

# *The* PALIMPSEST

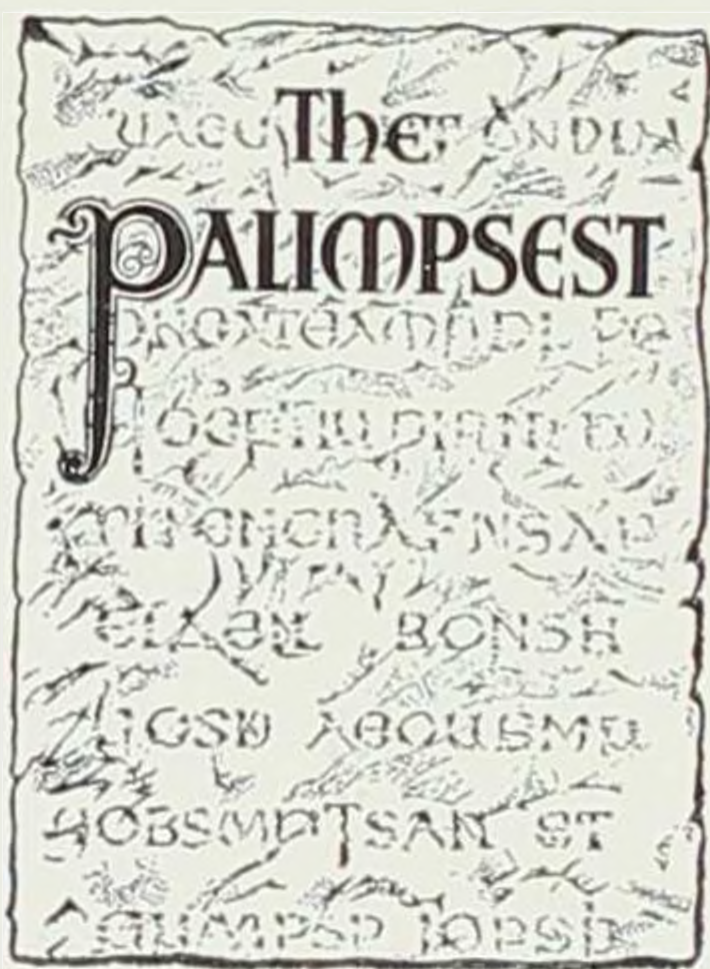


JOHNSON BRIGHAM — Librarian

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## *The Meaning of Palimpsest*

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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## *Contents*

JOHNSON BRIGHAM

LUELLA M. WRIGHT

The Days of His Youth	225
Journalist	230
The Midland Monthly	239
State Librarian	244
Writer and Historian	248
The Youth of Old Age	253

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# THE PALIMPSEST

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## The Days of His Youth

Very few Iowans have lived as richly as did Johnson Brigham. During a crowded lifetime of ninety years, Brigham occupied a post under Lincoln, edited the Cedar Rapids *Republican* during the 1880's, served briefly as consul at Aix la Chappelle, created the *Midland Monthly* in 1894, and from 1898 to his death in 1936 headed the State Library in Des Moines. As a writer he was equally versatile — as a minor poet, an essayist, a critic of discernment, a biographer, and an outstanding historian of the state of Iowa.

Born in Cherry Valley, New York, on March 11, 1846, the year Iowa became a state, he was christened De Witt Clinton Johnson Brigham; later he dropped the first two names. During his boyhood his attention was turned westward by the long lines of Conestoga wagons streaming through Cherry Valley from Albany to the Mississippi.

His father, Phineas Brigham, traced his ancestry back to Thomas and Mercy (Hurd) Brigham, who emigrated from England and settled in Mas-



sachusetts in 1635. His mother, Eliza (Johnson) Brigham, was descended from the pioneer families of Johnson and Stone in central New York. After attending the public schools in Cherry Valley, Johnson enrolled in Elmira Academy in Elmira, New York. His advanced education was interrupted by the Civil War.

In 1862 young Brigham tried to enlist in the 153rd New York Infantry but was rejected because of his age. Disappointed, he went to Washington where he became attached to the United States Sanitary Commission as a hall boy. Soon he was advanced to the position of relief agent. One of Brigham's first tasks was that of reporting on the first exchange of Union and Confederate soldiers near Savannah. He was assigned to the *General Sedgwick*, a northern boat, carrying 5,000 southern soldiers. When he boarded the Confederate steamer, the *New York*, he found hundreds of northern soldiers awaiting exchange. Some were barefoot, many unable to walk, and most without underclothing. The next day Brigham spent hours feeding the hungry soldiers with "Sanitary Commission soup" made from meat, beans, and tomatoes, and in distributing shirts, socks, underwear, and coats.

By 1864 young Brigham had acquired a flair for writing. His publication, an official report of the prisoner exchange, advanced him to a first assistantship under John Y. Culyer in the central office



of the United States Sanitary Commission, a post which he held until the close of the war.

The Washington scene etched unforgettable pictures on the youth's mind, particularly of Lincoln. Johnson Brigham was given the privilege by Mr. Culyer of exercising "a coal black stallion with a running record on the Long Island course." Frequently on the avenues of Washington, Brigham met the President's carriage. He never forgot the tall gaunt man "who sat leaning forward with his elbows on his knees," and whose countenance was "infinitely sad." Almost daily when Culyer's fleet stallion pranced by, Lincoln waved his big hand, as Brigham later wrote, to salute "the handsomest horse in the District."

The early months of 1865 furnished other memories of President Lincoln. On the raw and disagreeable day of March 5, Johnson Brigham listened to President Lincoln as he read his Second Inaugural Address. After Lee's surrender, Brigham and others marched with a band to welcome the President back from the front. Good-naturedly Lincoln appeared on a balcony, and expressed his appreciation. Then, turning to the band leader, he said: "The Confederacy has one tune which I very much like and since we have captured the Confederacy, I think the tune goes with it. Just to please me, will the band strike up 'Dixie'?" And as the drums and fifes played the familiar air the "President beat time with his big foot, and a genial



smile made his strong homely face almost beautiful."

Johnson Brigham never forgot Good Friday night of 1865. He knew Lincoln expected to attend Laura Keene's presentation of "Our Country Cousin" in Ford's Theater. Late that night, as he passed the entrance to the theater, he ran into an excited crowd. His inquiry brought a quick response. "Happened!" shouted a man, "My God, boy, they've killed the President!"

All night young Brigham remained near by "hoping against hope" for the recovery of the President. At seven in the morning, "the solemn tolling of the bells announced that the end had come." The following Tuesday he joined the mourners who passed solemnly by the President's bier at the White House. The next day he watched the funeral cortege move down Pennsylvania Avenue. Perhaps recalling the earlier salutes which the President had given the black stallion, Johnson Brigham was especially saddened by the riderless horse which followed the funeral carriage.

In 1868, at the age of twenty-one, Johnson Brigham entered Hamilton College at Clinton, New York. The following year, when Cornell University first opened its doors, Brigham registered as a junior. Although he remained but two semesters and did not take a degree, this year brought him contacts with several stimulating



minds. James Russell Lowell, George William Curtis, and Louis Agassiz were visiting lecturers at Cornell. Brigham studied under two of these. From George William Curtis, idealist, once associated with Brook Farm and later editor of *Harper's* "Easy Chair," he gained a new appreciation of literature. Under the revered Agassiz he studied geology and zoology. Brigham won the coveted Goldwin Smith prize in history at Cornell.

Becoming deeply interested in journalism, Brigham and four other students founded *The Cornell Era*. Years later, perhaps in justifying his voluntary withdrawal from Cornell without a degree, he spoke of journalism as a poor man's college, which, he felt, "had fitted him as well as many men for the destinies which they were to fulfill in life." This decision brought to an end his academic schooling, but Hamilton College and Cornell University had developed his deep interest in literature and his keen critical faculties.

LUELLE M. WRIGHT



## Journalist

For over a decade Johnson Brigham worked, sometimes as reporter or business manager or editor or all three, on several papers in the state of New York. His apprenticeship was served on the *Watkins Express*. In 1872 he bought a small Democratic weekly at Brockport, which he immediately turned into a Republican paper in support of Grant.

Later in the seventies he returned to the *Watkins Express* as part owner. There in 1875 he married Antoinette Gano, the daughter of Levi Gano, who was financially interested in the *Express*. Johnson and Antoinette Gano Brigham had one daughter, Anna, now Mrs. C. P. Hartley of Washington, D. C. The couple, however, became estranged and were divorced.

Subsequently, Brigham sold his interest in the *Express* and moved to Hornellsville where, until May 16, 1881, he edited the *Daily Times*. In 1881, however, because of poor health, he began considering the West as a new journalistic field.

An unexpected circumstance probably determined the events of his later life and ultimately brought him to Iowa. He accompanied a group of newspapermen to Wahpeton, south of Fargo, in



expanding Dakota Territory, where he called on a former friend, Dr. J. B. Hall, editor of the *Fargo Daily Republican*. Hall unexpectedly offered him an editorial position on his paper, and Brigham accepted.

On his return to Fargo, after a brief trip East, Brigham found that his chief duty was "to boom the territory editorially." And this he did. For several months the columns of the Fargo paper glowed with vivid accounts of reapers drawn by six horses, of the rapidly increasing population, and of the fine character of the populace. In 1881 the people of Dakota Territory were already hoping for a division so that there would be two Dakota states. Brigham's ability was recognized when he was asked to prepare a brochure to be presented to Congress. With a delegation of which he was made secretary and spokesman, he himself presented the "Memorial" to a joint committee of both houses of Congress.

Again a chance call on an editor, this time at Madison, Wisconsin, changed both the immediate and the future plans of Johnson Brigham. Returning from Washington, he called at the offices of the *Madison Daily* where he was introduced to Fred W. Faulkes, a journalistic visitor from Cedar Rapids. Faulkes, learning that Brigham was interested in locating in the Middle West, told him that the *Cedar Rapids Republican* was for sale and launched into a long monologue in which he so



eulogized Cedar Rapids and Iowa that Brigham was at once interested. Neither man then knew that he was facing an editorial rival, for later Faulkes became the vigorous editor of the Cedar Rapids *Gazette*.

This accidental interview resulted in Brigham's investigation of the *Republican*, and of his assuming its editorship a few months later. On March 1, 1882, the Cedar Rapids *Republican* was officially transferred to J. R. Sage, Johnson Brigham, Fred Benzinger, and H. P. Keyes. Two years later Brigham bought out the interest of J. R. Sage, and L. S. Merchant purchased the interests of the other two.

On that March morning when Johnson Brigham officially assumed his responsibilities, both he and Iowa were approaching their thirty-sixth birthdays. His most impelling journalistic need, he felt, was first-hand knowledge and contact with the people of Cedar Rapids and the near-by towns in Linn County. By assuming the self-imposed duty of canvasser and collector, he not only increased the number of subscribers to the *Republican* but also established lasting contacts with farmers and with professional and business men in Cedar Rapids and throughout the county. He also endeavored to familiarize himself with the surviving Indian legends and with past and current social and political history of Iowa and the Midwest. These interests he pursued up to his death in 1936.



As a journalist Johnson Brigham set his sights high. Near the close of the decade of the nineties, with nearly twenty years of newspaper work behind him, he responded to an invitation to address the students of Cornell College at Mount Vernon, Iowa, on the aims and ideals of journalism. Briefly summarized, they included a broad knowledge of history which embraced social, economic, and political theories and practice. To this he added "an encyclopedic knowledge of things in general." (In later life he claimed that he himself had read a hundred thousand books.) Besides, the journalist's kit and accoutrement should include "a keen sense of what is news" as well as "what is legitimate and useful to print." An editor should possess "inherent honesty of thought and purpose." He concluded, "The journalistic field is the world and the curriculum of study for that field is as wide as the whole world."

In the decade between 1882 and 1892, in his attempt to reach these ideals, Johnson Brigham experienced tensions and tangible and intangible rewards. A heavy debt on the *Republican* had to be overcome. Politically, Editor Brigham stood out strongly for the protection of American industries and for the regulation of railroads in order to combat the exploitation of the Midwest farmer. In another direction he turned the *Republican* into a strong advocate for prohibition. The first of these policies brought him considerable opposition from



the Democratic press of the state, the second from the railroad lobbies, and the third from state and local liquor interests.

His energetic rallying of Republican forces in caucuses, rallies, and conventions, both in person and through the columns of his paper, brought him state-wide recognition. As a delegate in 1888 he attended the Republican National Convention in Baltimore where he hoped to see Senator William Boyd Allison nominated. On his return to Cedar Rapids he gave the full support of his paper to the successful nominee, Benjamin Harrison. In 1892 he was made president of the Republican League of Iowa.

He never hesitated to use his editorial columns for causes in which he believed. He stood out so strongly for state prohibition in the late eighties that his life was frequently threatened and he had to keep a gun in his desk. He recalled, "My way home led past a row of vicious saloons where my enemies congregated. . . . My old mother used to wait up for me until I got home at one or two o'clock in the morning. 'Thank God, you are safe,' she used to say as I entered the door."

