

Crum and the Standard

While the pioneers were laying the foundation stones of the capitol at Iowa City, a young man who had recently emigrated from Pennsylvania was occupied with laying the foundations for one of Iowa's prominent pioneer newspapers. William Crum arrived in the frontier river town of Bloomington in 1840 equipped with a press and some type, journalistic ambitions, and strong political convictions. The same year a fellow printer from the Quaker State, Thomas Hughes, arrived with equal ambitions. The greatest difference between the two Pennsylvanians who had come to the recently organized Iowa Territory was in their political convictions. Hughes was glad to settle in a Territory predominantly Democratic in politics. Crum rolled into the frontier town that is now Muscatine with the hard-cider barrel of the Whigs, singing their campaign ballads.

Of the rivalry between the two young editors in their publishing enterprises there can be no doubt; the same rivalry must have been felt intensely as they prepared for the first issues of their papers. As in many pioneer races to be "first", it was a small matter that made William Crum's

Iowa Standard and not Thomas Hughes's *Bloomington Herald* the first newspaper in Muscatine. The first issue of *The Iowa Standard* published by Crum and Bailey appeared on October 23, 1840. Four days later the *Bloomington Herald*, issued under the firm name of Hughes and Russell, made its initial appearance. The publishers of the *Herald* had waited a week for the completion of the room they were to occupy!

Crum's paper was the sixth and Hughes's the seventh to be published in Iowa. The first, John King's *DuBuque Visitor*, had begun four years earlier while the Iowa country was still a part of Wisconsin Territory. Of the five editors who had preceded Crum and Hughes, four were Jacksonian Democrats. Only James G. Edwards, publisher of the Fort Madison *Patriot*, and later the Burlington *Hawk-Eye*, espoused the cause of the Whigs.

In 1840 Iowa was "the West". When he left Pennsylvania, young Crum, still in his early twenties, must have guessed the newness of the frontier into which he was going. He was able to grasp the unheralded honor of starting Bloomington's first newspaper and ride on the crest of the Whigs' political rise in Iowa. He did the same in the newly established community of Iowa City.

For Crum the first year was the hardest, the

paper being tossed up and down by its editor's financial insecurity. But if the little press of the *Standard* was silenced completely in lean weeks or was gaunt in appearance when paper failed to come into town on schedule, it made up for such weakness when it did appear. The political voice of the *Standard* was raucous, and as Editor Crum lived up to the caliber of vitriolic personal journalism when talking politics, so was he unsparing in his personal denunciation of rival editors.

There was no scarcity of vital news during the *Standard's* first year. The meaning of democracy, federalism, abolitionism, public printing, organization of the Iowa Whigs, the Oregon question, General Dodge's position in Congress, removal of the Iowa legislature from Burlington to Iowa City, opposition to Statehood for Iowa, the arrival of the first steamboat in Iowa City, agriculture, and the peculiarity of the slang expression "O.K." were editorial questions discussed. Chauncey Swan, the Territorial Commissioner of Public Buildings, was providing news copy with his reports on the progress of the new stone capitol.

Although the *Standard* devoted a sufficient amount of space to political news of the Whigs in Iowa and to the sessions of the Territorial legislature, the most important news event was the national election. Election returns from the States

were printed with comments throughout the weeks preceding the balloting in the Harrison-Van Buren race. The *Standard* hailed the election of Harrison with an editorial statement that, "This week we can, with glorious certainty inform our readers, that General WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON, is elected President of the United States, and with as large a majority as any President before elected. . . . Thus it is seen that the people have spoken themselves, and in a voice of thunder which cannot be mistaken from the voice of condemnation pronounced upon, and echoed through the castle of the tyrant."

Typical of the flowery pen of the pioneer editor was his condemnation of "locofoco trickery". "Schemes of many, and various, no matter how dark and treacherous, how high-handed and barefaced, has characterized that party during the Presidential canvass — to the very end. Should they, with these false inventions and fabrications, have gained their election, it will prove an immortal shock to a Republic which has been so prosperous till of late. But, nay — nay — we have other indications and prospects brightening the political horizon, which becomes more manifest every day. By all their insidiousness, they must die — die — die, in despair and forlorn."

Crum and his partner, W. D. Bailey, published

their weekly four-page paper from an "office in the second story of the building occupied by Howland & Brady" on Front Street. The prospectus announced that the paper was printed on a "super-royal sheet" with "entire new materials". An additional dollar was charged subscribers who paid at the end of the year, and there is evidence to show that most subscribers, if they paid at all, waited until the end of the year. The first twenty issues of *The Iowa Standard* were five column pages, but after March 5, 1841, the editor changed to six columns and Imperial size sheets.

The publishers announced that "all advertisements sent to this office for insertion, without the number of insertions marked thereon will, at the option of the Editors, be continued until ordered out, & charged accordingly." Rates for the first insertion for one square were one dollar. Each subsequent insertion cost fifty cents, with "a liberal deduction . . . to yearly advertisers."

The nature of the paper is readily characterized. Page one was given over largely to "Foreign news". "The Foreign news brought by the Great Western," the proprietor wrote editorially, "will be found on our first page and very lengthy, and excites much interest, to which we invite the attention of our readers." That part of the front page not taken up by the foreign news, mostly

second-handed, was filled with news of Europe and the United States which had been clipped from the papers of New York, Richmond, Bangor, Salem, and other eastern cities.

Six of the ten inside columns were reports and comment on politics and State elections. The *Standard's* editor seemed to relish no clipped item more than one which effectively scourged the "Locofocoism" of the Democrats. That the paper was to be a Whig organ there could be no doubt after the first issue.

Essays might be found on any of the pages, but page four usually gave the reader a half column of poetry, several columns of fiction, and a column of miscellaneous trivia having the appearance of filler.

By the end of the first month, the publishers of the *Standard* were becoming more conscious of advertising. With issue No. 4 there appeared the office's bid for book and job printing, and legal paper was being sold from the office. In the same issue advertisements appeared for the first time on the front page. The date was November 13, 1840, and the editors acknowledged the support of their friends with the comfortable statement that it had been "beyond all expectations".

From his first issue Editor Crum carried the caption in his dateline, "Printed & Published simul-

taneously at Bloomington and Iowa City by Crum & Bailey, at \$2.50 per annum in Advance." T. S. Parvin expressed doubt as to the double publication in Bloomington and Iowa City, but there is evidence for and against it. Parvin said in the *Iowa Historical Record* that the line "simultaneously" was carried "until a wag of a devil in the office changed it to *spontaneously* when it was dropped." In an issue dated both December 24th and December 25th the *Standard* carried a column on page three under an Iowa City heading. "Our subscribers in this City and County," the editor said at the beginning of it, "will recollect that LANSFORD W. HASTINGS, Esq. is Agent for this paper, who has a publication office open in this City for the distribution of the papers, and to whom communications can be made by them, if they think it more convenient to do so, than to us; from whose hands those matters will receive prompt attention."

The *Standard* seems to have weathered well the winter of 1840-1841. At times paper and ink were scarce, but by March, 1841, the firm of Crum and Bailey was prepared to announce an enlargement. Heading the editorial column on March 12, 1841, was this paragraph: "OUR ENLARGEMENT.— We have the pleasure, this week, of presenting to our subscribers an enlarged sheet. The liberal

patronage which has been so far bestowed upon us, we are determined to repay, if possible, by the most unwearied efforts to please our patrons. In order the more effectually to do this, we have added four columns to our paper. . . . We trust our friends will not permit their efforts in our behalf to flag, as our success and future improvement of our paper depend upon the patronage of the public."

Evidently the new six-column Imperial sheets were not the only surprise Crum had in store for his readers. The *Standard* announced on March 26th that a young Bloomington lawyer, Stephen Whicher, Jr., was joining the staff as an editorial writer, to enable the publishers to spend more time on the mechanical side of publication. Bailey's name was dropped from the flag the following week, and in the same issue (April 2) the names "S. Whicher, Jr. & W. Crum, Editors" appeared in the masthead.

In the first issue to which he contributed, on March 26th the young Whig lawyer addressed a message to the patrons of the *Standard*: "In pursuance of an arrangement made with the publishers of the 'STANDARD' since their last publication," he wrote, "the undersigned enters upon the cares and participates in the duties of an editor of a political newspaper. This occupation, to him, is new,

and he feels it to be arduous and responsible." Whicher promised no polished sentences, but only what he might judge to be the best political interests of the people. His only pledge was "fidelity". In explanation, Whicher continued, "The patronage usually accorded to a village newspaper, seldom justifies the publisher in securing a high grade of talent in its editorial department, nor in making it the primary and only business of any one to superintend its columns. The same hand that pens the paragraph, composes and puts to press. Such has been the condition of the publishers of this paper."

