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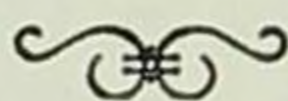
EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

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Wm. H. Hartman—Founder

On a chilly winter evening in March of 1858 a nineteen-year-old printer by the name of William H. Hartman sat in the parlor of Vaughan's lodging house in the little town of Delhi and discussed the future of Iowa with Martin V. Lott, a teamster who was taking a wagon load of supplies to the recently established town of Waterloo, in Black Hawk County.

Although the Panic of 1857 had caused a contraction of business, an air of optimism prevailed on the Iowa frontier. Everyone knew that the coming of the railroads would bring a flood of settlers, increased agricultural production, and a demand for eastern manufactures. Hartman and Lott agreed that those men who could acquire large tracts of land, or who could become the owners of established businesses, might ultimately become wealthy.

The story begins in May of 1856 when President Franklin Pierce signed the Land-Grant Act giving Iowa railroads the title to alternate sections

for six miles along both sides of their right-of-way. A similar act in 1850 had resulted in the construction of the Illinois Central to Dunleith, opposite Dubuque, in 1855. At long last the Dubuque and Pacific Railroad Company (chartered by the Iowa legislature in 1853) was able to proceed with construction. The first twenty-nine miles of track were laid in 1857, but the panic brought a halt to the project and the company was forced to default on its bonds.

This was the status of the railroad as Hartman and Lott sat before the log fire and debated whether prosperity would return. There is a curious significance about the accidental meeting of these two men at Delhi — virtually at the “end of track” in 1858.

Three years earlier, Martin Lott, the teamster, had hauled the first press and type from Rock Island to Waterloo. He had started out with two and one-half tons of equipment on his wagon, but muddy trails had forced him to leave some of the type cases and other equipment behind for a second trip. The journey from Cedar Rapids to Waterloo alone required eleven days of travel before Lott was able to deliver the press and a small amount of type to William Haddock enabling that ambitious editor to bring out the *Iowa State Register* on December 15, 1855, the first Waterloo newspaper.

Lott's role in this endeavor aroused Hartman's

intense interest for he had served as printer's apprentice under Haddock. Born at Allentown, Pennsylvania, on August 27, 1838, Hartman was the first son of Tilghman and Elizabeth Steckel Hartman. In 1840, when he was but two years old, Hartman's parents had moved by covered wagon to Tiffin, Ohio. While his father engaged in tailoring, young William attended the Tiffin school.

In the spring of 1852 the Hartman family again yielded to the lure of the frontier and moved to Iowa, where they purchased a log cabin and tract of land about a mile from Anamosa. Soon William was apprenticed to Haddock who had started publication of the *Anamosa News*, the first newspaper in Jones County.

Having completed his apprenticeship, Hartman returned to Tiffin, where he may have met and wooed his future wife, Miss Dorinda Z. Clark. Marriage then was out of the question for a penniless young printer, so Hartman headed back to Iowa, working for a time on newspapers in Dubuque and Delhi. Anxious to start a paper of his own somewhere, Hartman listened intently to Lott's description of Black Hawk County. Although he owed his landlord a past-due sum for lodging, the handsome brown eyed, curly haired ascetic-looking youth prevailed upon his landlord to wait for the money. The next morning the two men were on their way to Waterloo.

The trip with Lott was unpleasant for it was bitterly cold and the two men finally descended from the wagon to walk part of the way in order to keep warm. Eventually the line of trees which marked the Cedar River appeared on the horizon, and William H. Hartman arrived at the spot which was to be his future home and where he was to found one of the state's great newspapers.

The first permanent settlers in Waterloo had been George W. Hanna, his wife and two children, and a brother-in-law, John Melrose. Coming in 1845 from the vicinity of Marion, these sturdy pioneers traveled across the lush prairie, blooming with sweet william, prairie lilies, and violets. When they saw the sparkling Cedar River, Mrs. Hanna recalled that she cried out: "Boys, don't stop here. This seems to be the river of life and over yonder is Canaan. Let us cross over." This same feeling was expressed by many pioneer families upon arriving on the banks of the beautiful Cedar.

The earliest settlers had called Waterloo "Prairie Rapids," but the first postmaster, Charles Mullan, considered "Waterloo" more impressive and so certified the name of the village to Washington in 1851. The town was platted in 1854 when the population reached some 200 souls; in 1855 the first store was opened and the Sherman House constructed.

In 1858, when Hartman arrived, the population

numbered about 800, sufficient to support a newspaper. Hartman found work as a typesetter in the little shop (now 522 Commercial Street) where William Haddock was publishing the *Iowa State Register*. The terms of employment were not attractive, however, and Hartman soon discovered a better opportunity in Cedar Falls.

The first permanent settler in Black Hawk County had been William Sturgis who arrived at the site of Cedar Falls in 1845. Nine years later, on July 11, 1854, Dr. H. H. Meredith and William H. McClure had started the Cedar Falls *Banner* with A. F. Brown as editor, and Samuel C. Dunn and Joseph Farley as printers. It was a six-column folio (four pages) printed on equipment which had been purchased at Tipton, Iowa.

Although Cedar Falls had a larger population than Waterloo in the middle fifties, the *Banner* was unable to win adequate financial support. Dr. Meredith sold his interest to S. H. Packard who provided additional capital and assumed the editorial duties. "It did a flourishing business for some time," A. T. Andreas declared, "but as none of the parties were newspapermen, and all engaged in business, the affairs of the office were neglected, and its publication suspended some time in 1856 or 1857."

Fortunately, one can establish the exact date upon which Hartman and his new partner, George D. Ingersoll, went to Cedar Falls to resurrect the

Banner. An editorial by W. H. Hartman in the *Waterloo Daily Courier* of August 5, 1893, declared:

Just 35 years ago today the proprietor of the *Courier* thrust a so-called newspaper on a long-suffering community in this county. It was called the Cedar Falls *Banner*. The stripling was wafted to the gentle breezes in Cedar Falls, but it ceased to flutter in December following in consequence of our inability to "raise the wind" [of circulation].

Not the least of the difficulties faced by newspapers in those days was the inability to obtain regular supplies. That same year a group of Cedar Rapids men had financed construction of the river steamer, *Black Hawk*, to bring supplies to the growing population in the county by that name. The steamer managed to navigate the Cedar as far as Waterloo and arrived there for its first landing on October 8, 1858. But the inability of the steamer to navigate the rapids upstream from Waterloo meant that Hartman and Ingersoll could not rely on river transportation to obtain supplies in Cedar Falls. Moreover, the decline of the high waters of 1858 and 1859 ended the dream of a river traffic artery, and all supplies had to be brought in by wagon until the railroad arrived.

Meanwhile, William Haddock had not been doing well with his *Iowa State Register*. It was a Democratic paper, and Haddock had once expressed a firm belief in the doctrine of state rights

and the right of the South to hold slaves unmolested "so long as there is no help for it under the Constitution." There was increasing desire in Waterloo for a thoroughly Republican newspaper, and some residents so indicated to Hartman and Ingersoll, when the two young editors found it impossible to continue publication in Cedar Falls.

Seldom, if ever, did a newspaper have more humble beginnings than the *Waterloo Courier*. Hartman and Ingersoll put the creaky old Washington hand press, the type cases, and a few sticks of furniture on a bobsled and, on Christmas Day of 1858, headed across the seven miles of snowy prairie for their new home. This picturesque scene and the drama which it represents has been a favorite subject for historical pageants in after years. With this move, Hartman put his roving days behind and settled down to make his fortune. He little realized then the decades of toil, hardship, and abject poverty which lay ahead.

The initial prospects, however, proved encouraging. The first few days were spent in setting up the office in the little frame building at 611 Commercial Street. Subscriptions were solicited and results were successful in promises if not cash on the barrel head. On January 18, 1859, the first issue of *The Blackhawk Courier* was published, "Devoted to General News, Agriculture, Science and the Diffusion of Republican Principles."