According to William Boyd of Cedar Rapids, "Johnson Brigham made the columns of his paper almost classical." For over ten years Brigham himself wrote for his paper critical articles on Robert Browning, John Burroughs, James M. Barrie, Mark Twain, and Walt Whitman, championing



the last two in the face of much current disapproval. Once a week for a number of years he himself edited a "Book Table" in which the works of English and American writers were reviewed.

Another period of momentous decisions for Johnson Brigham came in 1892 and 1893. After careful thought, he decided to sell his holdings in the Cedar Rapids *Daily Republican*. This he did on October 21, 1892, probably aware that in the offing lay an appointment abroad in the consular service. Officially this came in February of 1893, when President Benjamin Harrison appointed him consul at Aix La Chapelle (now Aachen).

Johnson Brigham had then completed ten years as editor and part owner of the *Daily Republican*. He had seen Cedar Rapids grow from a straggling town of approximately 10,000 to double its size. He had been largely responsible for paying off the heavy debt of the *Republican* which had been assumed in 1882, and he had had the extreme satisfaction of seeing the *Republican* established in new headquarters with up-to-date machinery. Fred Faulkes, the rival owner of the Cedar Rapids *Gazette*, in his editorial of October 22, 1892, stated that Johnson Brigham had sold his holdings for \$20,000 to William R. Boyd and Luther A. Brewer, and implied that Brigham's championing of the farmers' cause versus the railroads, as well as the aroused antagonism of the liquor interests, had hastened his relinquishing of the paper.



The Republican press of the state, however, expressed deep regret that Johnson Brigham, then president of the Iowa Republican League, was leaving newspaper work. "Ret" Clarkson of the Des Moines *Register* wrote, "The retirement of Mr. Johnson Brigham is a distinct loss to the Iowa Press. Mr. Brigham has been not only a successful editor but a scholarly one, and has done his part to dignify and elevate the tone of Iowa journalism."

The summer of 1892, before he had definitely decided to dispose of the *Republican*, provided the most pleasant interlude in Johnson Brigham's life. He was not only anticipating his consular appointment, but he joined an editorial excursion to the west coast. Among the editors was A. W. Lee of the Ottumwa *Courier*, later controller of the Lee syndicate of newspapers, who was accompanied by his wife, Minnie Walker Lee, and her sister, Lucy Walker. These were the daughters of W. W. Walker, builder of the North Western Railroad across Iowa, a banker, and prominent citizen of Cedar Rapids. Johnson Brigham, thrown into companionship with Lucy Hitchcock Walker, fell in love with her. Somewhere on a train in Colorado they became engaged. The two were married on December 20, 1892, and combined a few months of consulship with a wedding trip in Europe.

Later Johnson Brigham paid high tribute to his



wife and to the ideal home life which she created in *An Old Man's Idyl*. This little book was published in 1905 under the pseudonym of Alexander Wolcott. Slightly disguising the incidents, he antedated his courtship ten years and carried the life history of his charming little daughters ten years beyond their age at the time of its publication. The author chose, and wisely too, to adopt for his *Idyl* the genre of the apparently artless fantasies popularized by Donald Grant Mitchell in *Dream Life* and by Jerome K. Jerome in *The Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*. For his *Idyl* Brigham might have chosen the more descriptive, if more prosaic, title of "Idealized Home Life Realized."

The dream narrative, written simply yet crowded with many literary allusions, begins with the rearing of their two little daughters in a well-adjusted home. Occasionally, too, he throws in a philosophic remark concerning parents' fallibility and youngsters' resourcefulness. Then midway in the book there is a throwback to his courtship of Lucy Walker as the steam cars carried them westward, to their marriage, and to the wedding journey to Aix La Chapelle, their enjoyment of "the castled Rhine," of the *pensions* of France, and particularly of the Lake country in England. There, much to their delight, they met an old cabby who remembered Wordsworth. Johnson Brigham quoted him as saying, "It's nice in you



outsiders to 'old 'im in such store; but between me and you, barrin' portry, of which I hain't no judge, 'e wa'n't thought to be so much mor'n 'is neighbors, and I'm certain 'e never set 'imself up to be."

The consulship, which lasted only from February to September of 1893, came to an early close with the inauguration of Grover Cleveland. On his return to America, Johnson Brigham was forced to make a new decision concerning his future, but once the die was cast, he never regretted his choice.

LUELLA M. WRIGHT



## The Midland Monthly

The comparative leisure of his months abroad, and the long hours on shipboard, as the Brighams returned from Aix La Chapelle, gave Johnson Brigham the opportunity of considering a new project. Feeling deeply that the time had come when the Midwest should have an outlet for critical and literary expression, he wanted to edit a magazine that would fulfill this purpose. On the few occasions when he had broached the subject to his friends, he was told emphatically that the time was not ripe for such a periodical; others said flatly that the whole idea was fantastic. The dream, however, continued to urge Johnson Brigham on to the creation of the *Midland Monthly*.

In his mind he had set up definite goals for this magazine. He felt that the Middle West and Iowa in particular should realize that the region already possessed a past. As a state Iowa was approaching her half-century mark. She possessed Indian legends and stories of frontier chicanery as well as of dogged heroism which needed to be set down in permanent form. In another way he felt that such a magazine would both explain to other regions Iowa's and the Midwest's prowess in education and culture and furnish an outlet for Midwestern



talents. For this enterprise most of Johnson Brigham's life had been a preparation. Always a great reader, for twenty years he had written many critical articles for his New York papers, and more for the *Republican*.

In family conference at Cedar Rapids, the magazine was named the *Midland Monthly*. Des Moines, because of its central position in the state and its advantages in supplying advertising material, was selected as the place of publication. Late in the fall of 1893 the Brighams took up their residence in Des Moines, and in January of 1894 the first issue of the *Midland Monthly* appeared in a heavy, slate-blue cover. Johnson Brigham could well take pride in this initial number. It contained a story by Alice French, nine grass-roots lyrics of Hamlin Garland's, a reprint of Major S. H. M. Byers' "Sherman's March to the Sea" with a detailed account of its composition by the author, and an appreciation of "Father Clarkson" of the Des Moines *Register*, written by Cyrenus Cole.

