RARELY SEEN:
Cool Stuff from the MUSEUM

Text by curators Michael Smith, Bill Johnson, and Jack Lufkin

Photography by John Zeller
"Hey, that's cool!"

That's what we hear from some of our visitors when they happen upon a particular item in our museum exhibits.

Others might remark, "Remember how Grandma used to have one like that?"

Or, "You never see those anymore, do you?"

Surely you'll make similar comments when you visit our new exhibit "Rarely Seen: Cool Stuff from the Museum."

On these pages, enjoy a sampling of some of the "cool stuff" we're showcasing.
from the Museum.

exhibit. "Ready, set, go!" Stuff
means when you visit our new-

museum. You'll make similar com-

mments. So what do you think?

"Well, I've never been here before,

but I think I might enjoy it."

"And do you know what I'm think-

ing?"

"I'm thinking about going to the

museum exhibit."

"And you're going to go to the

museum to see what's going on.

It's a great idea!"

"Hey! That's cool!"
The State Historical Society has been collecting the stuff of Iowa history for over 150 years.

Some objects in our museum collections relate to famous people, places, and events that are prominent in our collective memory. Think of foreign dignitaries and faraway wars, or local disasters and popular landmarks.

Ordinary people and everyday events, however, are as meaningful as are famous people and momentous events. So, too, are common rites of passage—like marrying and mourning—and everyday objects—like toys and chairs.

Objects that represent innovation remind us that Iowans have continually searched for better, faster, and easier technologies—whether in agriculture or electronics.

Works of art offer unique visions of the world. They add beauty to our lives, sustain cultural traditions, and feed the imagination, be they sculpture, needlework, theater, or music.
In a 1959 visit to Iowa, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev presented this cloak, or burka, to Coon Rapids farmer Roswell Garst, explaining that as a young man he had worn one while herding sheep in the Ukraine.

An innovator in hybrid seed corn and agricultural technology, Garst had hosted delegations and exchanged visits with agriculturists from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Garst first met Khrushchev in 1955 at his summer home in the Crimea.
On left: Operation Iraqi Freedom was in its second year when Sgt. Shelaine Tuytchaevs donned this uniform. Based in Des Moines, she and other members of the 366th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment U.S. Army Reserve were ordered to Mosul. There she served as a broadcast journalist.

Right: Maj. Edward Bryja acquired this Iraqi enlisted man's uniform while inspecting one of the many warehouses in the Taji area in Iraq. Bryja was deployed to Iraq in 2003 as a public affairs officer with the U.S. Army's Third Corps Support Command. During his tour he investigated the Republican Guard bases near Taji. This area held an Iraqi army air force base, repair facilities for the local Hammurabi Mechanized Division, rocket factories, and reported botulism and uranium enrichment facilities.

The gas mask is a reminder of the weapons of mass destruction that the multinational forces expected to encounter.
Designed to circulate air and dispel odors in a barn, ventilators like this one were commonly installed on barn roofs. This galvanized-steel Tip Top Ventilator was made in Des Moines by the Anderson Manufacturing Company and was used on a barn on the Van Pilsum farm near Prairie City about 1920.
Genevieve Nahra Mougin keeps alive her Lebanese heritage through traditional lacework. She says, “It’s just something to do with my old age.”

Her mother began teaching her needlework when she was only seven, using an ordinary needle and fine linen thread. The craft is known throughout the Middle East and is referred to variously as Phoenician, Syrian, Armenian, Arabian, or, simply, knotted lace.

She uses no patterns. Her designs, she says, “come straight from my head.” Her most ambitious piece is this drum tablecloth. With a diameter of 47 inches, it took her over eight months to complete. She wears two pairs of glasses because of the delicacy of the lacework.
The threat of German U-boats in World War II was brought under control by the electronic wizardry of George Town, Kenneth Henderson, and Harold Goldberg. Working for the Stromberg-Carlson Company, they developed the radar power source that brought the Navy Standard Radar Modulator (Moar II) into service as airborne radar. The units revolutionized the defense against German submarines. The radar could detect a periscope at four miles and a submarine's conning tower at 45 miles.

