

## The Bloomington Herald

On October 27, 1840, the first edition of the *Bloomington Herald* issued from a primitive press in a humble cabin. Vast as is the difference between the Bloomington of 1840 and the Muscatine of 1940, it is no greater than the difference between the *Herald* of that early day and the *Journal* of the present. The city has prospered and grown through lean years and fat ones; so has the newspaper, which one hundred years ago began its course under none too favorable circumstances.

"Encouraged by the flattering prospects of the success of a Democratic paper in Bloomington, held out by many of its citizens and of the counties adjacent to Muscatine, professing the principles we advocate, as well as many of the opposite party, all looking to the interest of the country at large," Thomas Hughes and John B. Russell "at a very heavy expense," established the *Herald* at the small but promising river town just four days after the first issue of the rival Whig *Iowa Standard* had been published.

Something of the condition under which newspapers were begun at that early period is reflected

in an editorial on the second page of the first issue. "So numerous", declared the *Herald*, "have been the prospectus here-to-fore circulated for obtaining subscriptions to the newspapers, to be published in this place, which have ended in wind, that the people generally have been so deceived that they now look upon all with suspicion and are unwilling to give in their names until publication has been commenced. Aware of this fact, we have commenced the *Herald* with a smaller number than we would have felt safe in doing under any circumstances yet we are by no means discouraged. Our list is already sufficiently large to give us the fullest confidence of success. The democracy of Muscatine are too wide awake to their interests, too firm in their support of their fixed and immovable principles, to suffer a channel to which they can all have access, languish for want of patronage. Then we would say to all, the prospectus of the *Herald* was issued and its publication commenced with a determination to go on with it triumphantly, too, if economy, industry, and perseverance would avail, and if not, to fail in the attempt. We now, instead of promises only, present the performance, hoping to meet with a hearty reception at the fireside of every farmer in the country."

Thomas Hughes was a journeyman printer,

trained in the shops of Danville, Harrisburg, and Philadelphia in his native State of Pennsylvania. At the age of twenty-four he came west to seek his fortune as a newspaper publisher. For about a month he set type for the *Iowa Sun* at Davenport and then went to Burlington to work for James Clarke on the *Territorial Gazette*. In the spring of 1839, after the legislature had adjourned and the ice had gone out of the river, he went to Dubuque and got a job on the *Iowa News*, of which John B. Russell was the managing editor. The two printers decided to start a newspaper of their own. Hughes returned to Pennsylvania, bought a press and type, and shipped the equipment to Bloomington in the summer of 1840. Being of Quaker ancestry Hughes was calm and non-aggressive in disposition with neither aptitude nor liking for controversy. He was entirely willing to leave editorial writing to his partner while he attended to the business management. Both men set type and worked the press.

John B. Russell was one of the most dynamic newspaper men on the Iowa frontier. An experienced printer, he was a partner with James Clarke in the publication of the *Belmont Gazette* in 1836 when the Territorial capital was located in Wisconsin. In the following spring, however, the *Belmont* paper was discontinued. Clarke followed

the Territorial government to Burlington and established the *Wisconsin Territorial Gazette and Burlington Advertiser*, while Russell formed a new partnership with John King and William W. Coriell at Dubuque and began the publication of the *Iowa News* in June, 1837. There were many changes of ownership while Russell was managing editor of the struggling Dubuque paper. It was not a profitable enterprise, and he must have welcomed the opportunity to help launch a new paper. Good-natured but outspoken and sarcastic, he enjoyed the hazards of his vocation. The apocryphal assertion that he composed his editorials at the type case seems to be confirmed by many sentences that ended in a tangle of phrases. His personality, rather than the more sedate temperament of Thomas Hughes, characterized the *Bloomington Herald*.

Besides current news, both foreign and domestic, Hughes and Russell promised that "a good space" in their paper would "always be devoted to Literary and Miscellaneous selections, so as to render it interesting to the lover of literature as well as the politician and man of business." Nor would the "interests of the Farmer" be neglected, "but such information of value" to him as could be "collected from the writings of old and practical farmers" would be printed. To make the paper

“interesting to our Territorial readers as a channel of information concerning our own country,” the editors offered inducements to correspondents that were calculated to insure communications from all parts of the Territory describing in detail the growth of towns, the formation of new settlements, the condition of crops, and other matters of importance.

“The perpetuity of our unequalled form of government, depending, as it does, upon the wisdom and intelligence of its citizens,” announced the prospectus of the *Herald*, should insure the support of the “best means of spreading universal knowledge, which is admitted to be common schools”. To the “advancement of this great cause”, the editors pledged their efforts.