During its first year the population of Waterloo

increased to between 1,000 and 1,200, and a considerable volume of legal notices continued to support the paper. Meanwhile, the *Iowa State Register* was not meeting with favor among the increasingly dominant Republican majority in the town. Haddock accordingly discontinued his *Iowa State Register*, selling much of his material to a new Waverly paper. His press, somewhat larger than that which had previously been used in printing the *Courier*, was purchased by Hartman and Ingersoll who printed their first eight-column folio — the *Waterloo Courier*, on November 22, 1859.

Unfortunately, a scant six months elapsed between the elimination of the *Iowa State Register* and the advent of a new competitor. It was on March 16, 1860, that H. A. and G. D. Perkins established the *Cedar Falls Gazette*, and the *Courier* lost the small amount of Cedar Falls advertising which had been appearing in its columns.

From this point on, financial insecurity began to plague the *Courier*. Hoping to obtain the support from legal notices and other advertising in Grundy County, Hartman founded the first newspaper in that county, the *Grundy County Pioneer*, at Grundy Center on August 2, 1860, with J. M. Chaffee as editor and John H. Wilson as printer. One side of the sheet was printed in Waterloo with the material used in the *Courier* and the other side was printed by Wilson at Grundy Center with the local news and such official advertising as the delin-

quent tax list. But the paper survived only about a year.

Despite such difficulties, Hartman was able to take two important steps. In September, 1860, he bought out his partner, Ingersoll, and in October he returned to Tiffin, Ohio, where he married Miss Dorinda Z. Clark. The couple immediately set up housekeeping in Waterloo where one of Mrs. Hartman's first tasks was to provide board for the printer's apprentices. Entries in Hartman's record book, which survives, indicate that the "devils" were paid during the early sixties from \$40 to \$50 for the first year plus board and washing. The salary increased to \$80 or \$90 for the third year.

An insight into the life of apprentices in those days is provided by Edwin Mesick who started work for the *Courier* as a printer's devil in 1863 at the age of fifteen and remained with the paper for forty-three years. He says:

After breakfast, we were introduced to a wood pile at the rear of the house where we found one of the dullest axes it was ever our good fortune to wield, and at once proceeded to demolish sundry slabs of red elm, so green that the water oozed out of them as we split them up. How the women folks ever prepared meals with such fuel has ever been a wonder to your scribe, but we cheerfully testify to the fact that they did, just the same.

Mesick wrote that the printing office at that time consisted of two rooms containing the old Washington hand press, a job press large enough to

print letterheads, a small quantity of news type, a few fonts of display type, some wood letters, racks for holding type cases, and a few pieces of furniture. The apprentices slept in bunks under the type cases.

Despite the lack of money and the general hard times, emigrants continued to arrive in the county and many settled in Waterloo. "We find the following notice of Waterloo in the *Dubuque Herald* of the 22 inst." declared Hartman on March 27, 1860. "It is correct, we believe, with the exception that our population is not put down large enough. Instead of 1,500 inhabitants, we now have 1,800 or 2,000."

Waterloo — the largest inland town between Dubuque and Sioux City — is situated on the Cedar, the noblest river in the state, and which at this point flows in a broad, strong current through the town. The place contains 1,500 inhabitants and has a most beautiful site, the prairie coming boldly up to the stream.

Meanwhile, Hartman and all Waterloo waited impatiently for the arrival of the railroad. Construction on the Dubuque and Pacific line had been resumed in the summer of 1859, and the road reached Independence by December 12. The following March the railroad reached a spot 78 miles west of Dubuque.

Hoping to exploit the enthusiasm of Waterloo citizens for the railroad, the directors now demanded that the city subscribe the enormous sum

of \$200,000 in stock as the price of crossing the river at Waterloo and establishing a terminus there. But the county judge (who then had the powers of the present board of supervisors) refused to sign the bonds. The railroad retaliated by accepting the offer of Cedar Falls citizens for \$75,000 worth of land, laid tracks north of Waterloo, and crossed the Cedar into that city in the spring of 1861.

