

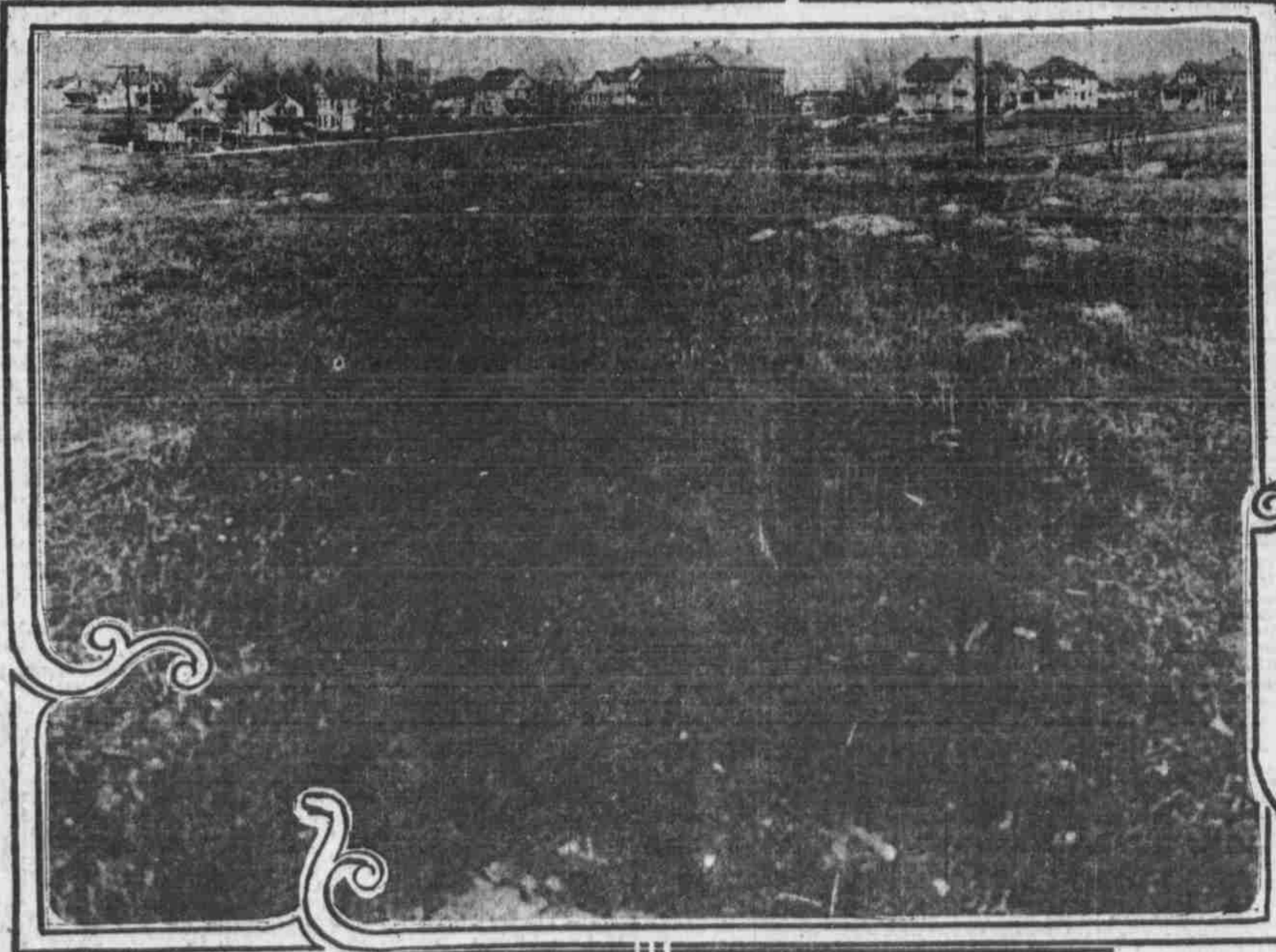
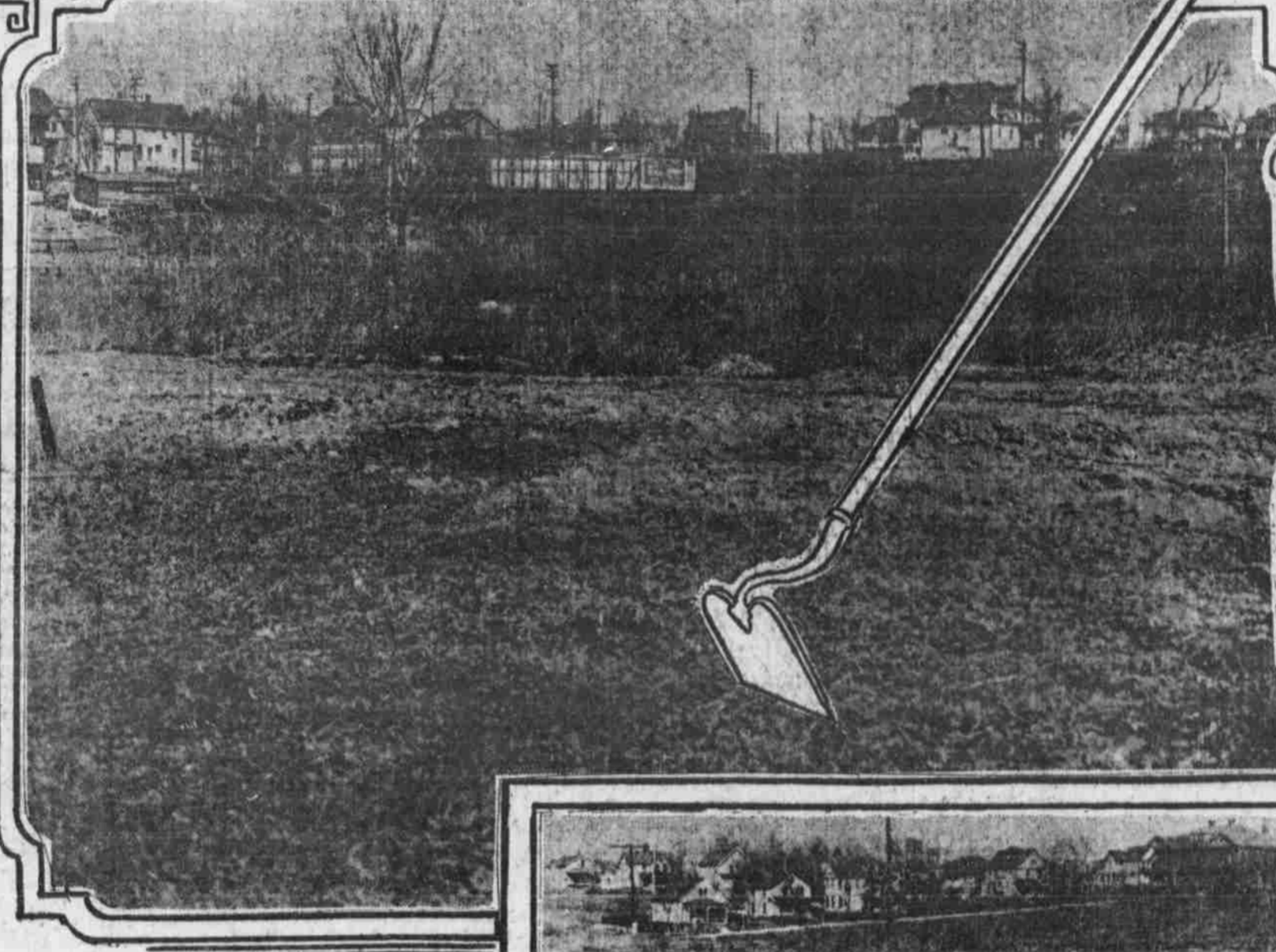
Uncultivated Waste Places in Omaha

