tradition which continues today. (courtesy Iowa Lakeside Laboratory)

In spite of all the wartime difficulties, Iowa Lakeside Laboratory survived the war without suspending a session.

Although he no longer lived in Iowa, Macbride retained his lively interest in the laboratory as well as in the state and university. By maintaining a voluminous correspondence, he continued to work for his dream. Moral support for the laboratory and its mission rarely flagged, but obtaining regular financial support continued to be a nagging and persistent problem.

Until a way could be found to transfer control of the research station from the alumni to the state, funding depended entirely on private donations and the sale of Iowa Lakeside Laboratory Association stock. It was a chancey basis for support during exceedingly troubling economic times for everyone. Raising money even for marginal upkeep of the grounds and

buildings was difficult and, while the benefits of laboratory expansion were readily apparent to everyone involved with the station, raising the money to finance expansion provided a rare challenge. It was to this fund-raising that Macbride devoted his efforts from Seattle.

"Okoboji worries me nights," he confided to Shimek in 1918.

The laboratory's immediate financial difficulties were eased slightly in 1919 when the University of Iowa Graduate College assumed the responsibility of paying faculty salaries and buying some necessary research equipment. The focus of the laboratory mission changed slightly during the postwar period, however, when it became a facility for experienced researchers and students already advanced in their science work. No regular classes were offered and the staff of the laboratory was limited to two University of Iowa professors, to be in residence at the station during the ten weeks

Suggestions for Students' Individual Equipment for Use at the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory*

- I. Bedding and tent or room equipment.
 1. Two warm blankets, or equivalent.
 2. Pillow and pillow slips.
 3. Sheets, or cotton blankets.
 4. Strip, 2 yards, oil cloth.
 5. Towels and soap.
 6. Small mirror.
 7. Needles and thread.
 8. Half dozen candles.
 9. Hooks or hangers.
 - II. Clothing.
 1. Comfortable walking shoes, — necessity.
 2. Sweater, — often useful.
 3. Khaki suits, — very convenient.
 4. Negligee shirts, — tan or gray preferable.
 5. Leggings, — useful in wet grass, etc.
 6. Tennis shoes, — used in many ways.
 7. Bathing suits, — indispensable.
 8. Rain coat, — very useful.
 9. Collecting case or bag, — very useful.
 - III. Miscellaneous.
 1. Dissecting set, — very useful.
 2. Camera, if you have one.
 3. Mosquito netting, — optional; fine meshed only is serviceable.
 4. Special reagents.
 5. Boxes for specimens.
 6. Drawing paper and outfit.
 7. Lecture note books.
 8. Hand lens; this is a necessity in many of the courses.
 9. Bottles and other containers suitable for your work.
 10. Alarm clock, — some find it necessary.
 - IV. Medicines, Some antiseptic salve. Peroxide, etc.
 - V. Special equipment for individual courses.
 - A. Ornithology
 1. Field glass, or opera glass.
 2. Chapman's "Handbook of Birds Eastern North America."
 - B. Malacology.
 1. A tin cup.
 2. An old tooth brush.
 3. Fine pointed forceps.
 4. One or two medicine droppers.
 5. Quantity of Homeopathic or shell vials, and pill boxes to keep shells in.
 - C. Biology of Aquatic Plants.
 1. Hand lens.
 2. Drawing pencil. India Ink and pens, if desired.
 3. Containers, for those who desire to collect material.
 - D. Field work in Botany
 1. Gray's "New Manual."
 2. Plant press (this may be made at the laboratory).
 - E. Lake Flora.
 1. Hand lens.
 2. Bottles and other containers.
 3. Mounting paper.
 - F. Entomology.
 1. Hand lens.
 2. Pair of forceps.
 3. Bottles, Homeopathic vials, etc.
 4. Special items of additional equipment furnished at cost.
 - G. Research Courses.
 Such items of special equipment as the work demands.
- Note: — Mason jars may be purchased at nearby groceries. Collectors should provide their own preservatives.