Realizing that the city which obtained the repair shops would enjoy the most rapid growth, Waterloo citizens stole a march on Cedar Falls by donating a large tract of land east of the city and raising \$30,000 to construct the railroad shops. With good feeling restored, the railroad laid tracks into downtown Waterloo where a passenger depot was erected.

These were days of intense rivalry between Waterloo and Cedar Falls. The legislature in 1853 had designated Cedar Falls as the county seat of Black Hawk, and the deplorable but exciting theory developed in Waterloo that the county seat could be moved if only the official county records and plat books could be stolen from Cedar Falls. An expedition marched to Cedar Falls one dark night and prepared to commit the crime, but a traitor had warned the good burghers of Cedar Falls who armed themselves with rotten eggs and promptly forced the Waterloo band to retreat in stinking humiliation.

But Waterloo soon was able to gain by legal means what it had been unable to win by force. The legislature called an election in 1855, and Waterloo won the county seat, even though Cedar Falls citizens muttered darkly that Waterloo had imported numerous visitors from Benton County to win the day.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the editor of the *Courier* and the editors of the *Cedar Falls Gazette* were not averse to building reader interest by hurling epithets at each other. There were few issues of the *Courier* or the *Gazette* in those days which did not contain a "challenge" or a "reply to a challenge." Thus, on May 23, 1861, the *Gazette* declared:

Although the cars commenced running regularly to Waterloo almost a month before they did to this place, we will bet that there has been double the amount of freight handled at our depot than at that of Waterloo, and we will challenge the *Courier* to produce the figures.

After further invective about alleged *Courier* insults to Cedar Falls, the editors of the *Gazette* awaited a reply. It was not long in coming. After characterizing the *Gazette* as a "smut mill," the *Courier* declared:

That we have pitched into "naughty rival neighbors" is untrue. The *Courier* has never yet spoken a disrespectful word of Cedar Falls; but the *Gazette* has been incessantly "blowing" about Waterloo. That paper finds fault with every enterprise our town undertakes. . . . The people of

Cedar Falls ought by all means to reward the *Gazette* for telling such contemptible fibs in favor of their little village.

These insults, however, were merely designed to build up civic pride and spur citizens into competitive activity on such projects as the attempts to obtain the railroad repair shops. Following the Civil War, the Perkins brothers went to Sioux City where they began publication of the *Journal*, one of Iowa's most influential newspapers today.

If civic rivalry was good fun, however, both the Perkins brothers and Hartman were intensely interested in promoting the success of the Republican party both nationally and in Iowa. On May 1, 1860, Hartman had written of Republican prospects:

The coming political contest will be the most important one in which the people of Iowa have ever participated. The election of a Republican president (and the consequent change in the present extravagant and corrupt administration of our national affairs) ought of itself to be of sufficient importance to call forth the most strenuous exertions of our party to secure its accomplishment.

This hoped-for result on November 6 of that year was only to bring a period of hardship and financial distress for Hartman. War came with the firing on Fort Sumter, and the *Courier* printed the news two days later on April 16, 1861, under the following headline on column three of page two:

FORT SUMTER ATTACKED AND BURNED
THE AMERICAN FLAG HAULED DOWN
and
THE PALMETTO WAVING OVER FORT SUMTER

The act aroused the residents of Black Hawk County to a fury of patriotism. No one foresaw the bloody struggle which lay ahead; and the *Courier* bravely declared:

For four weeks after the fourth of March the administration of Mr. Lincoln seemed to be as inert and weak, and timid as that of his predecessor; yet now we see that it was working with extraordinary vigor, but so quietly that neither friends nor foes could tell what it was doing or whether it was doing anything.

In Waterloo, mass meetings were held to whip up enthusiasm, and a popular speaker was a minister, "Father" Eberhart, who gave five sons to the Union Army and volunteered himself as a chaplain.