Between
Burt and
Cuming
East of
30th St.



Between
Farnam
and Dodge
East of
41st St.

SEED



43rd
and
Davenport St.
looking
North-
east.

OVER 8,000 acres of vacant lots and vacant tracts, annually growing up in weeds, lie within the city limits of Omaha. This is from a conservative computation made by competent real estate men by going over the assessment books and taking account of the unplatted tracts, as well as deducting the 923 acres of parks.

By far the greater part of the 8,000 acres of vacant ground in Omaha is owned by non-residents. The 8,000 acres of weed-grown vacant land is sufficient, if it were built up, to contain all the population that in forty years has been forced into the suburbs five and ten miles away from the business center of the city.

Lack of convenient water mains, sewers, street car lines and other public conveniences have retarded the sale and development of much of the vacant property. The absentee landlords are waiting for Omaha to spend its money for water mains, for the car company to build extensions, for the city to construct sewers to the edge of their lots. Then they can absorb all these benefits and exact a fat sale price from honest Omaha people seeking a spot on which to build a home.

The soil in these 8,000 acres is fertile. Garden hoes are cheap. And there are over 12,000 school children between the ages of 8 and 16 whose parents worry all the summer vacation months because they know not how to keep them out of mischief.

The cost of garden produce is high. The cost of cutting these weeds off these fertile acres is also high, both to the owners of the vacant property and to the city of Omaha, for the city maintains a dozen inspectors whose business it is to serve verbal notices to the owners to cut the weeds.

