Those Twentieth Century Years

And so the calendar turned into the Twentieth Century. Audacity and confidence had been chastened by fluctuating fortune; a generation of conservative Victorians had pursued business profits with diffident regard for the community's total health. But even though Council Bluffs had lost out to Omaha in the race for primary importance, the *Nonpareil* and Victor Bender were optimistically cultivating the fertile ground of the new century.

Bender made 1901 a banner year by issuing the first picture section as a 16-page supplement to the August 21 issue. He followed up by printing the largest issue to date on December 15 — thirty-two pages! Readers were praising Editor Howard L. Tilton's "lay sermons" in the Sunday editions and got their first look at the Seen and Heard column that spring. In 1961 this collection of pithy paragraphs combining both news and ads is still a daily feature.

Encouraged by circulation reaching 8,500 in 1904, Bender introduced the *Nonpareil's* first evening edition on May 1, 1906. He aimed at pleasing his rural subscribers with morning delivery and urban readers with end-of-day news.

Civic accomplishments added up impressively in the *Nonpareil's* golden anniversary edition of September 2, 1906 — 100 daily trains to serve more than 29,000 citizens, twenty miles of paved streets, fifty miles of water mains, thirty-eight miles of electric railway track, sixty manufacturing firms, grain elevator capacity unequalled in the river valley region, sixteen public schools, twenty-eight churches, two Catholic hospitals and the new $250,000 Edmundson hospital almost completed, a new $70,000 library, five banking institutions, great wealth in truck gardens, and hot house flower cultivation under 500,000 square feet of glass.

That decade brought two news items of notable contrast. Collapse of an over-crowded boat dock at Lake Manawa on July 4, 1906, brought death to six young people in the watery shambles. Because a locally-promoted "National Horticultural Congress" attracted such a huge response, businessmen raised $65,000 and built an auditorium to house it, all within sixty days in 1907. Four such annual exhibitions inspired regional orchardists to augment their plantings, and southwestern Iowa became noted for its wealth in fruit.

Victor Bender bought the *Nonpareil* in 1909, but the financial struggle brought on by his 1906 expansion made him receptive to a tempting offer from D. W. Norris and W. P. Hughes of Marshalltown. The new owners promptly dropped the

morning paper, and restored financial equilibrium.

Former managing editor for Publisher Norris at the Marshalltown *Times-Republican,* Mr. Hughes moved to Council Bluffs to manage the *Nonpareil.* These men laid down rules of integrity in both editorial and advertising departments. Norris stipulated that there must be fair dealing with all men, loyalty to the home community and high moral tone in newswriting. For years no liquor advertising was accepted, no matter what the loss in revenue. Hughes began the newspaper's emphasis on local and southwestern Iowa news coverage, which has achieved maximum development by the present staff.

As the paper's editorial spokesman, W. R. Orchard was coaxed away from the *Glidden Graphic* in 1911. Before long, his insistent editorials were urging Iowans to "get out of the mud" plaguing the state road system. Orchard won his battle for paved highways despite tax-payers' opposition. The title, "father of good roads in Iowa," followed him until his death in 1937.

Council Bluffs laid its most famous citizen to rest with military honors in 1916 — the greatest railroad builder of them all, Gen. Grenville M. Dodge. All too soon, the successors to his old 1856 "Guards" were going off to another war across the Atlantic. This time, news of 1917-1918 described the distinguished field service by Colonel Donald Macrae, Jr.'s famous Unit K motorized

hospital corps, the career of Colonel M. A. Tinley in the famous Rainbow Division, and the prowess of Council Bluffs' Company B of the 109th Engineers.

At home, patriots supported the Liberty Bond drives, but a strongly German segment was less enthused. Reluctant buyers were "persuaded" to take their quotas at sessions of a "kangaroo court" conducted by a "sheriff" who pointedly spelled out the duties of citizenship. Attorney Emmet Tinley alone aided in impressing 500 recalcitrants into line.

Into the 1920 post-war community stepped the volatile personality of a new *Nonpareil* business manager named Robert R. O'Brien. In dedication to progressive newspapering and enthusiastic support of his adopted city, Council Bluffs has seldom met his equal.

Fate aided the newcomer's efforts to correct the *Nonpareil's* shortcomings in equipment and space in 1922, when fire ate through into the newspaper's quarters from an adjoining building. New construction gave the paper the first made-to-order home in its history, at 115-117 Pearl street. A 64-page "New Home" edition on May 9, 1926, boasted of 100 plant employees and 75 carriers servicing the city's 36,000 population. Further progress in 1927 instituted automatic teletype news transmission in place of the expert telegrapher whose 35-word-per-minute transcription had

set the limit on each day's incoming world news budget.

Headlines of the "twenties" ran the gamut, from the hair-raising gun battle with box-car thieves who "holed up" on the Lena Snyder farm northeast of town in 1921, to the widening of the vehicular bridge across the Missouri in 1923. The MonaMotor Oil Twins, Ned Tollinger and Ned Wolfe, made Council Bluffs familiar to thousands of households as the home of Radio Station KOIL, pioneer of 1925.

That December, fire destroyed $1,250,000 worth of major business property, including the city's finest hotel, the Grand. Fifteen months later, heroic fund-raising efforts led by Dr. Donald Macrae, Jr., culminated in the gala opening of a new eight-story hotel called "The Chieftain" in recognition of past Indian history. Iowa's gifted artist, Grant Wood, created pioneer and rural scenes on the walls of two of its private dining rooms.

The decade also saw the beginning of a thirty-seven-year residence by a gentle-spoken, multi-talented clergyman who was to put his intellectual stamp upon the community — the Rev. J. R. Perkins of the First Congregational church. When he died in 1959 at the age of 79, his writings included the famous biography of Grenville Dodge, *Trails, Rails and War,* and two best-seller novels depicting early Christian times. His Sunday column, called "Accent on Life," livened the *Non-*

pareil for ten years. As a speaker, his intelligent ideas were couched in exquisite phraseology.

From 1921 to 1935, the city's sports addicts took over each fall, as the Council Bluffs Amateur Baseball Association and Athletic Association played host to the hotly-contested Southwest Iowa Semi-Pro Baseball Tournament.

Problems, problems characterized the Troublesome Thirties. "How to do business without cash" during and after the 1933 bank holiday brought an ingenious solution from Bob O'Brien. *Nonpareil* "scrip" or Thrift Money was issued to employees as part of salary. They used it in turn for purchases from merchants, who could exchange it for *Nonpareil* advertising. Nearly $15,000 in scrip was issued before the emergency subsided.

O'Brien's guiding genius came into its own when he headed a group of key employees in the purchase of the Norris interest in the paper in August, 1939. Associated in the purchase were Ora L. Taylor, John O'Brien, LeRoy A. Wallace, Harry Mauck, Jr., and George Fouts.

News headlines of the "thirties" told of picketing violence south of town during the farmers' "milk strike" of 1932. There was a tense twenty-four hours while an armed mob of Plymouth County farmers threatened to storm the county jail where pickets were imprisoned. Citizens' contributions paid for dredging Lake Manawa after silt and drouth had left it a reedy marsh. Indian

Creek (the "Lousy" of Mormon times) was tamed at last by PWA construction of a concrete channel through the heart of town. And Lewis and Clark's role in naming Council Bluffs was recognized in an impressive monument at "Rainbow Point" north of town, sponsored by the Colonial Dames in 1936.

On the site of the venerable Merriam Block opposite the southeast corner of Bayliss Park, rose a splendid new city hall into which the community's cramped government services moved thankfully in 1940.

All too soon, further construction was halted by the material demands of World War II. Council Bluffs sent 3,237 into the armed forces; 193 did not return. The county achieved a bond purchase record of $52,082,788. During the African campaign, the city knew months of suspense over the fate of its National Guardsmen, many of whom were taken prisoner in General Rommel's deadly "pincers movement." Other Council Bluffs men died — or existed in Japanese prison camps — in the disaster of Corregidor and the Pacific Island conquests. Wherever they served, Council Bluffs' proud military heritage accompanied them.

At war's end, the lid of civic expansion seemed to blow off. One formidable obstacle disappeared after Omaha's Ak-Sar-Ben organization bought the inter-city bridge and abolished tolls in 1947. Traffic interchange zoomed. Broadway, by this

time one of the most heavily-travelled thoroughfares in the state, speeded her traffic west on new concrete surfacing. A few years later, smooth asphalt coated the business section for still greater improvement.

Progress at the *Nonpareil* brought launching of a new AM-FM radio station called KSWI to supplement its services. In 1949 the paper pioneered west of the Mississippi in utilizing plastic plates for half-tone cuts, made on an electronic machine of radical new design.

By 1950, the *Nonpareil's* circulation had reached 19,500, blanketing the majority of homes of the city's 45,429 population. Editorial department changes which had seen John M. Henry, Clark H. Galloway and L. A. Wallace occupying the managing editor's chair, brought a new occupant of twenty years' varied experience — Harry Mauck, Jr.

That same year, the city took a long look at its hackneyed ward-alderman government. In a campaign spear-headed by the Junior and Senior Chambers of Commerce, voters approved the city manager plan, drawing upon dedicated, non-political professional and business men for the city council. A new era was beginning in the city's second hundred years.

But first, Fate was to make Council Bluffs fight for its life before the onslaught of a flood-raging Missouri River. Sodden levees were "shaking like

jelly" in April of 1952, as the angry torrent battered its banks. With nearly 6,000 families evacuated from the flatlands into the homes of hill residents, with thousands of volunteers toiling to exhaustion on the river banks, the city achieved a new maturity through crisis. Miraculously, the levees held. And so did the feeling of unity among residents of once-rival sections, who forgot old jealousies in the pride of working together toward a better community.

Subsequently, completion of upriver dams controlled the river's seasonal flow. The threat of spring floods melted away. Areas once liable to inundation safely mushroomed housing developments. Happily, the city's new $1,750,000 water purification plant on the river bank had come through the flood stage undamaged. Before long, a $25,000,000 generating plant built by the Iowa Power and Light company was pouring 140,000 kilowatts per hour into the Iowa power grid from its location on a river bend south of town.