Consistently Johnson Brigham drew in contributions from men and women who were well known in the state and the nation. Among these were Senators William B. Allison, James Harlan, and Jonathan P. Dolliver; J. Christian Bay, later librarian of the John Crerar Library in Chicago; newspapermen like Cyrenus Cole, Harvey Ingham, Irving B. Richman, and Henry Wallace, Sr.; and prominent educators like W. W. Gist, Lewis



Worthington Smith, Samuel Calvin, and Seldon Whitcomb. Johnson Brigham possessed, too, an uncanny faculty in recognizing talent in writers who were then unknown to the reading public. He, therefore, welcomed contributions from Albert Bigelow Paine, future biographer of Mark Twain; Emerson Hough; and Ellis Parker Butler, whose "Pigs Is Pigs" later brought him fame.

Starting the *Midland Monthly* in 1894 in a period of a great national depression, Johnson Brigham found the financial obligations oppressive. In the absence of capital he utilized every possible means to keep the magazine on a paying basis. The subscription list from four "little magazines" helped to strengthen the *Midland*, which in 1894 was able to absorb *The Literary Northwest*; in 1896, *Tainter's Magazine* and *The New Bohemian*; and in 1898, *Illustrated Iowa*. These had been published respectively in St. Paul, Galena, Cincinnati, and Des Moines. While these annexations served to increase the subscription lists, they were also indicative of a widespread interest during the late nineties in creative and critical writings throughout the Midwest.

By introducing two sections in the *Midland Monthly*, called "Editorial Comment" and "The Midland Book Table," Johnson Brigham made the magazine truly critical. In these he commented on contemporary articles in magazines and on current books written by Walt Whitman, Mark Twain,



James Whitcomb Riley, Eugene Field, and Lafcadio Hearn. English writers, such as Sir James Barrie and Mrs. Humphry Ward, and French authors of the caliber of George Sand, Emile Zola, and Alphonse Daudet were criticized.

Two other interests tied his few years with the *Midland Monthly* with his work as state librarian; first he championed the aims and ideals of the Women's Clubs, and secondly he advocated better library facilities in the state. In 1895 Johnson Brigham asked Mrs. Harriet B. Towner of Corning, Iowa, to edit a section in the magazine called "Women's Club Notes." Both Mrs. Towner and her husband, State Senator Horace Towner, were deeply interested in supplying the people of Iowa with more books. In her column and in her addresses before district and state conventions, she kept the idea before the Women's Clubs. And in the legislature in 1896, Senator Towner introduced a bill to create state-supported traveling libraries. There is little doubt that Brigham's support of the Towners had much to do with his appointment in 1898 as State Librarian of Iowa.

With a limited personal income and with no subsidies for his magazine, Johnson Brigham fought an uphill financial battle for nearly five years. Though eastern magazines and his own clientele lauded the *Midland* highly, and although Des Moines businessmen generously contributed their support, yet the time came in 1898 when



Johnson Brigham felt it best to sell the magazine to a St. Louis syndicate. Perhaps if Governor Leslie Shaw had not appointed him State Librarian, Brigham might have kept the *Midland* running for a longer life span. The St. Louis people, however, put out just a few numbers, and the *Midland Monthly* was no more.

As years go by, Johnson Brigham's *Midland Monthly* will rank as an important creative and cultural achievement in Iowa's early history. The editor, the Nestor of Iowa's literary magazines, achieved one of his goals, that of creating a literary organ that made Iowa critically conscious of itself and of its writers.

LUELLA M. WRIGHT



## State Librarian

On May 1, 1898, Johnson Brigham, then fifty-two, became State Librarian of Iowa. Appointed for one year, he held the office for thirty-eight years, up to his death at the age of ninety. Governor Leslie M. Shaw, knowing Brigham's stalwart support of Republican principles, his brilliant editorship of the *Midland Monthly*, his interest in people and books, and his belief in the usefulness of the Traveling Library, chose wisely in his appointment.

In assuming his duties, Johnson Brigham was head of the Law, the Historical, and the Miscellaneous Collections. Each of these was presided over by a special curator. Brigham was particularly fortunate in working with Charles Aldrich, founder of the Historical Department, and later with his successor, E. R. Harlan.

The State Library was housed in the Capitol near the legislative chambers. Brigham and Aldrich seized the opportunity of impressing upon members of both houses the impelling need for larger quarters. Ten years later, when the Historical, Memorial, and Art Building was sufficiently completed, the State Library was assigned commodious quarters on the first floor. The bill



to complete this much-needed building was introduced in the House on February 11, 1904, by Representative Emory H. English.

Through the Traveling Library, Brigham sought to have the resources of the State Library made available to rural and municipal communities without libraries. This was done by collecting books in bundles of fifty each, suitable for schools, and for literary and agricultural clubs.

In 1900, two years after his appointment, in large part through the vision of Charles Aldrich and Johnson Brigham, the General Assembly created the State Library Commission. This was established to promote the growth and administration of public libraries throughout the state. Of this Commission, Johnson Brigham held the chairmanship for thirty-six years. To the *Iowa Library Quarterly*, the official organ of the Iowa Library Commission, he contributed news items of the library world, particularly of Iowa; numerous articles on the statesmen of Iowa; and more on the contemporary literature of the state.

Immediately upon becoming State Librarian, he began vigorously to expand on one of the chief interests of Charles Aldrich — that of collecting back files of newspapers and of all periodicals listed in *Poole's Index* and *The Readers' Guide*. Fifty years ago these newspapers were more readily procurable than now, and the collection in the Iowa State Department of History and Archives



at Des Moines, now priceless, remains as one of Johnson Brigham's great contributions to the state.

In 1917, as state director of Iowa for the American Library Association in the drive to secure a Million-Dollar Library Fund for government cantonments, Johnson Brigham sent in a contribution of \$36,000 and a collection of 125,000 books. On June 4, 1923, a month after he had completed twenty-five years as State Librarian, Drake University bestowed upon him the well-deserved honorary degree of Doctor of Literature.

Throughout his incumbency he belonged to the National Library Association and to the Iowa Library Association. In 1904 he was elected president of the National Association of State Libraries, and in 1903 and 1927 of the Iowa Library Association. He regularly attended library meetings and conferences of the State and National Library Associations. Often Mrs. Brigham attended these meetings with him. Many of the older librarians in Iowa recall with pleasure the Brighams and their genuine interest in people and in books.

In 1934 Johnson Brigham was honored by the first plaque awarded by the Iowa Library Association for the most distinguished literary work published by an Iowan during the year. This was *The Youth of Old Age*. Through the advice of Grant Wood, the officers consigned the creation of the plaque to Christian Petersen. In bas-relief on



bronze appears the form of a serious-faced young man with stylus in hand ready to engrave words on a tablet. Around the border of the plaque runs the legend: TO THE IOWA AUTHOR FOR THE MOST OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO LITERATURE BETWEEN SEPTEMBER 1, 1933-1934.

At his death in 1936, Alice S. Tyler, the able secretary of the Iowa Library Commission, prepared a tribute entitled, "Johnson Brigham. 'Guide, Philosopher, and Friend.'" She wrote:

A lover of books, and with a thorough acquaintance with world literature, he had brought to library work the attitude of a man of culture; but he had also recognized the practical aspects of library service and was whole heartedly committed to public library developments in the State.

To Johnson Brigham the State owes much, chiefly because of his ability and convincing quiet personality and his persistent devotion to the things of the mind and spirit although he was not a cloistered student but loved his fellowman. His support and encouragement in those constructive years had much to do with placing Iowa to the front rank among the states with effective library service to all people. . . .

LUELLE M. WRIGHT



## Writer and Historian

Besides directing the State Library capably, Johnson Brigham found time for critical and historical writing. During the years 1899 to 1901 he edited a weekly column called "Books and Men" in the Des Moines *Daily Capital* where in chatty fashion he commented sometimes critically and sometimes philosophically on current European, British, and American writings. His articles appeared in such magazines as *Century*, *Scribners*, *Youth's Companion*, *Chautauquan*, *Review of Reviews*, *Forum*, *Annals of Iowa*, *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, and the *Iowa Quarterly*. For the *Encyclopedia Americana* he was asked to contribute the article on Iowa.

In 1917 Johnson Brigham's experience was requisitioned in the publication of *Prairie Gold*. The Iowa Press and Authors' Club agreed to pool their resources and publish a regional anthology. The Club chose Johnson Brigham as editor-in-chief, with Lewis Worthington Smith and Helen Cowles LeCron as assistants. To this anthology of 350 pages Iowa writers contributed most generously. Outstanding in fiction were Alice French, Hamlin Garland, Ellis Parker Butler, Arthur Davison Ficke, Alice C. Weitz, Frank Luther Mott,



James Norman Hall, and Rupert Hughes. Some who sent in verse were Tacitus Hussey, Major S. H. M. Byers, Ethel Hueston, Randall Parish, Edwin Ford Piper, and Emerson Hough. "Ding" Darling added much to the book by supplying his inimitable cartoons.

A dozen years later Johnson Brigham was asked by the Iowa State Teachers Association to enlarge and unify the articles on Iowa authors which had appeared in *Midland Schools* into a handbook which was later entitled *A Little Book of Iowa Authors by Iowa Authors*. In the Preface the editor stated that the book was designed "to encourage Iowa youth to creative expression and Iowans generally to a larger interest in what was being done in the field of literature by Iowa writers."

All in all the little book contained sixteen biographical sketches, among them those of Hamlin Garland, Alice French, Ruth Suckow, Bess Streeter Aldrich, and Frank Luther Mott. Two other chapters discussed briefly a number of promising young writers, such as MacKinlay Kantor, Jay G. Sigmund, Thomas W. Duncan, and James Hearst. This book filled a great need in Iowa, and thanks to its contributors and able editorship it has remained the standard source for reference concerning the writers of Iowa.

Between 1905 and 1934 Brigham published eight books, most of them relating to the history of Iowa. The first of these, *An Old Man's Idyl*,



which paid an outstanding tribute to his wife, has already been discussed. It came from the press in 1905. An address before the Bankers' Club annual dinner furnished the nucleus of his *Banker in Literature*. After examining hundreds of histories, novels, and biographies by French, British, and American writers, he brought his findings together into a 250-page book which the Bankers Publishing Company of New York issued in 1910.

In 1912 he printed a brochure entitled *A Library in the Making*, which had recently appeared in the *Annals of Iowa* with the same title. A year later appeared his biography of James Harlan. Written under the direction of Dr. Benjamin F. Shambaugh, it added a valuable volume to the biographical series of the State Historical Society at Iowa City. The research, covering five years, made the book "the most laborious literary task" which Brigham had ever undertaken. He found James Harlan a man after his own heart, a self-made man of integrity, who came to Iowa in 1846 to teach in the short-lived Iowa City College, and was elected to the United States Senate in 1855. For this biography Brigham was given free access to Harlan's personal memoirs, letters, and papers. This was made possible by Robert Lincoln, the only surviving son of President Lincoln, and of his wife, Mary Harlan Lincoln, the daughter of James Harlan.

Brigham's next four books, all of historical na-



ture, entailed infinite research in the archives of the State Department of History in Des Moines, especially the newspaper files which he had so diligently collected. His idea of recording history was liberal, for he wanted to probe through the bare bones of records, as he said, to "the spirit which brooded over community life."

In 1911 *The History of Des Moines and Polk County* appeared in two large volumes, the first covering the history of the city and county, and the second, with which Johnson Brigham had no direct responsibility, containing biographical sketches of the men and women who had made or were making local history.

In 1915 he published *Iowa, Its History and Its Foremost Citizens*, which first appeared in four volumes, two of which were historical and two biographical. As the title implies, Johnson Brigham chose to stress the endeavors of the men and women who made Iowa. His ideas of the importance of the hero, sung and unsung, are expressed clearly in his Preface, where he wrote, "At all times in Iowa history there have been *men*, — creative souls that, though they sometimes relaxed their efforts, rose to emergencies and mastered material things, — men divinely commissioned for leadership who, nevertheless, recognized the collective wisdom of 'the plain people.' "

According to this belief, he inserted numerous sketches of the leading men of the state, such as



Joseph Street, Indian agent; William Salter of the Iowa Band; Samuel Kirkwood, Iowa's Civil War governor; T. S. Parvin, father of Iowa Masonry; George Grover Wright, jurist; and George D. Perkins of the *Sioux City Journal*. Two brochures, privately printed, one of political and one of scholarly nature, *Blaine, Conkling and Garfield* (1919) and *The Many Sided Omar* (1925), show his diverse interests.

In 1927 he tried his hand at a historical novel, *The Sinclairs of Old Fort Des Moines*, which is better history than fiction. Though the narrative interest flags at times, the reader is rewarded by vivid pictures of the establishing of the old Fort at the juncture of the Raccoon and the Des Moines rivers, and close-up views of the villages of Keokuk and Poweshiek.

LUELLA M. WRIGHT



## The Youth of Old Age

In his eighty-ninth year, in 1934, Johnson Brigham published *The Youth of Old Age*, his last book. A glance through its pages makes one wonder when or if Johnson Brigham ever became old in spirit. Two weeks before his death he was invited to contribute an article to the *Iowa State Register*. At the age of eighty, in 1926, he and Mrs. Brigham took a trip around the world, stopping at Mukden, Manchuria, to visit their elder daughter, Ida Brigham Storms. Three years later the Brighams made a second visit to China.

