

## The Walt Whitman Club

The list of men who have been inducted into the Iowa Schoolmasters Walt Whitman Club over the past 75 years reads like a *Who's Who* of great names in Iowa education. The idea for such a club had its inception at Cedar Falls in 1895, when J. T. Merrill, then superintendent of schools at Cedar Rapids, was visiting with O. J. Laylander, superintendent at Cedar Falls. Commenting on Laylander's expressed wish that the writings of Walt Whitman should become more familiar to students, Merrill said: "Why not organize a Walt Whitman Club?"

At the meeting of the Iowa State Teachers Association the following fall the suggestion took definite form when Superintendents J. T. Merrill, F. J. Sessions, W. D. Wells, George I. Miller, and O. J. Laylander drew up a brief organization paper and prepared a list of charter members. The following comprised the charter membership of the Walt Whitman Club when it was organized in Des Moines in 1895:

J. T. Merrill

F. J. Sessions  
George I. Miller  
W. D. Wells

W. W. Rodwell  
W. F. Chevalier  
Sherman Yates



O. J. Laylander  
L. E. A. Ling  
S. H. Sheakley

F. T. Oldt  
W. A. Doron  
Charles E. Shelton

At the Club's meeting in 1896, J. T. Merrill was elected president for life, with the title of Chief Walt, and O. J. Laylander was elected secretary—with the title of Scribe Walt. On the death of Mr. Merrill in 1900, Franklin T. Oldt was elected Chief Walt. When Mr. Laylander moved to Chicago in 1906 to accept a key position with Ginn & Company, Walt Palmer succeeded him as Scribe Walt.

The Iowa Schoolmasters Club evoked considerable curiosity at its inception. Many wondered as to the real object of the club. The press referred to it in a mysterious way. The members themselves were secretive. According to O. J. Laylander, the "old ladies of both sexes jumped to the conclusion that it was something horrid." After all, Whitman had been dead only three years when the Walt Whitman Club suddenly sprang into being in Iowa. Many knew Walt Whitman only by one line—

"I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world."

Would Iowa, some concerned citizens queried, suddenly become a land resounding with "barbaric yawps" from the members of this new club? As O. J. Laylander relates:

In certain educational circles, the club was denounced as something dangerous and was even referred to from



the pulpit by a professor-preacher in such a way as to lead his hearers to believe that the Walt Whitman Club was a promoter of underground literature. While the leaders in the club quietly enjoyed this misunderstanding, they felt that out of respect to certain members of the club something desperate had to be done in order to save the reputation of the club.

Even such a staid editor as Johnson Brigham seemed to raise an eyebrow as he took notice of the club in his *Midland Monthly* of February, 1897. In his editorial, Brigham wrote:

A most notable event in the literary history of the Middle-West is the organization of a Walt Whitman Club, composed of twelve of the foremost educators in the State of Iowa: Supt. J. T. Merrill, Cedar Rapids; Supt. Charles E. Shelton, Burlington; Supt. S. H. Sheakley, Waverly; Supt. F. T. Oldt, Dubuque; Supt. W. A. Doron, Monticello; Supt. Sherman Yates, Ida Grove; Supt. G. I. Miller, Boone; Supt. W. F. Chevalier, Red Oak; Supt. F. J. Sessions, Waterloo; Supt. L. E. A. Ling, Cresco; Supt. O. J. Laylander, Cedar Falls; and Prof. W. D. Wells, Davenport.

The organization was effected between times during the recent convention of the State Teachers Association in Des Moines. Its purpose is to study Whitman and by correspondence compare notes on his poems. Its members will meet once a year at the State Capital for conference and discussion. Twenty years ago these gentlemen would have jeopardized their standing as educators by such a commitment to the author of "Leaves of Grass."

The founding fathers of the Walt Whitman Club proved themselves both resourceful and equal to the challenge that lay before them. Their



next initiates, they determined, would possess such outstanding virtues that none could raise a questioning voice. Furthermore, they decided that the entire program would be witnessed by a group of highly regarded, unbiased citizens, who were not members of their Club.

Two exemplary Iowans, President Wm. M. Beardshear of Iowa State College at Ames and Freeman H. Bloodgood, Fayette County Superintendent of Schools at West Union, were invited to join the club. Then, to cap it off, Governor Leslie M. Shaw and other distinguished Iowans, including a Des Moines editor, were invited to the first Annual Banquet and with it, the privilege of witnessing the initiation. The following news account written by Lafayette Young of the *Iowa Daily Capital* appeared the next day in his Des Moines paper:

The first annual spread of the Iowa School Masters Walt Whitman Club, held at the Turner hall parlors last night, marked one of the most pleasant and interesting gatherings that has ever surrounded a banqueting board in Des Moines. The "Walt Whitman Club" is an organization composed of about a score of "good fellows" chosen from among the leading educators of Iowa. Its object is expressed in the word "camaraderie." Its purpose is to inculcate a spirit of good fellowship. These lines serve as its motto:

Camarado, I give you my hand!  
I give you my love more precious than money,  
I give you myself before preaching or law;



Will you give me yourself? Will you come travel with me?  
Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?

The feature of last night's program was the initiation into the mysticisms of the order of President W. M. Beardshear of the Iowa Agricultural college and Superintendent F. H. Bloodgood of West Union. Following these interesting ceremonies the banquet was served at midnight. Covers were laid for twenty. The invited guests included Gov. L. M. Shaw, William Hawley Smith of Peoria, Samuel Strauss, S. Y. Gillan of Milwaukee, Elbert Hubbard, editor of the "Philistine" of East Aurora, New York, Hon. Lafe Young and F. W. Bicknell. The members of the order present were Superintendent J. T. Merrill of Cedar Rapids, F. C. Eastman of the Normal School of Cedar Falls, T. M. Irish of Dubuque, Superintendent W. F. Chevalier of Red Oak, President W. M. Beardshear of Ames, Superintendent O. J. Laylander of Cedar Falls, Superintendent George I. Miller of Boone, L. E. A. Ling of Cresco, Superintendent F. T. Oldt of Dubuque, Superintendent C. E. Shelton of Burlington, Superintendent F. J. Sessions of Waterloo, Superintendent S. H. Sheakley of Waverly, Superintendent W. A. Doron of Eldora, F. D. Merritt of the State University at Iowa City, and Superintendent Bloodgood of West Union.

An elaborate menu was served and after coffee, Superintendent Merrill, who holds the office of Chief Walt, turned over his place of authority to Brother Walt Eastman, who acted as toastmaster, introducing the different speakers in a manner thoroughly original and eloquent. Toasts were responded to by Brothers Beardshear, Bloodgood, Shelton, Sessions, Laylander and Merritt. Governor Shaw and Samuel Strauss responded for the guests of the evening. It was late this morning when the participants in the banquet were dismissed after school boy fashion by "Chief Walt" Merrill. The banquet will be long re-



...First Annual Spread...

.....Iowa School Masters' Walt Whitman Club....

...Turner Hall Parlors...

...Des Moines, Dec. 27, 1898...

In honor of the Elevation of Friends Beardshear and Bloodgood to  
the Comraderie of the Brother Walt Degree.

MENU

"This the meal equally set; this the meal for natural hunger \* \* \*"

BLUE POINTS.

CELERY.

CONSOMME ROYAL EN TASS.

SALTED ALMONDS.

QUEEN OLIVES.

BONOHEES (?) A LA COMTESSE.  
RADISHES.

PUNCH CARDINAL.

ROAST QUAIL BARDE.  
TOMATO MAYONAISE.

MACAROONS. NESSELRODE PUDDING VICTORIA.  
CHRISTMAS KISSES. LADY FINGERS.

SELECT FRUIT.

CHEESE AND CRACKERS.

COFFEE.

FRAPPE.

AFTER COFFEE

"I have heard that the talkers were talking \* \*"

TOAST MASTER, BROTHER WALT EASTMAN.

"As it Seems to Me," ..... Brother Walt Beardshear

"To You," ..... Brother Walt Bloodgood

"All Walts Look Alike to Me," ..... Brother Walt Shelton

"The Stranger Within Our Gates," The Stranger Himself

Grand Finale, ..... Any Old Walt

"Comerado, I give you my hand!

I give you my love more precious than money,

I give you myself before preaching or money,

Will you give me yourself? Will you travel with me?

Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?"

