

Some Special Categories

Special notice must be taken of certain Iowa magazines that refuse to be fitted neatly into any category in this series of articles or into any in the series that is to follow. We choose a few of them for attention here.

When *Life* made its sensational success as a picture magazine in 1936, the amazing welcome it received stimulated other enterprising publishers to enter the field of general pictorial journalism with their own offerings. About a score of such ventures were made, but the only successful one was the fortnightly *Look*, founded in Des Moines in 1937. *Look* was no mere imitation; it was packed with original ideas, lively, exciting, and worth reading. Gardner Cowles, Jr., known to Iowa friends as "Mike" when he was first associated with his father and brother in publishing the *Register* and *Tribune*, was the founder of *Look* and remains its editor and president of its publishing company. His magazine was immediately successful, soon gaining a million circulation and moving its main office to New York in 1940. Today it is one of the three great mass circulation magazines in the weekly-biweekly class.

A long forgotten but interesting periodical, im-

portant to the study of early Iowa culture, is the *Opera House Reporter*, founded by James S. Cox at Estherville. Cox was then manager of the Lough Opera House in that town. In those years such Houses had to take whatever shows came along with no chance of learning about them in advance; and as a result, some very bad ones sometimes appeared on the Lough stage. Cox gave public notice eventually that if an audience decided any show on his stage was really atrocious, it could walk out and get its money back. When this happened, Cox mailed out a circular to other opera house managers warning them against the bad show; they replied with letters about bad and good offerings and begged him to continue the circulars. Thus the *Opera House Reporter* (affectionately nicknamed "The Iowa Detective") was born in 1898. The very first numbered issue carried some advertisements: an impresario wanted "singing and dancing comedian, heavy man, leading lady; must be good dressers on and off stage"; "The Great Nina, electric picture and endurance dancer" was guaranteed — "Will forfeit \$500.00 if you can produce her equal."

L. C. Zelleno and George H. Bubb acquired the paper in 1915. It was then a 16-page quarto with some illustrations, published weekly at \$2 a year, including gossip and news of shows and show people; but still featuring "managers' reports,"

now arranged by towns and states throughout the Middle West. In 1917 they moved it to Des Moines. But the motion picture was already making great inroads upon the old opera house business. In the spring of 1921, an attempt was made to enlarge the journal's scope, and the title was changed to *Amusement Reporter*; but it did not quite last that year out.

A few music journals have been published in Iowa, as Frank Abbott's *Presto*, born in Cedar Rapids in 1884 but soon moved to Chicago; Wendell Heighton's *Western Musical Herald* (1906-1916), a Des Moines monthly with Minneapolis and Chicago editions; and P. C. Hayden's *School Music*, begun in Quincy, Illinois, and then moved to Keokuk, where its melodies ceased in 1915.

An admirable small-quarto monthly of thirty-two pages with self-cover called the *Book Marker* was published in Des Moines by Donald and Zoe Murphy, 1927-1929. Book reviews, brief critical pieces, and editorial chat composed a delightful bill of fare. But Donald became occupied with writing serials for farm papers, Zoe had a baby, and family budgets of time and money brought an end to a journal that not a few readers were sorry to see die.

In 1900-1901 H. S. Kneedler began in Boone a beautifully printed little magazine after the form, if not the style, of Hubbard's *Philistine*. It was called *The Optimist*, and it enlisted a number of

good contributors — such Iowans as Johnson Brigham and Lewis Worthington Smith; such diverse Easterners as Henry L. Mencken and Ella Wheeler Wilcox. But its optimism was short-lived.

A famous journal of its time was the *Analyst*, dedicated to “pure and applied mathematics,” and published by J. E. Hendricks in Des Moines, 1873-1884. After leaving Iowa, it was issued as *Annals of Mathematics*, first at the University of Virginia, then at Harvard, and finally at Princeton, where it is still published. It has always been a bimonthly.

The *Dubuque Chess Journal* was a 76-page octavo published monthly through 1870-1878 by C. A. Brownson. It varied in title — sometimes simply — *Chess Journal*, sometimes *Brownson's Chess Journal*. Suspended for eight years, it was resumed 1886-1892.

Another specialized monthly was the *Western Penman*, begun in Cedar Rapids by A. N. Palmer in 1885. Professor Palmer's beautiful Spencerian writing fascinated boys and girls in many school-rooms. His little magazine of 16 quarto pages sold for five cents a copy. It was moved to New York in 1905 and published there as the *American Penman* until 1938. By that time fine penmanship was virtually a forgotten art.

We have left until the last one of the handsomest magazines ever issued in Iowa. This is the

Iowan, of Shenandoah, a quarterly of 56 small-quarto pages plus cover devoted to Iowa personalities, industry, history, public affairs, travel, nature, sports, homes and gardens, art, and education. About two-thirds of it is devoted to pictures, with some eight pages usually in color. Begun as a bimonthly at only \$2 a year by David E. and Willard D. Archie in 1952, it lost money until, in 1958, it dropped all advertising and newsstand sales, increased the color, and doubled the price. It became a quarterly in 1961. Today it has nearly 10,000 circulation at a regular subscription price of \$7.50.