After the war, Town and Henderson joined the engineering faculty at Iowa State University.
Like many couples in the early 1940s, Arlene Alberts and Clinton Fogde were ready to marry after World War II ended.

But Arlene could not find a wedding dress, and white silk was not to be had anywhere because most of it was used for parachutes. That was when Clinton realized that he had ready access to yards of white parachute silk.

Still enlisted, Clinton and his buddies in the army air corps readied a cargo plane with a large cargo parachute tied to railroad ties. They took off from their station near Omaha. Flying low over the Alberts farm near Pocahontas, they pushed out the parachute. It floated down on the farm and was recovered by Arlene's father. Arlene had her dress fashioned out of the silk, and the couple was married on June 16.
The "Torch of Life" was a daily reminder to Des Moines motorists to drive safely. In 1967 the sign was installed prominently on the exterior wall of the National Traveler's Life Insurance Company office on Keosauqua Way. On days when traffic fatalities occurred in Polk County, the neon light was turned off, signifying an extinguished life.
This stately hearse belonged to Elias Parker, who entered the funeral business in Jesup in 1912. Before that he was a farmer and blacksmith.
Meet Phoebe Ann. Teacher Margaret Burt used this ceramic china doll to soothe upset or timid kindergarteners at Longfellow School in Des Moines, where Burt taught for 28 years. In 1927 a reporter for the Des Moines Evening News recalled that "many men and women now living in the city recall the days when grief and homesickness were soothed by holding the doll or hearing a story about Phoebe Ann."
In 1890 Pastor Paul Bieger left the small Bethany Lutheran Church in Burlington, Iowa. This remembrance quilt was presented to him from the Ladies Aid Society. This close-up reveals only a few of the many varieties of fabrics, stitches, and patterns typical of a crazy quilt.
Left and bottom right: Two views of the scale model of the Agri Industries grain elevator in Council Bluffs. The model was used as an exhibit in a trial following a disaster at the facility on the afternoon of April 20, 1982.

Council Bluffs residents heard and felt the terrible explosion from miles away. Experts deduced that a spark had ignited grain dust. Fire leveled the elevator house and damaged the massive storage bins, with capacity for over two millions bushels of grain.

Five workers died and 24 were injured. Families of the victims sued Agri Industries.
Local businesses in Johnson County hoped that their ads painted on this theater backdrop would catch the eye of audience members awaiting the start of a performance. The colorful backdrop was used at Center School in Johnson County about 1933.

In the foreground is an Eastlake-style Kimball reed organ from the late 19th century. The organ and stool were sold by Waterloo dealer L. S. Parsons.
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Behold an almost forgotten 1960s trend, the paper dress. Dorothy Hershner of Cedar Rapids acquired this dress through a promotion; she wore it only once—even though Time magazine predicted that cheap and disposable “paper clothing apparently is here to stay.”
Sculpted from Carrara marble, *America* was the creation of Vinnie Ream Hoxie for the 1893 Chicago World's Fair and represented the bounty of this nation.

Born in 1847, Vinnie Ream was awarded a contract from the U.S. Congress in 1866 for a full-size marble statue of Abraham Lincoln for the Capitol rotunda. The first woman to win such a federal commission, she was only 19 at the time.

Hoxie and her husband sometimes summered in Iowa City.
You'll see much more of Iowa history in the State Historical Society's new exhibit "Rarely Seen: Cool Stuff from the Museum."

Even more rarely seen are the staff who created the exhibit, such as technician Vern Tyler (right), who is putting the finishing touches on a furniture display.

Other behind-the-scenes museum staff for this exhibit include Tom Hardie (technician); Jodi Evans (registrar); Jerry Brown (exhibit designer); Pete Sixbey (conservator); Bill Johnson and Jack Lufkin (curators); and Michael Smith (chief curator and interim museum director).

The State Historical Museum is located at 600 E. Locust, Des Moines, Iowa. Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 9-4:30, and Sunday, noon -4:30. Closed Mondays and official state holidays. www.iowahistory.org