

## The *Nonpareil* Is Born

"Pioneer journalism was of all professions the most perilous and discouraging. The man who succeeded must needs have a virile mind, immense capacity for work, undaunted courage in the face of almost unsurmountable difficulties." Thus commented the *Council Bluffs Nonpareil* in its editorial column of the fiftieth anniversary edition on September 2, 1906.

These words were lauding the newspaper's principal founder — William Wirt Maynard. Undaunted by the savage exchange of editorial barbs with the editor of the *Bugle* during his previous experience on the *Chronicle*, Maynard had accepted the Dodge-Baldwin offer of financial backing and decided to return to Council Bluffs. Controversial issues dividing the country needed a Republican spokesman, and Maynard knew what he wanted to say on questions of states' rights versus federal supremacy, and admission of new states with or without slavery.

The young newspaperman came back to Council Bluffs by stagecoach in March, 1857, riding the coattails of the bitterest winter weather in years. After conferring with his brother-in-law, A. D. Long, who was to be a partner in the venture,

Maynard took his sponsors' \$880 and made the four-day trip by stage and train to St. Louis to buy a press. Several weeks elapsed before the steamboat swung in to the dock at Wray's Landing south of town, to unload the precious "Wells Celebrated Power Press."

The publisher scarcely had time to note his twenty-fifth birthday anniversary in the rush to install the press and type cases. He and Long concentrated their whole effort on that important maiden issue May 2, 1857. The masthead revealed its chosen name, *The Council Bluffs Nonpareil*. Readers accepted the editor's definition as "without equal" in the same zesty spirit that prompted it.

That first issue had four pages of eight columns in twenty-three-inch depth, thirteen columns devoted to news and eleven to advertisements. Publication was to be "Every Saturday morning, at No. 1 Palmer Block on the third story" (now the corner of Broadway and Scott Street). Editorially, the paper espoused Republican principles, with reservation of "the right to adopt whatever coincides with our views and to condemn what we cannot reconcile with our belief . . . in a fearless and independent way."

Subscriptions cost \$2.00 a year, and job printing was solicited. Advertising from all the principal business houses and professional men was generous, amounting to a virtual town directory.

Maynard, though small in stature and light in build, was pithy of expression and a hustler in business. As the weekly publication dates rolled on, the paper prospered, especially when editorial sparks flew between Maynard and the *Bugle*.

Winter brought disillusionment. The panic of 1857 was spreading westward to Iowa with withering effect. Banks failed. Business was paralyzed when "Nebraska currency" was discredited. Maynard weathered the economic drouth by trimming both ad rates and paper size, accepting barter and wood to use in his steam-operated press. The *Chronotype* had early starved to death, but the *Bugle's* current editor, Joseph E. Johnson, and its publisher, L. O. Littlefield, held the edge on advertising patronage.

Maynard was left to shoulder the struggle alone when his partner died. At this juncture, nobody would have been more surprised than Bill Maynard if he could have foreseen that the *Nonpareil* would outlast over a score of competitors through the next century. History shows that only four were published for more than a few years — the *Bugle*, which traded political vitriol with the *Nonpareil* until 1870; the *Globe*, published from 1873 to the late 1890's, and the *German Freie Press*, published from 1875 until after World War I, but hardly classified as a community spokesman. The *Labor Press* has professed to speak for organized labor since 1933.

By 1858 the Cherry County gold rush to Colorado was bringing life-saving revenue to the town, and a gold-struck *Nonpareil* printer named William H. Kinsman served as the *Nonpareil's* "correspondent" at the scene. Bumper crops gave the impetus to stage a successful Pottawattamie County Agricultural Society fair under the leadership of Caleb Baldwin, president. Featured in the stock showings was L. W. Babbitt's famous horse, Cherokee, which won first prize at the county fair.

The *Nonpareil* made a modest beginning toward the news illustrations that would virtually flood its columns a century later, when it used a woodcut of a crowing rooster above an article concerning a Republican election victory in October, 1858. Subsequently, a map showing the route to the Colorado gold fields was repeated by request four times in a year. At intervals, Maynard used a Democratic donkey's head topping his acrid editorial references to the *Bugle*.

Sensational news of a distinguished visitor's arrival appeared in a front page box on August 13, 1859: "Hon. Abe Lincoln and the secretary of state for Illinois, Hon. O. M. Hatch, arrived in our city last eve and are staying at the Pacific House. The distinguished 'sucker' has yielded to the importunities of our citizens without distinction of parties and will speak on the political issues of the day at Concert Hall this evening." The next

issues described Lincoln's speech as "masterly and unanswerable."