*The Youth of Old Age* contains much of the author's philosophy of life. It is a brave book, a wholesome one for old and young to read. In his Preface he said that he was grateful for a competence that made him fully independent and for good eyesight that enabled him to continue his reading and rereading of a vast number of books. After the death of his wife he had spent hours in search of items that would confirm his belief in the possible youthfulness of old age. These he had collected into a compendium, adding in a chatty and individual manner sometimes a personal and sometimes a philosophical comment. Reviewers referred to him as "the youthful octogenarian."



The death of his wife, Lucy, in 1930, brought to an end nearly forty years of ideal companionship in marriage. A few years later both his daughter, Ida Brigham Storms, and her son Robert died at Mukden, Manchuria. His other daughter, Mary Brigham, had married J. Marshall Johnson, an army man, and lived in many places in the United States, but always kept in close touch with her parents.

In spite of the loneliness of Johnson Brigham's last years, his friends commented upon his serenity of mind, a quality which he had apparently cultivated throughout his life. He had acquired the ability to encounter sorrow and to bury it deeply within himself, remaining outwardly serene and mentally alert.

This quality is evident throughout *The Youth of Old Age* and is seen in both his choice of selections and in his reflections. There is a note of delightful irony apparent in the book. In 1905, at the age of fifty-nine, he had entitled his tribute to his wife, *An Old Man's Idyl*; but at the age of eighty-eight he repeatedly declared that life began at seventy.

Johnson Brigham had always possessed the faculty of making and holding friends. His work on the Cedar Rapids *Republican* had brought him into contact with Richard Clarkson of the *Register*; later he counted among his close friends Gardner Cowles and Harvey Ingham. His active



membership in the Iowa Press and Authors' Club, of which he was twice president, enabled him to continue his close touch with the editors and the writers of Iowa. A member of the Unitarian Church since 1900, he served as president of the Unitarian League, and at one time was president of the State Unitarian Association.

In addition to his historical and literary interests he kept in touch with the businessmen of Des Moines through directorships in various banks and insurance companies; for a time he served as vice-president of the Waterbury Chemical Company. He participated actively in the Grant, the Prairie, and the Bankers' clubs.

On his eightieth birthday, on March 11, 1926, Mr. and Mrs. Gardner Cowles honored Johnson Brigham with a dinner given at the Wakonda Club for 250 invited guests. His work as librarian, citizen, and leader was lauded by James B. Weaver, Lewis Worthington Smith, and Mrs. Alice Weitz. Harvey Ingham closed the program with a toast entitled "The High Lights of Eighty Years."

Ten years later the Des Moines Library Club planned an honorary dinner to celebrate the State Librarian's ninetieth birthday. Because of illness the guest of honor could only listen over the radio. At the banquet, in her toast to "Johnson Brigham, Ninety Years Young," Mrs. Alice Weitz said:

The glory of a man's life lies not in the scarcity of his



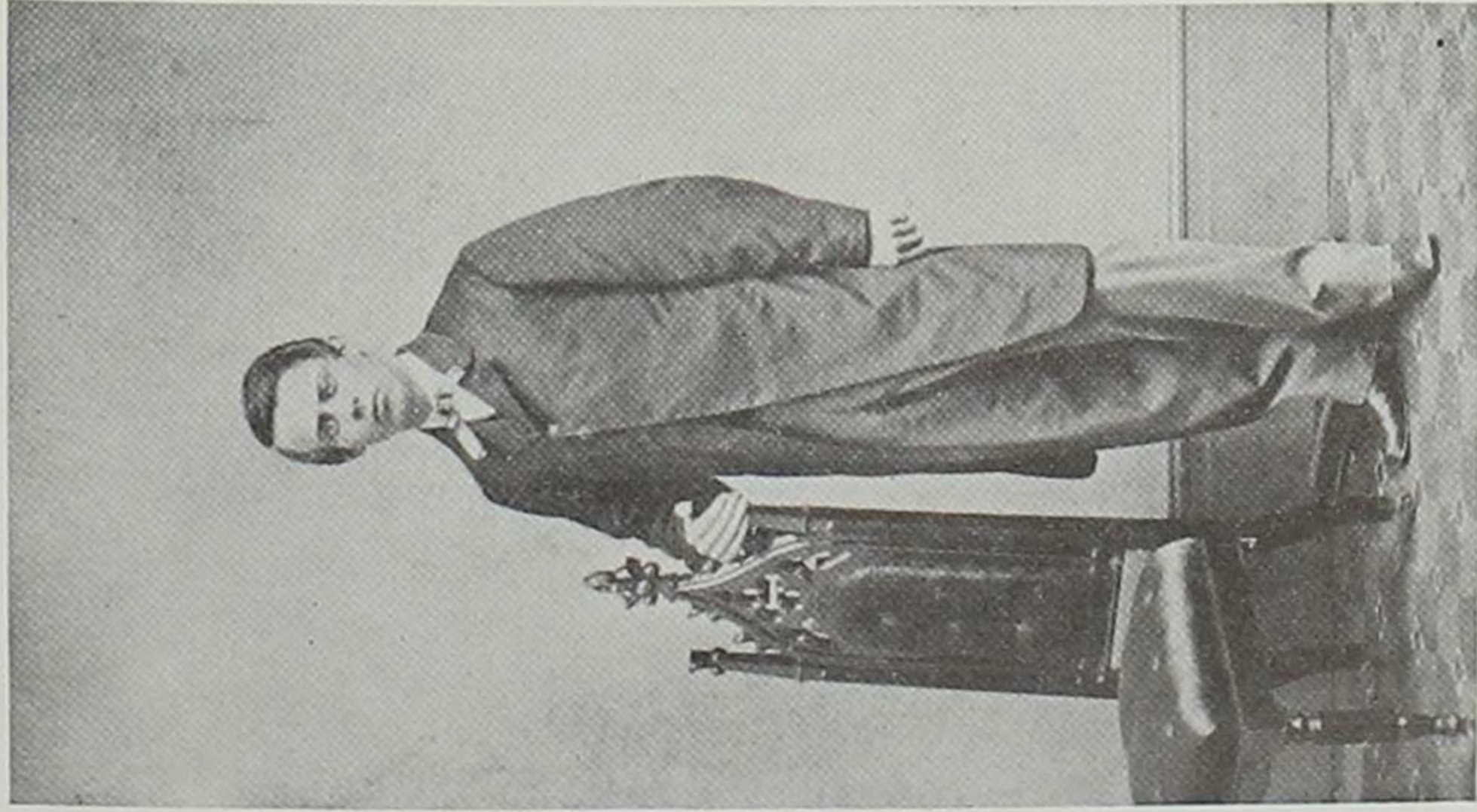
enemies but in the quality of his friends. . . . I offer this toast to his grace of mind, his love of his friends, his tolerance of those who disagree with him, his elegance of taste, his courageous philosophy, his unmatched conversational powers, and his greatness of heart.

