

ing faith in socialism and in human reason that drove this powerful and diverse movement. It is a historical perspective difficult to capture, yet at the very heart of the movement's success.

The Nickel Machine: A Biographical Memoir, by John M. Harrison. Iowa City: Maecenas Press, 1990. 125 pp. Illustrations. \$9.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY TOM MORAIN, LIVING HISTORY FARMS

William Allen White, America's most famous small-town newspaper editor, wrote that "it is the country newspaper that reveals us to ourselves." *The Nickel Machine*, John Harrison's loving portrait of his father Jack, is in the tradition of small-town journalism with which they have both been intimately acquainted. Jack Harrison was editor of the *Oakland Acorn* for nearly forty years and president of the Iowa Press Association in 1924. Son John grew up in the newspaper office, went into partnership with his father on the *Acorn*, left for other newspaper assignments, and then taught journalism for many years at the university level. The "nickel machine" of the title was the office linotype, which the Harrison children were told produced the nickels for their allowances.

Like many small-town editors of his day, Jack Harrison was active in politics. Much of the book recounts his political career and achievements. Elected to the state legislature, he narrowly lost a bid to become Speaker of the House, an event that soured him for a time on political participation. Later, he ran unsuccessfully for Congress. The book also describes Harrison's family life and community activities. As editor, Harrison was at the center of many community improvement activities and was a tireless promoter of Oakland. Nor does the book neglect Harrison's personal side. He loved to play cards and enjoyed singing in the Congregational church choir, and he passed his love of music on to his children.

In the introduction, the author claims that his father, while not famous, was "remarkable," yet "representative of significant aspects of American life" of the era. The author, however, spends little effort trying to substantiate these claims. Written without footnotes, it is an extended essay on a subject the author knew intimately and loved deeply. In the best tradition of the home-town newspaper, the book is a celebration of the significant events in the lives of the people who matter most to those for whom it is written.

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