*The list of suggested equipment for laboratory students has been drawn from Elizabeth Frances Nuss' 1946 master's thesis, "History of the State University of Iowa: The Iowa Lakeside Laboratory." The list dates from one of the years that Robert B. Wylie served as director of the laboratory (1915, 1917, 1919-1921, 1923, 1926).

the station was open.

The research basis of the laboratory created new concerns about station size and the changing needs of participants in the great experiment. There was a serious need for simple

cottages, as Director Robert B. Wylie made clear in his report on the 1920 summer session:

*With increasing emphasis on the re-
search the members of the Laboratory*



The purpose of Iowa Lakeside Laboratory was to take biology students out of the classroom and into the real world to study nature firsthand. The wide variety of habitats in the area of the laboratory offered field study of many kinds, including the shoreline of Little Miller's Bay. (courtesy Iowa Lakeside Laboratory)

will be older men, many of them with families. Naturally such heads of families in seeking opportunities for summer work must take into account their wives and children too young to be left behind for the summer. The needs of these must be kept in mind, especially as there are now no cottages or rooms for rent on our side of the lake. . . .

. . . While we should be very conservative about opening the privileges of the Laboratory grounds to "non combatants" it must not be forgotten that the possibility of bringing the wife along will determine for many advanced workers the possibility of their coming to our station.

The 1920s were difficult times for the laboratory. Reports from the station directors were filled with pleas for repair of the station buildings: "the main cottage needs a new roof"; "the porch will soon require repair"; "the laboratory building needs a number of new windows"; "all

the buildings are in need of paint."

In 1922 the trustees of the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory Association authorized a campaign among the university alumni to raise a \$10,000 endowment fund, the interest from which would provide for the upkeep of the station. The fund-raisers attempted to tap the feelings that alumni had developed for Macbride through the years of his association with the university: "You are also a friend of Dr. and Mrs. Macbride. We are raising this Endowment fund at this time in order that Dr. Macbride may know that this work which he began and carried for so many years may be continued." The results of the two-year campaign were disappointing in that nowhere near the desired amount of money was raised, although the small endowment fund did provide a source of emergency funds for laboratory upkeep.

The condition of the laboratory buildings did not improve, however, and their increasingly shoddy appearance was a matter of continuing concern for Macbride. In a letter to Director

George W. Martin in 1928, Macbride voiced his concern and offered his assistance:

I wish you would advise me if there is any particular attention that might be given to the buildings or approaches or grounds that would make the property seem less neglected. I understand that nothing has been done toward keeping it up for some time. I do not think it should be permitted to present an unsightly appearance, so long as we are associating it with the university work. I will look after the matter if you will tell me just what is needed, and will act promptly.

The late 1920s also marked the return to a structured curriculum at Iowa Lakeside Laboratory that combined course instruction and research for the summer session participants. As Director Martin reported in a letter to a prominent alumnus, "You will note that we are trying the experiment of reverting to the plan . . . which was so markedly successful as administered by President Macbride in the

earlier days."

It was in 1928 that supporters of the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory faced a remarkable opportunity to expand the research station. Macbride had long hoped to acquire additional property adjoining the laboratory, especially since the farms that had once characterized the western shoreline of Lake Okoboji were being replaced by increasing subdivision. When two tracts of land adjoining the station property on the north were offered for sale, he waited with eagerness to receive Shimek's report of the owners' asking prices. It was a rude shock. F.G. Floete had placed a \$15,000 price tag on his seventy-two acres, immediately north of the laboratory, and \$2,000 would be needed to purchase the small twelve-acre tract owned by J.C. Myerly. Floete would drive a hard bargain. Macbride wrote to Shimek, hoping against hope to gain a reduction in Floete's asking price:

Let Mr. Floete know that we folk are not realtors, speculators, buying land for sub-



A laboratory dredging party, c. 1912. (David Boot Album, SHSI)

division, simply to sell again at an extravagant [sic] profit, nor indeed at all: we spend freely asking no return for the sake of the intellectual life of men, for the uplift of men in all clearness and cleanness of thinking. . . . he can, I believe, realize the value of such attainment against which money does not count.

