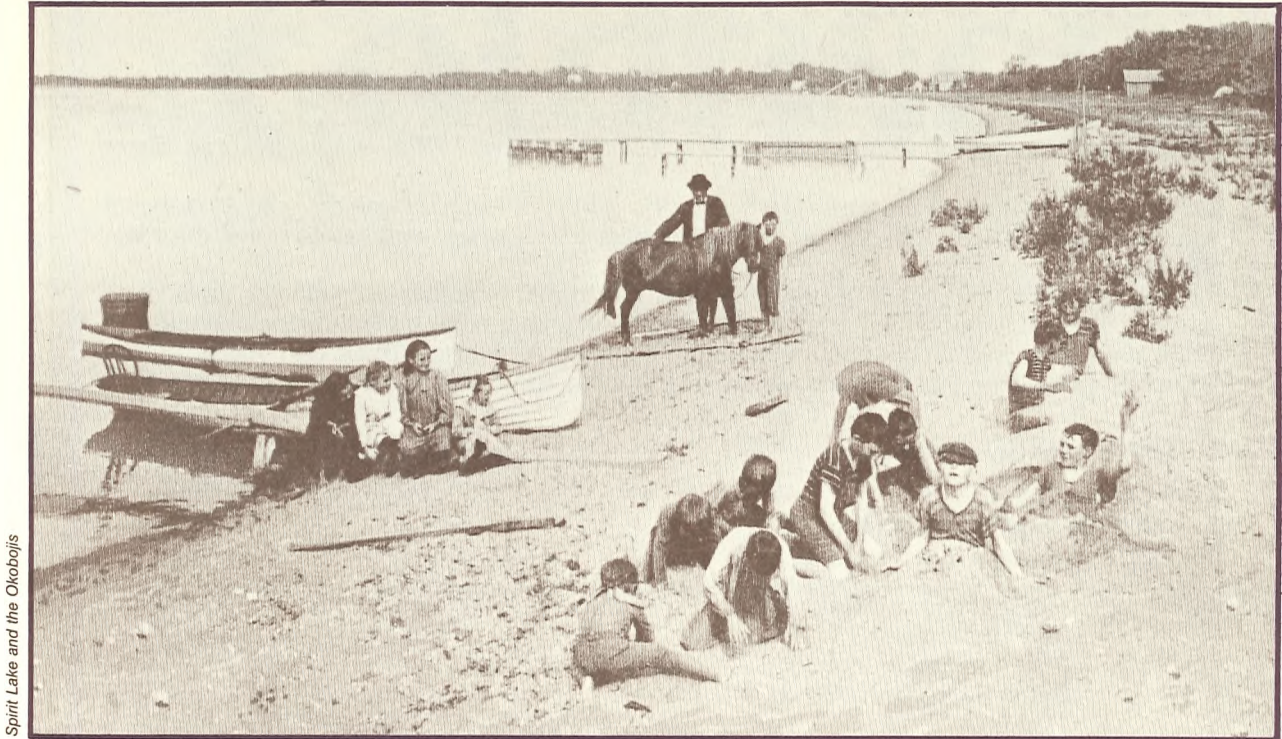


# Getting Away From It All



Spirit Lake and the Okobojs

Children play in the sand on the shore of Spirit Lake in 1901.

Railroad companies looked for ways to encourage people to use trains. Sometimes they built resort hotels and then built railroad lines for people to use to get there. The railroad companies advertised their resorts and the special train service for vacationers.

The Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Northern Railway built a resort hotel at Spirit Lake in 1883. The following year the company opened the beautiful Hotel Orleans at the lake. Some said it was the finest hotel in the upper Midwest. The hotel had two hundred rooms, bowling alley, billiard hall, tackle shop, and boat house. Soon another railroad company, the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul, ran a line near Lake Okobojs. The lakes quickly became a favorite summer resort with campgrounds, cottages, and hotels on the beautiful shores of

the lakes.

Railroad travel was certainly a big improvement over travel by wagon or stagecoach, yet it was not always pleasant. In 1893 Carrie Carson wrote about the train trip home from her vacation in a summer cottage at Lake Okobojs:

We boarded the train for Des Moines at twelve o'clock; at one-thirty we reached Ruthven, where we had dinner. The ride was very hot and dusty and before we had been on the train an hour, we had breathed in more dust than we had seen in a month. We ate once more at Des Moines. We had expected to leave Des Moines on a train which would get us home about one o'clock, but found that it did not stop at Marengo, so we had to wait for a train which left at one o'clock. We

were so tired that we went to Munger's, [a hotel] and went to bed. We rested and were called in time for our train. Just before reaching Newton we ran into a derailed freight car, and had to wait until it was removed. We had to wait a long time and grew very cold, but at last we started on and reached home an hour and a half late. It was between four and five in the morning when we reached Marengo.

The trip had taken about fifteen hours.

In the 1890s train travel may not always have been pleasant or fast—trains averaged about 25 miles per hour with all the stops to let off or take on passengers. Railroad passenger service, however, made it possible for lowans to travel places they would not have been able to visit before.