

# THE PALIMPSEST

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## The Press in 1858

Iowa reached the peak of a tremendous population growth in 1858. This growth, coupled with the political turmoil in Iowa and the nation, led to the establishment of a score of frontier newspapers such as the Bloomfield *Democratic Clarion*, the Corning *Sentinel*, the Corydon *South Tier Democrat*, the Bedford *Iowa South-West*, the Simoda *New Idea* (Shelby County), the Onawa *Adventure*, the Harrison County *Flag*, the Sioux City *Register*, the Cerro Gordo *Press*, the Howard County *Sentinel* (New Oregon), the North Iowa *Gazette* (Vernon Springs), and the Butler *Transcript* (Clarksville). In addition, such towns as Dubuque, Davenport, and a sprinkling of smaller villages in eastern and central Iowa acquired one or more papers in 1858.

While over twenty newspapers were added in 1858, fully seventeen fell by the wayside, including some of the above. Moreover, several newspapers that were begun in 1857 were suspended in 1858, among them the Crescent City *Oracle*, Fayette *Journal*, the Muscatine *Zeitung*, and

*Ward's Own* of Bloomfield. The printing press and type of the *Zeitung* was moved to Keokuk, that of the *Harrison County Flag* from Calhoun to Magnolia, while the *Butler Transcript* press was trundled from Clarksville to Winterset.

There was plenty of evidence of hard times among editors in 1858. Waning emigration, the withering effect of the Panic of 1857, and a disastrous crop failure caused subscribers and advertisers alike to overlook their debts to newspapers. The need for local assistance was emphasized by all editors. On December 28, 1858, the Bloomfield *Democratic Clarion* noted:

Recollect, if a home weekly paper is to be supported, home influence is to do it. Every dollar sent to Eastern papers is at the expense of the local papers. The county acquires prominence through its paper more than any other way, and to every one who has county interests at stake, his home paper is a necessity. Never will such a man take a paper printed away from home until he is able to take a second paper.

That casualties were common is attested by the editor of the Webster City *Hamilton Freeman* of November 12, 1858:

We very much regret to learn that the St. Charles Intelligencer and Boonsboro Democrat have succumbed under the pressure of the times, and gone under. Indeed, we had the blues all day in consequence of this information. The coming winter will be a very hard one for the country press of this state, and we believe at least a score or more papers will be suspended before Spring. Those

that weather the storm, will only do so by the most rigid economy. We regret to part company with our esteemed contemporaries, and hope they will "turn up" ere long under more favorable auspices. Dennison, of the Democrat, is one of the best fellows in the world, but an awful loco-foco — one who gives and takes sledge-hammer blows, and meets his political enemies in the best humor.

In another column of the same issue the Webster City editor warned subscribers of the *Hamilton Freeman*:

We hope that those of our friends whose subscriptions are unpaid, will bear in mind the fact that it is with the utmost difficulty that a newspaper can be kept up in these hard times. Papers, with seemingly fairer prospects than ours, are being discontinued in all parts of the State; but we mean to go through, or "spile a-trying." But we base this intention upon the hope that our friends will stand by us in the effort. Every man, without exception, therefore, who owes us on subscription is earnestly requested to pay up. As Shakespeare pathetically remarks — "Help, Cash-us, or we sink!"

In addition to delinquent subscribers and advertisers, the difficulty of securing newsprint proved a costly problem to editors located in central Iowa. On October 14, the editor of the *Mitchell County Republican* apologized for reducing his paper to a half sheet, blaming his extra duties at the county fair and at the election for it. On December 12, 1858, the same editor declared:

There will be no paper issued from this office next week. We did hope, when we issued half sheet last week, that we should not be thrown back again, but we have been

unavoidably, and "lay over" with the hope of being able to issue regularly hereafter, during the winter.

The editor complained that he had been unable to get his newsprint from McGregor, where it had arrived by railroad expressman. In 1857 he had paid \$20 to bring his newsprint from McGregor but he could not afford to do so this time. On January 20, 1859, when publication finally was renewed, he explained something of the cost of printing.

The Paper upon which the Republican is now printed cost us here, \$7.25 per bundle. We purchased it of Bradner, Smith & Co., wholesale paper dealers, No. 12 LaSalle st., Chicago, Ill., at \$6 per bundle; freight to McGregor, and thence here, \$1.25 per bundle. The rates are the same for two or ten bundles. This we find to be much cheaper than to pay \$7.00 at Beloit, or \$8.50 at McGregor, or \$9.00 at Decorah. The paper speaks of its own quality.

As long as a newspaper was not a competitor the average Iowa editor was friendly. Thus, the Ottumwa *Courier* chronicled the sale of Bloomfield's *Ward's Own* to H. B. Horn, who promptly renamed it the *Davis County Index*. The *Courier* editor described *Ward's Own* as "one of the most spicy little papers in the State" and wished Mr. Horn every success with his new *Index*. The Dubuque *Times* wished "many days and great success" to the *Index* and congratulated Mr. Horn on having the "good sense" to change the paper's name.

Not so friendly was the *Mitchell County Re-*

*publican* toward a nearby Osage editor whose paper joined the steady procession of publications that fell by the wayside.

The [North] Iowan came to us last week minus one of its original proprietors, and "shorn" of one column. This week its editor gives us his valedictory; thus after a brief and inglorious career he retires — he has speedily "run out." During his brief editorial career he has been "shown the door" in a state convention; organized another upon the sandy foundation of the Lecompton Swindle, been its champion till its putrid carcass was a stench in his nostrils, been kicked and cuffed about by the Douglasites, and finally sold out to them.

By his choice billingsgate and falsehoods he has won the contempt of the editorial fraternity, and soon departs to regions unknown to mend his broken fame and fortune.

The bitter exchange between rival political factions knew no bounds in 1858. Casting a malevolent look in the direction of the *Chariton Mail*, the *Des Moines Iowa Weekly Citizen* of January 27 sneeringly remarked:

This ferocious, diminutive, underdeveloped upstart, in attempting to make the Republican party responsible for the disunion convention, held some months since in Cleveland, thus relieves itself: "and we still assert that they are responsible, and what is more, we assert that *that convention was upheld by every republican paper in the State, the Citizen not excepted.*" . . . If outright falsehood do injury to him only who manufactures and circulates them, how much injury is inflicted upon the moon by the nocturnal yelping of a misshapen quadruped, of the canine species, in Lucas county.

Doubtless the very uncertainties of their profession caused Iowa editors to commence holding annual conventions — that of 1858 being held in Cedar Falls. The need for relatively uniform subscription, advertising, and printing rates, and the wages due printers and typesetters would naturally receive considerable attention. Since the clarion voice of the editor was the most articulate on the frontier it is not surprising that the birthday of Benjamin Franklin, early American printer, should be observed with parades and speeches in several Iowa communities.

A veritable thorn in the side of most editors was the efforts of county officers to cut down the cost of printing and advertising for county government in order to make an impressive economy record for the voters. This was followed even though the printer received nothing for his labors. According to the Dubuque *Express and Herald*:

A paper in a county does more to give it character abroad, to attract immigration; to increase the basis of taxation, and to protect the public interests than the efforts of any hundred of the citizens of the county. . . . County officers do not reflect upon the value of the county press; nor are they informed as to the expense of publishing a Newspaper, or they would never refuse to pay remuneration prices for county work. . . . If the subject was properly understood, county officers would agree with us in saying that *a county had better support a Good Newspaper by a direct appropriation* than to be without one, and they would not only pay regular prices for work but refuse to take a reduction.

Newspapers provide the best single source of information on life in Iowa in 1858. Local advertisements, the business cards of professional men, train schedules, steamboat arrivals and departures, stagecoach and hotel news items and advertisements, land sales, blacksmiths, livery stables, wagon manufacturers, gunsmiths, barbers, bakers, candlemakers, brewers and brickyards, schools, academies, and female seminaries, confectioners, ice cream parlors, nurseries, and bookstores, these are but a few of the scores of items that shed light on activities in the Hawkeye State a century ago.

The printing press, which rolled out newspapers, city di-

rectories, emigrant guides, medical reports, state documents, and fraternal and religious books and pamphlets, formed a busy section of community life.

The press in 1858 was responsible for several books and over sixty known imprints or pamphlets.

**E. BAILEY,**  
WHOLESALE AND RETAIL  
**CONFECTIONER.**  
**BRADY STREET,**  
West Side, between Third and Fourth,  
**DAVENPORT, IOWA.**

Oranges, Lemons, Almonds, Filberts, Oysters, Ice  
Cream, Brazil Nuts, Cocoa Nuts, Pecan Nuts,  
Pea Nuts, Walnuts, Etc.

ALWAYS ON HAND AND FRESH IN SEASON.

**J. METZGER'S**  
**UNION BAKERY,**  
No. 18 EAST SECOND STREET,  
NORTH SIDE BET. BRADY AND PERRY,  
**DAVENPORT, IOWA.**

MANUFACTURER OF ALL KINDS OF  
**CRACKERS, PIES, CAKES & BREAD,**  
WHOLESALE AND RETAIL.