Yes, lettuce, radishes and potatoes are high. Every day we hear the complaint. There are a few thousand women who could spend a few hours in the morning and evening hoeing in gardens. They could do so with profit to the household and with profit to their store of health.

There are several thousand men who could spare an hour in the morning and another in the evening directing the garden work of their own children among the 12,000 boys and girls, and could even handle a hoe in a potato or cabbage patch themselves with just as much profit as a golf caddy.

But they don't. The vacant lots do not belong to them, they say. Some real estate men have suggested there should be a city ordinance allowing the city to assign vacant lots to persons who desire to cultivate them. This it is maintained, could be done because the cultivation would abate a nuisance by keeping the weeds down.

But no such ordinance has been introduced. Here are a few things that the 12,000 boys and girls could accomplish with the intelligent help of a few thousand parents mornings and evenings:

They could raise potatoes alone and produce 884,000 bushels. No, that is not estimating it too high, for the United States agricultural reports show that the average yield of potatoes for the United States is 106 bushels per acre. Everyone knows that Omaha soil and climate is far above average United States soil and climate.

These potatoes would supply every family in town with ten bushels and would leave the children 500,000 bushels to ship out in the state for spending money.

Or, if hoeing corn is less work than hoeing potatoes, these children, with the help and direction still of the few hours' spare time of their parents, could raise 400,000 bushels of corn. This would give twelve bushels of corn to every family in the city and would make fried mush for every family every breakfast of the year.

If they should devote the entire acreage to cabbage culture they would, in a favorable year, raise more cabbage than the whole state would consume in a year.

But they don't want that much cabbage. A sane division of the acreage would give 3,000 acres to the potato crop. This would yield ten bushels of potatoes for every family in Omaha. That should last them through the winter.

A thousand acres of corn would raise corn

enough to furnish fried mush for every breakfast of every family in the city during the three winter months.

Another thousand acres devoted to the culture of navy beans would produce 15,000 bushels, or one-half bushel for every family in the city.

A thousand acres devoted to diligent cabbage culture would put sixty-seven heads of cabbage into every cellar in the city.

Still there would be left 2,000 acres of soil to dispose of.

Save this for miscellaneous garden truck and it would furnish all the lettuce, radishes, onions, celery, peas and other strictly summer vegetables the city could consume.

But no such wave of economy has as yet developed the youth and the parents of Omaha's youth. No ordinance permitting the city to assign weed-grown vacant lots to industrious boys has as yet been written upon the books.

So, what is Omaha doing with these vacant lots?

It is building up a great city around them, so that the owners of the vacant ground can some day demand great tribute from those who wish to establish useful industries on the sites.

Meantime weeds flourish. It costs the people of Omaha annually a great many thousand dollars to keep the weeds cut around the curbing of these vacant lots. It costs the city other thousands to maintain a force of inspectors who serve written and verbal notices on the owners of the vacant lots to cut weeds on the lots proper.

Again, this is not guess work. The city health department maintains ten sanitary inspectors at \$75 per month, and a large part of their duty is to serve notices to those delinquent in cutting weeds. That is a little item of \$9,000 a year the taxpayers of Omaha are paying to the inspectors, besides furnishing them a bushel of car tickets to ride out and serve 13,494 verbal notices to cut weeds.

Then, it takes a great many dollars to buy postage stamps to notify the absentee landlords of vacant lots that they must cut weeds. It took 2,140 such written notices last year.

The department of street cleaning and maintenance also has its troubles with the weed problem on vacant lots. An appropriation of \$1,500

has just been made from the miscellaneous fund of this department for this purpose. Last year it spent \$1,200 in this work. Coming up!

No, the department doesn't actually cut weeds on the lot proper, but it does cut the weeds along the curbing and at the edge of the street along the vacant lots. If the lots were improved the item would not exist.

A few figures in regard to improved and unimproved ground were made up in Omaha by a committee headed by D. C. Patterson. The committee went to the assessment rolls, went over

the city where it took account of the platted and unplatted ground, deducted the parks and studied the maps of every addition in the city with a view to getting a careful estimate of the situation.

It finds that there are twenty-four and one-half square miles of ground within the city limits. This is about 15,700 acres. Of this 923 acres are in parks. Ground not platted the committee found to be 4,700 acres, including parks and public grounds. It found 19,230 improved lots and tracts and 23,811 unimproved lots and tracts.

On the farms in the agricultural sections of

Nebraska where land is worth \$150 per acre, farmers never allow a half acre to lie idle. They make every foot of it produce.

In Omaha where the ground is worth from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per acre, 3,000 acres lie idle.

But the city has at present no control over the vacant ground within its boundaries, even though much of it is owned by New York and London speculators who have never seen Omaha. The city has no power over these weed fields, except that it may pay a force of men to ask the owners to please see that the weeds are cut.