

## The Muscatine Journal

The Muscatine *Journal* is the smallest as well as the oldest of the Lee newspapers in Iowa. It traces its ancestry to October 27, 1840, when the first copy of the Bloomington *Herald* came off a crude, hand-operated press set up in a wretched log cabin on the bank of the Mississippi at Bloomington, a town of just over 500 population. There were only 43,112 people in the Black Hawk Purchase at this time and the Territory of Iowa was six years removed from statehood.

Ownership of the Bloomington *Herald* passed into the hands of N. P. Stout and William Israel in 1847. That same year a thirteen-year-old youth, John Mahin, was apprenticed to it for board and clothing. John Mahin and his father, Jacob Mahin, purchased the *Journal* in July, 1852, from Noah H. McCormick who had owned it since 1848. The first *Journal* under Mahin management was issued July 17, 1852. Meanwhile, in 1849, the name of Bloomington had been changed to Muscatine and the newspaper had followed the town in its change of name.

John Mahin was an energetic and dynamic crusader. An implacable foe of the liquor interests, it was natural that in the course of his career he

should acquire bitter enemies. Principles established by Mahin in his more than fifty years at the helm of the *Muscatine Journal* have continued to guide those who followed in his footsteps.

In his first issue young John Mahin promised better type and content and set forth the principles of community service and interest which still guide the paper. "Locally," Mahin declared, "our paper will be devoted particularly to the interests of Muscatine county and city. Indeed, as our interests are identical, in justice to ourselves, we cannot act otherwise."

The *Journal* became Muscatine's first daily in July, 1855. Orion Clemens, brother of Samuel L. Clemens (Mark Twain), acquired an interest in the paper shortly after the Mahins purchased it, and Mark Twain was employed for a brief time.

Organization of The Journal Printing Company, the firm which now publishes the *Muscatine Journal*, was in 1878; the first officers were John Mahin, John B. Lee, and A. W. Lee. John B. Lee was the father of Mrs. Mahin and A. W. Lee.

A. W. Lee, the founder of the Lee group of papers, first demonstrated his newspaper ability when he became business manager of the *Muscatine Journal*, on which he had worked as bookkeeper and reporter in 1874.

Ownership and operation of the *Journal* remained in the Mahin family until it was purchased by A. W. Lee and associates in 1903 — the third

newspaper to be published by the Lee organization. After disposing of his interests in the *Journal*, John Mahin moved to Evanston, Illinois, to make his home near a son. He died at Evanston July 24, 1919, at the age of eighty-six.

Several notable Lee lieutenants were associated with the *Journal*. Walter Lane, who had previously served as advertising manager and business manager, succeeded Mahin as publisher. He died in 1907. Frank Throop, who had first become identified with the *Journal* in 1901 as city editor, followed Lane as publisher, with Lee P. Loomis succeeding Throop as managing editor. In 1915, when Throop acquired an interest in a Davenport newspaper, Loomis became publisher and was succeeded as managing editor by Ralph J. Leysen, who had previously been city editor.

Loomis continued as publisher until 1925, when he took the helm of the *Mason City Globe-Gazette*. He was followed as publisher by Clyde Rabedeaux, former advertising manager. Rabedeaux served as publisher until his death in December, 1942. C. Lloyd Bunker succeeded Rabedeaux as publisher after formerly serving as circulation manager and advertising manager. The names of George M. Hinshaw, D. D. Mich, and Walter Russell loom large in the story of the *Muscatine Journal*. Russell joined the staff in 1926 and has been city editor since 1930.

There have been many dramatic episodes in the

history of the *Muscatine Journal* since Mahin retired half a century ago. Thus, there was a protracted period of strife, growing out of a pearl button strike, which saw the community divided and bitterness flare into violence so intense that troops were sent to the city. The *Journal*, on the side of law and order, encountered condemnation from both sides in the dispute. When it was settled, the *Journal* set out upon a studied program of re-establishing harmony, in which it found many allies.

Later the *Journal* found itself pitted against an ingenious individual, Norman Baker, who claimed a "cure" for cancer. Sufferers were lured to Muscatine by the hundreds to undergo treatment at a "hospital" hastily converted from a fraternal organization hall. A bountiful income resulted for the proprietor and his associates. The *Journal* incurred the enmity of Baker when it published, as a matter of legitimate news, the names of those who had succumbed while under treatment.

An unprecedented campaign of abuse began over a radio station operated by Baker, involving the publisher, staff members, and executives of the *Journal*. It was continued for several years. The *Journal*, with the spirit of John Mahin of old, adhered to its right and duty to present the facts, even though some opposed publishing such information when it conflicted with their material prosperity. An opposition daily newspaper was

established as the feud raged. Eventually the "hospital" was closed, the license of the radio station revoked, and the opposition newspaper collapsed. Norman Baker subsequently ran afoul of the law with his promotion schemes and served a term in the federal penitentiary.

At about this same time the *Muscatine Journal* found itself called upon to report a "cow war" in Cedar County. The "cow war," an outgrowth of resistance to a state law requiring the testing of cattle for bovine tuberculosis, saw organized resistance to the testing program and eventually the calling out of national guardsmen. The tests were finally accepted as being in the best interests of the public, as farmers became educated as to their worth — a process in which the *Journal* played its part.

The *Muscatine Journal* was among the earliest of the smaller Iowa daily newspapers to add full leased wire service of the Associated Press, at first provided through a Morse telegraph operator and in more recent years by automatic teletypes.

In 1940 the *Journal* printed a centennial anniversary edition containing 230 pages, hundreds of illustrations, and tracing the history of the paper and the community over the span of the century. It was the largest paper ever published by the *Muscatine Journal*.

WALTER RUSSELL