

## The Modern Era Begins

While Iowa farmers fretted over freight rates during the 1880's another problem concerned editors. A technological revolution was sweeping aside the old-time newspaper with its Washington press and its dozen type cases. The change had begun some years earlier, when the rotary press was developed, but Ottmar Mergenthaler's invention of 1880 sped the pace incredibly. He devised a machine that would set type from a keyboard, rapidly and accurately. Before long, no progressive newspaper could afford to be without a Linotype machine or two. The days of newspapers started and run on a shoestring were ended.

The need for more capital improvements probably forced both the *Gazette* and the *Hawk-Eye* from one-man to company ownership by the late 1870's. For a time Frank Hatton, later Postmaster-General in President Arthur's cabinet, headed the *Hawk-Eye*. Then in 1885 John L. Waite began his long tenure as the *Hawk-Eye* editor, and W. B. Southwell became business manager of the paper. A succession of editors on the *Gazette* was halted in 1887 when Thomas Stivers and his brother, Henry Stivers, bought control. The next



generation was memorable for the rivalry between Stivers and Waite, as each espoused his party's causes and strained for a greater circulation than his rival.

John L. Waite had been a newspaperman for over twenty years when he moved into the front office at the *Hawk-Eye*. He had served under Hatton, then later left the newsroom for an appointment as postmaster of Burlington in 1882. Indeed, he was favored by Republican administrations with that office, which was considered a choice political plum, at various times down to 1910. Waite's first love was the *Hawk-Eye*, however, and when official duties did not interfere he was editorializing and writing headlines.

Like his neighboring competitor, Thomas Stivers was a newspaperman of long experience before he finally came to Burlington as editor and publisher of the *Gazette*. It is reported that when he took charge the *Gazette* equipment "was of the most primitive, with a noticeable absence of improved machinery, and its entire circulation by mail and carrier was less than one thousand copies." Tom Stivers set out to make Burlington conscious of the rejuvenated journal.

Neither newspaper could ignore the growing farm dissatisfaction with railroad management and governmental fiscal policy. Both retained their political orthodoxy when Iowan James B. Weaver sought the presidency as the Greenback



candidate in 1880, and they followed this policy when Weaver again ran as the Populist candidate in 1892. Waite saw that the *Hawk-Eye* remained firmly in the Republican fold, while Stivers became a conservative Democrat himself. Stivers considered the silver issue championed by William Jennings Bryan extremely radical, and he refused to go along with the nomination of Bryan in 1896. Instead, Stivers threw the *Gazette* behind the "Gold Democrats" and their candidate, John M. Palmer of Illinois. Quick to exploit a chink in the opposition's armor, the *Hawk-Eye* printed letters from "Silver Democrats" who quarreled with the sound-money wing of the party. "Rating patriotism above bonds and money, I would rather be a poor populist or a poor greenbacker on the money question than a rich gold bug (Gold Democrat)," wrote one Bryan supporter.

Stivers was more successful with his financial activity than with his political affairs. For a few years the *Gazette* had been printed from type set by *Hawk-Eye* machines. By 1904 he was able to install presses and other equipment worth about \$50,000 in the *Gazette* plant. This expenditure added a Goss straightline press capable of turning out 25,000 copies of the *Gazette* in an hour, along with a battery of Linotype machines. With Tom Green acting as Stivers' "right-hand man," the circulation climbed to 3,800.

Meanwhile, the prestige and profit accruing to



Stivers and his competitor, Waite, were noted by other newsmen.

Former Mayor George A. Duncan began publishing the *Evening Journal* in 1893. The first copies were printed on silk. The *Saturday Evening Post*, which was finally compelled to relinquish the word "Evening" from its title because of confusion with a nationally known weekly, was founded by J. W. Murphy in 1882. It was a weekly and also began to share in the city's patronage to a larger degree. The old German-language *Iowa Tribune*, established as a weekly in 1861, had become the property of the Iowa Tribune Publishing Company in 1896. Long identified with it was Max Poppe, one of Burlington's more colorful newspaper figures. *Der Volksfreund*, another German publication, was published as a semi-weekly, beginning in March, 1894, by members of the Lohmann family — Carl, Henry, William and Charles.

Waite finally forsook his postmastership in 1910 to devote his full time to the *Hawk-Eye*. Southwell had left a few years earlier for a Des Moines job. The paper's tradition as a temperance sheet, dating back to founder Edwards, was continued by Waite and his son, Clay, who was now business manager. Waite seems to have been innately conservative, a fact which gained him wide support in Burlington. A contemporary Burlington historian noted that Waite "believes in



progress; but does not readily take up with every nostrum which is advocated as a cure for public or party evils." This background accounted for Waite's opposition to the direct election of senators, and, in 1912, for his break with the "Big Stick" man — Theodore Roosevelt — and his wing of the Republican party.

When the Roosevelt forces decided to seek the presidential nomination through a third party in 1912, Waite flayed the "Roosevelt steam roller politicians" for their tactics. The nomination of Wilson was said to show, the *Hawk-Eye* also declared, that a Democratic victory was unlikely because of "the populistic influences now backing him for the presidency. . . ."

Another indication of Waite's conservatism was an editorial comment on the airplane in 1912. Air travel might be possible, the *Hawk-Eye* conceded, "but it will be in some way not yet dreamed of by the most expert students of aviation."

The *Gazette* was exuberant when Woodrow Wilson was inaugurated in 1913, but soon the staff was saddened by the death of Thomas Stivers, which left his son, George, and Tom Green in command. Within a year the emphasis on the *Hawk-Eye* and the *Gazette* front pages was on Europe, however, as the clouds of World War I gathered over that unhappy continent. The outbreak of war quickly brought both newspapers into a partisan position favorable to the Allies.



Iowa agriculture boomed under the demand from war markets, and Burlington itself hummed with increased railroad and commercial activity, with the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad playing a dominant role. The city population in 1915 was 12,404, and the old dreams of competition with St. Louis and Chicago had given way to determination to make Burlington a thriving intermediate point.

America's entrance into the war directly affected almost every Burlington family. Young men were drafted for military duty, mothers and wives volunteered for Red Cross work, and older men served as YMCA secretaries and Liberty Bond salesmen. War news was eagerly sought, thus increasing the circulation of the *Hawk-Eye* and the *Gazette*. The anti-German sentiment generated by wartime emotions also reacted against the German newspapers in Burlington, and they eventually closed their doors.

In 1917 John L. Waite, in his seventy-seventh year, turned his duties as publisher over to Southwell, who returned from Des Moines. W. H. Davidson was Waite's chief lieutenant and showed considerable ability as an editorial writer. As a sign of the times the *Hawk-Eye* was now printing the famous cartoons of Clare A. Briggs, with their mirthful *When a Feller Needs a Friend* and *Mr. and Mrs.* During the war Briggs supplemented the fare with a *D—n the Kaiser* series



that helped people maintain a sense of humor despite wartime tensions.

Armistice Day, 1918, dawned on a new America. The United States had gone into the war "to make the world safe for Democracy." The nation had emerged with a large national debt, with huge sums owed to her by other Allied powers, and with a president devoted to the idea that blossomed into the League of Nations. At the outset both the *Gazette* and the *Hawk-Eye* favored the international body. As the Senate became embroiled over the League issue, the *Hawk-Eye* praised the League "as a blessing that would go far toward ridding the world of the curse of war." The *Gazette* claimed that Republican Senators were strangling the League with blind opposition. The *Hawk-Eye* attempted to lift the discussion above a partisan basis, but when it appeared that Wilson had lost his fight the *Hawk-Eye* blamed the failure on the President's reluctance to take others into his counsel when the peace treaty had been drafted. Historical writing since then has somewhat vindicated the editorial attitude of both newspapers.

Burlington continued to grow during the Roaring Twenties, aided by the postwar boom which convinced President Coolidge that the business of the United States government was business. High profits offset the troubles caused by a wave of strikes, and it seemed that everybody was buying