Lincoln's visit was prolonged by an engine breakdown on the river boat which had brought him up from St. Louis. After he had examined the Riddle tract property which was to be security for a personal loan, Lincoln was free to visit his friends, W. H. M. Pusey and Thomas Officer. Local hostesses lionized him. At the Pusey reception, "nearly every citizen of the town came to shake Abe's hand."

Lincoln and destiny stood shoulder to shoulder when a sight-seeing tour led him to a towering bluff overlooking the Missouri River flood plain toward Nebraska. He spent some time with Grenville M. Dodge, extracting from that expert on railroad surveys the pertinent advantages of a Platte Valley route west for the hotly-discussed trans-continental railroad line. After his inauguration as president a year and a half later, Lincoln remembered Council Bluffs, and in 1863 designated it as the eastern terminus of the Union Pacific. (A monument erected in 1911 by the D.A.R. and the Lincoln Memorial Association now marks the spot where Lincoln viewed the plain.)

In 1860, Maynard announced, the *Nonpareil* has been anything but a paying institution for the past two years and reduced the paper's size to 7 columns, on a page 12 inches wide and 18 inches deep. When the Civil War exploded into reality

in April of 1861, the editor jumped into the dispute with all the editorial vigor he could summon. Council Bluffs was a melting pot of many opinions, but Maynard stood firmly for the Union, even when he worried over "the almost defenseless condition of our frontier, almost surrounded by treacherous tribes of Indians" when local guards had marched off. There could be danger, too, from slavery-committed Missouri less than 50 miles to the south.

Hundreds of volunteers enlisted in the Fourth Iowa Infantry after Secretary of War Cameron had commissioned Grenville M. Dodge as colonel and organizer. They trained at Camp Kirkwood, located on a plateau south of town which overlooked the Mosquito Creek valley where the Mormon Battalion had been formed thirteen years before. Dodge emerged from the war a major-general after outstanding battle service. He founded the Union's Secret Service operation, then served as reconstruction genius of war-shattered railroad supply lines; at home he survived a slanderous attack by the Copperhead movement whose "Knights of the Golden Circle" had many supporters.

Maynard had been joined in late 1860 by an aggressive young news editor, William S. Burke, who carried increased responsibility when Maynard began an eight-year stint as postmaster. War-induced prosperity made it possible to launch

a daily newspaper on January 28, 1862, while maintaining the weekly. Subscription rate was \$1 by carrier, 75¢ by mail. The first *Nonpareil* "extra" hit the streets when a general named U. S. Grant captured Fort Donelson February 17, 1862. Federal occupation of Corinth brought a second "extra" three months later, printed on a square of paper the size of a calling card.

When the Illinois and Mississippi Telegraph company proved miserably undependable, readers were forced to depend on printed letters from soldiers. Publication was simply suspended on days without news. The daily was dropped in April of 1863. Burke bought out Maynard's interest that fall; encouraged by expanding news transmission, he burst into daily, tri-weekly and weekly publication. The daily's format resembled a modern tabloid of four pages, with twelve on Sundays. In a sudden brainstorm, Burke changed the paper's name to *The Council Bluffs Slope* but public opinion forced him to change back in a hurry.

Wartime shortages of paper and news produced some issues of curious size and brevity. Some were mainly made up of advertising. War headlines often contained up to twelve decks, the words "etc., etc." used to imply more.

Burke is immortalized in present historical circles for his *Emigrants' Guide to the Gold Regions of the West* in 1866, printed in the *Nonpareil's* job shop and based on Dodge's maps made during

his railroad surveys. (A copy came to light in 1960 in the *Nonpareil's* reference bookcase; when Managing Editor Harry Mauck realized its present-day value of \$1,500, he first locked it up in a panic, then more sensibly entrusted it to the public library.)

Maynard returned to active editorship on December 22, 1866, and after several management shuffles, was associated with John W. Chapman when he died in 1876. "He wielded no feeble pen in whatever conflict of the kind he engaged," the newspaper eulogized in his obituary. "His motto was always for the right. Wrong and violence ever had an earnest opponent in him. He never compromised with himself or left anything unsaid that he thought necessary . . . to enforce his views."

Thomas P. Treynor, one of the *Nonpareil's* many owners, had said of him in 1872, "Maynard has one valuable quality in which he surpasses them all. He knows what to leave out!"