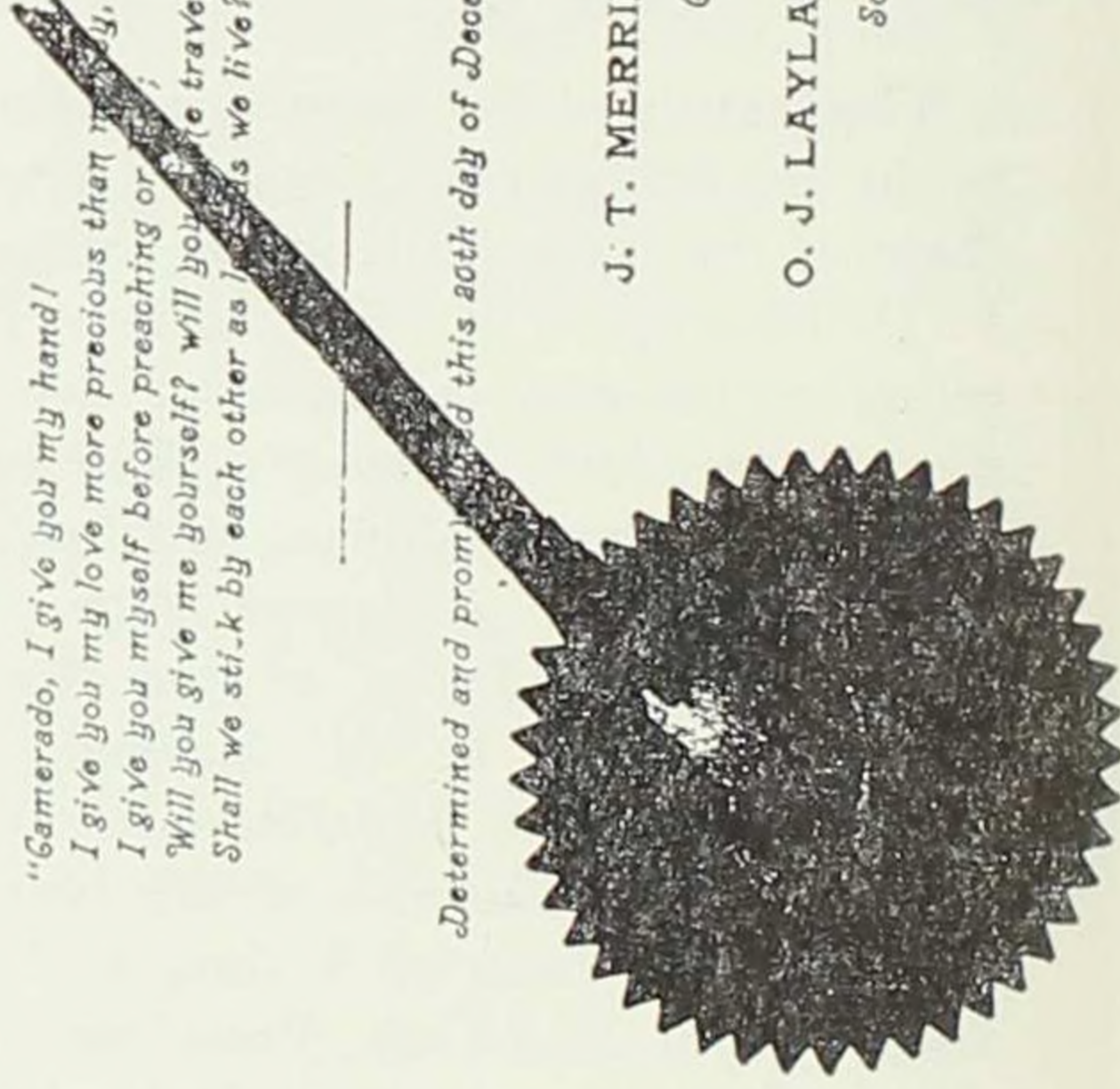
Determined and promptly acted this 20th day of December, 1898.

J. T. MERRILL,

Chief Walt.

O. J. LAYLANDER,

Scribe Walt.





Second Annual Banquet

...of the...

Iowa School Masters'  
Walt Whitman Club

Odd Fellows' Temple,

Des Moines, December 27th, 1899.

In honor of the Elevation of Friends Beard, Mullin and Willard to the Comraderie of the Brother Walt Degree.

PART SECOND.

UNDER THE DIRECTION OF

TOAST MASTER BROTHER WALT SESSIONS.

The President's Annual Address. . Chief Walt Merrill.

Roll Call. (The Usual Response by Members:  
Song, Yarn or Speech).

"The Man Without a Subject." . Brother Walt Willard.

"What Induced Me to Become a Walt" . . .  
. . . . . Brother Walt Mullin.

"Before and After Taking." (Phunny Speech) . .  
. . . . . Brother Walt Beard.





membered. The menu cards, which were given the guests as souvenirs, were splendid works of art. The cover of each was a pen drawing suggestive of the different daily occupations of members and guests. Attached by a gold seal was a leaf of grass, stamped with the initials of the "Walt Whitman Club."



The above was the only time that a press release was given for a Walt Whitman Club banquet and initiation. This story, with the names of the distinguished guests who attended the banquet and witnessed the ceremonies, had the desired effect. It stopped for all time the wagging tongues of those who knew nothing of the Walt Whitman Club and its significance.



When the Walt Whitman Club was organized in 1895 the population of Iowa had just passed the two million mark. Public education was well-entrenched although the high school still had competition from academies and colleges. Some idea of the size of schools, the months open, the salaries of superintendents, the number of assistants, and the average salary of teachers, can be gleaned from the following data on the Walt Whitman Club founders contained in the *Iowa State Educational Directory*—1896-1897:

Club Member	School Dist.	Enrollment	Mos. Open	Position	Salary	Assts.	Average Monthly Salary
W. F. Chevalier	Red Oak	1,084	9	Supt.	\$1,400	28	\$47.04
W. A. Doron	Monticello	482	9	Supt.	1,200	12	40.00
O. J. Laylander	Cedar Falls	946	9	Supt.	1,600	25	49.00
L. E. A. Ling	Cresco	485	9	Supt.	1,300	12	44.55
J. T. Merrill	Cedar Rapids	4,347	9	Supt.	2,040	114	48.78
George I. Miller	Boone	1,760	9	Supt.	1,800	50	46.50
F. T. Oldt	Dubuque	4,778	10	Supt.	2,300	112	48.55
F. J. Sessions	East Waterloo	1,112	9	Supt.	1,600	33	48.75
S. H. Sheakley	Waverly	620	9	Supt.	1,600	16	43.02
Charles E. Shelton	Burlington	3,956	9½	Supt.	1,900	109	66.72
W. D. Wells	Grundy Center	353	9	Supt.	1,125	8	38.75
Sherman Yates	Ida Grove	520	9	Supt.	1,200	13	45.00
W. W. Rodwell	Marshalltown			Teacher			
Thomas Irish	Dubuque	920	10	Prin.	1,600	22	41.82
F. E. Willard	Marshalltown	2,318	9	Supt.	1,900	60	56.68
I. N. Beard	Osceola	558	9	Supt.	1,100	15	40.53
Geo. H. Mullen	Washington	810	9	Supt.	1,400	21	43.00
F. H. Bloodgood	Fayette County	Superintendent, West Union					
D. M. Kelly	Cedar Falls	1,038	—	Supt.	1,500	28	44.16
D. A. Thornburg	Grinnell	833	9	Supt.	1,400	23	54.54

It is well to note the relationship of the above institutions with the three institutions of higher



learning in 1895. The State University of Iowa was a relatively small institution with a faculty of 98 professors and assistants and only 1,250 students enrolled in all departments. Its total appropriation was \$115,000. The "Agricultural College" at Ames was also small, but its president, William Beardshear, had just completed his term as President of the Iowa State Teachers Association and was shortly to be initiated into the Iowa Schoolmasters Walt Whitman Club. W. A. Doron of Monticello and George H. Mullen of Washington were on the Board of Directors of the State Normal School at Cedar Falls. F. J. Sessions of Waterloo served on the Executive Committee of the Iowa State Teachers Association.

Perhaps the best explanation of the purpose of the Walt Whitman Club is given by O. J. Laylander in his *Chronicles of a Contented Man*. Published in 1928, Laylander's book recalls:

The early days of the club were intentionally shrouded in mystery. Strict secrecy was exacted of the members. None but the members knew that the purposes were not primarily literary; that it was in fact a gridiron organization, to which only those known to have a sense of humor could be elected; a center of camaraderie and wit that has had vitality enough to carry it already through more than thirty years, and has had on its roll many of the brightest and best men of the state.

The annual meetings of the club at Des Moines were a source of keen enjoyment. Each meeting provided for the admission of three new members. These were selected with



a view of their adaptation to the requirements. Repartee and good fellowship were essential qualities, for many of these meetings were occasions of real brilliancy. . . . The club had more laughs in it than its members could have possibly found elsewhere. The best evidence that this organization has real merit is that it refused to die.

The second Annual Banquet of the Iowa Schoolmasters Walt Whitman Club was held at the Odd Fellows' Temple in Des Moines on December 27, 1899—"In honor of the Elevation of Friends Beard, Mullen and Willard to the Camaraderie of the Brother Walt Degree." It was on this occasion, according to O. J. Laylander, that Walt Mullen, when called upon to respond to the toast—"What Induced Me to Become a Walt"—in desperation responded—"God knows, I don't."

The yearly initiation did not take final form until December of 1900. It was the brain child of Professor F. C. Eastman, Head of Latin at Iowa State Teachers College, who, with Thomas M. Irish, Principal of the Prescott School at Dubuque, had been initiated into the club in 1897. It is said that the versatile Eastman, who was constantly bubbling over with enthusiasm, would have, with a little encouragement, put the whole initiation into verse.

Superintendents D. M. Kelly of Cedar Falls and D. A. Thornburg of Grinnell, together with President George E. MacLean of the State Uni-



versity of Iowa, were the first Waltlets to be initiated into the Walt Whitman Club under the ritual conceived by Eastman in 1900. This initiation, with its searching personal inquiries, its journey into the literary tastes of the candidate, and its memorable visit to Walt Whitman's farm, is an experience through which each neophyte must pass. It is an evening that none will forget. It is an occasion for which the Walts will travel many miles once a year in order to exchange greetings and enjoy the sumptuous New England Boiled Dinner prepared by Walt Whitman's fastidious Hired Girl.

For the writer, who has known no other gathering place than the Fort Des Moines Hotel during the past quarter century, it came as a surprise to note, in poring through the Minutes of the Walt Whitman Club, the various meeting places during the first thirty years of the Club's history. Many of the following have either disappeared, been replaced, or might be called historic landmarks:

Yeoman's Hall	December 31, 1902
Savery Hotel (Parlor G)	December 29, 1903
Savery Hotel (Ladies Ordinary)	December 26, 1904
Chamberlain (Dutch Room)	December 26, 1905
Elks Hall	December 26, 1906
Chamberlain Hotel	December 31, 1907
Elks Hall	December 28, 1908
Savery Hotel (Ladies Ordinary)	November 4, 1909
Chamberlain Hotel	November 4, 1910



In the early days, beginning with 1909, it appears that the initiation frequently took place in such unusual places as the offices of the Board of Education, Room 1103 Fleming Building, in the Lincoln School Building, and in the Press Club Rooms, prior to the annual banquet. Between 1925 and 1929 meetings were held in 705 Youngerman Building, in the rooms of the American Institute, the offices of the Midland Schools Teachers' Agency, and in the Flynn Building. The dinner usually was held at one of the hotels. The dues assessed for the meal and sundry incidentals during this period usually ran from \$1.25 to \$1.50. The "sundry incidentals" included the cost of the programs, postage, janitor expense, etc., which were all faithfully paid by the Scribe Walt, who also served as Treasurer. The balance on hand in those days of high finance ranged from 24 cents balance on hand in 1925 to \$4.72 overdrawn in 1926. The deficit was due in part to flowers for Professor Franklin T. Oldt's funeral, who served the Club faithfully as Chief Walt for a quarter of a century.

An idea of the caliber of the men who were initiated into the Iowa Schoolmasters Walt Whitman Club can be gained from a study of its membership rolls. Particularly notable is the number of College and University presidents identified with the group.



**U. of IOWA**

George E. MacLean—1902  
 John G. Bowman—1912  
 Walter A. Jessup—1913  
 E. A. Gilmore—1935  
 Virgil M. Hancher—1944

**IOWA ST. UNI.**

Wm. M. Beardshear—1898  
 A. B. Storms—1905  
 Charles E. Friley—1940  
 James H. Hilton—1954

**U. OF NOR. IOWA**

O. R. Latham—1929  
 Malcolm Price—1944  
 J. W. Maucker—1952

**DRAKE UNIVERSITY**

Wm. B. Craig—1901  
 Hill M. Bell—1906  
 D. W. Morehouse—1924  
 Henry G. Harmon—1947

In addition to the above, W. A. Shanklin—1906, A. E. Bennett—1909, and J. P. Van Horn—1926, were presidents of Upper Iowa University; Edwin Schell—1911, was president of Iowa Wesleyan; and Harry M. Gage—1927, was president of Coe College.

Since the Iowa Schoolmasters had organized the Walt Whitman Club primarily as a haven for superintendents who found themselves in a "lonesome job," it is not surprising that its membership from the start was composed largely of superintendents, principals, and other administrative officers in the public school system. The presidents, deans, and directors of Drake University and the three large state institutions have always been well-represented in the Walt Whitman Club. Their loyalty to the Club never wavered. Thus, Walter A. Jessup was Dean of the College of Education at the University of Iowa when he became a Walt in 1913. Three years later he was



# CHARTER MEMBERS



L. E. A. LING  
F. J. SESSIONS  
GEORGE I. MILLER  
W. D. WELLS

S. H. SHEAKLEY  
W. W. RODWELL  
J. T. MERRILL  
O. J. LAYLANDER  
W. F. CHEVALIER

SHERMAN YATES  
F. T. OLDT  
W. A. DORON  
CHAS. E. SHELTON



LAST OF THE CHARTER MEMBERS,  
50TH ANNIVERSARY MEETING



W. W. RODWELL



O. J. LAYLANDER



L. E. A. LING

WALTIETS—50TH ANNIVERSARY CLASS—1945



WM. R. GIBSON



BARTON MORGAN  
A. B. GRIMES



J. P. STREET

SCRIBE WALTS—RECORDERS OF HISTORY



C. L. McDOWELL  
1944-1963

O. J. LAYLANDER—1897  
AARON PALMER—1905  
C. D. SLINKER—1921

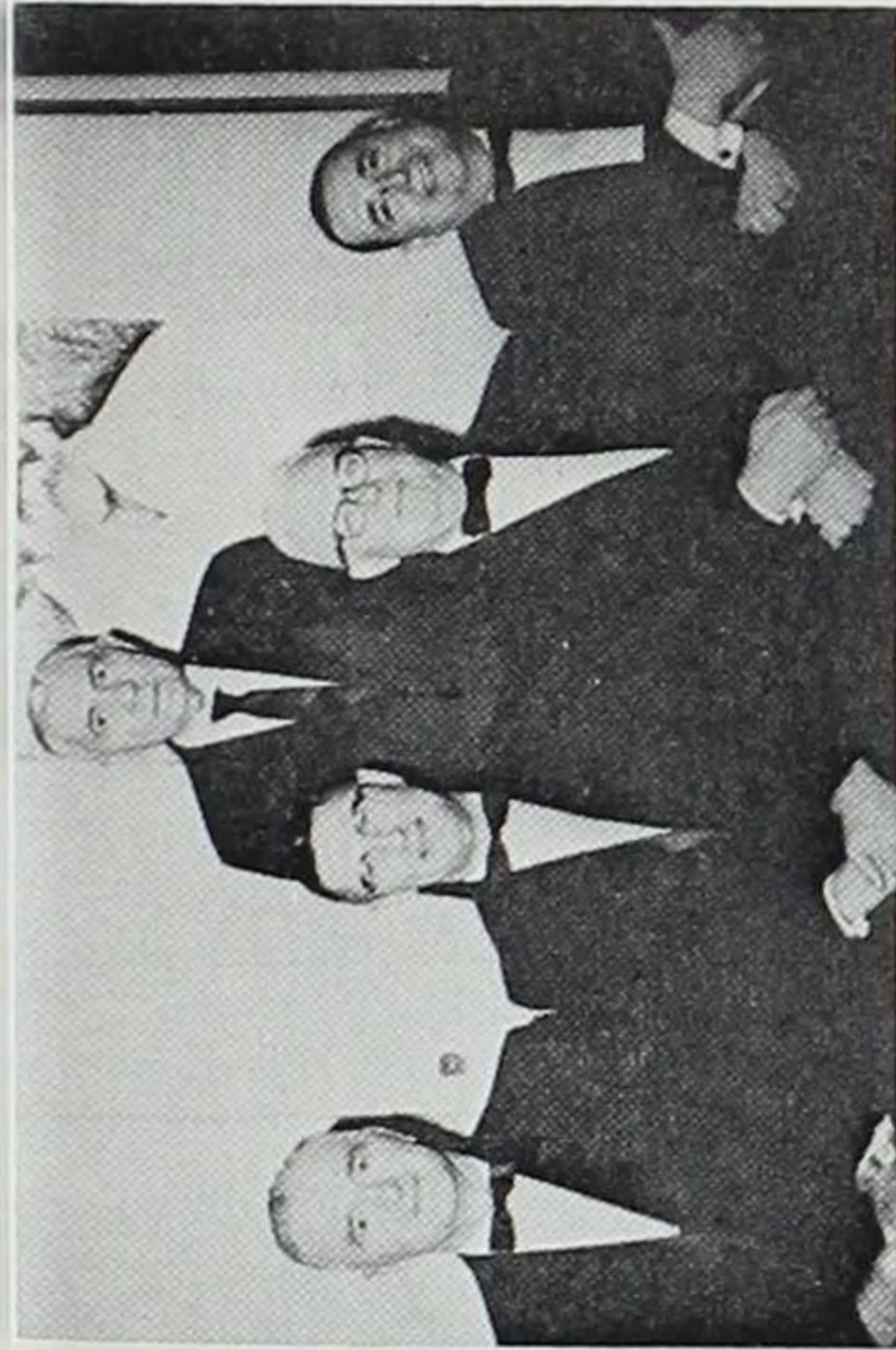


W. H. GALBRETH  
1964-

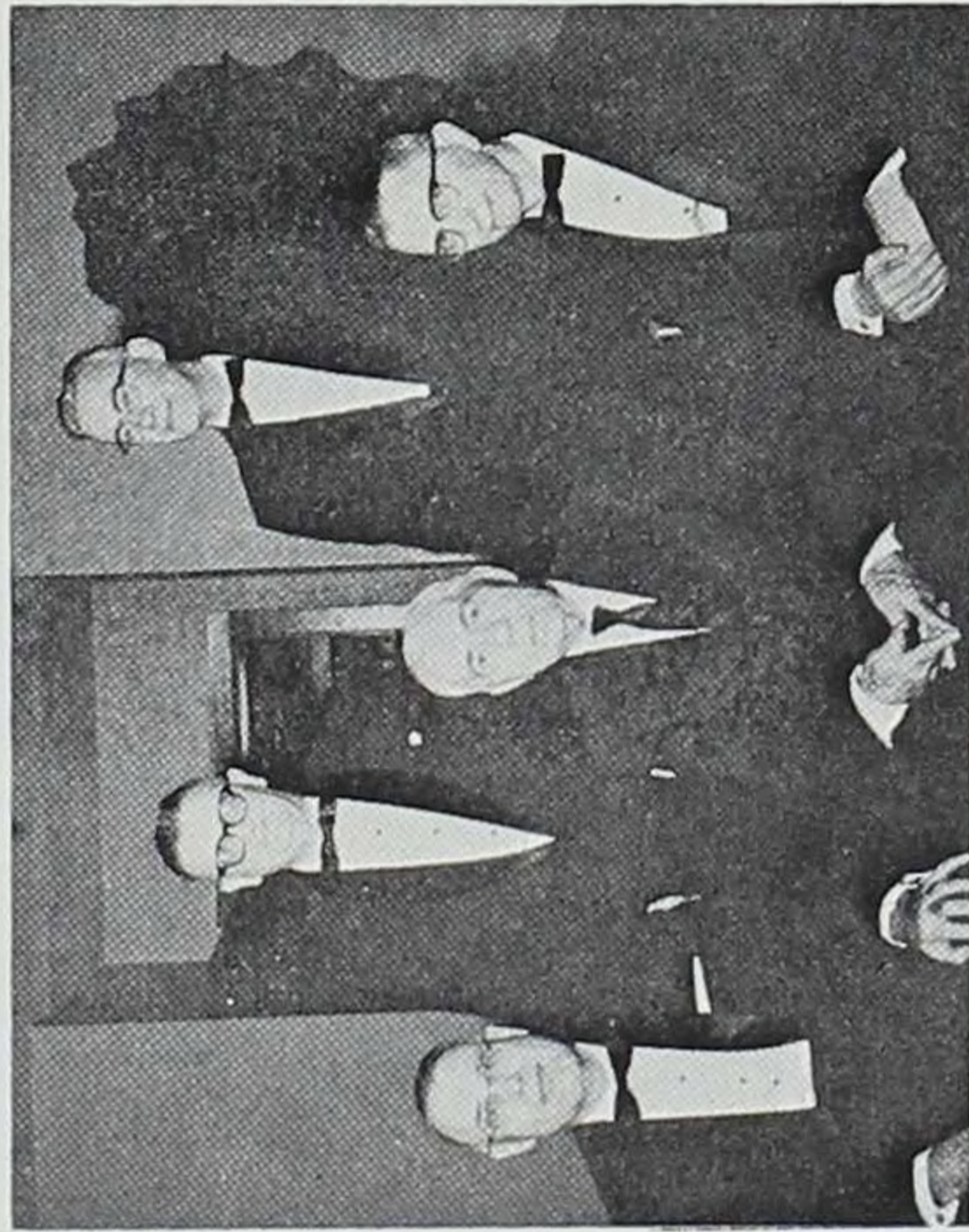




Two Chief Walts—Dornon and Gage.



1959 Waltlets—Briggs, Schlicher, Hoglan, Lagomarcino—  
with Chief Walt Gage.



1958 Waltlets—Kluckhohn, Carpenter, Frey, Sharar—  
with Chief Walt Gage.



Chief Walt Quinn with Waltlets Schuchert, Adams,  
Jones, Seydel—in 1961.



# UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE PRESIDENTS



G. E. MacLEAN



J. G. BOWMAN



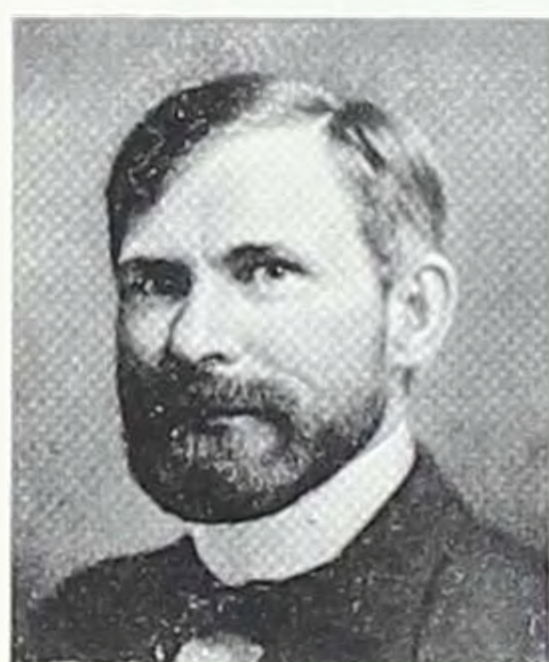
W. A. JESSUP



E. A. GILMORE



V. M. HANCHER



WM. BEARDSHEAR



A. B. STORMS



C. E. FRILEY



J. H. HILTON



O. R. LATHAM



MALCOLM PRICE



J. W. MAUCKER



W. B. CRAIG



H. M. BELL



D. W. MOREHOUSE



H. G. HARMON



P. F. SHARP



W. A. SHANKLIN

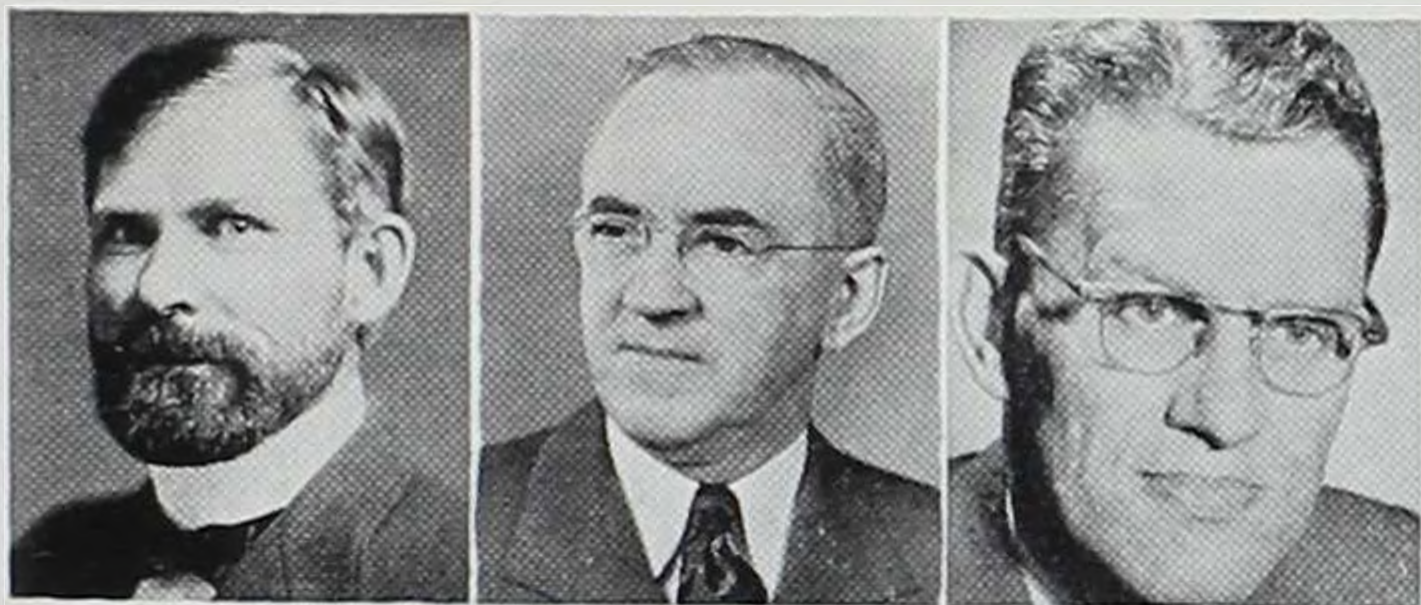


J. P. VAN HORN



A. E. BENNETT



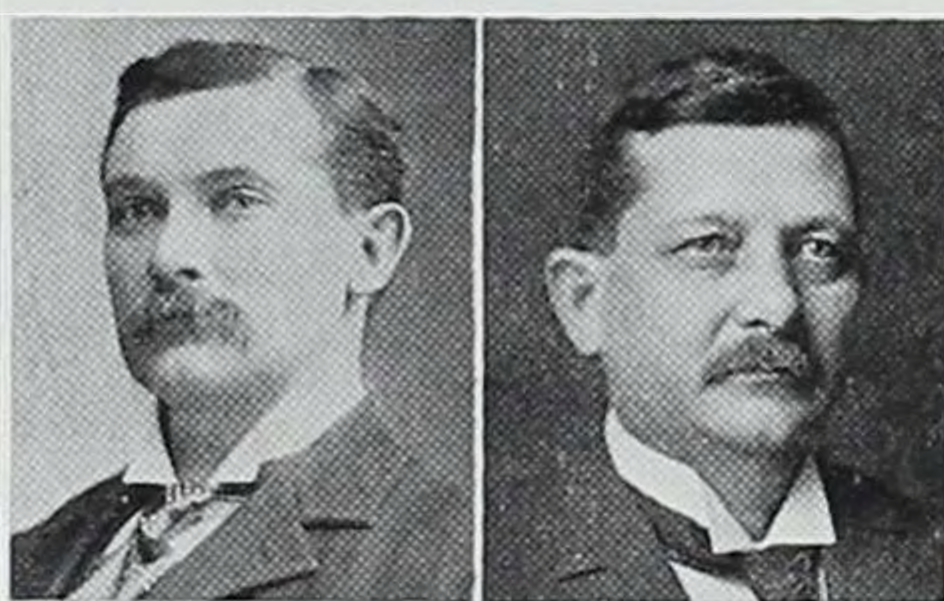


Left: Walt Presidents, National Societies

Left, below: Walt Supts. of Pub. Instr. (Iowa)