Seven months later, on October 9, 1936, the end came. Though his health had been failing, there was no prolonged illness. Three days later he was buried at Cedar Rapids in the Oak Hill Cemetery beside his wife.

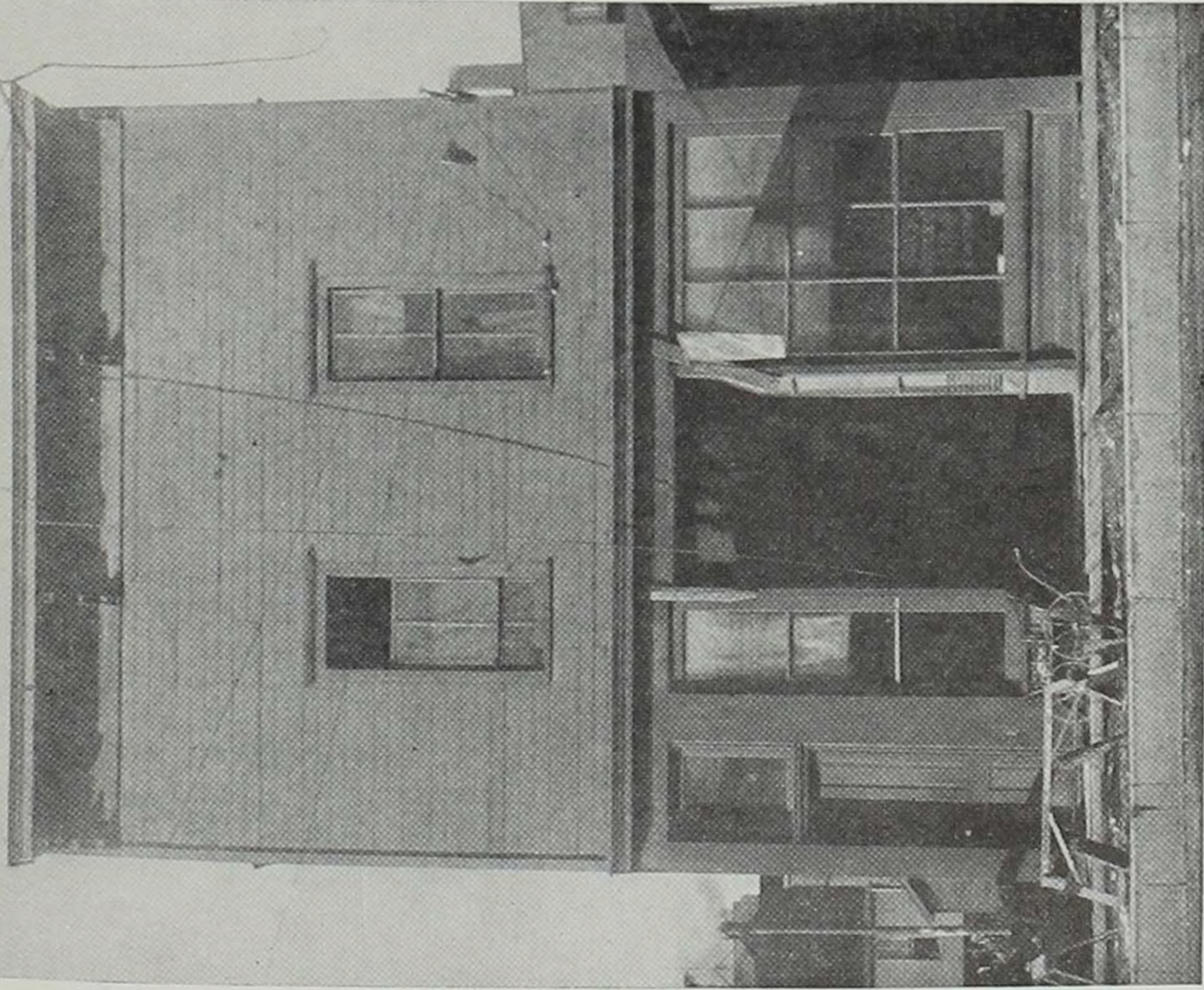
The Cedar Rapids *Gazette* carried the following words: "The State of Iowa owes much to Johnson Brigham for the preservation of its history. . . . Brigham, however, was more than a historian, for he was influential in molding the activities of his adopted state." The editor might have added the words of Samuel Johnson when he paid his final tribute to his friend, Oliver Goldsmith: "he adorned whatever he touched."