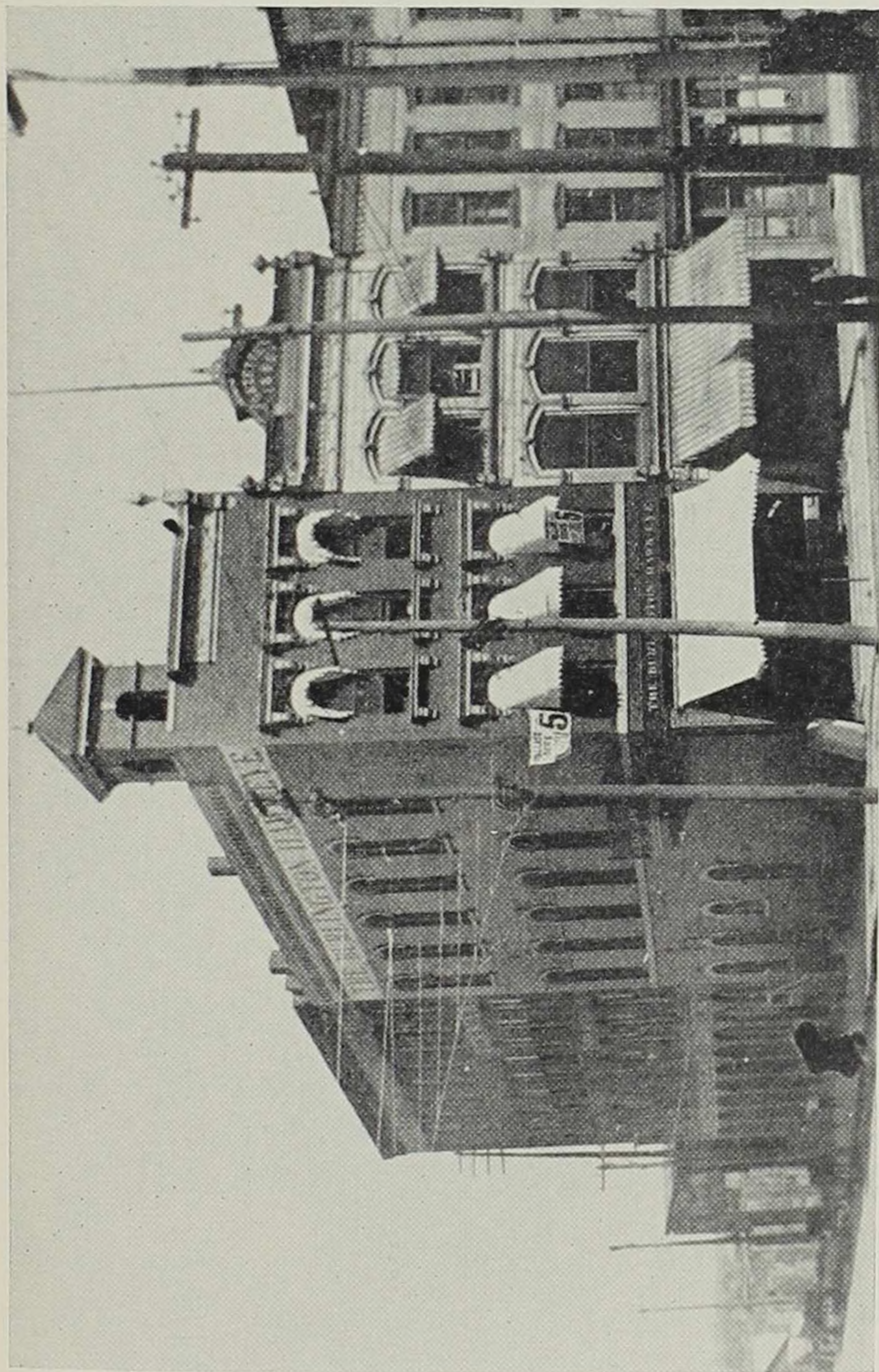
an automobile. "We want better roads!" the *Gazette* and *Hawk-Eye* chorused when statistics showed, around 1923, that Iowans owned more than 500,000 cars.

Southwell died in 1920, and John F. D. Aue succeeded him as publisher, with Waite still at the editor's desk. Waite receded from his earlier stand on aviation, too, and urged Burlington to build an airport! Aue later went to Whittier, California, where he died in March, 1945.

The *Hawk-Eye* had not abandoned its conservatism, however. John L. Waite lived until 1924, partly retired but occasionally at the news office until his death. Waite believed in the future of the Chautauqua movement when others were predicting its early demise. "So far as anybody can judge, the Chautauqua has come to stay and will ever be popular as the summer school of children and sure of a larger growth in the middle west," the *Hawk-Eye* declared on July 1, 1920. But motion pictures, spectator sports, and the radio gradually pushed other forms of entertainment into the background, thus overthrowing Waite's judgment. Nevertheless, his views on temperance had been upheld by passage of the prohibition amendment, though he did not live to see the "grand experiment" fail.

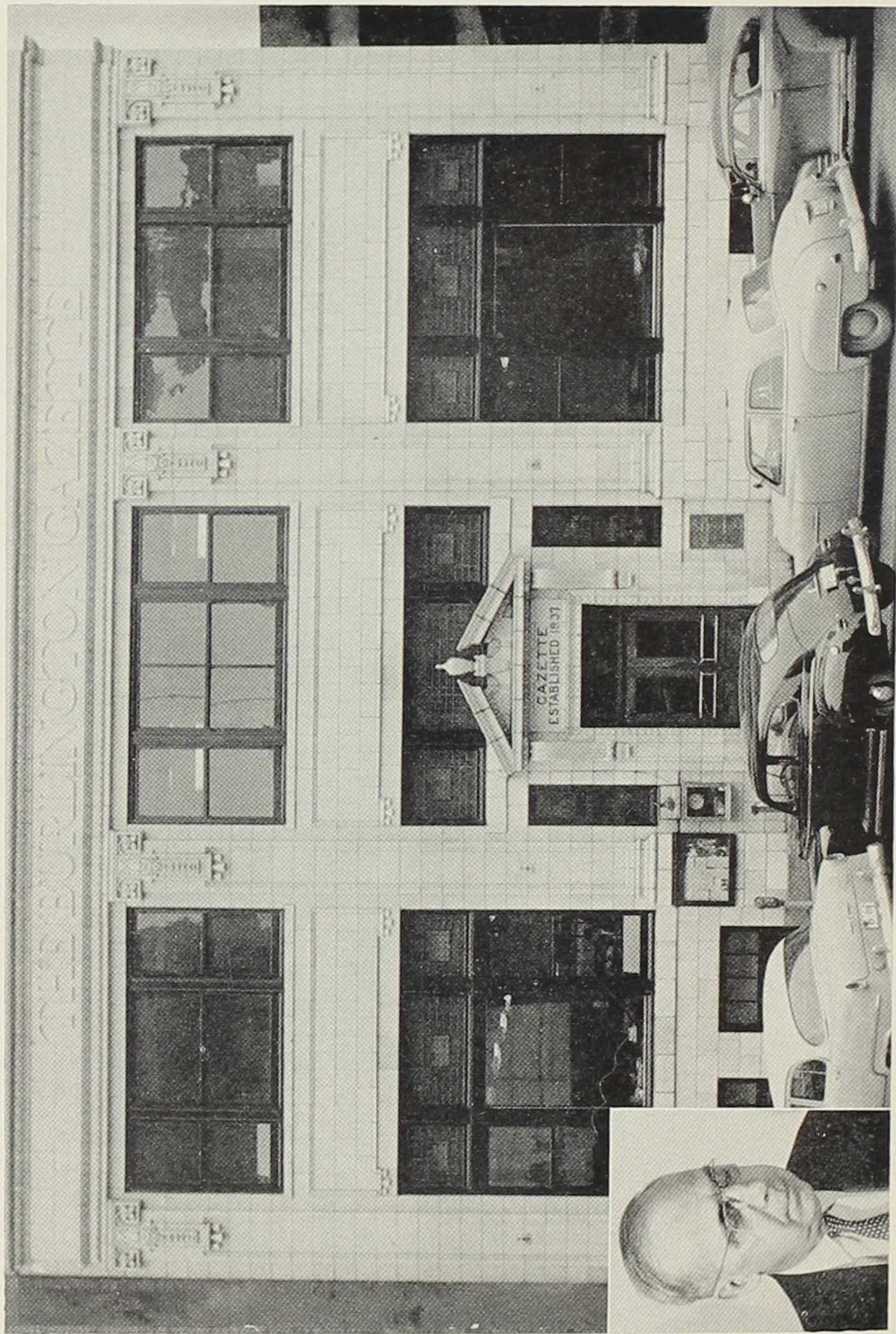
A common destiny for the *Hawk-Eye* and the *Gazette* seemed improbable in 1927 when George Stivers died. J. Tracy Garrett, a *Hawk-Eye* re-





*Hawk-Eye and Gazette buildings at Main and Washington Streets, about 1895.*





Present-day home of the *Hawk-Eye Gazette*.  
*Inset:* Clarence W. Moody, editor and publisher since 1941.



porter-editor since 1917, had followed Waite and Aue as editor and publisher. Clay Waite continued as business manager for a time. He then retired and died in Burlington in 1951. Joseph H. Coffin, Stivers' nephew, carried forward the family tradition by assuming control of the *Gazette*. Garrett and Coffin took over the respective editorships when the so-called "Jazz Age" was reaching a zenith, with the headlines made by a new set of heroes and heroines — ranging from Bobby Jones and Helen Wills to Clara Bow and Jimmy Walker. This was perhaps the high tide of the Republican party, for even the Democratic national committee chairman admitted that Americans had finally reached a permanent level of prosperity.

Certainly the situation around the *Hawk-Eye* and *Gazette* offices made optimism easy. Burlington had a population of 23,000 in 1929. The *Gazette* circulation was 12,045, with the *Hawk-Eye* slightly behind in the race for readers. Only a few signs of economic unrest — upward trends in unemployment, a lowering farm income — clouded the prosperity picture.

Suddenly the stock market crash on Wall Street caught the nation unaware. Businessmen contracted their activity, advertising revenue fell off, and the publishers of the two Burlington dailies shared the uncertainties of the next few years.

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