

## Two Iowa Women

In an article published in the *Annals of Iowa* in October 1884, Dr. Jennie McCowen, of Davenport, Iowa, analyzing the Iowa census of 1880, found that over 80,000 Iowa women were working somewhere outside the cozy confines of their homes. She found women employed (or at least enumerated in the census as employed) as boilermakers, miners, pork-packers, blacksmiths, commercial travelers, stenographers, librarians, and teachers, as well as physicians, pharmacists, and lawyers. I have mentioned only a small portion of the job classifications cited in her article, but I have done so to offer evidence of the changing status of women in this state as early as the 1880s.

In Iowa, as elsewhere in the United States, the 1880s and 1890s were decades in which the impact of urbanization and industrialization upon women in society was being most seriously felt. As machinery limited the traditional "fireside employments" of women, it was, as Dr. McCowen pointed out, "inevitable that women would adapt themselves to the changed circumstances, and . . . seek some outside occupation by which they might not only support themselves, but, also, if need be, provide for the necessities and comforts of those depending upon them."

All too often, in considering the place of women in early twentieth-century society, historians have been too much taken with the heady and very important issues of woman suffrage and prohibition. Those issues were indeed noisy ones upon which gallons of impassioned ink were spilt. But continued emphasis on such problems has tended to draw attention from the place of women in society and from the career opportunities open to them at that time. Urbanization continued well into the twentieth century and the movement of young people, women and men alike, to the cities was a continuing phenomenon. As industrialization continued apace, even further changes occurred in the home, the marketplace, and the industrial workplace which altered the terms of life for Iowa women.

The complexity of the scene in the second decade of the twentieth century is apparent in the lives partially documented in the two articles appearing in this issue of the *Palimpsest*. Mrs. Wilma Lewis, early in her life, made the decision to move from city to country, a career choice which cannot have been that uncommon in a still basically agricultural society. Miss Margaret D. Paul, on the other hand, after pursuing a high school and college education, went on to further academic work in elocution and then made a decision to become a professional speaker or elocutionist on the Chautauqua circuit. Subsequently, she put her experience to good use in a career in education in Gary, Indiana.

All too often when we reflect on the days of our grandparents' youth, we are tempted to think of women as either homemakers or teachers. We should remind ourselves occasionally that all women in the first decades of the twentieth century were not homemakers or teachers. We need to remind ourselves also that those who were homemakers or teachers had often become so in very determined fashion. Perhaps we should remember that the determination of women to live a life of their choice is an age-old trait in Iowa as elsewhere in this republic. It was certainly in evidence in the lives of Mrs. Wilma Lewis and Miss Margaret D. Paul.—*Editor*