

## A Fortright Iowa Editor

It was in 1932 that Grant Caswell, managing director of the Iowa Press Association, conceived the idea of a Master Editor-Publisher Award to be bestowed upon those fellow craftsmen who had "worked hard, lived honorably, influenced unselfishly, with a sincere view to the betterment of their communities." The first recipients of this highly coveted Award were: Harvey Ingham of the Des Moines *Register and Tribune*, Elmer E. Taylor, Sr., of the Traer *Star-Clipper*, and J. F. Grawe of the Waverly *Bremer County Independent*.

During the decade that followed the names of those receiving the Master Editor-Publisher Award reads like a Hall of Fame for Iowa Journalism. Included in this group of distinguished Iowans was Don L. Berry of the Indianola *Record-Herald*, who with Sherman W. Needham and G. C. Tucker, were named Master Editor-Publishers in 1943. Berry thus joined the ranks of such men as Ward Barnes, J. M. Beck, E. P. Chase, W. C. Dewell, J. M. Grimes, W. Earl Hall, Wm. C. Jarnagin, Tom Purcell, C. S. Rogers, Ralph E. Shannon, and a score of others who had been carefully scrutinized by the jury of their peers and not found wanting in those attri-

butes that were felt indispensable for receiving the Master Editor-Publisher Award.

Don Berry had demonstrated his own unflinching editorial courage on more than one occasion. In the fall of 1925, for example, he took a leading role in personally helping to stabilize the price of corn by making it possible for farmers to borrow money on it from their local banks. This one-man crusade came about when a candidate for the United States Senate, Howard J. Clark, declared that Iowa bankers would not dare make such loans. Berry prepared a full page advertisement for his paper, visited the five banks in Indianola and received authority from their presidents to print the names of their banks on the bottom of the "ad" and each assume one-fifth of the expense. The bankers agreed to loan "a considerable portion" of the value of corn to farmers "when accompanied by a legal certificate of inspection and sealed under the Iowa warehouse law."

The advertisement appeared on Tuesday, October 20, 1925, and the price of corn stopped dropping in Indianola and soon began to rise slowly. That Berry had struck pay dirt for the farmers is demonstrated by the following front page story carried in the mail edition of the *Des Moines Capital* of October 26, 1925:

INDIANOLA, IA., Oct. 26. — (A.P.) — Not only are five Warren county banks willing to receive warehouse receipts and loan money on them, but they inserted a full

page advertisement in a local newspaper, telling the farmers that they were anxious to invest in that class of security.

The advertisement starts out by saying that the farmer's crop is good security, advises farmers to hold your own grain until the market is right and then asks the question, "Why let the speculator have the advance?"

"The time is past," the five bankers say, "when the farmer must throw his wheat on the market immediately after it is harvested in order to raise a little money for immediate needs, taking the low price which usually follows the harvesting of any crop and seeing the speculator get the benefit of the rise which usually comes later.

"Any of the banks whose names appear at the bottom of this advertisement will accept the crop of any reputable farmer as security for a loan to a considerable portion of its value when accompanied by a legal certificate of inspection and sealed under the Iowa warehouse law."

The advertisement was printed on the Des Moines *Register* editorial page on October 30, with a long editorial by Harvey Ingham headed by the caption — "The Iowa Land Owner." Ingham termed it the "most unique and most significant bank advertisement ever published in Iowa. If the candidacy of Mr. Clark for the Senate accomplishes nothing more than to center attention on the close relation between banking and farming in Iowa he will have done the state and the whole west an essential service." Ingham commended the Warren County bankers for "leading in a movement that will mean more to Iowa than anything we have yet done if it is followed up. . . .

It is full time that we made the Iowa 'corn song' something more than means of entertainment." As Berry relates:

Whether there were other causes than the Indianola banks' move, I do not know. If so, the coincidence is striking.

Just one crib of corn was sealed in Warren County, but the farmers knew they didn't have to sell, and the buyers knew they would have to bid up. It was like the old song of the flea on the tail of the dog of the boy of the wife of the wild man of Borneo. The message of the flea finally got to headquarters.

The banks participating in the advertisement were Peoples Trust and Savings Bank, First National Bank, Warren County State Bank, Worth Savings Bank, and Indianola Banking Company. Of these, only the first is still doing business, the others having gone down in the depression, but not from corn loans.

