

Week-End Miscellanies

In the years before the great Sunday editions of the daily newspapers, with their abundance of miscellaneous reading matter, were widely distributed, hundreds of cities and towns all over the United States had their weekly miscellanies. These were issued on Saturday for family reading on Sunday — and often treasured throughout the week. It was for such a purpose that the *Saturday Evening Post*, most famous of the tribe, was founded in Philadelphia in 1821 (though it still chooses to adhere to the discredited fable that Benjamin Franklin founded it in 1728). Others attained distinction in one way or another, but most of this multitude of week-enders lived out their terms, long or short, in parochial obscurity.

But the hunger for Civil War news stimulated the publication of Sunday editions of dailies, and by the end of the Sixties five Iowa cities had such papers — Dubuque (2), Burlington (2), Muscatine (1), Keokuk (2), and Council Bluffs (2). Publishers usually placated the Sabbatarians by working their staffs Saturday nights to get out the Sunday papers, and then giving them Sunday off and issuing no Monday editions; an "extra" might be rushed out on Monday if a big news-break de-

manded it. But these early Sunday papers were of the same size as the week-day papers, contained much the same kind of matter, and were confined to local distribution; and so it was not until the 1890's, when Iowa Sunday papers began following the example of the Chicago and East Coast papers in richness of feature material and larger size, with greater breadth of circulation, that they threatened and at last virtually put an end to the old week-enders. Some continued, however, with special emphasis on society and amusements — always an important element in the content of these papers.

The Keokuk *Dispatch* was begun in 1848, but changed its name six years later to *Saturday Post*, and ended in 1860. Its chief claim to fame is the fact that it printed the first of Mark Twain's productions for which he received cash payment. Sam Clemens, just turned 21, had been working for his brother Orion in a Keokuk printing office when he conceived the romantic idea to voyage to the headwaters of the Amazon, there to collect coca and make his fortune. In order to help pay expenses, he planned to write letters back home about his adventures. George Rees, then publisher of the *Saturday Post*, promised him \$5 apiece for his letters.

Of course, Sam never reached the Amazon. He worked at his trade in Cincinnati for some months, and then in the spring started down the river for

New Orleans — South America bound. But once on the Mississippi, the lure of that great river gripped him, and his boyhood ambition to be a steamboat pilot returned to erase his dreams of the Amazon. In the meantime, Sam had written three letters to the Keokuk *Saturday Post* — one from St. Louis and two from Cincinnati — under the pen name of “Thomas Jefferson Snodgrass,” taken from a character in the *Pickwick Papers*. The letters were written in dialect, a device characteristic of the humor of the time; but in this case it is not overdone, and the sketches of Sam’s travels to Cincinnati are mildly amusing. But the Snodgrass Letters have never been considered worthy of inclusion in Mark Twain’s collected works.

The *Western Soldiers’ Friend and Fireside Visitor*, a Saturday miscellany of eight newspaper-size pages established by C. A. Haviland at Davenport in 1867 to catch the interest of returned soldiers and their families, succeeded in building some circulation outside of its home town. After a few years it moved to Chicago to become *Gem of the West and Soldiers’ Friend* and reach for a larger audience; but it perished in 1875.

The *Saturday Evening Post*, of Burlington, was founded in 1882 as “a local society and general family newspaper.” It published verse and fiction, dramatic and musical news, and “personal gossip.” It dropped “Saturday Evening” from the title in 1926 in order to avoid confusion with its

more famous Philadelphia contemporary and continued as the Burlington *Post* until its end in 1939.

Cedar Rapids had two week-end journals of society, amusements, and literary miscellany in the 1880's — the *Saturday Evening Gossip* (1883-1889), conducted by Eugene Hunt, also publisher of the short-lived *Farm and Home*; and *Saturday Evening Chat*, begun in 1882 as a "society" paper but becoming more a "family magazine" in the latter 1880's. It changed its title to *Saturday Record* in the next decade and lasted until 1915.

In Marshalltown the *Sunday Reflector* was begun in 1880 and continued throughout that decade. In Sioux City Kittle Hunt (who later signed herself with more matronly dignity Kathryn Hunt James) started a week-end paper of society and amusement items and literary miscellany under the name *Stylus* in 1889. It lasted more than half a century, conducted in its later years by Arthur C. Hunt.

The *Merry War* was the picturesque title of a Clinton Saturday journal of social life and amusements (with verse, sketches, etc.). It was founded in 1886 by D. H. Winget; when he retired in 1933, it was passed on to a succession of editors and owners. The enterprising Bob Fulton was conducting it when he started his "shopper" *Town Talk*; for about ten years he ran both separately before merging them in 1950 under the *Town Talk* title, and so it continues.

An early Saturday miscellany in Des Moines was *Plain Talk* (1870-1950) published for many years by the Bishard Brothers on the East Side of the river, which it long served especially in its news notes. Before the international copyright law of 1891 closed that avenue of supply, *Plain Talk* often carried two fiction serials at a time by the popular English novelists of the day. Also it printed some verse and many entertaining extracts from other papers, along with notices of the theatrical productions currently being shown in the city, and so on. In later years it gained some reputation as an advocate of reform movements.

Another interesting Des Moines journal was *Persinger's Saturday Times*, founded in 1883 by H. R. Persinger, who produced on pink paper, full folio size, a collation of items about society, the churches, the stage, music, "Our Colored People," and so on in great variety and with some illustration by sketches. But after four years the paper was merged with John E. Clarey's *Saturday Mail*, which had been founded as the *Saturday Evening Mail Car* in 1879, and which was as good as the *Times* and possibly better. It carried good criticism of Des Moines theaters and concerts, and its departments "The Observer" and "The Lounger" were admirable chitchat. Persinger continued in the editorial chair of the *Mail and Times* for several years, and the paper lasted until 1907.

The enterprise in illustration noted in *Persinger's Saturday Times* was even more bold in the *Illustrated Des Moines Graphic*, a Saturday journal of 1889-1891. It described itself as a "sporting, sensational, dramatic, and society" paper. Murders and prizefighting were specialties of the *Graphic*. It also catered to the fraternal organizations, and ran fiction serials regularly. Though copiously illustrated, it is scarcely possible to describe kindly most of the work of its artists, whose chalk plates and wood engravings were, in general, as crude as much of the paper's reading matter. A. R. F. Ziegler was the original publisher, and later editor also.

Still another Des Moines Saturday journal was the *Saturday Review*, begun in 1890 by John E. Clarey, who had sold his interest in the *Mail and Times*. Also illustrated by woodcuts, it had much variety. In 1897 Clarey made it a monthly with the title *Illustrated Iowa*, but the next year it was absorbed by the *Midland Monthly*.

Iowa probably had more than 50 of these weekend journals in the latter half of the 19th century — most of them in the Seventies, Eighties, and early Nineties — distributed among a score of its cities and towns. But we shall have to content ourselves with our look at the dozen discussed above.