But Russell, if not Hughes, was most interested in politics. Perhaps the discussion of governmental policies and the character of public officials were supposed to have the greatest news value a hundred years ago. “In National Politics,” the prospectus declared, “the HERALD will yield a cordial support to the leading measures of the present administration, yet we shall not be so devoted to its support as to give our sanction to any and every measure it may propose. We do not claim for the Chief Magistrate infallibility, but we are sincere in our belief that the measures of

his administration are far better calculated to carry the country through its besetting dangers, than those proposed by the opposite party. If in the future course of the Chief Magistrate, he shall, in our opinion, leave the path of duty, we shall plainly speak our mind, as well upon his course as upon the Whig party, which, for the sake of power, has left principles to take care of themselves, and is, by its wily leaders, endeavoring to sing and drink into office, a representative of no set of fixed principles, that they may themselves fatten on his lack of principles, judgment and decision."

On problems affecting local interests, the platform of the *Herald* was more specific. It promised to "advocate an immediate and thorough organization of the Democracy, preparatory to the formation of a State Constitution, imposing restrictions on future legislation in granting exclusive privileges to corporate bodies, the free exercise of which has enslaved the people of many of the states; and of defining its powers in other respects so as to suit its condition." Another important issue concerned suffrage, according to the *Herald*. "Justice to naturalized citizens requires that their rights to the elective franchise, according to the spirit of the constitution of the United States be guarded against the schemes of the Whig party,

as their efforts in some of the states to deprive them of this sacred privilege, prove their principles to tend. That these safe-guards may be incorporated in that instrument, it is essential that the Democracy maintain their ascendancy, therefore we shall advocate the policy of drawing the party lines at every subsequent election."

In fulfillment of the prepublication pledge of partisanship, the first issue of the *Herald* editorially chided the Whigs for claiming direct descent from the Revolutionary opponents of the Tories, and predicted that they could not gull the people into a belief of their fabricated stories of Presidential dictatorship. In accordance with its partisan standards, the *Herald* supported President Martin Van Buren for reëlection and opposed General William Henry Harrison, the military, "cider-barrel" candidate of the Whigs. "It will not do to fall into their footsteps," the editor proclaimed, "and select a hero because they have succeeded with a mock hero for a tool. Let us take up the same man and show no military titles to give us strength. Principles are what we are contending for, and it is upon the intelligence of the people we rely and not upon blind attachment to a title. Martin Van Buren is our first, second, and last choice."

The first number of the *Herald* consisted of four pages twenty-one by fourteen inches in size, with

six columns to the page. There were no headlines and the front page was made up of news taken from the papers that had been brought by the "latest" steamboat. Most of the news dealt with political controversies and seldom included items of local interest. Advertisements were few even though the rates were one dollar for one square of twelve lines and fifteen cents for each subsequent insertion. The subscription price was three dollars a year if paid in advance, three fifty at the end of six months, or six dollars at the end of the year. The circulation of the *Herald* never exceeded five hundred.

Thomas Hughes, having moved to Iowa City in October, 1841, joined Ver Planck Van Antwerp in establishing the *Iowa Capitol Reporter* at the Territorial capital in December, 1841. Russell published the *Herald* until 1845 when he sold his interest to Dr. Charles O. Waters. Under the management of Dr. Waters, who was reputed to be a scholarly writer, the tone of the paper improved.

In 1846, M. T. Emerson, a printer and a man of good judgment and character, purchased the *Herald*. Emerson was a Whig and changed the politics of the paper to favor that party. He threw his whole energy into the conduct of his paper and made noticeable changes in the mechanical and



editorial departments. But his connection with the paper was destined to last only a few months, for the career which began so brightly soon ended in death.

The next owners of the Bloomington *Herald* were N. L. Stout and William P. Israel. Of this firm, Stout was the editor and Israel the printer. They conducted the affairs of the office from 1846 until 1848. Stout was a vigorous partisan and during his term in the editorial chair the columns of the *Herald* abounded in vigorous denunciations of slavery. It required no small amount of courage to advocate abolition in 1846, especially in a Territory bordered by the great thoroughfare which floated the commerce of the South. Fear, however, had no deterring influence upon the editor of the *Herald*. He condemned slavery without stint so that the Bloomington newspaper became noted throughout the Northwest.

Probably the most important event marking the administration of Stout and Israel was the employment of a thirteen-year-old boy to work as "devil" in the shop and learn the printer's trade. This young apprentice was John Mahin who started to work in November, 1847, and remained with the paper over fifty years.

Of conditions in a typical newspaper shop when he began his apprenticeship Mahin wrote: "The

printing establishment was a primitive affair, consisting of three double racks of cases for type, a Washington hand press and an imposing stone, about four by eight feet on the surface. All the mechanical work was done in one room, where was also the editorial writing table. Mr. Israel and Mr. Parvin were masters of the art preservative and were my preceptors in learning the trade. My duties consisted in sweeping out in the morning, carrying water and wood, and keeping up the fires when necessary, while the remainder of the time was devoted to setting type. I was also carrier for the paper, delivering it to the town subscribers on Saturday." According to the young apprentice, it "was quite an achievement to 'learn the boxes,' that is, to ascertain the arrangement of the letters in the case containing the type, for they were not arranged alphabetically as one might suppose, but for convenience. The letter 'e' therefore had the largest box in front of the compositor as he stood at the case. The 'i' came next and was on the right hand side of the 'e' box. The 'k,' 'j' and 'z' boxes were small and on the outer part of the case, because comparatively few of them were used. It was not many weeks until I was given a copy to set for the paper and I was immensely proud when what I had set first appeared in the paper. The news at that time was mostly

in reference to the Mexican War. There were also stirring times in France and I remember once when I had set up a reprint article referring to Napoleon, with an 'a' instead of an 'o' in the last syllable, I was much mortified when the proof sheet came to me to find that I was in error. After that I kept in mind the humorous precept of Mr. Israel, who said it was a good rule 'to follow copy even if it was blown out the window.' "

Although the *Herald* was only four pages of six columns each and issued once a week, its two printers and one apprentice were hard pressed to do the mechanical work. Issue day was Saturday but almost invariably they had to work all Friday night to get the paper out on time. It was the business of the apprentice to "roll the forms", that is, "apply the ink to the type by means of a large soft roller made in an iron mold, from glue and molasses, which had previously been boiled to the proper consistency. These rolls had to be made by the office force in those days.

The pressman, according to Mahin, had the hardest part of the job. Each sheet of paper had to be placed by hand on the tympan and clasped in place by a rim of the tympan called the "brisket" which was drawn down upon it, swinging on hinges. The tympan thus prepared was turned over and laid flat on the type forms resting on the

“platen” or iron bed of the press. By turning a crank the platen with the forms was carried beneath the framework of the press. A pull on the lever pressed the tympan against the type and made the impression. Then the form was cranked out, the tympan raised, and the sheet of paper unclasped, taken off, and laid on a board prepared for the purpose. One side of the paper was usually printed on Thursday and the other side on Friday night.

A pressman did well if he could print a “token” an hour on the old Washington hand press. A token then meant ten quires of paper. Each quire contained twenty-four sheets. Thus, at least two hours were required “to print an issue of two hundred and forty papers as each paper had to go through the press twice.”

John Mahin remembered that the *Herald* office had some job printing. “It was the custom to print invitations to funerals with a dark border around them. Ball tickets were printed in the gaudiest style of the art. Chromatic presses were unknown then, so a color or tint was given to the ticket by sprinkling some powder on it as it came from the press, before there was time for the ink to dry. In this kind of printing it was my duty to apply the ink with a ball made by tightly packing cotton in a piece of silk. All kinds of jobs were printed on

the Washington press, as there was no other kind of press in the office."

Financial liabilities compelled Stout and Israel to suspend publication of the *Herald* toward the end of 1848. Presently, however, it appeared as a Whig sheet of six columns, on February 20, 1849, under the editorship of F. A. C. Foreman. "Alphabet" Foreman "believed a newspaper should have a little of everything in it. He was an imaginative and florid writer . . . a practical printer, as well as a good writer, but a man of intemperate habits." While he lay helplessly drunk, his wife often had to set type for the paper and with her foot rock "the baby in a rude wooden cradle under the type stand." Foreman published only a few issues of the *Herald*. With his failure the paper expired.

On May 9, 1849, Vol. I, No. 1 of the *Muscatine Journal* came out. Noah M. McCormick of St. Louis, who had bought the old *Herald* plant, was editor and publisher. About that time the name of the town was changed from Bloomington to Muscatine, so the new editor named his paper accordingly and substituted *Journal* for *Herald*. Though McCormick was a poor writer, he managed the paper with more financial success than any of his predecessors.

In July, 1852, he sold the improved property to

Jacob Mahin and his son John. The erstwhile apprentice assumed the duties of editor. John Mahin served the *Journal* almost continuously until his retirement in 1903, and made it a vital influence in Iowa journalism. Tracing its origin to the old Bloomington *Herald*, the *Journal* files now span a century of almost continuous publication.

EDITH MAY BELL