

## The Old Mill

*For many years Howe's Academy in Mount Pleasant was housed in a mill that had been converted into a schoolhouse. It was a splendid school. The students believed their teachers were unexcelled and had confidence in the rigid system of education that was maintained. Because of the thoroughness of their study or, perhaps, on account of the original purpose of the building, they spoke of their school familiarly as "The Old Mill". At the annual reunion of the Howe's Academy Association on September 12, 1931, a boulder bearing a bronze tablet and marking the site of "The Old Mill" was dedicated. On that occasion R. S. Galer delivered the following address on the history of the Academy. — The Editor.*

### FOUNDATIONS

Iowa was opened to settlement on June 1, 1833. A vast tide of immigration from Ohio, from Virginia, from Kentucky, from New England and other parts of the East swept over these prairies and laid deep the foundations of the State. Into these crude, primitive conditions in 1841 came Samuel L. Howe, a strong, adventurous spirit of resolute character bent on start-

ing a school on these flower-starred prairies and timbered streams.

When Howe's Academy was founded in 1842, Iowa was still in the early pioneer stage. The Territory of Iowa had been created less than four years before. The town of Mount Pleasant had been laid out in 1837. A few lots had been sold and a few hundred people lived in scattered houses near the public square. Indians were still common. Times were hard and the people poor. The panic of 1837 had not entirely disappeared. Prices were so low as to be incredible to the people of this generation. It was an unpromising time and place in which to start a school that was to be supported solely by private tuition.

Into this virgin wilderness came early many different groups with the purpose of planting schools so that the youth might have the opportunity to secure an education. Congregationalists from New England incorporated Denmark Academy in 1843. Forward looking people established a scientific institute at Trenton and an academy at New London. Somewhat later the Quakers founded Whittier College at Salem, named in honor of their patron saint and prophet. Methodists were very early in the field and at Iowa Wesleyan, under its original name of the Mount Pleasant Collegiate Institute, they erected the first college building in Iowa.

The earliest pioneer of them all was Samuel L.

Howe. He came as a young man, bringing his family, putting to the hazard not only his future career but his very existence. He was already a teacher of experience, trained in the schools of Ohio.

I can barely remember how he looked in his later years, the late seventies of the last century. He was not large, but was a sturdy, determined looking man with a spare figure, a high forehead, a strong nose, piercing eyes, and a square chin. At that time he wore a full long gray beard, with a clean-shaven upper lip. In appearance he resembled the artists' conception of a stern New England Puritan or better yet of an ancient Hebrew prophet. Indeed, it required but a little stretch of the imagination to fancy that he stepped out of the pages of the Old Testament into our modern times.

This was the man who founded and for thirty-five years conducted the most noted private school in Iowa. His personality merited that distinction. Few there were who could dispute his ability, his force, and his scholarly qualifications.

#### THE OLD MILL

The history of Howe's Academy is as romantic as the story of early Iowa settlements in which it had its origin. Its primitive beginnings were in a small log cabin on the prairie some four miles east of Mount Pleasant on the Burlington road. This was in the

winter of 1841-1842. Sometime later in 1842 Samuel L. Howe removed to the straggling village of Mount Pleasant and for a time conducted his school in the upper story of the log jail which was located about in the middle of Block 8 of the original plat of the town, on the east side of the alley that runs north and south through the block.

In 1844 the school was removed to the Cumberland Presbyterian Church on the corner of Madison and Main streets, where the Public Library now stands. Finally, in the latter part of 1845, it was transferred to the building which Professor Howe reconstructed especially for that purpose. This was the familiar "Old Mill", part of which is reputed to have ground out food products in the early days. Later it ground out a fine product of men and women and under the old name became affectionately enshrined in the hearts of thousands of Howe students. This building remained its home until the Academy affiliated with Iowa Wesleyan College in 1897.

For the benefit of those who never saw the Old Mill or those whose memories of it have become dimmed through lapse of time it may be recorded that the Academy was located on the south half of Block 1 of Commissioners' Second Addition to Mount Pleasant, about three blocks east of the public square on East Monroe Street where the residence of C. C. Stevenson now stands. There were no other build-

ings on this half block until after the Academy was torn down about 1900 and the ground sold off in building lots.

The building consisted of two stories and a basement, about seventy feet long and perhaps sixty feet wide. The north half of the second story was the main school room, seating as many as one hundred and fifty pupils, not nearly enough space for the crowds that came each winter. A platform about two feet high ran along the entire west end. There were two regular recitation rooms extending south from the main room to the south front of the building. The east end of the lower part of the building was of brick and was occupied by the family of Samuel L. Howe. The rest of the building was frame and so open that it was intensely cold in the winter. Several stoves made a brave but often ineffectual effort to heat the main room. Below were a number of bare, barn-like rooms which were rented unfurnished to students. It was in one of these I spent the two years I was in attendance as a student. Many of the older students may remember the well in the basement, the stove pipes which had a habit of coming down at embarrassing moments, the deeply worn stair steps, the empty hallways, the lively Friday night sessions of the Philotaxian literary society, the nearly flat roof on which some of us loved to clamber to study Latin while watching the ever changing aspects of the sky above.

With varying fortunes the school remained in this building for fifty-two years — two generations, measured by the mortality statistics of that time. In the winter the building was crowded, in the fall and spring there were fewer students, the numbers varying with the farming seasons. During part of that time most of the rural schools of Henry County and many in adjoining counties were taught by students trained in the Howe methods. A high type of instruction was the result in the fewer subjects which then made up the common school curriculum.

In 1858 Professor Samuel L. Howe was selected as the first superintendent of public instruction in Henry County. Again in 1866 he accepted the duties of that office, and thereafter, partly because of those duties and partly because of his advanced age, his son Seward assumed an increasing management of the school, which became complete upon the death of Samuel L. Howe in 1877. Seward was young and vigorous, had an attractive personality, and was a splendid teacher in his specialties of Latin, grammar, and mathematics.

For forty years the school never pretended to prepare students for college, except incidentally. But in 1886 a full college preparatory course was installed and in 1887 the first class was graduated. Many of the students from that time on entered college without examination, the school being fully accredited.

## THE HOWES — FATHER AND SON

No story of the Academy would be complete without a sketch of Samuel L. and Seward C. Howe. For Howe's Academy well illustrates the famous saying of Carlyle, that human institutions are often but the lengthened shadow of a great man.

Samuel L. Howe was a teacher of striking boldness and originality. He followed no conventions and adopted no rules. Utter freedom and informality were the chief characteristics of his daily routine. It is doubtful if he even knew the great pedagogical traditions reaching from Aristotle, through Comenius, Pestalozzi, Horace Mann, and Herbert Spencer. Certainly he followed none of them in any regular fashion. He was a law unto himself. But if he did not know the formal rules he certainly followed the great lines of teaching laid down by nature. He had an instinctive knowledge of practical psychology. He knew how the human mind works in actual practice. Consciously or unconsciously he made use of correct methods and attained sure results. His success attested the correctness both of his psychological method and of his empirical measures.

He was no time-server or diplomat. His speech was clear cut and positive, his manner precise. He knew what he wanted to say and he said it directly and forcibly. His convictions were intense and he would not compromise. Witness his fiery anti-slavery zeal,

at a time when such views were decidedly unpopular even in Iowa. He edited an abolition newspaper in addition to his trying school duties. Such activities might affect his financial fortunes, but never did he compromise with conscience or shrink from consequences. A son was born when William H. Seward was proclaiming his doctrine of the "irrepressible conflict", and, in his devotion to this great advocate of freedom, he named that son Seward.

His manner in the school room was arbitrary, dogmatic, imperious. He would not brook idleness or lack of thoroughness. That was the foundation of his success. To him thoroughness was next to godliness. Upon this principle he strenuously insisted and made it the *sine qua non* of the student's work. Often he reiterated that the student did not know a thing unless and until he was able to explain it. The acid test, especially in mathematics, was to explain problems in arithmetic and demonstrate Euclid. What a training it was to master a subject under his instruction, to be able to analyze, to explain, to build up a proposition according to the most rigid rules of logic!

Another fundamental method was drill. Constant repetition and reiteration literally ground the subject into the pupil's mind. The value of repetition as an aid to memory has long been recognized by successful teachers. The Howes were drill masters par excellence.

In Latin every declension and conjugation had to



be thoroughly committed to memory, because it enabled further study to be carried on with the least effort and quickened results. Cicero and Virgil, Caesar and Sallust and Livy yielded up their difficulties in the light of this primary knowledge of forms and grammatical construction.

Upon the mastery of correct English, Professor Howe placed the greatest emphasis. It was more than an emphasis, it was a hobby. He talked of it by day and dreamed of it by night. In this he anticipated by many decades the stress given to this subject by the modern college, in which dozens of courses now afford opportunity for the student to study his native tongue. His Philotozian Grammar, bold and original, was for years used not only in his own classes but generally in the schools throughout the country.

Seward Howe, the son, was a conspicuously successful teacher, but of a somewhat different type. He had the same extreme notion of the importance of the school and the soundness of the methods used. He had the same intense concentration upon the curriculum, the same disregard for the things not included in it. For him Latin and grammar and mathematics constituted a sacred trinity. Even history did not rank with the august three. Geography and physiology were tolerated. Elocution was emphasized as a useful decoration. People who are accustomed to our modern schools can hardly realize the intense energy

devoted to these favorite studies. Methods of teaching them were an important part of the daily routine, because it was recognized that the school's continued success depended largely upon its ability to turn out teachers with exceptional qualities. It was for this reason that the Academy included in its title the phrase "Teachers Training School".

It is no disrespect to say that Seward Howe did not possess the originality or aggressive personality of his father. The paternal characteristics were present but in a lesser degree. Nevertheless he had a distinctive individuality. For him the school was his whole life and into it he poured an admirable devotion, a passionate intensity. In all his waking hours it was the sole object of his thought and study.

The affection and unwavering loyalty which the two Howes inspired in their pupils was amazing. They not only possessed our completest confidence, but we thoroughly believed they were the greatest teachers who ever conducted an academy and that their methods were the best ever devised. Woe to any one who would have dared to dispute these propositions in our presence. Nor was it simply confidence in their professional abilities. We had a personal affection for them as well. We swallowed as gospel truth everything they had to say with the same blind confidence that Sancho Panza had in his master Don Quixote.

These two, Samuel L. and Seward C. Howe, *were*

Howe's Academy. Not only were they the only principals throughout its entire history (Samuel L. from 1842 till his death in 1877, and Seward after that date), but they were the chief instructors as well. Able assistants they had at various times — teachers who shared or even surpassed their popularity. But every one knew they were the guiding spirits. Their methods were used exclusively, their personalities were dominant and decisive, as teachers came and went. The whole character of the school was so fixed that it could not be changed by the varying tastes of different instructors.

One of the noted features of Seward's method in which he patterned after his father, was his frequent lectures. These were given during the school hours and often interrupted the daily routine. Sometimes they lasted an hour, two hours, three hours. Once I saw a whole forenoon taken up in this manner, classes being forgotten. The students meekly listened, knowing it was a personal idiosyncrasy which had to be given vent. Lectures upon manners and morals, upon the necessity of study, upon methods of teaching, upon the place of the school and its distinctive excellencies became familiar occurrences.

This was the only way in which any moral guidance was attempted. No arbitrary rules of conduct existed. A freedom of personal conduct shocking to the Victorian ideas prevalent at the time prevailed. So

the school had no fixed hours or rules of study. Dances were permitted, though narrow minded persons thought it scandalous. Living, outside of school hours, was not only unregulated but received absolutely no attention. The only requirement was to master certain subjects by diligent study, and the absorption of the school in this one supreme ideal was complete.

The whole Howe family was remarkable. Teaching seemed to be an inherited quality. No description would be complete without mention of the other gifted members of the family. Professor Howe was assisted at various times by his children — Oscar, Pembroke, Hayward, Edward, Seward, Mrs. Elizabeth Panabaker, and Mrs. Frances Newby, all of whom were talented and successful teachers.

The oldest son, Oscar Howe, became the head of one of the important public schools in New York City and remained there many years until his death. Edward Howe was precocious as a teacher. After an apprenticeship in the Old Mill he went west and was for many years head of a similar private academy in San Francisco.

Warren Pembroke, Pem as he was familiarly called, remained in Mount Pleasant and became a thorn in the flesh to his father and Seward. Brilliant and well-educated, he possessed many exceptional qualities as a teacher, but he was at the same time impulsive, unstable, and unwilling to work under authority. Dur-

ing his later years his convivial habits diminished and finally destroyed his usefulness to the school and to the community. His mind, if it had been susceptible to discipline, would have placed him high on the honor roll of a distinguished family.

It would be impossible, because of the lack of complete records, to give a full list of the various instructors who assisted the Howes. Usually there was but one regular assistant, supplemented at times by special instructors. So far as available the following list gives the names of these regular assistants outside of the Howe family, with their years of service.

G. D. Dodds	1874 to 1882
A. B. Noble	1882 and 1883
G. W. Walters	1883 to 1885
Roger S. Galer	1885 to 1887
Nellie Ritner	1887 to 1889
Arthur Smith	1889 and 1890
Lincoln Antrim	1890 to 1897
C. O. Giese	1899 to 1901
H. Newton Wright	1901 to 1906
Belle Newbold Wright	Part of 1906
D. H. Barton	1904 to 1915

#### THE COLLEGE INTERLUDE

One of the vivid recollections of life at the Old Mill was the rivalry, amounting at times to bitterness, between Howe's Academy and Iowa Wesleyan College.

Much of the time Howe's enjoyed greater popularity and had a larger attendance of Henry County students. The College looked down on us as godless, and we reciprocated by regarding it as narrowly sectarian. The curriculum of the preparatory department of the College came sharply into competition with the Academy.

Happily, the hostility between the two institutions gradually diminished and when, in 1897, the proposition was made that Howe's Academy should move to the College buildings and become the college preparatory department, to the surprise of most of us, the offer was accepted and the transfer was consummated. For five years this coalition existed. But the two schools were temperamentally incompatible. They had different ideals and pursued different methods. It was not surprising that the union, which had been only formal, never a complete amalgamation, fell apart and each again pursued its separate existence.

In the meantime, however, the Old Mill, falling into bad repair, was torn down and its site sold off for residence lots, to be henceforth only a historical memory.

Professor Howe, forced to provide a new home for his school, bought the old and then disused German Presbyterian Church on Lot 3 Block 20 on South Jefferson Street. This he remodeled into a residence and school building combined. There he and Mrs.

Howe lived and there the school carried on until its demise in 1916.

In its new home, the Academy had a few successful years which may be termed its Indian Summer, but it was never as prosperous as it had been in its palmy days on East Monroe Street. Too many changes, a broken constituency, a rival school, and new conditions militated against its old-time prestige and importance. The pressure became too great for Seward's financial resources, and in 1916 he quietly announced that Howe's Academy would not reopen. The school simply ceased to exist and the long and splendid chapter of education in Iowa was closed.

#### THE STUDENTS

During more than two generations the Academy furnished its full quota of men and women who have made a mark for themselves in the active world. Certainly it furnished more than its share of teachers, not only for the public schools, but for academies, colleges, and universities. The record can never be written in its entirety. But it is only just, in this brief story, to call attention to this priceless product for which Howe's Academy was founded and which constitutes its chief and crowning glory.

To whom did the Academy minister? First and foremost its appeal was to the boys and girls on the farms and in the humble homes of Henry County. It

offered them what they could not get in college, the opportunity to enter at any time, to take such studies as they chose, and to quit when they pleased or when their money ran out. From the modest homes in every part of Henry County they trekked each season, few in the fall, then in increasing numbers when the corn was husked, and thinning out again as spring work began. When the school was at its height, the old building fairly swarmed with students. In 1885 we started in September with twenty-six, ran up to two hundred and fifty in January, and closed in June with forty. The pupils lived in rented rooms and most of them cooked their own meals and did all their own work except baking bread. Most of the homes in the eastern part of town rented rooms, usually unfurnished, to students. Modern accommodations were unknown. Some of us earned our tuition by building fires and sweeping the school rooms.

The school was a paradise for the exceptional student. There seemed to be no end of classes formed to accommodate differing tastes and abilities. Every hour from eight in the morning till four in the afternoon was occupied with recitations, which made prodigious work for the teachers. But even this was not enough. During the crowded winter months a night school was held to supplement the regular day work, especially for drill in grammar. Those who learned most easily fairly raced through the common branches, then alge-



bra, Latin, geometry, and later physics, botany, and general history. Any student could go as fast as his abilities permitted, and step from one class to another at any time. There were no examinations and no time limits governing promotions.

*INFLUENCE AND CHARACTER OF THE ACADEMY*

The chief characteristic of the Howe teaching was its intense vitality. The Howes grappled with the actual facts of the various branches and concentrated on them with an earnestness that at times became almost fanatical. They were no idealists, no dreamers in the realm of pedagogy. Every subject was alive. Cut it and it bled. To them every student was a separate, flaming personality, which could satisfy itself and its destiny only by the fiercest concentration and effort. The graces were neglected: the enchantments of poetic art and personal charm were ignored.

This downright realism, this individuality, this strenuous search for reality made the school a seething crucible in which the gifted student was inspired and the dullest mind touched into activity. How many torpid spirits became seized with ambition as they sat day by day under this scorching and vivid earnestness! How much genius existing but latent, how much talent prosaic but potentially capable was brought out into the light by this patient and relentless energy!

It is not strange that such a school became noted.

Its success from the very beginning was instantaneous. For two generations it exercised an enormous influence in eastern Iowa and in Illinois. Its students were widely sought as teachers and their methods, adapted from the original, became the assurance of success. Probably beyond any school of its kind in the whole history of Iowa, Howe's Academy enjoyed a reputation for thoroughness of method and for a practical realism which is the very essence of a successful school system.

Schools consist primarily of teachers endowed with personality, ability, genius, and enthusiasm for teaching. Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student on the other is the classical illustration. A typical illustration also was Howe's Academy. It had no library, no physical apparatus, no chemical retorts and crucibles, no mechanical aids of any kind. It had blackboards and little else. But what it lacked in these material accessories it made up in the quality and enthusiasm of its instructors. In these respects it fulfilled the primary law that learning is communicated through a personality rather than by means of physical aids and costly surroundings. Pupils' spirits in contact with the incandescent spirits of teachers — this is the great and everlasting law of pedagogy.

Such schools however have one inherent weakness. The teacher was the school and when the teacher failed the school was doomed to fail also. Such teach-

ers can not impart their peculiar faculties and hence have no successors. Even if times had not changed and required a different type of a school system, it is probable that the Academy would before now have become a thing of the past. Institutions to be permanent must be based on a deep need and an enduring principle, rather than on a personality however gifted, alluring, or brilliant.

Howe's Academy was essentially a pioneer school, suited to the social conditions of a formative and growing State. It pioneered in methods but it did not break with the educational tradition of a bread and butter curriculum. Its horizon did not enlarge to include the events of an industrial age. Outside of Latin its curriculum was strictly utilitarian. It placed intense stress upon teachers and teaching, realizing intuitively that this was the crying need of the times. But it ignored the work of Edison and Darwin and Bell and Marconi and Ford as outside the legitimate subjects of its instruction. Neither Samuel Howe nor Seward was attuned to a world of science. In this they should not be too severely criticized. Few there were at that time who recognized the greatness of the impending change in human society which came from these new inventions and their revolutionary effects in our social structure and industrial habits.

The Academy gradually faded out of existence. There were a number of contributory causes. In the

first place the existence of a rival school in the same limited territory decreased the clientele. In the second place Professor Seward Howe could not adjust himself and his school methods to the rapid changes in social conditions. An even more decisive circumstance was the competition that came from high schools supported by public taxation. These sprang up in every town and provided a corps of instructors and equipment that no private institution could possibly duplicate in numbers and variety. Moreover, their doors were open without tuition to every boy and girl of ambition. But the immediate cause of the Academy's death was the increased requirements made by State law for teachers' certificates. No longer were Howe graduates permitted to teach unless they took special teacher courses in accredited colleges. This was the sudden end of a process of slow decline.

No one can estimate how far-reaching the influence of a school like this may be, how many lives it may touch in its widening activities, what hopes it may kindle, dreams inspire, or souls stir to noble action. These things do not submit themselves to chemical analysis, to mathematical calculation, or cold statistics. They are largely psychological, below the surface, yet nevertheless real in their influence. It is the very essence of education to shape and mold and guide and inspire, that these effects may extend on through the years and generations in ever widening circles.

We need not mourn that Howe's Academy passed out of existence. It performed its mission well in its day. But its day passed and it had to yield to changing conditions. It furnished to many young men and women an opportunity for a sound, thorough education, which would otherwise have been denied them. It inspired these youths with an almost apostolic fervor in the pursuit of knowledge. It rendered an incalculable contribution in the formative days of Iowa history to the cause of education and upright citizenship. It inspired ardent zeal, created a solid fabric of enduring character, and built itself into the warp and woof of Iowa life. Glory enough, it would seem, for any institution.

A granite boulder and a bronze tablet — fit emblems of Howe's Academy and its two illustrious principals.

ROGER S. GALER