



Yours in haste

A. K. Bailey.

HON. A. K. BAILEY.
Editor *Decorah Republican*; State Senator, 1890-1892.

PIONEER EDITORS OF NORTHEASTERN IOWA.

BY HON. A. K. BAILEY.*

Who were they? No one can fully answer that question—not perfectly, at least. As contemporary with many of them for more than forty years, I will undertake to mention a few, and state the claims they have to as much of kindly remembrance as our rustling, hustling period has time to bestow. Omitting all references to the editor-printers of Du-buque, because they deserve a chapter by themselves, I essay the task assigned me by the editor of ANNALS OF IOWA, himself one of the pioneer journalists of central-northern Iowa.

The first place is due to Hon. A. B. F. Hildreth, still a resident of Charles City, to which place he came in 1856. He is entitled to pre-eminence because out of the meager earnings of a country newspaper he was shrewd enough to lay the foundations of an ample fortune. But there were other reasons: For nearly a score of years before coming to Iowa Mr. Hildreth had been in training as a printer, business man and editor, in the New England states, for the task he under-

*Mr. Bailey is himself one of the longest in continuous service, and one of the foremost of the pioneer editors of Northeastern Iowa. He was born in the town of Wales, Erie county, New York, November 18, 1835, the son of Wesley Bailey, who had also edited and published anti-slavery and temperance papers in the city of Utica and elsewhere in the Empire State. He attended the public schools until he reached his thirteenth year, when he entered his father's office to learn the trade of a printer. In due time he became foreman of the office, and later its proprietor. This was *The Utica Teetotaler*. He was also associated in the publishing business with George W. Bungay, a man who attained a national reputation as a temperance lecturer and poet. In 1860 Mr. Bailey came to Iowa, and with his father founded *The Decorah Republic*, the first number of which appeared April 13th of that year. The name was subsequently changed to *Republican*. It is still published under that name, with Mr. Bailey as its senior editor. During these forty years he has held the offices of treasurer and recorder of Winneshiek county, postmaster (for 16 years) of Decorah, and State Senator (1890-94). While recognized as one of the foremost and most useful members of the Senate, his distinguishing work was in behalf of the Australian ballot law, of which he was an earnest advocate. No one, however, gave more zealous support to the bill establishing the State Historical Department. *The Republican* has from the beginning been recognized as one of the leading local journals of Iowa. Having outlived most of his early contemporaries, it is fitting that Mr. Bailey should place on record his recollections of those who were most prominent in that quarter of our State. It will be seen that while this record is a brief one, the spirit which actuates him is one of genuine kindness and appreciation.

took in Iowa. It required a combination of all these qualities to make a first-class pioneer journalist such as Mr. Hildreth proved himself to be. When he came to Iowa, Charles City was one hundred and twenty-five miles away back in the interior, *i. e.*, from Dubuque, which was then the river trading town for all that section known as the Cedar Valley. It was a week distant; for the chief motor of those days was the ox-team, and by that means Mr. Hildreth carried to the very frontier a printing outfit that enabled him for many years to issue a model of good printing as well as of editorial ability. *The Charles City Intelligencer*, after its first year, became a blanket sheet of nine columns to the page. Mr. Hildreth's editorial pen had unusual facility, and he possessed a pair of scissors that could be, at times, very brilliant, and supply its share of reading matter with celerity and dispatch. Then, too, the amount of advertising *The Intelligencer* carried was the wonder and envy of those less gifted in financiering. His columns teemed with cards and display advertisements of Chicago and Milwaukee houses. How he secured them no one but he knew, but it was a job well done. From the very start this displayed his genius as a money maker; and therefore it is not a matter of great surprise that after fourteen years of service, at the age of 54 years, he permanently retired from editorial life and has since enjoyed a serene old age in the care of fortunate investments which keen foresight had enabled him to make. He is the only journalist known in Iowa able to build a first-class hotel, with a handsome up-to-date opera house attached, without impoverishing himself or permitting the wolf to get within sight of his rear door.

In passing let me note that during the first two years of Mr. Hildreth's experience in Iowa, he had for a partner D. D. W. Carver, so long associated with Hon. M. M. Ham, in the firm of Ham & Carver of *The Dubuque Herald*. Much of the mechanical excellence of *The Intelligencer* was due, beyond doubt, to Mr. Carver, for Mr. Hildreth pays him a high tribute as a superior workman. He says, "No

printer in Iowa could excel him in the execution of fine work." Mr. Carver's history, however, properly belongs to the record of Dubuque newspaperdom.

The next most prominent name memory recalls is that of Col. A. P. Richardson, of *The North Iowa Times* at North McGregor. I cannot say that he was an Irishman, but he was better known as "Pat" Richardson than by his more formal title; and he had the proverbial Irishman's wit in large measure. As a paragraphist he almost stands without a peer, as he is now remembered. He was not an essayist; and he had no time for able "leaders," even in those days when every first class paper was considered not ready for the press until it had at least one editorial article of a half column or more in length. And how these paragraphs did fairly bubble with wit that was witty indeed and humor of the most rollicking sort! Sometimes they verged on the broad, but they always had that saving grace which genuine wit possesses. Memory recalls at this time the story Col. R. used to tell with brilliant vivacity of the first issue in his editorial career. The type had been set; the press had groaned; and the first number of *The Times* was born. With the most profound satisfaction the editor lighted his pipe, sat down, and began its examination. (Col. R. was not a printer, but entered the editorial ranks by a side door.) Over and over its columns went his eye with a glad and glowing pride! Once and again it was reperused! Every important question in politics and religion had been treated and settled! While his pride was at a white heat, the sanctum door opened and the foreman yelled, "copy!" As he told it, Col. Richardson looked at the man in amazement; and when he comprehended the full purport of that awful word, there was an overflow of wit and profanity that only one born and bred in an old-time print-shop can fully comprehend. If there is any one who at this time at all compares with Col. Richardson in epigrammatic force and keen wit, it is J. S. Trigg, editor of *The Rockford Register*, who is rapidly winning a national reputation as a writer on farm, orchard and garden topics.

There were two other pioneer editors deserving mention who were like Col. R. in their ability to put into terse sentences a thought that others of us could not make clear in less than a quarter column. These were John W. Shannon and Andrew J. Felt. Both were remarkable men. Shannon shone in publications at Fayette, West Union and Elkader. During the later years of his Iowa life, he was looked up to as the Nestor of our press associations. To this he added richer and fuller experience in Huron, S. D., in the pioneer days of Dakota's territorial life, and his *Huronite* was unexcelled in ability. He passed to his reward a little more than a year ago.

Andrew Felt was a little giant; erratic, witty, caustic, but a gladiator in a fight. He wandered from place to place until he found a task at Nashua, Chickasaw county, that just suited him. There he built up a newspaper and a fame that followed him down to Kansas, where he won honors and was at one time lieutenant-governor. He still lives at Salina, in the "Sunflower State," but whether in the newspaper ranks or in banking I cannot say.

A contemporary of Col. Richardson in Clayton county, was Col. Eiboeck, whose fame as the editor of *The Iowa State Anzeiger* has since become more than State wide. At Elkader, as editor of *The Journal*, he acquired a fine reputation and a nice competence.

Still another contemporary was Robert Tompkins, for many years the editor of *The McGregor News*. Tompkins was sturdily honest, a man of deep and strong convictions, who believed intensely in whatever cause he espoused. He was the very opposite of Col. Richardson in these respects: wit he had none; he was too serious for jesting; his blows were always with a sledge-hammer; and mighty were the contests he had for years with his Irish rival. But long ago he was gathered to his fathers, and few there be that remember him.

The oldest editor in service in the section of Iowa now

passing under review is William R. Mead of *The Cresco Plaindealer*—a veteran indeed. It was in October, 1859, that he—not a printer—began the publication of a Democratic paper at New Oregon, then the county seat of one of the smallest and most sparsely settled counties in the State. Other editors have come and gone, but Mr. Mead, always representing the minority party—or “the under dog” in the political fights of over forty years—still remains at the helm of *The Plaindealer*—hale, vigorous, hearty and just as able as ever to put up a robust political fight in defense of his political faith. His editorial vigor is in no manner abated after forty-one years of severe labor.

The next eldest in the ranks is A. K. Bailey of *The Decorah Republican*. He was the junior member of the firm of W. Bailey & Son, who, in the spring of 1860, acquired possession of the village printing-office at the county seat of Winnesheik. The senior was not a practical printer; but he possessed an experience of more than twenty years as an “abolition” and temperance editor in New York, that well fitted him for the editorial management of a Republican paper in prohibition Iowa. In 1868, he retired from active editorial life, and twenty-three years later, after a serene old age, passed into rest at the age of 83 years. In his prime, he was a man of earnest convictions, a vigorous writer, and therefore one whose editorial utterances on important questions carried much weight.

The pioneer editor in Fayette county was probably John Gharky, a strong man and most industrious printer; but so intense was his Democracy that during the War of the Rebellion he sold out hastily and left, hoping to find a more congenial political clime in Missouri. It was afterwards said he admitted his removal was a mistake, because while there was too much Republicanism for him in Iowa, too many of the Missouri Democrats were unable to read!

The senior member of the profession now in service in Fayette county is Charles H. Talmadge of *The West Union*

Gazette. For more than thirty-three years—the life-time of a generation—he has maintained a high reputation as an editor and kept *The Gazette* at the front in influence and worth. Although comparatively young (in appearance), Mr. Talmadge was a typo before the war, in the offices of *The Mitchell Republican*, published by Parker & Talcott; *The North Iowan* (Stilson Hutchins' paper) at Osage; *The Mason City Democrat* by Datus E. Coon; and *The Clear Lake Independent* by Brainard & Noyes. I venture the guess, without having data to verify it, that all four of these were pioneer newspapers in Mitchell and Cerro Gordo counties.

Research discloses that *The Lansing Mirror* is the oldest paper in the Fourth congressional district. Its publication began in 1851. The office was brought thither from Galena, Ill., by a gentleman named Houghton. Its editor was a man named Sumner; but not long thereafter, editorial control passed into the hands of one Chatterton whose pedigree as a printer cannot be given. This record makes *The Mirror* some four years older than any of the papers herein mentioned. Among the successors of Chatterton were two deserving of mention. The first of these is Thomas C. Medary. Though somewhat erratic at times, "Tom," as his friends always called him, had "the nose for news" highly cultivated. To this he added fine ability in expression, no little humor and much mental strength. In paragraphing, he was the best disciple of Col. Richardson. Without being an imitator, he was trained to brevity, and in him it was always "the soul of wit." After various excursions in the newspaper field in Northern Iowa and elsewhere, Mr. Medary died in the harness as editor of *The Waukon Democrat*. The other ex-editor of *The Mirror* to whom I refer is the Hon. James D. Metcalf, of Washington, D. C. He was not possessed of brilliant talent but had much common sense and those careful, painstaking, thorough-going business habits that generally accomplish more than erratic genius. The same

qualities employed in Uncle Sam's service, have carried him up step by step to the head of the money order business of the Post Office Department—a place in which there is no politics, and wherein merit and capacity are the sole tests. It includes both domestic and international business, and unitedly covers the details of money transactions yearly counted by millions of dollars.

The editor in Allamakee county who has rendered one parish the longest continuous service is A. M. May of *The Waukon Standard*. Only a few months ago he retired from active labor after over thirty years of high class editorial work, that ought to be remembered for its sturdy support of all things good, honorable and true.

In the annals of Mitchell county there are two names that shine out conspicuously. One of these served in that county for only a brief season; but the work he did at Osage was an apprenticeship to the larger field he found at Independence as the editor of *The Buchanan County Bulletin*. I refer, of course, to the late William Toman. As a vigorous writer he has had few equals; no superiors. He was born with an intense love of right, and an equally fierce hatred of wrong, as he met these elements in public questions. To these qualities was added an independence so sturdy that when it was questioned his friends often said it leaned over backwards. Take him all in all few editors anywhere excelled him in those prime qualities—ability and integrity. The other name is that of Thomas G. Atherton, for almost a generation the presiding genius of *The Press*. His career was so long, honorable and influential as to entitle him to the front rank for his county in the class under review in this hasty sketch.