And finally, Broadway lost one of its traffic-strangling obstacles. Those railroad crossings, which once had meant life itself to a pioneer community, lost their power to block motorists when Governor Leo Hoegh snipped a ribbon that opened a soaring seven-block-long viaduct on August 17, 1955.

That was the year the *Nonpareil's* Bob O'Brien lost his last great battle — to cancer. In the inevi-

table reorganization, his successor as president of the New Nonpareil company was a thirty-six-year veteran of its financial management — Ora L. Taylor. Robert H. O'Brien, the eldest son, was drafted from management of the radio station to become publisher; the second son, Jack O'Brien, advertising manager, and Harry Mauck, Jr., continued as managing editor. Other employees have become stockholders: Frank M. Lane, city editor; Burke Gillespie, wire editor; Charles McDonald, circulation manager; Glen A. Gohlinghorst, classified advertising manager; Jack Kennedy, chief photographer; Robert Fischer, mechanical superintendent, and Norman Pflugshaupt, cashier.

Continued progressive management has brought circulation to nearly 24,000. The present inadequate press will be replaced soon with a newly-purchased five-unit Hoe press featuring color decks, capable of 80-page capacity and a median speed of 30,000 per hour. Installation awaits plans for enlarging the newspaper building.

Under the "saturation" policy of local news coverage, the *Nonpareil* now averages over thirty sustaining features of all types weekly. More than 500 local and area pictures appear monthly.

National recognition of such lively newspapering has come from the American Press Institute in New York, where Managing Editor Mauck has conducted seminar sessions on local news features for twelve out of the thirteen years since 1948.

Editor A. M. Piper's 1959 editorial, "Shall the State Be Master or Servant of the People?" won a top national award from the Freedoms Foundation of Valley Forge.

Another first place citation came in 1960 from the National Editorial Association in its Freedom of Information division. The *Nonpareil's* winning entry exposed Iowa's financial loss in interest by "dead storage" practices in banking state funds. Other prizes received include the AP sweepstakes photographic award four years in a row; a University of Wisconsin award for quality of news coverage; recognition for community service in fields of agricultural conservation, music and fine arts, religion, cancer education and community improvement.

Civic leaders regard Council Bluffs' 22% population growth since 1950 as a springboard for a "future unlimited." Its 19-square-mile area will be bisected in coming years by both north-south and east-west arteries of the Interstate Highway system. Two new bridges will speed traffic, in addition to the present two highway and two railroad bridges. Dock facilities handling grain and other merchandise are available for river barge shipping, which is pushing toward a million tons yearly for the area.

Aimed toward attracting new industry is the $360,000 Industrial Foundation area now being developed at the city's southern edge. The com-

munity has pursued an ambitious school-building program since it found itself with aging facilities in 1950. Eighteen new or replacement elementary units or additions have been built and equipped at a cost of $6,300,000, including two junior high schools occupied in September, 1961.

A whole story could be written around the frustrations the city endured until postoffice and Federal services could occupy their new Federal building in 1959.

Since 1953, twenty-nine new additions containing 1,662 residential sites have been developed, and private and public construction projects which were scheduled to be started in 1961 in city and vicinity amount to $7,500,000.

Plans are imminent for a sewage-treatment plant to comply with Federal river-pollution control. Augmented storm and sanitary sewer lines, street surfacing, constant amplification of off-street parking facilities, enlargement of water mains, telephone equipment, increased gas and power services, are keeping up with the population explosion.

Anticipating a figure of 80,000 by 1980, Council Bluffs is preparing. "The golden link in the corn belt" plans to replace "pioneer" with "progress" as its second century rolls on.

Among Council Bluffs' more distinguished sons and daughters are numbered Nathan M. Pusey,

president of Harvard University; the late Lee DeForest, "father of radio," who built the first three-electrode tube, audion amplifier and oscillation feed-back circuit which made possible radio broadcasting, radio-therapy and radio surgery. Bob Bender, son of the *Nonpareil's* Victor Bender, who started in Council Bluffs under his father in 1906, became general news manager of the United Press, one of the world's three largest news-gathering organizations. The late Anna Steese Richardson who interpreted women's role after enfranchisement as director of Good Citizens' bureau of the *Woman's Home Companion,* started her literary career as a reporter on the *Nonpareil* in 1896 at $5.00 a week.

Son of a pioneer Council Bluffs dentist, Dr. Charles E. Woodbury's accomplishments in the field of gold foil techniques earned him a portrait in the Dental Hall of Fame at the University of Southern California's School of Dentistry, after his death in 1952.

A Council Bluffs naval academy graduate, Julian Meyers, ended up in the 1930's as chief of naval operations and a rear admiral. George H. Carter, one-time city editor of the *Nonpareil,* served as "public printer" in Washington under President Harding, later as a member of the national printing commission.

Aerial view of Council Bluffs business district taken near completion of Broadway Viaduct in 1955.