Butter, Soda, Water, Boston, Sugar and Pie Nic  
Crackers, Pilot Bread, Cracknel Biscuit,  
Pies, Cakes and Bread.

Orders executed with Dispatch, and delivered to Depots and  
Steamboats and all parts of the City free of Charge.

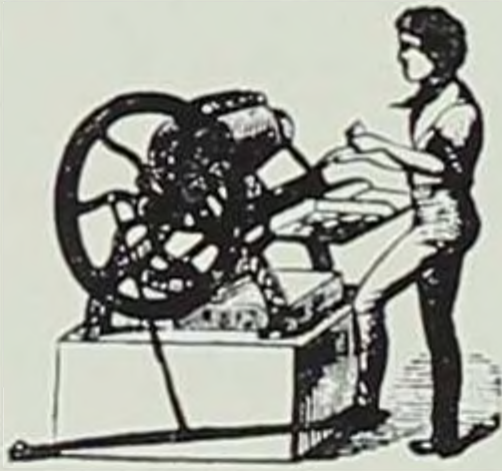
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Franc B. Wilkie's *Davenport Past and Present*, printed by Luse, Lane & Co. of Davenport, was probably the most ambitious volume. It was handsomely illustrated with lithographs made in New York City and contained 333 pages. Not so ambitious was *A Brief Description of Fort Dodge,*

*Iowa: Its Agricultural, Mineral, and Commercial Facilities and Character* which was printed by A. S. White at the Sentinel Book & Job Printing Office in Fort Dodge. Lyons, Iowa, published a similar pamphlet.

**IOWA STATE DEMOCRAT**  
STEAM PRESS PRINTING ESTABLISHMENT

POST OFFICE  
BUILDING,  
BRADY ST.,



DAVENPORT,  
IOWA.

The *State Democrat* is one of the best Advertising Mediums in the West, having a large and rapidly increasing circulation.

**PUBLISHED DAILY & WEEKLY**  
Daily, \$6; Weekly, \$2, per annum.

**JOB PRINTING**

Of every description executed with Neatness and Dispatch:  
D. M. RICHARDSON, }  
GEO. B. WEST. } **RICHARDSON & WEST, Prop'rs.**  
D.T.

Equally valuable were the ambitious city directories issued in such flourishing towns as Davenport, Dubuque, and Keokuk. These not

only listed all the citizens but included a classified section containing many unusual plates on the various industries and professions. The Dubuque Emigrant Association was particularly ambitious: witness its 52-page *First Catalogue of Land For Sale by the Dubuque Emigrant Association* and its two editions of *Northern Iowa*.

In 1958 Iowans find the "Committee of One Hundred" prepared to solve their problems on such subjects as agriculture and industry, educa-



tion, taxation, and reapportionment. A century ago a lone citizen who signed himself "Iowa" courageously offered his solution to similar problems in the Davenport *Weekly Gazette* of January 14:

There is one thing that Davenport must do, to retain its great vitality and healthy growth; she must adopt every species of manufacturing that lays within her grasp; for every new manufacturing establishment located here gives character and permanency to the place. Persons who own real estate certainly depend upon the growth of the city to find sale for their realty. . . . With all her natural advantages, will the property holders stand and see manufacturing interests languish and die? If such a thing is tolerated, not many years hence, many of your platted city lots will be potato fields. If any man in the city, who owns real estate, would make out an annual statement of his wealth, and tax himself 5 per cent and invest the same in some kind of a manufacturing establishment here, the real property would enhance in value more than 20 per cent annually; and still realize a handsome profit out of his manufacturing investment.

In 1858 there was no Ezra Taft Benson but, despite a calamitous crop failure due to wet weather, the Davenport *Weekly Gazette* of April 29 had a solution for disheartened farmers:

Editors, who for so many years have been advising everybody to go to farming, must endeavor to find some other business for the unemployed, as the world . . . now that a general peace seems to have possessed it, is overstocked with provisions. Hard times caused by too much to eat! . . .

Instead of a war to make prices of produce higher and times better, let us encourage home production and convert our iron ore into rails instead of depending upon England, and manufacture within ourselves all of the gewgaws to which we are indebted to France. Our manufactories are idle and our importations do not increase. Until a change is effected in our policy, times will continue hard and men find life a continuous struggle. Society is badly constituted when men have to look for their own prosperity to war among other nations. In proportion as a country is self-reliant is it independent. The same may be said of a city with respect to other cities. . . . Every manufactory established in Davenport contributes to make our city self-reliant and consequently independent.

With Iowa newspapers serving as a barometer, it would seem that Iowa prosperity, then and now, was influenced by wars, the weather, and economic recessions.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN