

# THE PALIMPSEST

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## Darlings of the Press

In the forty years that have elapsed since the writer began his research in Iowa and Upper Mississippi Valley newspapers, he has gone through almost two thousand years of these valuable historical sources. While his original research, which began in 1927, dealt with the Mississippi River and steamboats, he was not long in discovering there were tremendous gaps in Iowa historical research, particularly in the period prior to 1870. Some fields of history, such as the French and Spanish Periods, or Prehistoric Man and the Indian, had received considerable attention. Far greater attention, on the other hand, had been accorded the constitutional, political, and governmental phases of Iowa history. Meanwhile, agriculture and industry, religion and education, music and drama, theater and lyceum, blacksmiths and locksmiths, carpenters and bricklayers, had been largely bypassed and had received scant attention by the historian.

Newspaper editors played an important role in

furthering those things which were for the public good. Thus, they were prime movers in the founding of schools, churches, and Sunday schools, in the development of bands and other musical groups, in the planting of trees and the improvement of streets, and in the encouragement of theater and lyceum programs. Many communities could attribute their growth and development to the enthusiasm and energy of their local editor.

In addition to these very desirable pioneer needs, editors were wont to fill their columns with words of advice to young and old, rich and poor, on the importance of following strict moral and spiritual precepts. There was no need for a "Dear Abby" or a "Dear Ann" in pioneer Iowa for newspaper editors invariably filled this role—most of them with relish. The best way to court a girl, the problems of love and marriage, and the dispensing of free advice to young people became an editorial prerogative. Not all such advice was original, for editors found plenty of grist in the columns of other newspapers. For example, while much of this advice was in a serious vein, a surprising amount might be characterized as humor. In other words, almost all editors had a good sense of humor and accordingly they were not slow in recounting to their readers any funny incidents that happened in their own community, or copying such incidents as they appeared in the columns of

their fellow editors. The character and personality of an Iowa editor is frequently revealed in the columns of his papers.

One must not gather from the above that all Iowa editors were sanctimonious, or that only they had a sense of humor. The press of the Nation, and especially the Midwest, seemed to revel in this policy. Thus, the following item from the *Prairie du Chien Patriot* of November 10, 1864, paid the usual high praise to American women, and won widespread attention from Iowa editors.

She is generally graceful in her figure, slow in her gait, mild in her looks, proud in her mien, engaging in her conversation, delicate in her expressions, quick at blushing, chaste in her thoughts, innocent in her manners, improving on acquaintance, generous to a fault, ready to weep with one in her distress, solicitous for the poor, sincerely religious, eminently humane, constant in her attachment, a fond wife, a tender mother, tenacious of her word, jealous of her honor, prudent in her conduct, circumspect in her house, and what is very natural, cannot keep a secret.

Another tribute, widely disseminated in the Iowa press, appeared in the *Clarence Iowa Age* of June 4, 1868.

### *A Wife's Love*

Woman's love, like the rose blossoming in the arid desert, spreads rays over the barren plain of the human heart, and while all around it is black and desolate, it rises strengthened from the absence of every other alarm. In no situation does the love of a woman appear more beauti-

ful than that of a wife. Parents, brothers, and friends, have claims upon the affections—but the love of a wife is of a distinct and different nature. A daughter may yield her life to the preservation of a parent—a sister may devote herself to a suffering brother; but the feelings which induce her to this conduct are not such as those which lead a wife to follow the husband of her choice through every pain and peril that can befall him; to watch him in danger, to cheer him in adversity, and ever remain unalterable at his side in the depths of ignominy and shame. It is a heroic devotion which a woman displays in adherence to the fortunes of a hapless husband. When we behold her in domestic scenes, a mere passive creature of enjoyment, an intellectual joy, brightening the family with her endearments and her love for extreme joy which that presence and those endearments are calculated to impart, we can scarcely credit that the fragile being who seems to hold her existence by a thread, is capable of supporting the extreme of human suffering; nay, when the heart of man sinks beneath the weight of agony that she would maintain her pristine powers of delight, and, by her word of comfort and patience, lead the murmerer to peace and resignation.

Such were the qualities with which many Iowa women were blessed. And a legion of Iowa men stood ready to attest to the truth of these abiding virtues.