In a September 1928 letter to Mrs. Frank A. Stromsten, treasurer of the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory Association, Macbride allowed a similar frustration to slip out at what he perceived to be Floete's inflated asking price for the land:

Now Mr. Floete has the land we want, not as farm-land but as small town-lots for sale, I believe! I had never heard that the whole country is platted —: a town, if you please; and it is intended that city prices shall obtain. So Mr. Floete pro-

poses to sell us land worth 3 or \$4000, at present market prices, for \$14,000, city-lot prices, I presume!

Now I do not think there will soon be a 'waiting-line' of buyers for lots, on Millers Bay at city prices; — not this winter anyhow, nor even early next spring; so I still have hope!

In spite of the amount of money to be raised for the purchase of the eighty-plus acres of land, Macbride could scarcely contain his enthusiasm about beginning the effort. He wired Shimek in October 1928:

FIFTEEN THOUSAND CAN BE RAISED BUT NOT OVERNIGHT COST GREATER THAN EXPECTED BUT CAN BE MET I AM SURE . . .

The sophisticated fund-raising efficiency of the University of Iowa Foundation, even



(David Boot Album, SHSI)



Bohumil Shimek began his career at the University of Iowa on the same day as his favorite instructor, Thomas Macbride. They shared the dream of establishing a natural science laboratory "to teach Iowans about Iowa." Their combined fund-raising efforts in the late 1920s allowed the acquisition of additional land adjoining the laboratory. (courtesy Iowa Lakeside Laboratory)

today, cannot match the tremendous enthusiasm and almost superhuman effort with which the two men, Macbride and Shimek, set out to raise \$17,000 to save their dream. For they both admitted that if this opportunity to expand was lost, the laboratory would surely die. As Macbride so clearly stated the challenge, "The land question is *the* question!"

The correspondence between Shimek in Iowa City and Macbride in Seattle reached frenzied heights. Messages were telegraphed with great impatience, the mails being simply too slow to satisfy each man's demand for current information. The Myerly tract was readily

purchased. Raising funds for the Floete tract presented the real challenge.

Shimek's experience in raising funds for the Czech nationalists during the war served him well. Using long lists of personal contacts suggested by Macbride, Shimek first sent a short note, addressed to "friends of Dr. Macbride." He simply asked if he might "call your attention to a project in which he is intensely interested? . . . Dr. Macbride is growing old, and I hope that we may bring to him the joy of achievement while he is still here to share it." If the initial query letter went unanswered, he tried again in a month's time. But many letter recipients responded positively with questions or checks. Indeed, the stack of carbons surviving this correspondence is a substantial archive.

The fund-raising task proved difficult and time-consuming. The early checks were slow in coming. Both men were suffering failing health, especially Macbride who was now eighty years old. Days of little or discouraging news led Macbride to express doubts about his dream for the first time. In a letter marked personal and confidential, he wrote of his frustration to "his dear Friend, Prof. Shimek":

I do not wish in any way to impose the O. station on the Natural hist[ory] people at the Un[iversity] now or hereafter. If the men immediately concerned care not for it, see not in it an opportunity of unusual promise and satisfaction to serve Ia, especially the NW fraction of the State, the station had better be turned to other purpose or other hands.

He added, doubtfully:

I am timid about it: not withstanding that every man so far has been enthusiastic . . . I am an old man and the folk may, in their kindness, hesitate to discourage me. . . . Thus seems the case to me: — the

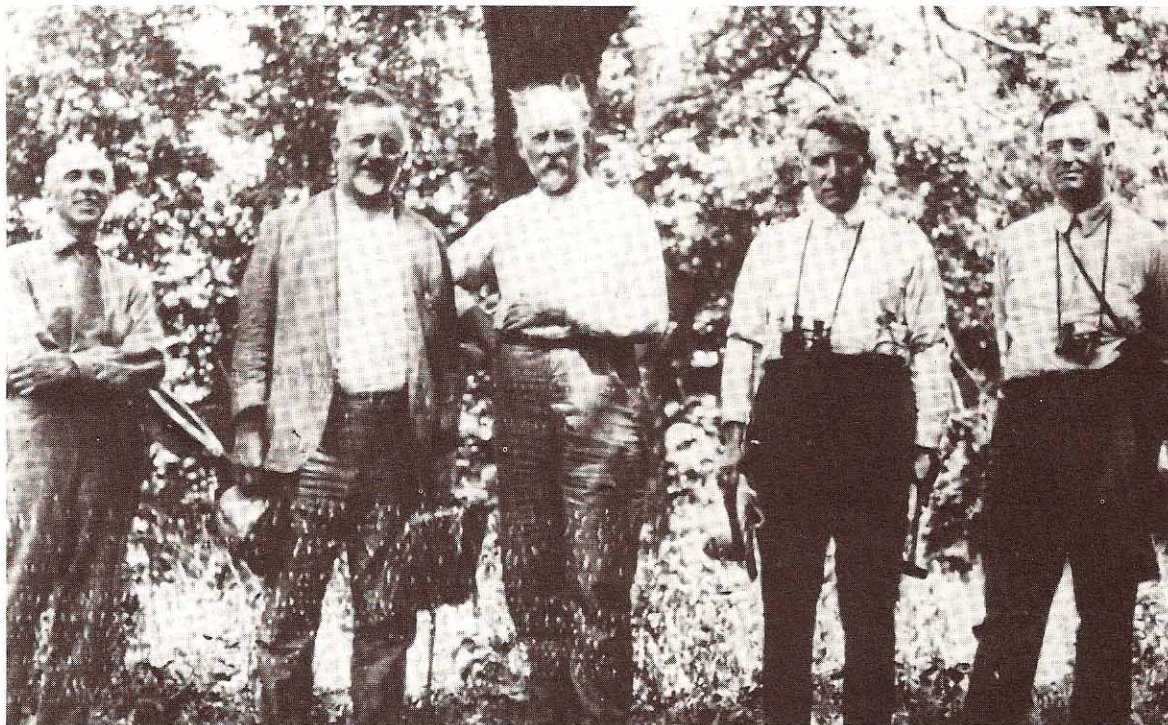
present equipment at the lake is like a worn-out overcoat; it may be worn, but there are limits both in appearance and service! We must either rebuild or stop! If we rebuild, the building must be creditable, alike to the Alumni, their Alma Mater, the dignity of science, and our proud, deservedly proud, Commonwealth.

Confessing his doubts to his old friend must have helped Macbride. Before the letter ended, a tone of cheerful optimism had returned. With the optimism came new energy and a determination to correspond with as many alumni as possible as often as was necessary to raise the needed funds. This he did with courtly persuasion and old-fashioned arm twisting.

Shimek's reply to this letter does not survive. But he must have been deeply touched, realizing that it was his turn to provide a strong shoulder for his friend to lean on. Despite his crippling arthritis, Shimek launched a vigorous new campaign for funds.

The hundreds of letters were, of course, designed to open purse strings. But, perhaps unconsciously on Shimek's part, they tugged at the recipients' heartstrings too. The new campaign was certainly effective. He proposed that the name of the research station be changed to Macbride Lakeside Laboratory to honor the "Grand Old Man." In a letter to a generous Davenport friend Shimek wrote:

I certainly recognize the value and the possibilities of the Laboratory, for it accords wholly with my conviction that



1921. (Left to Right) Charles R. Keyes, archaeologist and founder of the Iowa Archaeological Survey; Bohumil Shimek, botanist from the University of Iowa; Louis H. Pammel, botanist from Iowa State University; George F. Kay, geologist from the University of Iowa; and T.C. Stephens, ornithologist from Morningside College. The laboratory was the site of research for scientists not only from Iowa and the Midwest but from around the world. (courtesy Iowa Lakeside Laboratory)