Reference has been made above to D. E. Coon as the pioneer editor at Mason City. He was probably the first at Osage also. If I am correctly informed, he printed a Buchanan organ at that place in 1856. The land office was removed from Decorah to Osage in the spring of that year, and the officials all being strong Democrats they, no doubt,

encouraged and assisted Coon in his enterprise. In June, 1858, Coon removed the material he had used in Osage over to Mason City and started *The Cerro Gordo Press*; but he did not remain there long, for he enlisted in the War of the Rebellion and became General Datus E. Coon. One of his employes, one who had worked for Coon at Osage and with him had moved over by ox-team to Mason City, was Will Ed. Tucker. Mr. T. set the first "stickful" of type on *The Press*, and has been engaged in editorial work in Cerro Gordo county almost constantly ever since. In 1860 he, with a partner named Tobin, moved over into Hancock county and started *The Hancock Sentinel* at Ellington. That was then the county seat, but now it is only a hamlet and postoffice in one corner of Hancock county. That office secured to these enterprising proprietors, in that year, no less than five tax-lists for neighboring counties wherein no newspapers existed. The experiences of Mr. Tucker in his pioneer enterprises would make a sizeable volume of most interesting venture and experience.

"Of all good things Iowa affords the best!" And that reminds us that Sidney Foster, the author of this epigram, was one of the early editors of little Worth. He was not the pioneer editor. That distinction belongs to P. D. Swick, who started *The Northwood Pioneer*, issuing the first number October 24, 1869, and continued it until March, 1874. Foster's editorial career lasted from 1878 to 1884, when he migrated to Des Moines and engaged in the more lucrative business of insurance. All previous papers "came to stay," but the real stayer proved to be Frank Scammon, who established *The Northwood Index* in November, 1881, and has remained with it, a genuine and continually growing force in the affairs of Worth county ever since.

These facts cover the capital cities of all the counties in the Fourth congressional district, except Chickasaw. *The Courier* was the first paper, and it has had a career of forty-one years duration. Of it and other papers I am not sufficiently informed to venture upon a record.

The information herewith submitted is subject to revision and correction. Where errors have been made, as errors will be, in such histories, local corrections can be furnished in brief notes, which no doubt THE ANNALS OF IOWA will gladly publish, in future numbers, for the sake of "the truth of history."

Since the foregoing was sent to the printer researches by Auditor J. G. Hempel, of Clayton county, in course of publication in *The Elkader Argus*, disclose that the first paper in Clayton county was *The Herald*. It was published at Garnavillo, the first county seat of that county. A relocation of the shire town took place at an early date: Elkader went up and Garnavillo down; hence *The Herald* expired.

NAVIGATION OF CEDAR RIVER.—From an advertisement in another column, it will be seen that the Maid of Iowa, will ascend the Cedar river as far up as Washington Ferry, leaving Burlington on the 15th inst., which will afford our farmers convenient to that stream, an excellent opportunity for shipping whatever of surplus produce they may have on hand. Within the last few days, she has made one trip between that point and Nauvoo, laden with produce, and we learn that she passed Overman's a day or two since, on her second trip. She has, so far, we understand, met with no serious obstacles to the successful navigation of that river. Should the stage of that river, in subsequent seasons prove as favorable as the past and present, it will be of incalculable advantage to a large district of as fine farming country as is to be found in any part of the west.—*Bloomington Herald*, Aug. 2, 1844.

SPECIE, in proportion to the amount of money in circulation, was never more plenty in our little community than at present. We have heard repeated inquiries for good paper in exchange for specie, and understand it is hard to obtain.—*Herald, Bloomington (Muscatine)*, Iowa, Jan. 20, 1842.

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