Whicher pointed out that the publishers of the *Standard* had no government printing contracts or other patronage, had a subscription list of less than six hundred, and an "advertising custom below that of any other paper in the Territory". Subject to the "pressure of hard times" and the lack of surplus capital, the establishment of the press at Bloomington was "an experiment and its continuance problematical". It could not be expected "under these circumstances to command the pecuniary means to make it the primary object of any man by his pen to raise up and sustain for its columns a reputation enjoyed alone by those papers whose proprietors are free from these embarrassments", Whicher wrote. The young lawyer, un-

doubtedly concerned most about his personal rise in the Whig party in Iowa, was careful to point out that he was in no manner connected with the *Standard's* pecuniary concerns.

Whicher's smoother style of writing enlivened the editorial columns during his short connection with the paper and, even though his pen was not as acid as Crum's, he drew fire. Following Whicher's introductory editorial the editor of the Bloomington *Herald* wrote, "A decent respect for our calling forbids that we should welcome a self-important demagogue into our corps, thereby sanctioning the opinion which is already too prevalent, that printers are fit only for the mechanical department of a paper, and pettifoggers the only qualified persons for the management of its editorial columns." Whicher's best contribution during his short association with the *Standard* was his report on April 2nd and 9th of the Whig convention in Davenport.

The paper seems to have had a hard time during the month of April, 1841, in spite of Whicher's assistance. Crum must have sunk into despair at the news of the death of "Old Tip". Since its beginning the *Standard* had devoted itself with dogged faithfulness to the Whig hero, President Harrison. The April 29th issue was printed with black column rules in mourning for Harrison; and

heading the editorial column was the *Standard's* farewell to Bloomington. "All those indebted to this establishment for subscription and advertising up to this time", Crum wrote, "will please call and settle their accounts immediately, as the proprietor is determined to wind up his affairs and discontinue the publication of the *Standard* till the times become easier."

For the month of May the *Standard* was suspended. But during that month, Crum apparently regained hope and moved his press and type to Iowa City. Publication was resumed in the new capital on June 3rd with No. 28 under the new name, *The Iowa City Standard*. Still devoted to Harrison, Crum carried a quotation from "Old Tip" in the flag: "I desire you to understand the true principles of the Government. I wish them carried out — I ask nothing more."

The rivalry between the *Standard* and the Bloomington *Herald* did not cease when the *Standard* moved to Iowa City. In late July the two quibbled editorially over the exchange of copies of the two papers. On December 4, 1841, Thomas Hughes of the *Herald*, who had also moved to Iowa City, helped Ver Planck Van Antwerp launch the *Iowa Capitol Reporter* as a Democratic competitor of the *Standard*. Before the *Reporter* was established, the *Standard* had a short-

lived rival in the *Iowa City Argus*, begun in July, 1841, but as unpopular with the Democrats, whose cause it espoused, as with the Whigs.

During the year the *Standard* shifted publication dates several times from Thursday to Friday to Saturday and back, in order to adjust itself to mail schedules. Entrenched in the new Territorial capital, the *Standard* was holding its own during the summer months. At the same time the *Standard* was making its bids for acceptance, the Whig party was continuing its efforts to secure a firmer foothold in the Iowa legislature.

With October came the first anniversary of the *Standard*, marked only by Crum's pleas that patrons pay their subscription bills. "Patrons, we have now been associated together nearly one year", he wrote. "We commenced the issuing of the *Standard* under the pressure of hard times, with the hope of seeing them change, but it appears that they are equally as embarrassing now as at the commencement. We have labored hard, and worked our way thus far without receiving enough from our subscribers to purchase the paper required for the printing. We distribute between six and seven hundred copies weekly, the paper of which costs \$7 per week. Among that number we can count but about fifty who have paid us thus far, and the remainder are of course unpaid.

These are facts lamentably true. By one glance it will be seen that our own labor, the labor of our journeymen, our apprentices, the wearing of our materials, and numerous other items are all to be accounted for, and where is it to come from? Did we receive a livelihood? No. In a good book we learn that the laborer is worthy of his hire. But this is not fulfilling it in our case."

The fortunes of the *Standard* after it was printed in Iowa City are not primarily a part of this story, but they do show that for William Crum the business of publishing became easier as the paper grew. By the fall of 1842 he was able to make a trip East to buy new type and a new press. In December of 1844 he sold out to A. P. Wood. In 1849 the paper passed into the hands of Dr. S. M. Ballard who, sensing the approaching death of the Whig party, changed its name to *The Iowa City Republican*. Crum himself continued as a prominent citizen of Iowa City and as late as 1869 was treasurer of the board of trustees of the University of Iowa.

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