Half of the students enrolled for the first session of Iowa Lakeside Laboratory were women. Tuition for the full term was \$25 with an additional \$4 for board and tent accommodations. Enrollment during the first summer was 26 students. Today, classes continue to be kept small to allow for individualized instruction and to intrude as little as possible on natural areas. Enrollment now averages close to 100 students in two sessions each summer. (courtesy Iowa Lakeside Laboratory)

the scientific men of our state institutions should devote much of their effort to the solutions of problems of value and interest to our own people; as an alumnus I am interested in the continuity of interest in the old institution and in finding worthwhile projects around which this interest may be perpetuated in a personal way; — but there is another, an intimately personal consideration which induces me to try to push this plan through under circumstances by no means easy for me just now, — my interest in Dr. Macbride.

To have such a friend! To refuse to let such a friend's dream die!

When news reached Seattle of the proposed name change, Macbride adamantly refused to

allow his name to be used. He hurried a letter to Shimek that explained his feelings about the name change:

You will recall that I was honored at one time by the name Macbride Lakeside Laboratory. But it could not be. . . . because if for no other reason, I have always felt it a pleasure to aid it and ask my friends so to do — if it bore my name, how impossible that would be. — A prominent member of the staff with whom I recently spoke remarked: "That will be a great monument to you!" — not with my consent: if I have anything to do with its building!

I am not in the market for a monument: not yet, although a green field not far

away looks very inviting betimes.

He added,

No: I work because I believe in the service it will be to the people of Ioway, of north-west Iowa . . . This I have sought: nothing more.

Whether Shimek seriously heeded his friend's concerns is uncertain. He continued to refer to it as the Macbride Laboratory in his correspondence with alumni but the name was never formally changed.

Shimek recognized the value of a personal touch in soliciting donations for the laboratory, and made as many personal speaking appearances before alumni groups throughout the state as possible. He encouraged alumni organizations in towns and cities across Iowa to throw their support behind the laboratory, and he created a wide network of acquaintances that offered moral support and suggestions of possible new contacts.

Contributions of all sizes were received. Some donors sent a few dollars, admitting they had no interest in the laboratory but wanting, instead, to contribute something as a memorial to Macbride or another beloved professor. Others, especially alumni who had studied at or visited the laboratory, were enthusiastic supporters, as they still are. The largest donation of all was \$5,000, from Macbride himself. Equally valuable was Shimek's contribution of the stationery and postage for all of the letters. (Mrs. Shimek typed nearly all those letters!)

Reports on all aspects of the fund-raising drive, which even extended to alumni on both coasts, were sent to Seattle almost daily. Yet Macbride felt the distance and his separation from the home front keenly. In January 1929 he expressed a bit of his frustration:

I have no doubt everything is going on as well as may be; but sitting out here in si-

lence and alone, I should be more efficient in what has been planned, could I have more frequent reports.

If Shimek neglected Macbride, it was only because of exhaustion brought on by the rigors of the campaign. His proud report to a fellow fund-raiser suggested the hectic pace of the drive:

I was in Davenport Friday. . . . They think they can get from \$500 to \$1000 now and then more later. Muscatine will also probably do something, but I do not yet have definite information. I was in Cedar Rapids today and in a couple of hours I secured \$325, with a promise of three other individuals.

As the flurry of fund-raising continued, negotiations resumed with Floete for the purchase of his land. Floete was finally persuaded to lower his asking price for the seventy-two acres in return for a large down payment and the promise of full payment within one year.

On April 8, 1929, a telegram was joyfully sent, and joyfully received in Seattle:

CONTRACT SIGNED AND SIX THOUSAND FOUR HUNDRED DOLLARS PAID DOWN. FIFTEEN HUNDRED MORE PROMISED DEFINITELY AND MORE IN SIGHT. GO TO DES MOINES WEDNESDAY. DAVENPORT WILL DO SOMETHING. ALSO CEDAR RAPIDS. WE HAVE TAKEN OVER INSURANCE ON BUILDINGS AMOUNTING TO FOUR THOUSAND DOLLARS. POSSESSION GIVEN IMMEDIATELY!

* * *

Thomas Macbride and Bohumil Shimek would rejoice in the fulfillment of their dream — the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory of today. As natural scientists, they would be



The intense intellectual excitement of scientific research was supplemented by well-deserved rest and relaxation. Even today the Fourth of July and an annual party commemorating “Bohumil Shimek’s birthday” break the intense summer schedule and offer students the opportunity to enjoy the warm lake water. (courtesy Iowa Lakeside Laboratory)

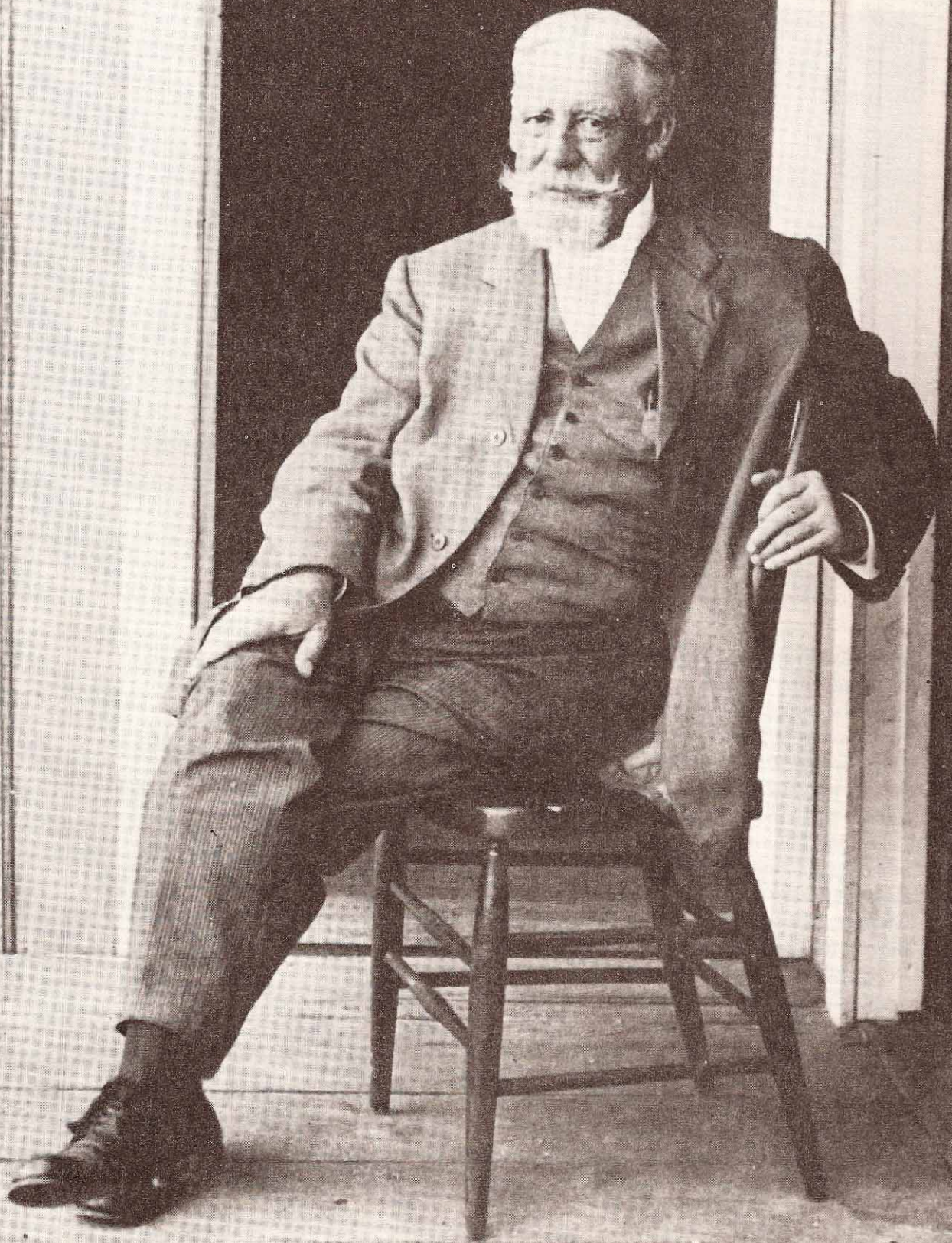
pleased with the direction that scientific study has taken at the laboratory. Further, they would be satisfied and pleased that the same high standards they set during the hardest of times have survived. They would be amazed that their laboratory attracts investigators from all over the world, who take “Iowa” and “Iowa Lakeside Laboratory” and all that those words mean back to the People’s Republic of China, Panama, Indonesia, Sweden, Malaysia, Iran, Guatemala, and Thailand. They would applaud the current efforts to restore prairie on the ‘North 40’ and they would smile to see that cars are parked under the same oak tree where horses were once tethered, and students still walk, with frequent pauses, along the same prairie paths. So much has changed in the seventy-six years of the laboratory’s operation, and yet so little.