LUELLE M. WRIGHT

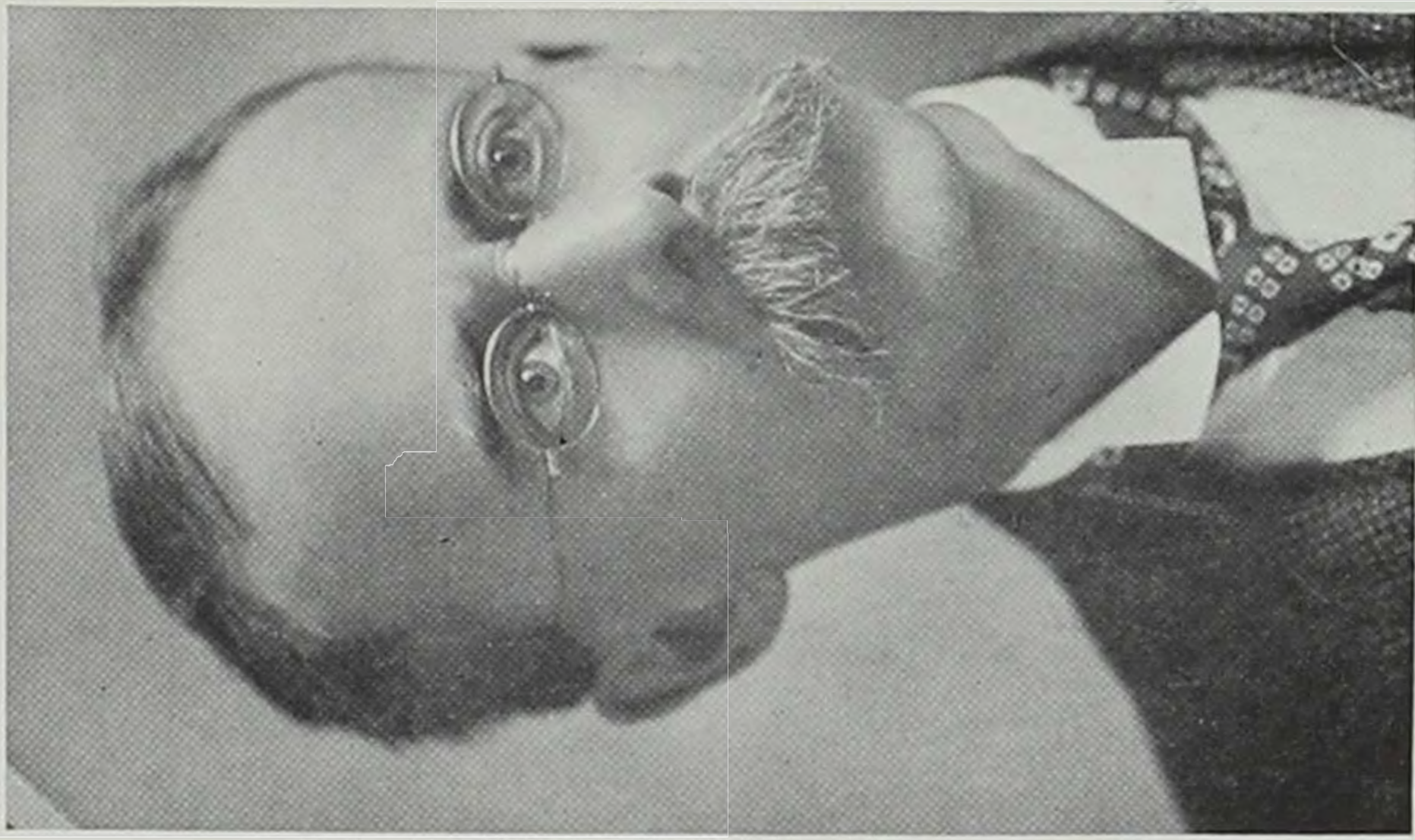




JOHNSON BRIGHAM — at 19  
*A Washington Clerk*



Cedar Rapids Republican Office in 1882  
*Brigham's Editorial Headquarters*



JOHNSON BRIGHAM — at 54  
*State Librarian*



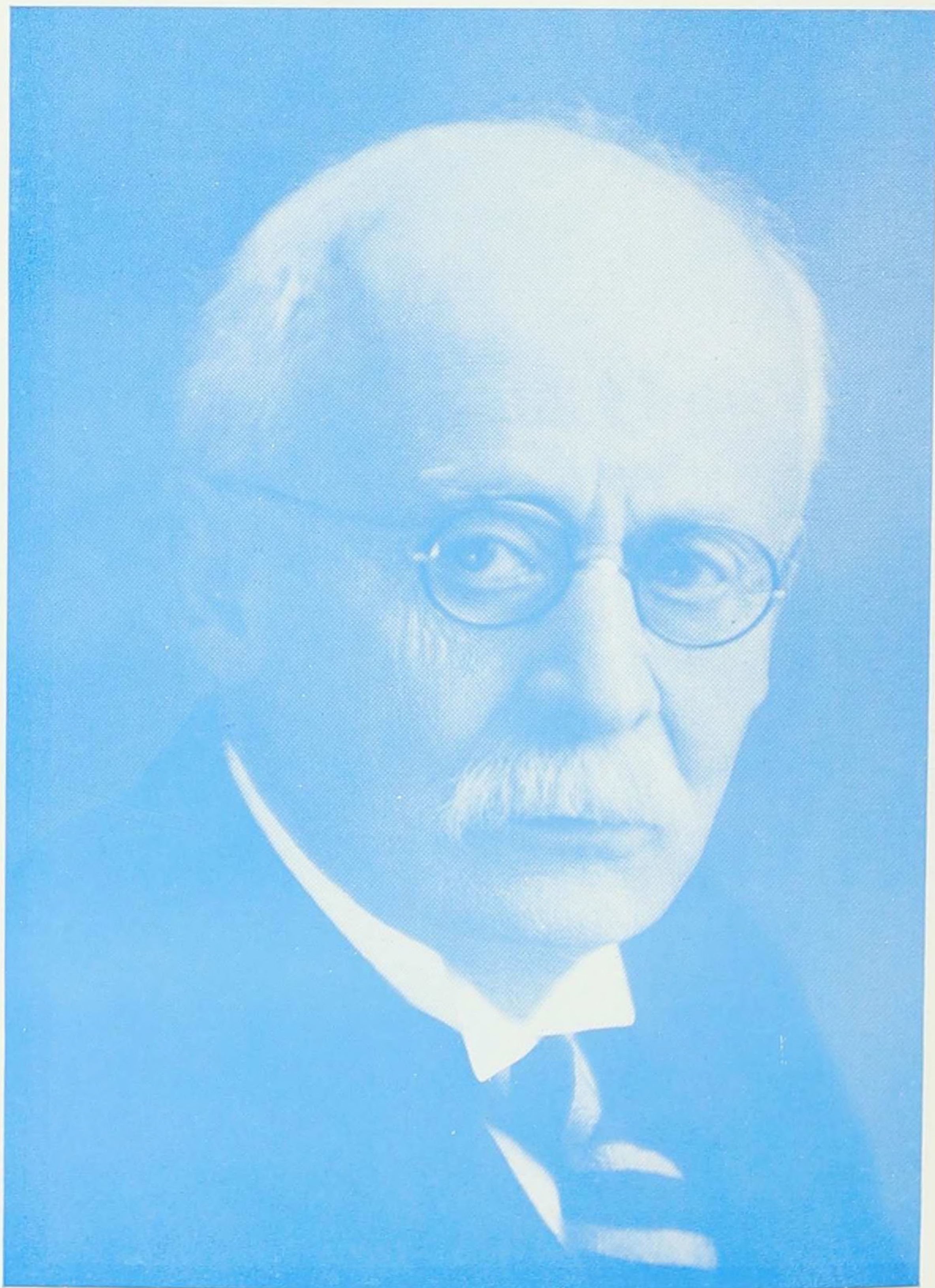


Photo courtesy Des Moines *Register*

JOHNSON BRIGHAM — Octogenarian  
*The Youth of Old Age*