

John R. Mott did not lose touch entirely with his Iowa connections. Back in Fayette, speaking at the 50th anniversary of his class, he acknowledged the importance of small colleges. They had, he thought, a significant role in the educational program. A few friends were left to greet him. Postville has mementos that keep his memory green. And visitors to Upper Iowa University may see, if they wish, the room in Alexander Dickman Hall where he had his living quarters. It may have been in this room that he sat down to pen his convictions about what he, for one, "owed" to the 20th century. The debt which he chose to assume would be paid by a lifetime of noble striving. Paid in full.

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## LIBRARY NOTES . . .

### A TERRITORIAL LIBRARY RECEIPT BOOK: 1841-1843

by Lida L. Greene  
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We came upon the old library receipt book quite by accident. Aloys Gilman, assistant librarian, who keeps a careful eye on the Manuscript Division, was making an inventory of a box of documents when the folio volume came to light. It was 12x7½ inches, the cover gray-blue with black and corner pieces of russet now dimmed and dog-eared with wear. Handwritten, in letters shaded with the flat of a quill stroke, were the words *RECEIPT BOOK Morgan Reno*. A catalogue card revealed it had been in a Department vault for seventy-five years. Morgan Reno, the man who kept the record, was the third director of the Iowa Territorial Library. It was like turning back time to sun-browned farmers riding horseback to meet in legislature.

Inside the volume were printed charge forms, five to a page. "Received of the Librarian of the Iowa Territorial Library . . ." followed by spaces for the choice of reading, the date and the borrower's name. Page one, number one registers the loan of *Rowlet's Interest Tables* on June 1841 to Jesse Williams, a practical choice for a territorial secretary and a businessman.

The Iowa Territorial Library was a shade more than two years old when Williams set quill to pen his name. It had its beginning in a grant of \$5,000 made by the U. S. Government to a fledgling commonwealth. The books had been purchased by Gov. Robert Lucas in Cincinnati before his departure for Burlington and the assumption of his new role beyond the Mississippi. The library acquisitions had been selected carefully "with the aid of literary friends," he would state in an annual report. Among the more than 300 items were the law classics, statutes of American states, a sound medical collection for a frontier with few doctors, histories of Europe and America, literary essays, English magazines, America's own *Niles Register*, the stirring novels of Sir Walter Scott. In it there were books to amuse, to advise, to educate, to uplift the builders of a new state. The story of the Library? You can read it in "Library in the Making," a report by Johnson Brigham, a former state librarian, in the *Annals of Iowa*, October 1912 and January 1913. But this is the story of a special book with gray-blue and russet binding and of the men who signed it. They wrote their names large in history.

The roster of signatures in the library register is a veritable *Who's Who* of the notables in beginning Iowa history. The first page also features Charles Mason and Thomas Wilson, two of a great triumvirate of territorial judges appointed to serve the newly organized counties beyond the Mississippi. Court could not have been in session in July 1841, since Wilson was relaxing with Sir Walter Scott's *The Abbott* and *The Antiquary*. Mason, not long out of the army and already beginning to make a name for himself in the judicial field, was soberly probing the meaning of the Bible with *Clarke's Commentaries*, a book still in publication.

Four governors of the state left their names in those pages. John Chambers, appointed by President John Tyler to follow Lucas as Iowa's second territorial governor, on July 8, 1841 borrowed the published reports of *Long's Expedition*. Again that year and once in 1844 he returned to the volumes on Maj. Stephen H. Long's explorations in the west (1820-1821). Did a busy executive, bound to desk and conference table, long for the mystery and adventure of the untried west?

Several withdrawals of *Supreme Court Reports* (1840-1841) in February 1843 were made under the name of one A. Briggs of Jackson County. No one would have been more surprised than A. Briggs if he had been told that 1846 would see him inaugurated as governor of a new state.

On Oct. 5, 1842 Ralph L. Lowe carried home the invaluable *Kent's Commentaries*. A pre-Civil War governor, 1858-1860, he would be remembered for his appointment of a commission to establish a sound state bank.