Thomas and Bohumil: rest easy, your dream lives on.

Note on Sources

Several extraordinary sources were available for the preparation of this article. The best among these included correspondence from the 1928 fund-raising campaign and photographs of the early years of the laboratory’s operation. The Iowa Lakeside Laboratory collection at the University of Iowa Archives was also valuable. The *Daily Iowan* and the *Iowa Alumnus* for the period from 1909 to the late 1920s provided excellent coverage of summer sessions at the laboratory. Two master’s theses were especially helpful: Elizabeth F. Nuss, “The History of the State University of Iowa: The Iowa Lakeside Laboratory” (M.A. thesis, University of Iowa, 1946); and Mary Winifred Conklin, “The History of the State University of Iowa: Thomas Huston Macbride” (M.A. thesis, University of Iowa, 1945). A 1974 report, *The Iowa Lakeside Laboratory, Its Past, Present and Potentials for the Future*, prepared by Richard V. Bovbjerg, Martin J. Ulmer, and John C. Downey was a rare source of information because of the perspective it gave to the laboratory’s sixty-five-year operation.

This article would not have been possible without the cooperation of Professor Richard V. Bovbjerg, the director of Iowa Lakeside Laboratory. Not only did he offer the author much previously unpublished correspondence, he answered countless questions and thoughtfully read the manuscript. The enthusiastic and extensive editorial assistance of Mary Fredericksen has made the project an absolute delight. The author gratefully acknowledges the contributions of both.



The Okoboji Lakeside Laboratory

by Thomas H. Macbride

The following material has been drawn from Professor Macbride's article published in the *Proceedings of the Iowa Academy of Science* for 1909. It is an important article for the information it conveys about the new lakeside laboratory's purpose and Macbride's plans for it in the year of its creation.

The establishment of the Okoboji Lakeside Laboratory, founded by the alumni of the State University of Iowa, promises to affect so deeply the future scientific work of our state that some account of its beginning and especially its raison d'être may rightly claim the attention of the Academy. The laboratory has been located on the west shore of Lake Okoboji in Dickinson county for the reasons following:

In the first place the topography of Dickinson county is peculiar, unique. Situated on the western border of the Iowa Wisconsin drift, the region illustrates, as possibly no other equal area in the state, the special characteristics, not only of glacial moraines in general, but in particular the very expression of the Wisconsin moraine. In fact, I think that it must be admitted that the Okoboji lakes and their encompassing hills do indeed form the finest bit of morainic topography to be found on our

western prairie. . . .