An equally dramatic situation occurred in 1932 when the President of the Iowa Press Association, James M. Beck of the Centerville *Iowegian*, named Don Berry chairman of a committee to try and stop the unfair foreclosure of Iowa farm mortgages by some life insurance companies. The choice of Berry proved excellent; without hesitation he quickly sought out influential key men who would be helpful in this problem. Lynn Fuller, vice-president of the Central National Bank of Des Moines, felt the idea was a good one but cautioned Berry to handle the insurance companies carefully. The farm loan manager of the Equitable of Iowa de-

clared his company would go along with Berry and his Iowa Press Association committee. Gerard Nollen, president of the Banker's Life, not only promised the co-operation of his company but offered to enlist the co-operation of reputable insurance men in New York City.

The first case came from Elmer Taylor, Sr., veteran editor of the Traer *Star-Clipper*, who was "so conservative" Berry felt he would never be guilty of overstatement. A New York company was unwilling to temporarily accept interest from a man who local bankers attested was a good, reliable farm manager. The Iowa Press Association wrote the company's local agent that the loan should be extended without fringe expenses being imposed. The Iowa loan agent wrote a very "snooty" letter which Don Berry, acting for the Iowa Press Association, forwarded to the President of the New York firm who instructed the local agent to accept IPA suggestions.

The next case came up in Don Berry's own Warren County. A man, George Devore, who had been sick for two or three years, had lost his wife, and was depressed and discouraged, had failed to answer letters demanding interest be paid, and a Mr. Steele of St. Louis, manager of the Connecticut Mutual Insurance Company farm loans west of the Mississippi, had come with local agents to ask what the Iowa Press Association would do in this case. Don Berry replied: "I

would see Lew Hodson," the uncle of George Devore, and one of the most substantial farm owners in Warren County. He explained Devore's situation thoroughly, something the local agent hadn't done. Within two weeks the interest was paid, and the Connecticut Mutual informed Don Berry that the Iowa Press Association could count on the company for 100 per cent co-operation. Not over five cases required IPA action.

The following winter the General Assembly passed a moratorium law stopping farm mortgage foreclosures, a procedure that had ended so quietly that most legislators were completely unaware of the work of Don Berry and his IPA committee.

Time and again during his colorful career, whenever a spokesman was needed, Don Berry sounded the clarion call to arms. His biting wit was demonstrated in his editorial, "Needed — A Brannen Plan for Barbers." His courageous editorial — "Shall We Follow the Blue Eagle Over the Cliff?" proved the death knell for the N.R.A. When Don Berry retired, the *Des Moines Register* of January 21, 1960, editorialized as follows:

*An Influential Editor Retires*

Don L. Berry, editor-publisher of the Indianola newspapers, retired last week at the age of 79. He is taking the title of publisher-emeritus and will be chairman of the board of the Record and Tribune Co.

After 40 years as editor, Don Berry surely is entitled to honorable retirement. But his many friends and admirers in Iowa journalism will hope that he occasionally writes an

editorial for the Record-Herald or the Tribune. His spicy comment on politics, religion, agriculture, state affairs and hundreds of other subjects always has been widely read and widely reprinted by other editors.

Berry is among the staunchest of Republicans, and his voice is heard with respect in both state and national G. O. P. circles. He has had considerable influence in formulating the Republicans' party policies concerning agriculture.

However, he does not mind taking the hide off a Republican politician when he thinks the lacing deserved. He might do these honors with a touch of sadness and with an insider's note of understanding, in contrast to his outraged indignation about Democratic misbehavior. But this partisanship does not keep him from reporting the facts and placing the blame where he thinks it belongs.

Don Berry is a leading light of Iowa journalism. He has set a standard for others to follow in integrity and courage.

Throughout his long career Don Berry was truly a force for good in his community. The church, the school, the civic club; the local merchant, the farmer, the laboring man; the agricultural fair, the Chamber of Commerce, and Simpson College — these, and many more, were always fairly and generously supported through the columns of the Indianola *Record-Herald*. But his vision and his influence extended far beyond Warren County — for his editorials were frequently reprinted by Iowa editors and found their way into the press of the Nation. Iowa owes much to such men as Don L. Berry.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN