

# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY RUTH A. GALLAHER

VOL. XXVII ISSUED IN FEBRUARY 1946 No. 2

COPYRIGHT 1946 BY THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA



## The Fourth Estate in 1846

Newspapers reflect the interests, attitudes, and activities of people and the times in which they live; and the newspapers of 1846 reveal a great deal about life in Iowa at that time. How many newspapers were there in Iowa in 1846? Where were they located? Who edited them? What did they print? What was "news" a hundred years ago?

The beginning of the year 1846 found nine newspapers within the area that was to become the State of Iowa. Two were "born" during the year and one died, leaving ten papers in Iowa at the close of 1846. A majority of these eleven newspapers were located in towns along the Mississippi. Burlington, Davenport, Dubuque, Fort Madison, Keokuk, and Muscatine (then Bloomington) were the river towns which boasted weekly papers. Iowa City, the capital, and Keosauqua were the only inland towns with newspapers in 1846.

In Burlington the Democratic *Territorial Ga-*

*zette and Burlington Advertiser* (later the *Iowa State Gazette*), and the Whig *Hawk-Eye* were vying for patronage one hundred years ago. This *Gazette*, the third paper to be established in Iowa and the first Iowa paper to openly announce its politics, had been founded by James Clarke in 1837. In 1846 Samuel Royal Thurston and James Tizzard were editor and publisher, in the absence of Clarke who had been called away from his editorial duties to become Territorial Governor of Iowa late in 1845. Thurston, a lawyer from Maine, made his Iowa editorship a stepping stone in his career. He later went to Oregon and served as Delegate to Congress from that Territory.

The Burlington *Hawk-Eye*, on the other hand, had been from its beginning in 1839 "a most radical, outspoken and fearless advocate of the principles of the [Whig] party it affiliated with." The name "Hawk-Eye" adopted by this paper in 1843 did much to popularize that nickname for Iowa residents. This sobriquet as applied to Iowans had been suggested by James G. Edwards in the Fort Madison *Patriot* in 1838. In 1846 Edwards and J. M. Broadwell were editors and proprietors of the *Hawk-Eye*.

The Davenport *Gazette* had been founded in August, 1841, with Alfred Sanders as owner and editor. It is said that when Sanders arrived in

Davenport, the townspeople crowded about the wharf to see his printing press unloaded and there was great excitement among the spectators when the press was accidentally dropped into the river. It was rescued, however, and was soon in operation.

Following this spectacular beginning, the history of the *Gazette*, Whig in politics, was smooth and uneventful. Its quiet existence was undoubtedly due in part to the steadying influence of Sanders who remained in the editor's chair until 1861. In 1846 the *Gazette* was Davenport's only paper. Its owners at that time were Levi Davis and Sanders, and its slogan was, "It should be held as an eternal truth, that what is morally wrong can never be politically right."

Dubuque, where the first Iowa newspaper, the *Dubuque Visitor*, had been started in 1836, was the home of the *Miners' Express* in 1846. Owned by George Greene and Democratic in its sympathies, this paper was sometimes called "The Thunderer", because, like the *London Times*, it "swayed at will the old democracy of this portion of the West."

The year Iowa became a State, Fort Madison residents were reading the *Lee County Democrat*, a newspaper which later became the *Plain Dealer*. This newspaper, established as the Fort Madison

*Courier*, had originally been neutral in politics, but it was a Democratic organ in 1846, with R. Wilson Albright as owner and T. S. Espy as editor.

At Keokuk, the *Iowa Argus and Lee County Advertiser* began its brief career in January of 1846, with William Pattee as editor. Pattee later became Auditor of State. His Democratic paper lived only a few months. A resident of Keokuk, in speaking of the paper's death, said, "the long name was too much of a load to carry".

The *Bloomington Herald*, forerunner of the *Muscatine Journal*, issued its first edition in 1840. Although the *Herald* was originally a Democratic paper, with the beginning of M. T. Emerson's editorship on April 17, 1846, it left the ranks of Democratic publications to ally itself with the Whigs. Emerson's regime as editor ended with his sudden death on September 13, 1846. He was succeeded by N. L. Stout and William P. Israel as editor and publisher.

Editor Stout was an abolitionist and announced himself as such on the editorial pages of the *Herald*. In commenting on a news item from the *St. Louis Gazette* he revealed his sympathies: "A committee of nine, in the Legislature of Alabama . . . expressed their apprehension that Kentucky, Maryland, and Virginia will soon abolish

slavery, and that North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas will follow their example. . . . 'God grant it, and to His name be everlasting praise.' "

Iowa City, as the capital of Iowa, was the home of opposing political papers, the Whig *Iowa Standard* and the Democratic *Iowa Capital Reporter*. The *Iowa Standard* had begun publication in Bloomington, the original seat of government, and had been moved to Iowa City in 1841. Its slogan in 1846 was "Impartially devoted to the dissemination of Truth and Popular Intelligence." During that year it was purchased by Silas Foster, and Eastin Morris became its editor.

The *Iowa Capital Reporter* had issued its first copy in 1841 with the slogan, "He is a freeman whom the truth makes free." Abraham H. and Garret D. Palmer were owners and editors in 1846. On January 14th, a "New Prospectus of the Iowa Capital Reporter" stated:

"The Reporter will be especially devoted to the advocacy and promulgation of sound democratic doctrines, and will aim to secure harmony of sentiment, and concert of action among the Democracy, throughout our Territory, or prospective State. . . . The various departments of Literature, Agriculture, Foreign, Domestic, Political and Miscellaneous news, will each receive its due share of attention."

Keosauqua in Van Buren County was the birthplace of the *Des Moines Valley Whig*, when J. B. Howell and James H. Cowles established the paper in June, 1846. This paper was moved to Keokuk in 1849 to become the *Des Moines Valley Whig and Keokuk Register*, and finally adopted the name *Keokuk Gate City* in 1855.

The *Iowa Democrat and Des Moines River Intelligencer* was also published in Keosauqua in 1846. It had begun publication there in 1843 as a neutral paper. In 1846, however, it was advocating Democratic principles under the leadership of James and Jesse Shepherd.

These were the newspapers in Iowa of 1846. They were similar in that they were all four-page weeklies, but they differed in size and number of columns and in yearly subscription rates, which varied according to when the subscriber paid his bill. The *Bloomington Herald* and the *Iowa Standard* were \$2.00 per year if paid in advance or \$3.00 at the end of the year. The *Iowa Capital Reporter* was \$2.00 if paid in advance, \$2.50 within the first six months, \$3.00 within the last six months, and \$3.50 after expiration of the year. Because of its Democratic sympathies, the *Reporter's* income was increased by contracts for public printing. The amount due this firm early in 1846 for legislative print jobs was \$1,837.

Velma Critz Stout says, "The relationships between a pioneer editor and his public might become strained because of that public's neglect of a much-needed subscription remittance. . . . Too soon did newspaper proprietors realize the wide gap separating announcement of the subscription rates and actual payment of the same rates. Little money flowed into their pockets and every year ended with the editors rich in promises and poor in specie." Often these early editors were paid in wood, eggs, meat, potatoes, or sorghum. The *Iowa Capital Reporter* in 1846 stated, "Produce will be received in payment of subscription at the office, and at such other points where arrangements can be made for disposing of it", while the *Davenport Gazette* pleaded, "Those desiring us to receive wood on subscription will please deliver it soon."

What was news a century ago? An examination of several typical papers indicates the type of printed material which appealed to the reader of 1846.

Poetry of some kind almost always appeared on page one. "Seemingly the fondness of pioneer readers for sentimental or eclectic doggerel was recognized by the editors," if we may take the countless verses which appear as evidence. Titles such as "The Dying Girl", "Be a Child Again",

"One Hour With Thee", and "I Love the Ladies — Everyone" indicate something of the favorite subjects for would-be poets. An unknown writer in the *Iowa Standard* for August 12, 1846, had a word to say about "Bachelors".

As lone as clouds in Autumn eves,  
As a tree without its leaves,  
As a shirt without its sleeves —  
Such are bachelors.

In other papers "The Magnetic Telegraph", much discussed in 1846, was honored in verse, "Laura" was eulogized by her lover, and the Mexican War was heralded in poetry. President Polk submitted his war message to Congress on May 11, 1846, and a poem in the June 12th issue of the *Bloomington Herald* was entitled "To Arms!"

Awake! arise! ye men of might!  
The glorious hour is nigh —  
Your eagle pauses in his flight,  
And screams his battle cry!

Poets' names did not usually appear in these early papers, but if the poet was a local resident and the poem was original, such facts were carefully noted. More frequently, the literary selections were "lifted" from uncited sources, and published to answer popular demand. Plagiarism and copyrights were ignored by frontier editors.



"Selected Tales" and sentimental stories consistently appeared as part of the front page in 1846. Readers apparently delighted in romantic and tragic tales such as "The Bridal Eve" in which a beautiful bride was scalped and killed by Indians. "The Lesson: A Tale of Domestic Life", appearing in the *Iowa Standard* on September 9, 1846, was less gory, but equally as romantic. Here the rich young hero masqueraded as a poor mechanic in order to win a wife on his own merits. Other tales included "The Lucky Crown Piece", "Ambition's Victim", and "Female Stratagem — An Arabian Story".

Articles on agriculture, household hints, travelogues, and biographical sketches of George Washington, John Jacob Astor, or General Winfield Scott also appeared on page one of the pioneer paper. One column was often devoted to the business cards of local land agents, insurance agents, attorneys, physicians, dentists, watchmakers, and saddlers. Occasionally political news appeared on the front page, but ordinarily it was reserved for page two.

Page two was, indeed, the editor's domain; there he might write spiritedly about party news — conventions, candidates, and elections. "It is hard at this time to realize", wrote D. C. Mott, "what an important part politics had in the news-

paper business during that period [1836-1860]. Waves of political feeling and excitement surged back and forth throughout the new territory and state." The Mexican War, slavery, the Oregon boundary dispute, and the drawing up of a new State constitution were questions to "excite the spirit of party strife to fever heat."

In May of 1846 when a constitutional convention met to frame a new constitution for Iowa, editors, Whig and Democrat, were quick to praise and criticize this document. It was printed in newspapers during June and July, and on August 3rd the vote on adoption of the constitution was held. More than two weeks later the results of the voting were still not known. On August 19th the editor of the *Iowa Standard* wrote: "It seems to be generally conceded, although we have not received the official returns of the late election, that the Constitution has been adopted by a small majority. If this be the case, no time should be lost before making preparation for the change from a Territorial to a State government."

Progress of the Mexican War was another topic for discussion on editorial pages. On May 15th, the *Bloomington Herald* quoted a communication from General Zachary Taylor, "I have the honor to apprise you that hostilities have actually commenced between my forces and those of the

Mexicans". Although the Whigs criticized the war on the ground that the Democrats had provoked it, they patriotically supported it with a "my country right or wrong" attitude. Notices of meetings to organize volunteers and an original "Hawkeye War Song" were news items in 1846.

The tariff and national currency were also subjects for debate by 1846 editors. The Whigs favored a protective tariff, whereas the Democrats, especially those of the South, advocated free trade. Hard money (specie) vs. paper money was another controversial subject.

Editorial headlines in the June 24th *Iowa Standard* declared, "Gratifying Intelligence. The Oregon Boundary Settled!" The Oregon boundary dispute was given great emphasis on editorial pages early in 1846. The Democrats, remembering their "Fifty-four forty or fight" slogan, believed there should be no compromise with England. The Whigs, referring to the "Oregon farce", said they were "heartily tired and sick of the many manoeuverings of those who have the control of this question of notice in the present Congress." Apparently, both parties were glad of the settlement, however, feeling that a war with Mexico was quite enough to handle at one time.

Page two of the 1846 newspaper contained more than editorial comments: local, national, and

foreign news stories appeared there. Local news was, however, apparently considered of little importance, for it was often completely overshadowed by editorial reprints or by a report of a flood in New Orleans or a famine in Ireland. "Brevity was a jewel in the crown of pioneer journalism", and this was certainly evidenced in the reports of local happenings. Probably these news items were already common knowledge in a small community.

River towns, of course, were concerned with the condition of the Mississippi and activities connected with it. "The Mississippi, at this point, is still well up, but falling slowly", or "The River has risen 10 or 12 inches at this place" are typical reports. In April of 1846, the arrival of immigrants at Bloomington was announced: "Eighty emigrants landed at this place from the steamer *Fortune*, on Wednesday morning last.— They come to seek new homes on the rich prairies of this and adjoining counties."

Mammoth beets, potatoes, or radishes were subjects of local news. On July 10th, the *Bloomington Herald* reported: "A radish from the garden of Mr. Thomas Morford, weighing 4 1-2 lbs., and measuring about 20 inches in length, has been left at our office." The *Davenport Gazette* described a big pumpkin grown in Scott County,

measuring 6 ft., 7 and a half inches in circumference and weighing 150 lbs!

Murders were not, apparently, considered sensational news. The May 8th *Bloomington Herald* carried the simple statements, "The notorious O. P. Rockwell was arrested in Nauvoo, on Friday last, charged with the murder of Franklin P. Worrell. He was taken to Quincy and lodged in jail." Compare that brief account with our present day murder news stories embellished with pictures, glaring headlines, and sensational details.

Marriage notices were also unadorned and far different from the accounts printed on 1946 society pages. A few lines similar to the following might announce the culmination of a romance.

"MARRIED, — in Montpelier township, on the 27th of May, by Rev. A. B. Robbins, Mr. JOHN S. SILVERTHORN to Miss EVELINE B. PORTER, all of this county." A statement such as the following might announce a separation: "Notice — Whereas my wife Catherine has left my bed and board without any just cause or provocation; this is therefore to warn all persons against harboring or trusting her on my account, as I will pay no debts of her contracting after this date".

Obituaries, sometimes bordered in black, appeared frequently, but there were no birth announcements.

Notices of church meetings, political conventions, or circuses might appear on pages two or three, cheek by jowl with advertisements for ice cream saloons and hotels. The schedules of packet ships were important news items in river towns, and they often consumed many column inches.

Patent medicine salesmen used more than their share of column space in the 1846 newspaper. Long testimonials gave evidence of the curative powers of "Dr. Bragg's Indian Queen Vegetable Sugar Coated Pills", "Buchan's Hungarian Balsam of Life", The Great Chinese Remedy for Coughs — "Ginseng Panacea", "Wistar's Balsam of Wild Cherry", and "Jew David's or Hebrew Plaster".

"Purify the Blood" with "Moffat's Vegetable Life Pills and Phoenix Bitters" said one advertiser. "They are known by their fruits; their good works testify for them". This tonic was supposed to cure asthma, acute and chronic rheumatism, affections of the bladder and kidneys, bilious fevers and liver complaints, colds and coughs, foulness of complexion, gout, giddiness, jaundice, leprosy, palpitation of the heart, ulcers, and worms. And all this without a vitamin.

Dry goods merchants listed their wares on pages three and four without the benefit of present

day illustrations to attract the public eye. Bold type often announced:

6 P's Broad Cloth,	15 P's Linsey,
10 " Cassimere,	200 " Calicoes,
12 " Flannel,	8 " Ticking,
20 " Kentucky Jeans,	30 " Bleached Cotton,
8 Pair Machinaw	10 " Drilling,
Blankets,	8 " Canton Flannel,
15 Dozen Comforters,	20 " Colored
20 P's Satinets,	Cambrick.
3 Hhds New Orleans	5 Chests Tea,
Sugar,	10 Bbls. Molasses,
25 Sacks Rio Coffee,	75 Bbls Kanawha Salt,
8 Boxes Tobacco,	10 Bags Shot.

Ready made clothing such as vests, pants, coats, "ladies' white corded skirts", gloves, shawls, bustles, and hosiery were available. Also advertised were boots and shoes, hats and caps "of the latest style, and of good quality", hardware, crockery, glassware, and "fancy articles" such as tooth brushes, cologne, "pink saucers", and tooth powders.

An unusual feature of page three or four in these 1846 papers was the unclaimed letter list. The names of addressees were listed alphabetically, and a postmaster's note followed: "N. B. Persons calling for any of the above letters, will

please say they are advertised, or they may not get them." By an act of 1845, two cents additional postage was charged on these letters. If they were not claimed they were eventually sent to the national dead letter office.

If any space remained on the last page of an 1846 newspaper after the advertisers finished proclaiming their wares, the editor filled it in with jokes and anecdotes. "A GOOD ONE" is a typical filler. "A Western editor gives the following as the most approved method of killing fleas in those parts: place the animal on a small pine board, and hedge him in with putty; then read to him an account of all the railroad and steamboat accidents which have happened the last twelve months. As soon as he becomes frightened so as not to be able to stir, draw out his teeth, and he will starve to death!"

Such was the fourth estate in 1846. Wire photos, comics, glaring headlines, sports news, society pages, and stock market reports were absent from the pages of pioneer papers. Yet those papers of 1846 serve as a "mirror" of those times just as present day papers reflect our times, for "an adequate history of any people can scarcely be written without an examination of its journalism."

CORNELIA MALLET BARNHART