Secondly, the region having Okoboji for its center is, by reason of the peculiar topography just mentioned, the field of a special floral display difficult to illustrate anywhere else within such narrow limits. We have a forest flora and a prairie flora; and neither in this part of the world has ever been adequately studied. It is believed that the fungal flora of the region, for instance, is especially rich and interesting. We have all kinds of habitat conditions, from aquatic to xerophytic. We have deep water, shallow water, but permanent; marshes, springs; and xerophytic [sic] slopes and hill-tops, some so dry as to offer home to the vegetation of the higher western semi-arid plains. The plankton of the lakes is filled with desmids and diatoms and all manner of algal flora, during July and August rich beyond comparison in all that makes up the tide of life for these simple but fascinating forms.

. . . the factors of ecology and distribution are all here, in large part so far, unexplored and certain to interest for centuries generation after generation of Iowa students.

For similar reasons, the fauna of the lake district will reward our constant study. The varied flora, just described, insures a varied fauna. The waters teem with animal life. Probably the protozoa of the whole valley will be found hiding on the vegetation of these [quiet] lakes and pools. Of course, the avian and vertebrate aquatic fauna are rich, and even the terrestrial vertebrates are likely to prove more than commonly worthy of investigation. While this is writing the papers tell of a mountain lion shot in one of the near-by marshy lakes! It is not believed that carnivores of size are likely to abound, not to such extent at least as to warrant a future visit from our nimrodic ex-president, but it is believed that natural science, in all its branches, entomology, ostracology, ornithology, will be greatly enriched by using such opportunity for research as Okoboji may afford.

(Left) Thomas Huston Macbride, the dreamer whose tireless efforts sustained the laboratory in its first twenty-five years. Just two days before his death in 1934, he completed an article for the *Des Moines Register* describing the laboratory. His support of the research station continues, even from the grave. Recent bequests from his estate will be used in the fall of 1985 to enlarge the laboratory library, construction which will include "pillars [which will] shine among [the] trees . . ." (courtesy Iowa Lakeside Laboratory)

Again, Okoboji as the world knows is already a place of resort, thousands of people find summer habitation on its shores. So that we find here unequalled opportunity for bringing scientific work to the attention of people of every class and kind, and confessedly natural history work in all our schools, colleges and universities is too formal, too artificial, too much based upon material specially prepared, laid up in herbaria, or conserved in cases and bottles; the lakeside laboratory offers an opportunity to correct this, at least in some small measure. Ever since the immortal Agassiz stood bareheaded with that famous company on the rocks of Pennikese, the naturalists of the world, at least, have realized that the proper and reverent place for the study of natural objects is in their natural surroundings. Dry dead fungi are dusty labelled things, as meaningless as the stuffed skin of mammal or bird, or a fossil in a box; better than no exhibit at all, to be sure, but poor indeed as compared with the natural world, where the fungus starts in the forest shade, the wings of bird or insect fan the sunny air, or the fossil speaks its significance from the stony pages of the riven quarry stone. The lakeside laboratory shall afford to all interested, for once at least a chance to see the real world, nature alive, accomplishing her miracles in their own silent

splendor, often needing not, for the student's appreciation, the voice of interpreter or teacher. . . .

The classes sought to be accommodated are; first, all students of nature competent to enjoy the laboratory method of instruction; the laboratory shall be open to anybody capable of using its privileges; second, teachers of biologic subjects in academies and high schools everywhere, who may desire to combine recreation with work and who may find in the service of the laboratory occasion to acquaint themselves with Iowa conditions and thus better equip themselves for serving the children of the schools; third, graduate students who may desire to perfect themselves in some line of research preparatory or introductory to an advanced degree. Such students are presumably competent to conduct work for themselves, needing simply a place at table and such suggestions as occasion may develop.

. . . the laboratories for use are to be open to the world, students enrolling in the order in which application arrives. It is hoped that the open door may be thronged and that the enterprise may not only serve those already engaged in scientific work, but may reach and influence thousands and make real all natural science to the upbuilding and quickening of every school, college or academy within the borders of our state.



(David Boot Album, SHSI)