BEARDSHEAR NEA Pres., 1901    STUDEBAKER U.S. Com. of Educ.    SALISBURY AASA Pres., '69

Below: 17 Walt Presidents, ISEA



MCCLENAHAN

WRIGHT

JOHNSTON

McCONNELL, '05

BELL, '10



ENSIGN, '19

MORGAN, '38

PACKER, '43

JOHNSON, '43

MARTIN, '45



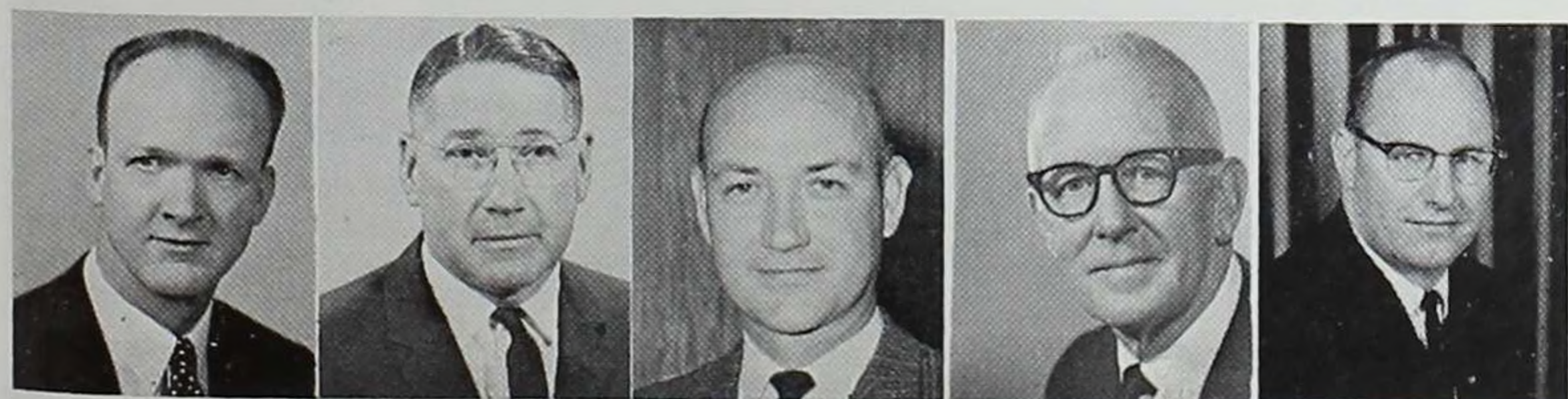
SCHMIDT, '47

RITTER, '48

ERBE, '51

DAVIES, '53

GETTYS, '57



THOMPSON, '58

BRYAN, '59

ANDERSON, '62

WELLS, '63

GAST, '67



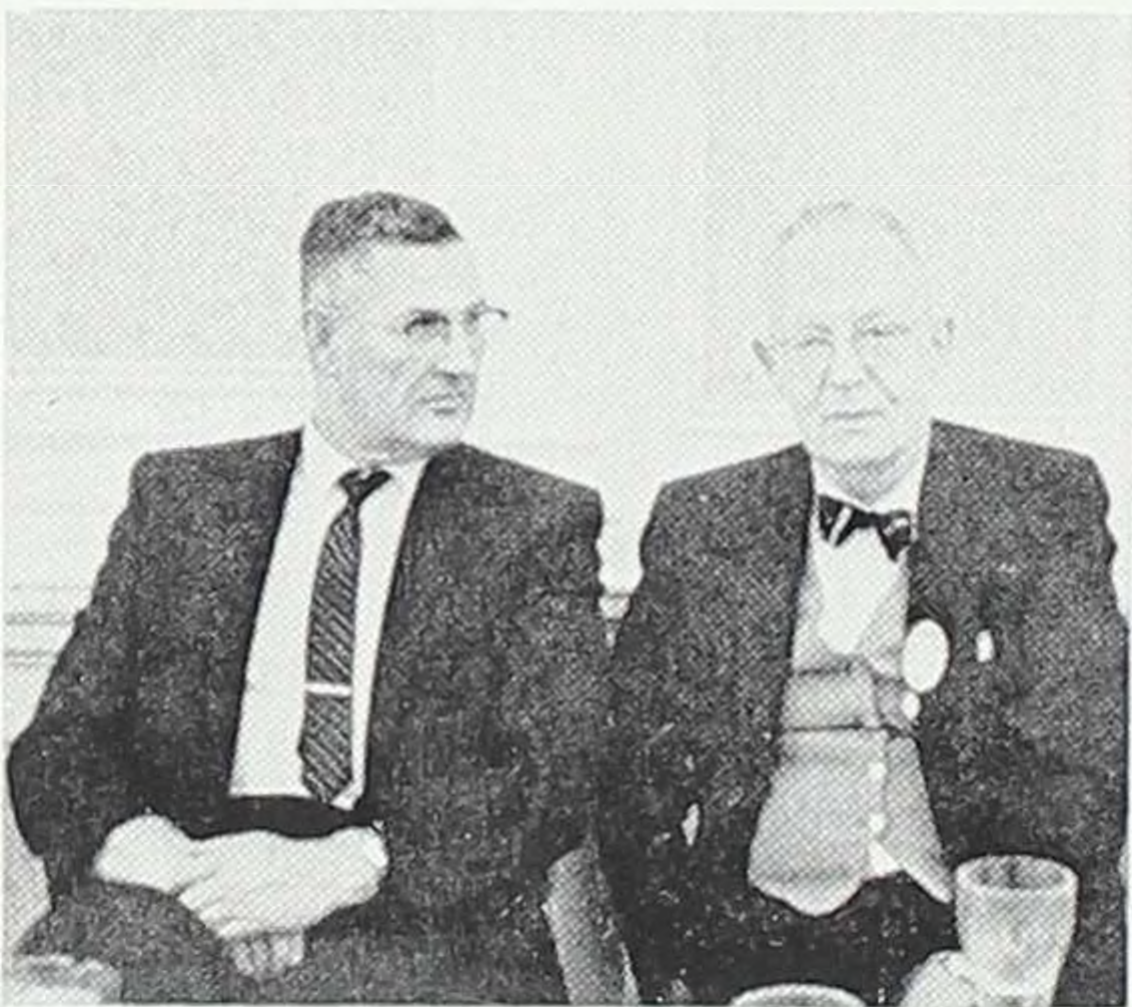
# INITIATION TIME PHOTOS



Arch Grimes—Walt Whitman lecturer.



Petersen, Chief Walts Dornon, Quinn.



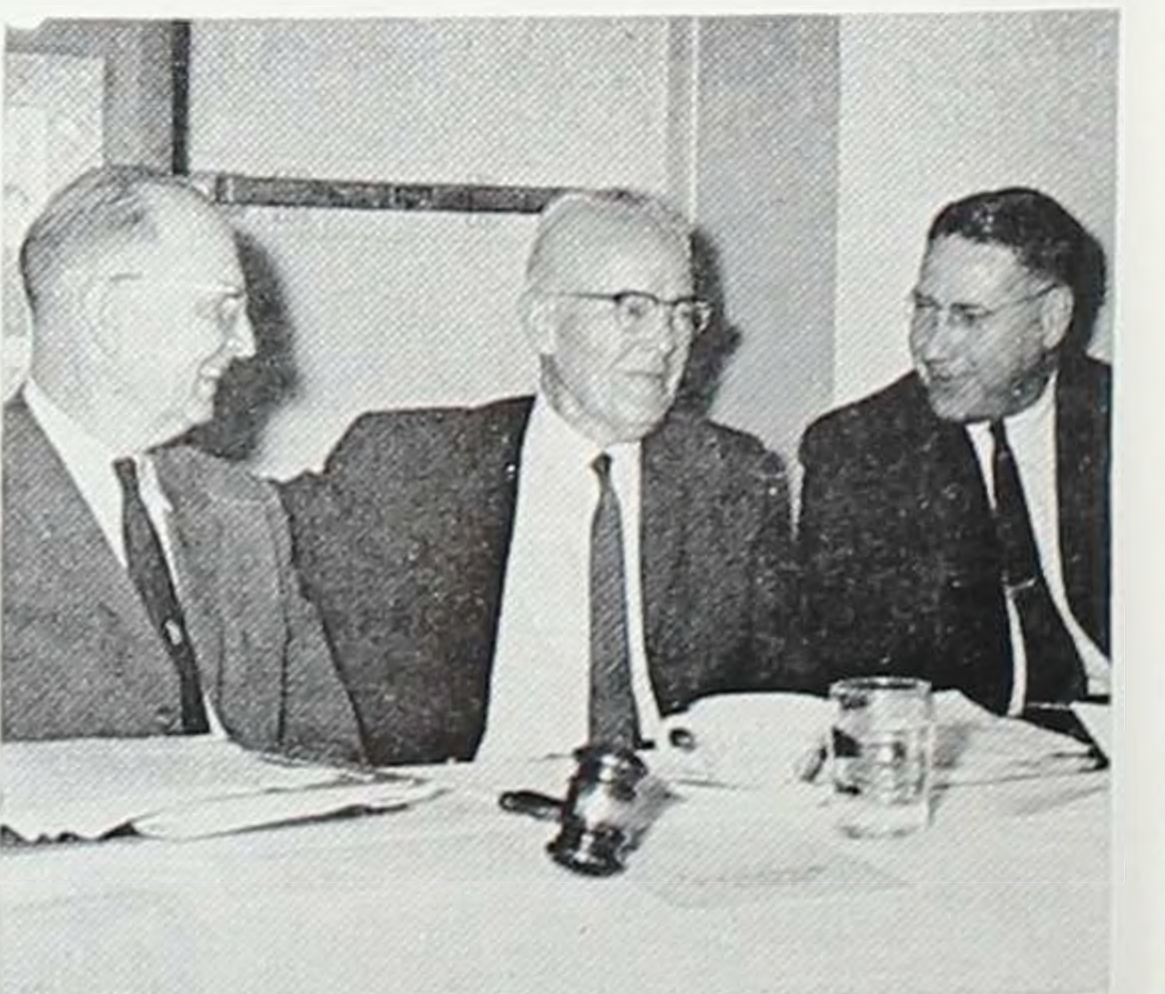
Ray Schlicher, J. C. Wright.