A secessionist lawyer named Rawson was one day dragged from his hiding place and brought to the street in front of the Sherman House, where a rope with a noose at the end dangled from the ridge pole which extended over the sidewalk. An eyewitness later described the affair:

With disheveled hair and torn coat, he was mounted on a dry goods box and made a speech to the assembled crowd in which he expressed very modified views on the subject which then engrossed them all.

The departure of men for the war did not sim-

plify the problem of running a newspaper. Hartman himself had suffered an injury in his youth which prevented him from serving in the field, but his young apprentice, Ner Corson, and his helper, Barton Clark, promptly enlisted. Clark was Mrs. Hartman's younger brother. Hartman hired other apprentices but they, too, soon enlisted; at one point the hard-working editor was left all alone in the office attempting to get out a paper.

By this time, the Hartmans had a family of three children: John C., born on June 21, 1861; William D., born on February 16, 1863; and Genevieve, born on July 6, 1867. The father was sometimes forced to desperate measures to keep the paper going. A good printer could set only about a column and one-half in a day. Leads and slugs had to be cast and sawed by hand. The task of moulding the mixture of glue and molasses to the press rollers, J. C. Hartman later recalled, "was one requiring skill and infinite patience."

Hartman was at times forced to reduce the size of the paper to six columns because not enough type could be set nor paper of the right size obtained. Despite such difficulties, he missed few editions.

Although the first cylinder press had been obtained to replace the old Washington hand press, this in itself created problems as the following desperate "Apology" reveals:

No paper was printed in this office last week for the very

reason that our "institution" was "froze up" completely. We did our "prettiest" to get up a paper, but all our efforts proved fruitless. The office was as cold as a barn all last week, and with eight windows on the north side, a chimney with no draft, and having nothing but green, water-soaked elm wood with which to get up steam (for the press), we would like to know how anybody can set type or do anything else in a printing office under such circumstances. We will issue the Courier regularly hereafter if it "takes a leg."

Poorly trained apprentices created other difficulties as this paragraph in the issue of July 31, 1861, reveals:

After printing the outside of this issue, one of our employees, in attempting to lift the fourth page off the press, accidentally let it drop on the floor, and the consequence is, every line of advertising was knocked into "pi."

On July 1, 1861, Hartman noted: "Our receipts on subscriptions since June 1 are as follows: To wood, \$1.50; peas, 75 cents; money (at least said to be money by those who saw it) 42 cents."

Edwin Mesick, the apprentice who started work in 1863, recalled those terrible times:

The man in business today [1909] can hardly realize the struggles and hardships borne by the businessmen of a half-century ago. There came a time in the history of the Courier when its proprietor had to have money, no matter at what cost, or lose his whole investment. Then it was that Mr. Hartman applied to a local money loaner and was compelled to pay the outrageous price of 3 per cent a month for the accommodation of a small loan.

The *Courier* needed new funds if it was to survive. Finally, on November 14, 1864, J. W. Logan purchased a half interest. Publication was continued "until the end of the war" although on a desperate basis. At last, on April 10, 1865, the *Courier* was able to report the stirring scenes in Waterloo when the news arrived of General Robert E. Lee's surrender. But it was a short-lived celebration, as one eyewitness recalled:

Is there a soul living in Waterloo of mature years who cannot remember that fateful Saturday morning when business houses were closed and men stood in whispering groups about the street, seemingly paralyzed, stunned by the sudden, awful news that our beloved president was assassinated?

Having survived the war, the *Courier* found itself confronted with new competition in Waterloo. On May 13, 1868, the *Iowa State Reporter* was started by H. Q. Nicholson with great bravado as a Democratic paper. It was a daring move, for Black Hawk County in 1868 had cast only 841 Democratic votes out of 3,421 cast in the election.

Late in the year Nicholson was called South by the illness of his father. Shop employees continued publication for some time, but when the editor failed to return, it was allowed to expire. J. J. Smart & Matt Parrott purchased the material and subscription list in February of 1869, and publication of the *Reporter* was resumed on April 14, 1869, as a Republican paper.

The *Reporter* provided vigorous competition for the *Courier*. Matt Parrott, who was to serve as mayor of Waterloo and later as lieutenant governor of Iowa, was an able editor. Whatever the reasons, Hartman and Logan in April of 1871 entered into a contract to sell the *Courier* to M. C. Woodruff and Charles Aldrich, later curator of the Historical Department of Iowa. Circumstances surrounding the sale are obscure, but J. C. Hartman, in his history of the *Courier*, declared:

Mr. Hartman did not relinquish his interest, for the terms of the contract were not consummated. In October, 1871, he took over Mr. Aldrich's interest. A. J. Felt acquired Mr. Woodruff's interest February 5, 1875 and the firm became Felt & Hartman. Fourteen months later, on April 16, 1876, Mr. Hartman became sole owner.

Hartman was able to regain control of his newspaper because President Grant had appointed him postmaster in 1873, and he could divert part of his salary from this position into support of the *Courier*. He served as postmaster until 1885 when President Grover Cleveland named a Democrat successor.

Another postoffice connection was to have significance in *Courier* history. A few years after Hartman retired as postmaster, a young student by the name of J. P. von Lackum became one of the first three mail carriers in Waterloo at the salary of \$600 a year. With his savings from this position, he managed to graduate from the dental

school at the State University of Iowa. He later married Miss Genevieve Hartman, and their children own the family stock in the *Courier* today.

Meanwhile, Matt Parrott, who had written in 1869 that "An editor . . . has no business holding office," severed his connection with the *Reporter* to enter politics. During the seventies the *Courier* and the *Reporter* ran neck-and-neck in circulation. A newspaper directory in 1876 gives the *Courier* circulation as 1,224 as compared to 1,200 for the *Reporter*.

But the Democrats were unhappy without a paper to promote their views; and on September 11, 1879, Isaiah Van Metre and J. H. Wilson started the *Cedar Valley Tribune*, later to become the *Waterloo Tribune*. Van Metre had been admitted to the bar in Cedar Rapids in 1858, had purchased the *Humboldt County Independent* in 1872, and had acquired a half interest in the *Cedar Falls Recorder* in 1877. He became sole owner of the *Tribune* in 1885. The paper became a daily, the *Waterloo Morning Tribune*, in 1904.

Previously, however, the *Courier* had experimented with daily publication for a week during the county fair period in the fall of 1878. On December 13, 1890, the newspaper became a daily permanently. The W. H. Hartman Company was incorporated in 1891 with W. H. Hartman as president and J. C. Hartman, his son, as secretary-treasurer.

Meanwhile, the *Courier* had been keeping pace with mechanical developments in the printing field. In the seventies, an attempt had been made to replace the old Bookwalter steam boiler with an upright gas engine, but this primitive mechanism proved unsatisfactory. Then a water motor was tried, but pressure proved too variable for reliability. Finally, an improved gasoline engine (manufactured in Waterloo) was used satisfactorily until the advent of electric motors.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century saw Waterloo change from a small frontier village to a prosperous trading center and the site of small industries which were to lay the groundwork for later industrial development. The population of 5,508 in 1875 increased to 12,580 by 1900. The old dream of a Cedar Valley railroad reached fruition in September of 1870 when the first train of the Burlington, Cedar Rapids & Minnesota Railroad (later acquired by the Rock Island) arrived. On August 18, 1884, the first train of the Chicago, Great Western Railroad arrived, giving Waterloo direct connections with Des Moines and Kansas City. Horse-drawn streetcar service was inaugurated in 1885, and eleven years later the company which was to become the Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern Railway Company (an electric interurban line) began electric service.

But W. H. Hartman was destined not to see the rapid growth of Waterloo in the early part of the

twentieth century. He died on July 1, 1895, revered and loved by thousands of his subscribers. Staff members recounted how in his later years subscribers or advertisers would come to the *Courier* office and refuse to do business with anyone but "Will" Hartman. He had passed through long years of fatiguing work and endured real poverty in his attempts to keep the newspaper going, but he left a business firmly entrenched in the commercial life of the city and in the respect of Waterloo citizens.

DAVID DENTAN