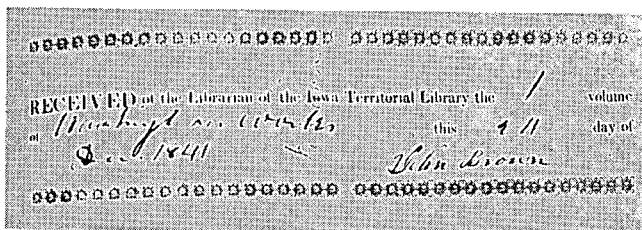
James W. Grimes . . . few men were more consistent readers. He favored sober books that would make a lawyer and public servant more proficient in his fields: *Maine Laws*, *Kent's Commentaries*, *Statutes of Wisconsin*. Governor, 1854-1858 and U. S. Senator, 1859-1869, he ably served his generation in an age of crisis. His leadership gave impetus to the work of the constitutional convention of 1857, and in 1868, a sick man and at risk of his life, he appeared on the Senate floor to vote against the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson. He was an example of the charge he delivered to the electors of Iowa in his inaugural address of 1854: "Be strong and show thyself a man." His decision in '68 cost him friends and blighted the remainder of his political career, but to the end of his years (1872) he held fast to the conviction that arbitrary use of the power of Congress to impeach the nation's chief executive would result in the establishment of a dangerous precedent for future generations of lawmakers.

Supreme court judges, governors, legislators. Turn the leaves of the register and the names are multiple reminders of years of service to an emerging state. The signature of Edward Johnstone, Keokuk lawyer and member of the constitutional convention of 1857, appears often. His peers were to remember him as "the kingliest of men." Joseph T. Fales, Iowa's first state auditor, was reading *Hamilton's Letters* in December 1842. Shepherd "Shep" Leffler, a member of the state's first congressional delegation, set down casually 30th volume of *Scott's works*. On April 29, 1843 E. (Enoch) Eastman, lieutenant governor under William M. Stone during the Civil War, carried home Hallam's *Middle Ages*. Eastman would become author of the motto to be inscribed on the

Iowa stone of the Washington monument: "Iowa, her affections like the rivers of her borders, flow to an inseparable union."

Bernhart Fenn, of Fairfield, early registrar of the Land Office and congressman, 1851-1854, borrowed a township map of Iowa in 1841. He in turn would become publisher of early state maps. Augustus Caesar Dodge, territorial senator, was at home in Burlington in October 1841, and had lawyer J. W. Woods sign for Chittys' work, *Pleadings*. Four years later, Dodge would present before the U. S. House of Representatives the first constitution of the new-born state.

Among the signatures well known to Iowa history is one of mystery. Dec. 17, 1842, a John Brown borrowed *National Portraits*, a volume of biographies of America's leaders. The name again appears under the withdrawal of *Washington's Works* on December 24. Two days before the year's end the same patron signed for the writings of Benjamin Franklin.



Who was this John Brown? Charles Aldrich, first curator of the Iowa State Department of History and connoisseur of the handwriting of the great, believed it to be the signature of John "Osawatomie" Brown who went to his fate at Harper's Ferry in October 1859.\* Aldrich came to his decision when there were men in Iowa who remembered Brown, men who had known the strength of his handclasp and who had been humbled before the flame in his eyes. Writing experts of the 1890s studied the Brown signature. Their opinion appeared to confirm that of Aldrich. The autograph, they believed, could well have been that of John Brown of Springdale, Tabor and the underground.

\*Aldrich's view is stated in "Was John Brown in Iowa in 1841?" *Annals of Iowa*, Vol. II (Third Series), 638-40. Des Moines, State Department of History and Archives, January 1897.

History, however, raises some significant questions. Well-known to Iowa abolitionists in the mid-50s to his death, John Brown, Ohio shepherd and tanner, spent the year 1842—as a bankrupt—doing the work he knew best. He herded the sheep of another man and tended the tanning vats. Nowhere could be found a report that he had made an extensive journey in the interests of the Negro. What could have brought the zealot to Iowa City in territorial days?

Iowa itself held little lure that year except for the land hungry. The territory was a truncated version of the present state with heartland and Missouri slope still to be joined. Statehood was four years away. The first real trail to the west had still to be plowed by the wagons of Brigham Young and his followers. Tabor, that safe and welcoming harbor for harrassed free-staters would not be planted for another ten years. Indeed, the struggle for Kansas had still to be fought in the halls of Congress. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, opening the way for popular vote on the free or slave status of the territory, would pour a flood of adventurers and abolitionists into the west. John Brown, the obscure tanner of Ohio, with sons Jason, Owen and John Jr., would be among them.

John Brown, December, 1842, writing his name in neat and careful script, who was he? It must be remembered that books of the Territory Library were not loaned casually. Rules limited lending to legislators, and members of the executive and judicial branches of the government. True, a "privileged" borrower might "introduce citizens or strangers" into the library who could read volumes not needed by favored borrowers. Lending a volume to an unknown was another matter. John Brown's name stands alone on the three receipts. There is no co-signer.

John Brown . . . his name. There was no John Brown among the legislators of that year. Was he a student son or nephew of some government figure, a bachelor lawyer serving the courts, a county officer stranded in Iowa City for the holidays? Or was he, indeed John Brown, come to blaze a trail that would lead to Osawatamie, to Springdale and to the gallows?

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