Max Clark, Kyle Jones, W. W. Wood.



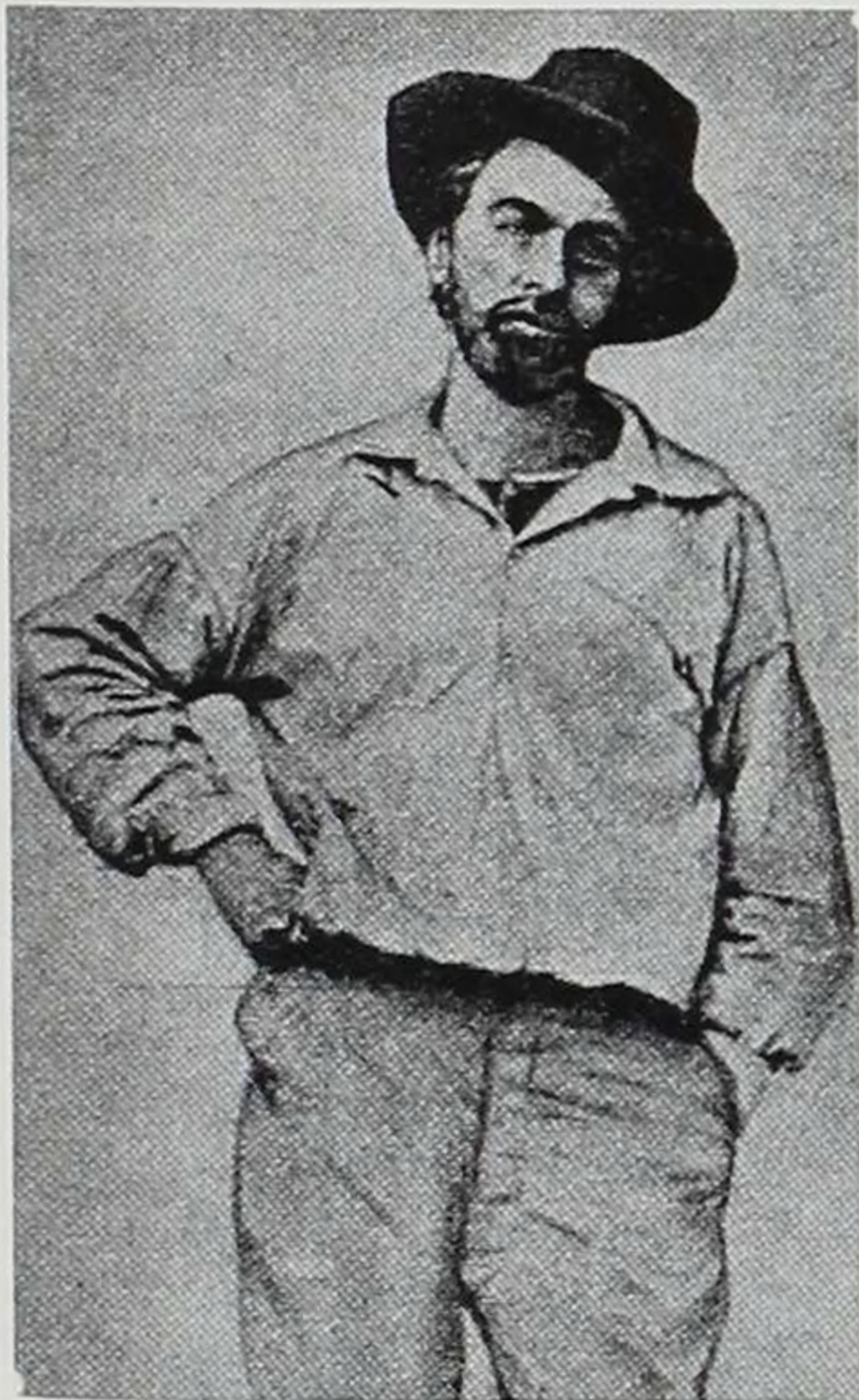
Scribe Walt McDowell, Chief Walt Gage.



Scribe McDowell, Chief Walts Peterson, Bryan.



# SOME CHIEF WALT



Walt Whitman photo—used as frontispiece in *Leaves of Grass*.



