

THE WILLIAM J. PETERSEN COLLECTION

William J. Petersen (1901-1989) was born and raised near the Mississippi River in Dubuque. His father was associated with the Diamond Jo Steamer Lines (1883-1911) and the young Petersen was fascinated by the river and the steamboats. Petersen graduated from the University of Dubuque in 1926, and studied at the University of Iowa (then, the State University of Iowa), receiving the M.A. in 1927 and the Ph. D. in 1930. His doctoral dissertation, "Steamboating on the Upper Mississippi," was the result of his childhood fascination and scholarly research.

The dissertation was published as a book in 1937 as Steamboating on the Upper Mississippi and re-issued, with added material, in 1968. William J. Petersen was associated with the State Historical Society for more than forty years during which he wrote extensively on the history of Iowa and the Upper Mississippi Valley, with a particular interest in river history and steamboats. His enthusiasm for the subject and his efforts in popularization resulted in the nickname "Steamboat Bill."

The University of Dubuque received some materials from William J. Petersen during his life and substantial materials from the estate, *viz.* archival documents (e. g., research notes), newspapers, photographs and prints, pamphlets, periodicals, and sheet music, as well as printed books.

The printed materials include: (1) books written or edited by Petersen, and those to which he wrote the foreword; (2) books published by the State Historical Society of Iowa, particularly those published during the time he was associated with it; (3) pamphlets and books on the history of Iowa, including sites, towns, and counties; (4) periodicals, particularly those edited by Petersen or to which he contributed extensively; (5) offprints and reprints of articles from scholarly journals, some of which were from apparently obscure journals collected by Peterson; (6) books on rivers, river transportation, and river history, irrespective of geographical location, or historical period, (e.g., "Rivers of America Series"); and (7) books by significant Iowa authors in which Petersen was especially interested (e. g., Richard Bissell [of Dubuque], MacKinlay Kantor, and Frank Luther Mott).

The scope of subjects defined above is reflected—to a large extent—in the collection of other materials: (1) Iowa newspapers, especially those used in the course of Petersen's research, including a few issued in the nineteenth century; (2) more than one hundred pamphlets, some of which are quite rare; (3) photographs and prints of the Mississippi River; (4) archival documents, including newspaper clippings, Petersen's research notes, brochures, and reports; and (5) a wide variety of miscellaneous materials, including interesting pieces of sheet music or Iowa or rivers.

We continue to augment the collection with books according to the scope of subjects in the collection received from the estate. The collection is a valuable resource for the study of the history of Iowa and the Upper Mississippi Valley.