

The Davenport Democrat

Franklin Pierce was President, the Rock Island railroad had just reached the Mississippi, and "Bleeding Kansas" was evoking bitter words from northern Abolitionists when David Nelson Richardson published the first issue of the *Iowa State Democrat* at Davenport on October 15, 1855. This notable journal is now nearing its 100th birthday, and is one of the oldest dailies in Iowa in point of continuous publication.

D. N. Richardson, a young printer on the Peoria *Morning News*, had been induced to move to Davenport by promises of patronage and a \$1,000 bonus. Promises of patronage proved illusionary, but the newspaper took root nevertheless, and in 1859 D. N. induced his brother, Jenness J. Richardson, to join him as a partner. D. N. was a scholar who filled the editorial chair well. J. J. was a canny businessman who brought prosperity through careful management and advertising receipts. He was the first known Midwest publisher to visit the east to solicit advertisements. Of him George P. Rowell later wrote in *Printer's Ink*: "No advertiser, big or little, failed to receive a visit from him. A rebuff rolled off him like water off a duck's back. He was in no hurry, he could

wait, would much rather wait than call again. If the order was a small one, he preferred it to none. If the man had no money, there was no objection to taking payments in goods."

The team of the Richardson brothers, aided by B. F. Tillinghast as editor (and later by Ralph Cram), continued to guide the *Democrat* until 1915, shortly before the death of J. J. Richardson. Tillinghast, who had been lured from the *Moline Dispatch*, became a civic leader and a force in journalistic circles. He was Iowa Red Cross chairman and organized efforts to aid the Johnstown flood sufferers in 1889. He also backed a shipload of corn to aid starving Russians in 1892.

As he grew older J. J. Richardson relinquished the details of business management — first to a nephew, C. T. Darling from Vermont, and later to J. B. Richardson, a son of D. N. Richardson, who became an important figure in Davenport business circles. J. J. then plunged into politics, becoming Iowa Democratic committeeman, in which post he had final say on appointment of Iowa postmasters during the Cleveland administrations.

Several other leaders should be mentioned. M. N. Richardson, another son of D. N. Richardson, was a stockholder in the *Democrat* and kept close tab on its operations for half a century, though he never gave it full-time attention. George H. Ballou, a Civil War veteran who carried a bullet in his body and was sometimes miss-

ing at press time because of a convivial meeting with friends, was city editor from 1878 to 1890. J. E. Calkins succeeded Ballou, and has the distinction of editing the Half-Century Edition of 1905, a remarkable job of research.

In 1915, when J. J. Richardson relinquished control to the Lee Syndicate, Frank D. Throop came from Muscatine as publisher. The *Democrat* was the fourth Iowa paper to join the Lee group. Throop headed the paper for about eighteen years before moving to Lincoln, Nebraska, to become publisher of the Lee Syndicate's latest newspaper—the *Lincoln Star*.

Ralph Cram, who had entered the employ of the *Democrat* as a reporter in 1883, became managing editor in 1909 on the retirement of Tillinghast. Soon his name appeared as editor and publisher. Cram was not only a widely respected editor but also a pioneer in the field of aviation, flying with such men as Lindbergh, Rickenbacker, and Eddie Stinson. He traveled on most National Air tours, and at sixty-two became himself a pilot.

In June, 1940, Leland M. Turnbull, who was previously advertising manager of the *Times*, became publisher of the *Democrat*. Turnbull has at all times been a leader in civic activities. He has headed Community Chest campaigns, the Contemporary Club, been a director of the Chamber of Commerce and the Rotary Club, and a leader in activities of the First Presbyterian Church.

In its pioneer days the *Democrat* acquired first the *Morning Gazette* and in 1902 the *Evening Leader*. Among the personnel of the *Leader* at the time it was taken over by the *Democrat* was Hugh Harrison, then assistant city editor. Harrison started in the same capacity on the *Democrat*, later was advanced to city editor, and in 1940 moved to the managing editor's chair. William A. Ceperley, whose cartoons were a feature of the *Democrat* for many years, succeeded him as city editor.

In its editorial department the Davenport *Democrat* now boasts the services of five men working with Harrison and Ceperley, all of whom have been with the paper from twenty to thirty years. The *Democrat* is an independent Democratic newspaper, but has always aimed to support what its editors believe to be right, regardless of politics. It was the only daily in Iowa which supported President Truman in 1948.

HUGH HARRISON