F. T. OLDT



R. J. BRYAN



LYLE QUINN



E. T. PETERSON



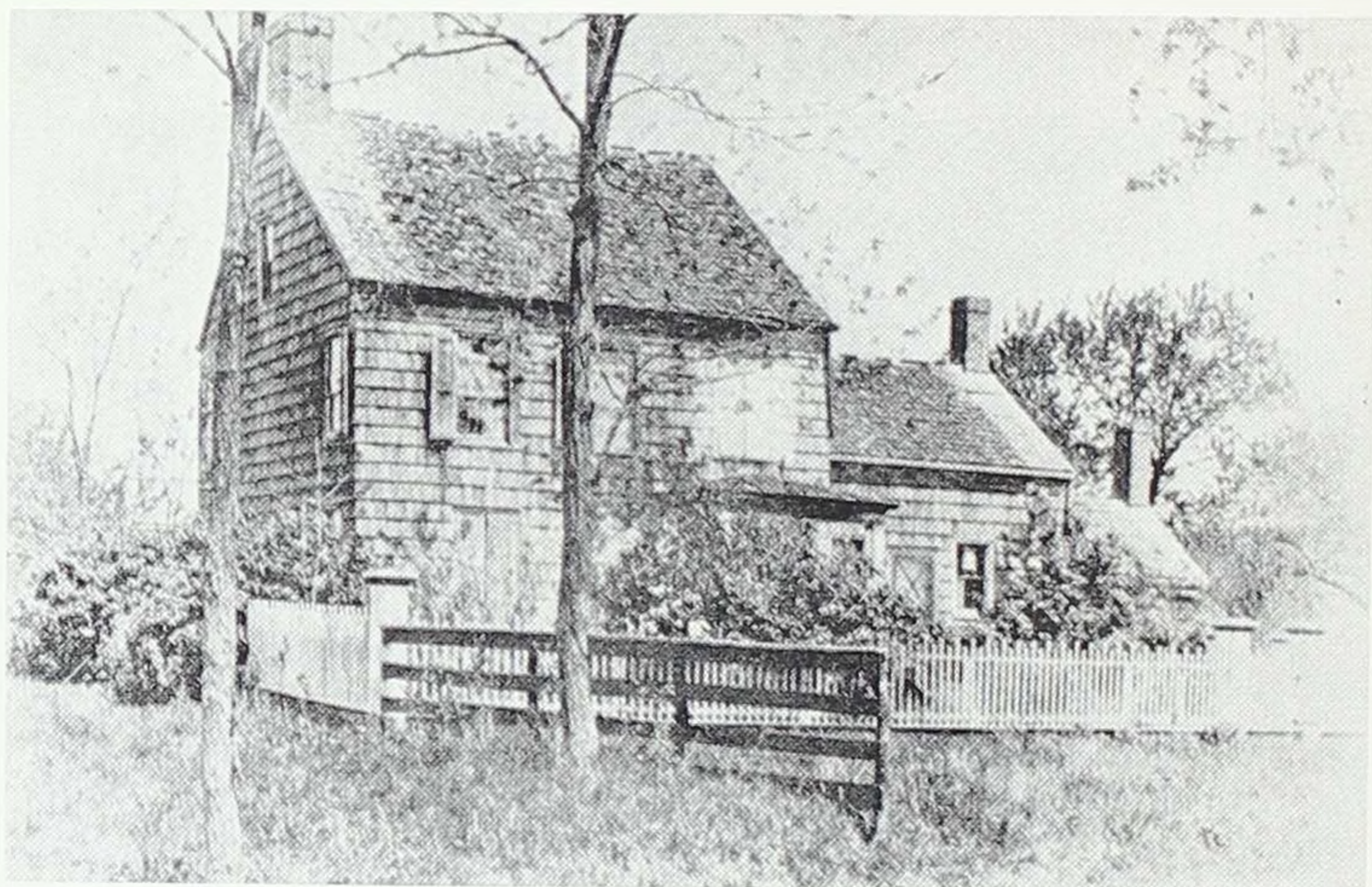
A. M. M. DORNON



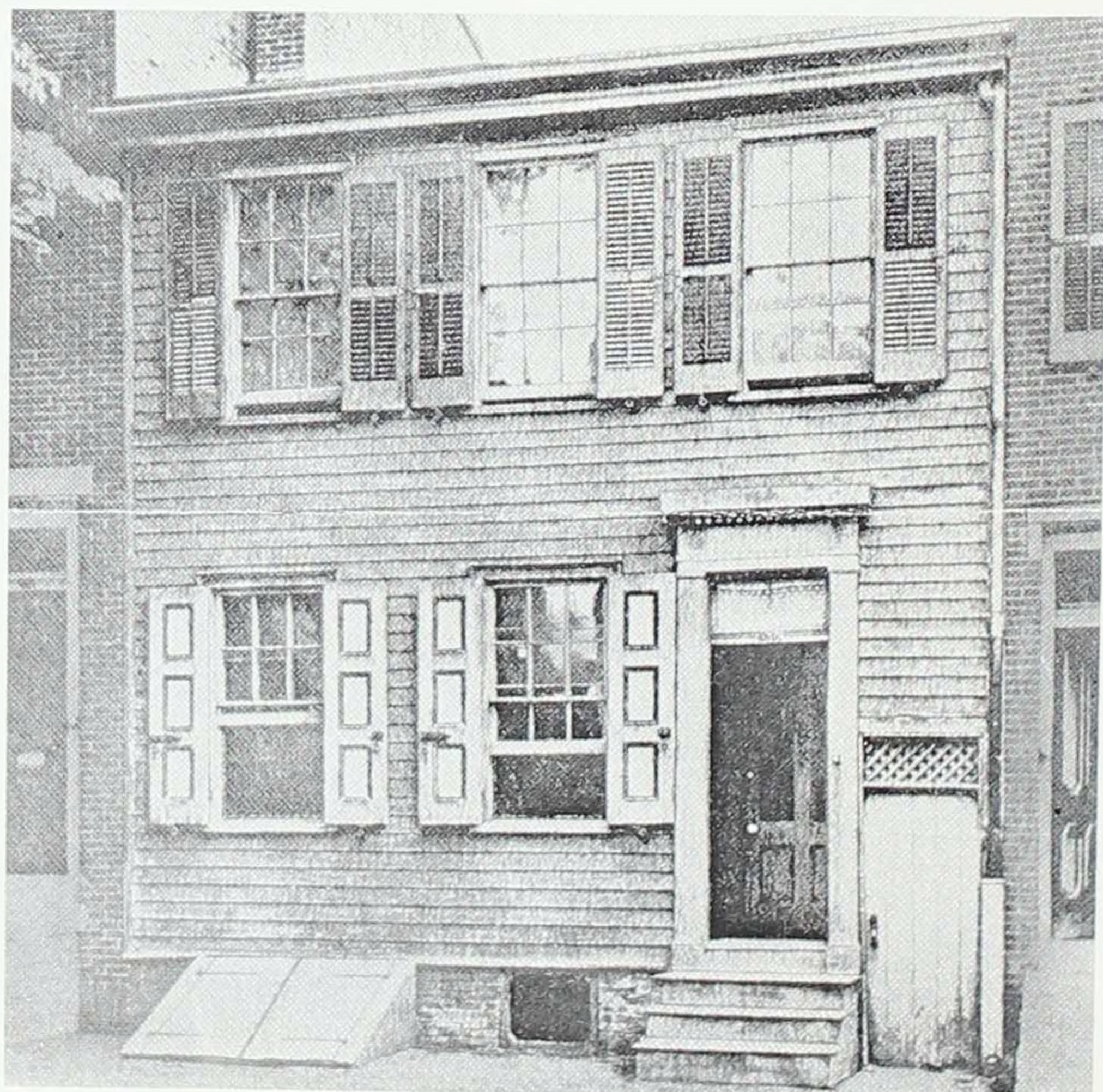
Principal Irish and Dubuque Prescott School Graduates—February, 1916.

Walt Tom Irish, 57 years a principal in Dubuque, little dreamed that the class president of 1916 would write the history of the Walt Whitman Club. More than 2,000 students graduated from Prescott School under Irish. He retired at age 83 and died in California at age 94.





Birthplace of Walt Whitman



Camden Home for Whitman's last twenty years.



named president of the University of Iowa to succeed Walt John G. Bowman. He continued to attend meetings after becoming president.

That one did not readily forget his Walt Whitman associations could be demonstrated a hundred times. From Pontiac, Michigan, James H. Harris (1913) wrote Scribe Palmer on October 31, 1921, that distance made it impossible for him to attend:

In body, that may be so; in spirit, not so. I shall always, in the latter sense, be a Walt Whitmanite, and neither time nor space can alter the delightful memories of my associations.

Deeply touched at the loss of Walt F. C. Eastman, William A. Shanklin (1906), President of Wesleyan University at Middletown, Connecticut, wrote on October 15, 1919:

I would that it were possible for me to be present on that occasion, both that I might have the privilege of fellowship with the Walts who will be there assembled and that I might bring a word of loving tribute to our dear Brother Eastman. Unfortunately for me, however, distance will deprive me of that privilege.

From his position as Head Resident of the Friendly House at Davenport, Harry Downer, a distinguished historian and school teacher, wrote Scribe Slinker "The Day After" the Walts had met of his inability to join them:

When I was a school teacher receiving real money, running into debt in the summer vacation and getting



square with the world by the following April, I seemed to find enough in the stocking toe each year to gather with the elect in November and after being led along the succulent pasturage of Walt Whitman's farm and exchanging raillery with the hired man and the hired lady cook no one could keep me at home with a rope. But since joining the uplift I have not handled enough money to buy a ticket and it is too far to walk. My pay is really adequate but it is largely in glory and obituaries.

Families of members of the Walt Whitman Club were well aware that attendance at the annual initiation and dinner served as an elixer in infusing new life into the veins of its members. When Eastman died in 1918, his daughter, Madge Eastman MacGregor, wrote Scribe Palmer in part as follows:

The Walt Whitman Club was very dear to my father's heart. Among you are the dearest friends of his lifetime, and he looked forward to your meetings each year with the greatest pleasure. I believe that you knew him as very few of his friends were privileged. There was between you a real understanding, an intimacy and a sympathy that he enjoyed with no one else. . . . You have afforded us a memory filled with the warmest satisfaction, and as he valued the good fellowship between you, so do we appreciate your expression of it.

The year 1918 was important for other events than the passing of Walt Eastman, who died in an auto accident. It was also the year of a terrible flu epidemic. On November 22 Chief Walt Oldt wrote Scribe Palmer that he gave the lectures to



the S.A.T.C. on "War Issues" and conducted discussions, quizzes, etc. The Army would have to let him off.

Ten days later, on December 2, 1918, Oldt wrote Palmer as follows:

Yours received. I think I shall write the State Supt. elect to take part in the program. *But*, will there really be a meeting? According to press reports the influenza in D.M. is worse now than in early November. A city in which the people are compelled to wear masks on the streets is not a very inviting field for a convention.

I lost my only son a few weeks ago after a siege of influenza, or pneumonia, lasting only four or five days. I knew nothing of the illness until telegram was received announcing death. It so shocked me that I find it impossible to become enthusiastic about a proposed meeting in a flu-stricken city.

Since a limit had to be placed on the number of College members it was determined to extend invitations after 1930 largely to the three State colleges and Drake because these were the only institutions that offered advanced degrees in education for public school administrators. It is interesting to note that the only charter member who was not a superintendent was 29-year old W. W. Rodwell, a Marshalltown teacher, who forfeited his active membership in the Walt Whitman Club in 1898 for missing a regular meeting but has always been identified with the Club.

Enough has been written to indicate that teaching and education form the crux upon which the



Walt Whitman Club was founded. Whitman himself had taught four years in one-room schools in seven Long Island communities. His annual salary was \$72.20 with board for no more than five months of teaching during the winter of 1837-1838. He taught 85 pupils. Throughout his life Whitman considered himself a teacher and a friend of education. His concept of a *good* teacher presents a real challenge to the modern pedagogue:

To be a good teacher requires great and long experience; a full stock of knowledge and a fine delicate tact in discriminating one kind of character from another. It is a high and arduous station—that of teaching. It is far, far more than going through the mere forms of hearing lessons. It needs the clear eye, and the steady hand. It needs that fine and exquisite judgment of human nature, which enables the possessor to know the right way of going to work with all the various and different kinds of tempers and dispositions. The duties of teaching, we will add, should be entered into not for money merely, but with a sense of its responsibility, its solemn obligations, and its lasting influences on those taught.

On the occasion of its 20th anniversary, in 1915, the Walt Whitman Club had a membership of 74, including the 13 charter members and the Waltlets who were being initiated that night. The records showed that at least 24 had left Iowa and were no longer active; eight had died, leaving a total of only 42 in Iowa when the group met in Des Moines. School administrators continued to form the nucleus of the group.



In the fall of 1945, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary, 96 names had been added in the thirty years that had passed since 1915. This brought the total initiated in 50 years to 172. Of this number, 64 were living in Iowa, 74 were listed as deceased, while those living outside the state (including a few about whom no reliable recent data had been obtained) numbered 34. Walt Laylander was again present and addressed the group.

Looking back over a period of thirty-three years, Joseph Fort Newton, Philadelphia pastor, sent his regrets to the assembled Walts on the occasion of their 50th anniversary:

It took me away back across the years to that goodly group in which I was so much at home, and with whom I had such grand fellowship. Some of them have passed over the hills, and are far away, but they somehow seem close to us. I wish so much that I could return to Iowa, and attend a meeting of the Club.

Although Newton was unable to be present, the Walts printed the following in their program from his *River of Years*:

All through the years Whitman has been a source of strength and inward sustaining; he has helped me to believe in America as I believe in God, helped me to keep its great Dream alive in my heart.

In 1953 an analysis was made of the background of 103 of the 110 deceased members of the Walt Whitman Club. Four of the group were



born before Iowa achieved Statehood: J. T. Merrill (1839), Thomas M. Irish (1841), William Smith (1845), and William Craig (1846). The place and year of birth of seven of the thirteen Charter Members is interesting:

Walter A. Doron	Iowa	1853
F. T. Oldt	Pa.	1853
Frank Sessions	Iowa	1853
L. E. A. Ling	England	1855
Wm. Franklin Chevalier	Ohio	1855
Wm. DeWitt Wells	Pa.	1858
Charles Shelton	Iowa	1859

Since Iowa was a relatively young state when the Walt Whitman Club was organized in 1895 it is not surprising that 51 of the known birth-places of these deceased Walts were outside of Iowa—Ohio leading with 12, Illinois with 9, and Pennsylvania and Indiana with 5 each. Three Waltlets were foreign-born—one in Great Britain and two in Canada. Twenty-five Walts were known to have been born in Iowa.

The following shows the Iowa colleges attended by members of the Walt Whitman Club according to the 1953 study:

University of Iowa	19	Highland Park	2
Iowa State College	7	Grinnell	1
Drake University	7	Des Moines Uni.	1
U. of Northern Iowa	6	Parsons College	1
Cornell College	5	Simpson College	1
Upper Iowa University	2	Iowa Wesleyan	1



Some of the more popular out-of-state colleges attended by Walts were:

University of Chicago	11	Harvard	4
Columbia University	9	Yale	4

Several charter members of the Walt Whitman Club graduated from smaller Eastern colleges—Oldt from Lafayette, Chevalier from Marietta, and Sheakley from Thiel. The positions held by the 103 deceased Walts at the time of their election were: superintendents—51, principals—13, college presidents—18, and a scattering of others.

Since the 50th anniversary in 1945 a total of 120 have been initiated into the Iowa Schoolmasters Walt Whitman Club. Four candidates were initiated in 17 of the 25 years. Eight were added to the rolls in 1946, 1947, and 1948, while ten were being added to the membership roll in 1970, in honor of the 75th anniversary of the Walt Whitman Club. Many Walts have continued to return to Des Moines long after their retirement; their joy at renewing old ties never seems to waver. Whether they are 80 or 90, their enthusiasm for that night remains undimmed. Walt A. M. M. Dornon actually continued his yearly hegira through his 99th birthday.

Considerable preparation must take place to set the stage for the reception of the Waltlets each year. The basic work is carried out by the local committee composed mostly of residents of Des



Moines and Polk County. In 1957 Scribe Walt Carlos McDowell sent out the following typical flyer notifying members of the forthcoming gathering:

PERSONNEL OF WALT WHITMAN'S FARM

November 6, 1957

Walt Whitman—A. M. M. Dornon or William Petersen

Chief Walt—Henry Galbreth or E. T. Peterson

Boss Walt—Max Clark or Clyde Parker

Exurger—Don Foster or Howard Blanchard

1st Hired Man—Ray Bryan

Alternate—Joe Gettys

2nd Hired Man—George Hohl

Alternate—James C. Wright

3rd Hired Man—Oscar Thompson

Alternate—Earl Harmon

4th Hired Man—Kenneth Stephenson

Alternate—Herbert Spitzer

5th Hired Man—C. J. Christiansen

Alternate—Amos Lee

Hired Girl—Lyle Quinn

Alternate—Walter Hetzel

10th Hired Man—L. H. Shepoiser

Alternate—William Gibson

Assistant Exurgers—B. C. Berg, Frank Douma, R. W. Johnson, Budd Moyle, Barton Morgan

Property Walts—Fred Schmidt, Ralph Norris

Arch Grimes at the piano

Few men can point to such a distinguished career as President William M. Beardshear, who headed Iowa State College at Ames between 1891 and 1902. Beardshear served as NEA Director from Iowa from 1887 to 1889 and from 1896 to 1901 as a life director. He died in 1902—when only fifty-two years old. In the memorial service held by the Iowa State Teachers Association for Beardshear on January 1, 1903, Henry Sabin declared in part:

There was no aristocracy, no envy, no hatred, no uncharitableness, no selfishness in Beardshear's heart. He greeted not alone the collegians among educators and



those in high places, but he greeted cordially the teachers of the common schools of the state. He believed in the education of all the people. He wanted the people to know his own institution and his greatest work was the organization of great excursions which took to the college the people who were sending there their children. He loved contact with the common people, and he, himself, sprang from them. He was the friend of every man. Iowa would be fortunate did she have a thousand such men, so enthusiastic and loyal to the cause of the education of the whole people. He answered the calls of the people. He never declined to visit any institution or any school, but scattered his addresses broadcast, and in considering an invitation thought not whether it was a great or a small school or a powerful or weak clientage. He spoke at farmers' institutes, at commencements, at normal institutes, upon all occasions, everywhere, and never said in reply to invitations: "I am too busy." It would be better for Iowa today had he said sometimes that he was too busy, for he sacrificed his life on the altar of overwork. But had he said "No" to any invitation from any quarter it would not have been Beardshear.

Back in February of 1897 Johnson Brigham, editor of the *Midland Monthly*, in calling attention to the founding of the Walt Whitman Club, wondered if the progenitors might not have left themselves open to sharp criticism. It is doubtful if Mr. Brigham was even acquainted with young O. J. Laylander—who conceived the idea of the club.

Thirty-one years later in 1928, this same Johnson Brigham, then the revered State Librarian of



Iowa, wrote the following note which was later printed on the dust jacket of O. J. Laylander's new book:

I sat in my easy chair last night—well on into the night—in quiet enjoyment of "The Chronicles of a Contented Man." Occasionally an outburst of laughter drew from the family an insistence that I read aloud the story. Occasionally I compelled the wife to "listen to this"—reading some passage which cleverly expressed my own unformulated philosophy of contentment.

I thank you for the pleasure and soul-satisfaction given me by the story of your early life in Ohio with its hardships and triumphs; your youth and young manhood in Iowa; your evolution from a poor farmer into a successful educator and publisher—all so modestly yet so vividly pictured; your reminiscences of great Iowans, well known to fame—and to me; the fine tributes you pay to your partners; and, above all, and running through all, your invincible philosophy. I have never found any work which so well crystallizes my old-age views of life.

And who would not be stirred to the depths by a man who could philosophize as follows:

THE CHRONICLES OF A CONTENTED MAN  
(1928)

I am not a distinguished man. I have made no notable achievement in science, art, or letters. I am not the proud possessor of a rosary of titles and degrees. I have not served on the crew of the ship of state. I am not a great preacher or reformer. I have not accumulated great wealth. Nevertheless I am an unusual man, for I am a contented one. . . .

As I pass down the quarter stretch to the judges' stand



I have no cause to revise my claim. Contentment is possible. Its food is love, its harvest is friends. I certainly cannot complain. I have gotten out of life all that I deserve. I make no pretense of understanding things not meant to be understood, nor judging things that cannot be judged. I simply accept and am not disturbed. . . .

I am unable to join the chorus of those who sing always the songs of youth. To me *now* is the most interesting point in life. In retrospect the trials and disappointments of my own youth were just as real and as hard to combat as those of adult life. The best ten years that I have known were the last ten, the best year was last year, the best day today; for to its own joy is added all the joys that have gone before. . . .

Thus it seems to me: Unless the fruition of the years is filled with fond friendships, one must have lost the way. Unless what is styled worldly success has been lighted by love, the race has been scarcely worth the running.

As I now sit in the cool of the evening of life and listen to the voices of friends they are very sweet.

Together have we laughed,  
Together have we wept;  
Together sweet draughts quaffed,  
Together vigils kept.  
Together in fair weather,  
Together in the gale;  
Together—careless whether  
Together win or fail.  
Together have we fought,  
Together sometimes won;  
Together trophies brought,  
Together been undone.  
Together long rest earning,  
Together heart and heart;



Together in our yearning,  
 Together though apart.  
 Together drifting ever,  
 Together nearing shore;  
 Together, doubting never,  
 Together evermore.

The Walt Whitman Club has truly lived up to the spirit of "Together" as noted in this poem by Laylander.

The following men, in accordance with tradition, have served as Chief Walt or Scribe Walt, until illness, death, or removal from the State made it impossible for them to continue in office:

<i>Year</i>	<i>Chief Walt</i>	<i>Scribe Walt</i>
1896	J. T. Merrill	1896 O. J. Laylander
1901	F. T. Oldt	1906-1921 Aaron Palmer
1927	A. M. M. Dornon	1922 A. M. M. Dornon
1958	Harry M. Gage	1927 Clay D. Slinker
1961	Lyle Quinn	1943 John Hilliard
1962	E. T. Peterson	1944 C. L. McDowell
1964	Ray Bryan	1964 Henry Galbreth

Since 1895 a total of 290 have been elected to the Walt Whitman Club. Much the same pattern of membership emerges with superintendents predominating, followed by principals, and then deans, directors, and professors of education largely from the state schools.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN