

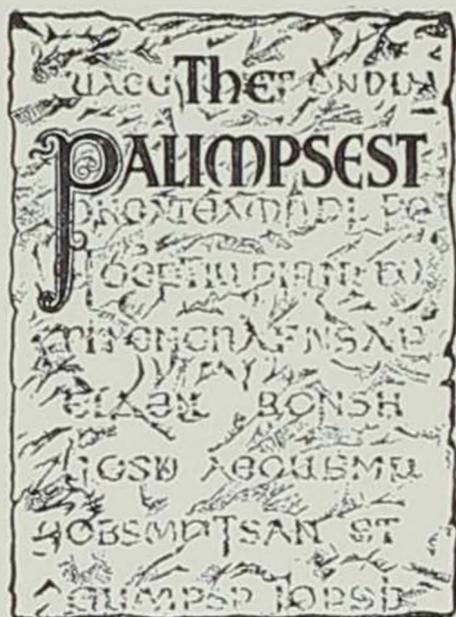
*The*  
**PALIMPSEST**



Schaeffer Hall  
THE PALIMPSEST: 1920-1955

Published Monthly by  
**The State Historical Society of Iowa**  
Iowa City, Iowa

JUNE 1955



## The Meaning of Palimpsest

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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## Contents

### THE PALIMPSEST: 1920-1955

The Vision	205
BENJAMIN F. SHAMBAUGH	
Palimpsests	206
JOHN C. PARISH	
Journalism and History	213
JOHN C. PARISH	
A Geological Palimpsest	216
JOHN E. BRIGGS	
THE PALIMPSEST in Retrospect	226
WILLIAM J. PETERSEN	

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## Cover

*Front* — The State Historical Society of Iowa is located on the third floor and in the basement of Schaeffer Hall on the State University of Iowa campus.

This issue marks the end of THE PALIMPSEST's thirty-fifth year. To mark this occasion, three articles from the first issue of July, 1920, are reprinted. The first two explain the purpose of the magazine and the meaning of its title. "Journalism and History" was the first of the editorial comments which Dr. Parish and subsequent editors have contributed. "A Geological Palimpsest," which appeared in November, 1920, was the first contribution by Dr. Briggs, who edited THE PALIMPSEST for many years. Dr. Petersen, Superintendent of the State Historical Society, sums up the achievements of thirty-five years and writes of the individuals who edited and wrote for THE PALIMPSEST during that time.

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# THE PALIMPSEST

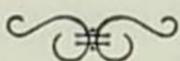
EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

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## The Vision

In imagination let us picture the history of Iowa as a splendid drama enacted upon a giant stage which extends from the Father of Waters on the right to the Missouri on the left, with the Valley of the Upper Mississippi as a background.

Let us people this stage with the real men and women who have lived here — mysterious mound builders, picturesque red men and no less interesting white men, Indians, Spaniards, Frenchmen, explorers, warriors, priests, fur traders, adventurers, miners, settlers, country folk, and townspeople.

Let the scenes be set among the hills, on the prairies, in the forests, along the rivers, about the lakes, and in the towns and villages.

Then, viewing this pageant of the past, let us write the history of the Commonwealth of Iowa as we would write romance — with life, action, and color — that the story of this land and its people may live.

BENJAMIN F. SHAMBAUGH

## Palimpsests

Palimpsests of a thousand and two thousand years ago were parchments or other manuscript material from which one writing had been erased to give room for another. The existence of these double texts was due chiefly to the scarcity of materials. Waxen tablets, papyrus rolls, parchment sheets, and vellum books each served the need of the scribe. But they were not so easily procured as to invite extravagance in their use or even to meet the demand of the early writers and medieval copyists for a place to set down their epics, their philosophies, and their hero tales.

And so parchments that were covered with the writings of Homer or Caesar or Saint Matthew were dragged forth by the eager scribes, and the accounts of Troy or Gaul or Calvary erased to make a clean sheet for the recording of newer matters. Sometimes this second record would in turn be removed and a third deposit made upon the parchment.

The papyrus rolls and the parchments of the early period of palimpsests were merely sponged off — the ink of that time being easily removable, though the erasure was not always permanent. The later parchments were usually scraped with a

knife or rubbed with pumice after the surface had been softened by some such compound as milk and meal. This method was apt to result in a more complete obliteration of the text.

But there came men whose curiosity led them to try to restore the original writing. Atmospheric action in the course of time often caused the sponged record to reappear; chemicals were used to intensify the faint lines of the old text; and by one means or another many palimpsest manuscripts were deciphered and their half-hidden stories rescued and revived.

On a greater scale time itself is year by year making palimpsests. The earth is the medium. A civilization writes its record upon the broad surface of the land: dwellings, cultivated fields, and roads are the characters. Then time sponges out or scrapes off the writing and allows another story to be told. Huge glaciers change the surface of the earth; a river is turned aside; or a flood descends and washes out the marks of a valley people. More often the ephemeral work of man is merely brushed away or overlain and forgotten. Foundations of old dwellings are covered with drifting sand or fast growing weeds. Auto roads hide the Indian trail and the old buffalo trace. The caveman's rock is quarried away to make a state capitol.

But the process is not always complete, nor does it defy restoration. The frozen subsoil of the

plains of northern Siberia has preserved for us not only the skeletons of mammoths, but practically complete remains, with hair, skin, and flesh in place — mummies, as it were, of the animals of prehistoric times. In the layers of sediment deposited by the devastating water lie imbedded the relics of ancient civilizations. The grass-grown earth of the Mississippi Valley covers with but a thin layer the work of the mound builders and the bones of the workmen themselves.

With the increasing civilization of humanity, the earth-dwellers have consciously and with growing intelligence tried to leave a record that will defy erasure. Their buildings are more enduring, their roads do not so easily become grass-grown, the evidences of their life are more abundant, and their writings are too numerous to be entirely obliterated.

Yet they are only partially successful. The tooth of time is not the only destroyer. Mankind itself is careless. Letters, diaries, and even official documents go into the furnace, the dump heap, or the pulp mill. The memory of man is almost as evanescent as his breath; the work of his hand disintegrates when the hand is withdrawn. Only fragments remain — a line or two here and there plainly visible on the palimpsest of the centuries — the rest is dim if it is not entirely gone. Nevertheless with diligent effort much can be restored, and there glows upon the page the fresh, vivid chron-

icles of long forgotten days. Out of the ashes of Mount Vesuvius emerges the city of Pompeii. The clearing away of a jumble from the top of a mountain in Peru reveals the wonderful stonework of the city of Machu Picchu, the cradle of the Inca civilization. The piecing together of letters, journals and reports, newspaper items, and old paintings enables us to see once more the figures of the pioneers moving in their accustomed ways through the scenes of long ago.

The palimpsests of Iowa are full of fascination. Into the land between the rivers there came, when time was young, a race of red men. Their record was slight and long has been overlain by that of the whites. Yet out of the dusk of that far off time come wild, strange, moving tales, for even their slender writings were not all sponged from the face of the land. Under the mounds of nearly two score counties and in the wickiups of a few surviving descendants, are the uneffaced letters of the ancient text.

And the white scribes who wrote the later record of settlement and growth read the earlier tale as it was disappearing and told it again in part in the new account. These new comers in turn became the old, their homes and forts fell into decay, their records faded, and their ways were crowded aside and forgotten.

But they were not all erased. Here and there have survived an ancient building, a faded map, a

time-eaten diary, the occasional clear memory of a pioneer not yet gathered to his fathers. And into the glass show cases of museums drift the countless fragments of the story of other days. Yet with all these survivals, how little effort is made to piece together the scattered fragments into a connected whole.

Here is an old log cabin, unheeded because it did not house a Lincoln. But call its former occupant John Doe and try to restore the life of two or three generations ago. It requires no diligent search to find a plow like the one he used in the field and a spinning wheel which his wife might have mistaken for her own. Over the fireplace of a descendant hang the sword and epaulets he wore when he went into the Black Hawk War, or the old muzzle-loading gun that stood ready to hand beside the cabin door. And perhaps in an attic trunk will be found a daguerreotype of John Doe himself, dignified and grave in the unwonted confinement of high collar and cravat, or a miniature of Mrs. Doe with pink cheeks, demure eyes, and fascinating corkscrew curls.

Out of the family Bible drops a ticket of admission to an old time entertainment. Yonder is the violin that squeaked out the measure at many a pioneer ball. Here is the square foot warmer that lay in the bottom of his cutter on the way home and there the candlestick that held the home-made tallow dip by whose light he betook himself to bed.

In the files of some library is the yellowed newspaper with which — if he were a Whig — he sat down to revel in the eulogies of "Old Tippecanoe" in the log cabin and hard cider campaign of 1840, or applaud the editorial which, with pioneer vigor and unrefined vocabulary, castigated the "low scoundrel" who edited the other party's "rag."

But most illuminating of all are the letters that he wrote and received, and the journal that tells the little intimate chronicles of his day to day life. Hidden away in the folds of the letters, with the grains of black sand that once blotted the fresh ink, are the hopes and joys and fears and hates of a real man. And out of the journal pages rise the incidents which constituted his life — the sickness and death of a daughter, the stealing of his horses, his struggles with poverty and poor crops, his election to the legislature, a wonderful trip to Chicago, the building of a new barn, and the barn warming that followed.

Occasionally he drops in a stirring tale of the neighborhood: a border war, an Indian alarm, a street fight, or a hanging, and recounts his little part in it. John Doe and his family and neighbors are resurrected. And so other scenes loom up from the dimness of past years, tales that stir the blood or the imagination, that bring laughter and tears in quick succession, that, like a carpet of Bagdad, transport one into the midst of other places and forgotten days.

Time is an inexorable reaper but he leaves gleanings, and mankind is learning to prize these gifts. Careful research among fast disappearing documents has rescued from the edge of oblivion many a precious bit of the narrative of the past.

It is the plan of this publication to restore some of those scenes and events that lie half-hidden upon the palimpsests of Iowa, to show the meaning of those faint, tantalizing lines underlying the more recent markings — lines that the pumice of time has not quite rubbed away and which may be made to reveal with color and life and fidelity the enthralling realities of departed generations.

JOHN C. PARISH

## Journalism and History

"Our historians lie much more than our journalists," says Gilbert K. Chesterton. This puts us in a bad light whatever way you take it. In order to defend the historian we must acquit the journalist of mendacity, and we fear the jury is packed against him. So we prefer to ask to have the case thrown out of court on the grounds that Mr. Chesterton brought the charges merely for the sake of eulogizing a third individual — the artist — as a true recorder of the past. Of which more anon.

In spite of this implied indictment of journalism, we wish to announce that the next issue of *THE PALIMPSEST* will be a Newspaper Number, wherein will be disclosed some of the words and ways of the early editors. They were often more pugnacious than prudent, and since prudence sometimes conceals the truth, perhaps their pugnacity may be counted as an historical asset. At all events, newspapers can not avoid being more or less a mirror of the times, and an adequate history of any people can scarcely be written without an examination of its journalism.

### ART AND HISTORY

But to return to Chesterton. His arraignment

of historians and journalists occurs in an introduction to *Famous Paintings*, in the midst of an argument for the effectiveness of the work of the old masters in popular education and the value of the canvas in portraying the real conditions of the past. Nor will we gainsay him in this. The artist who goes back of his own era for subjects must make a careful historical study of his period. The style of clothes worn by his subjects, the type of furniture or tapestry, and the architecture of the houses and bridges and churches of his backgrounds must be accurate. He is in that sense an historian as well as an artist, and his contribution is truthful or otherwise in proportion as he has taken the pains to be a competent historical student.

Nevertheless the best of artists and the best of historians make mistakes. We remember the discussion that arose a few years ago when Blashfield's fine canvas was placed in the Capitol at Des Moines. It depicts the westward travel of a group of pioneers crossing the prairies by means of the ox-drawn prairie schooner. It is a splendid piece of work, but some pioneer who had lived through such scenes and knew whereof he spoke observed that Blashfield had pictured the driver of the oxen walking on the left side of his charges, whereas in reality the driver always walked on the other side. True enough as Blashfield himself admitted. Yet there were difficulties having to do with the com-

position of the picture. The scene was arranged with the caravan moving toward the left or west side of the picture. Therefore, if the driver had been properly placed he would have been more or less hidden by the oxen — an eclipse scarcely to be desired from the standpoint of the artist. If the directions had been reversed, the canvas would have been criticised as showing the group coming out of the west — thus defeating the basic idea.

The last straw of criticism was added when another pioneer, referring to the symbolic figures which Blashfield had painted in the upper part of the picture hovering above the caravan and leading the way to the west, remarked that when he went west there were no angels hovering over *his* outfit. So we hesitate to accept Mr. Chesterton's implication that the artist is more infallible than the historian or journalist.

#### THE REALM OF THE HISTORIAN

But the historian is vitally concerned with the question of the accuracy of the artist who paints of the past, the essential veracity of the novelist who chooses historic settings, and the truthfulness of the journalist who, with his editorials, his cartoons, and his advertisements, is usually the first to write the record of events. In fact the historian must concern himself with these and all other recorders, for the things of the past are the subjects of his particular realm and he must keep them in order.

JOHN C. PARISH

## A Geological Palimpsest

Iowa is very, very old — as old as the hills, and older. So old, in truth, is this fair land that no matter at what period the story is begun whole eternities of time stretch back to ages still more remote. Seasons without number have come and gone. Soft winds of spring have caressed a dormant Nature into consciousness; things have lived in the warmth of summer suns; then the green of youth has invariably changed to the brown and gold of a spent cycle; and winter winds have thrown a counterpane of snow over the dead and useless refuse of departed life. For some creatures the span of life has been but a single day; others have witnessed the passing of a hundred seasons; a few giant plants have weathered the gales of four thousand years; but only the rocks have endured since the earth was formed. To the hills and valleys the seasons of man are as night and day, while the ages of ice are as winter, and the millions of years intervening as summer.

Through stately periods of time the earth has evolved. Mud has turned to stone, the sea has given place to land, mountains and molehills have raised their heights, and tiny clams have laid down their shells to form the limestone and the marble

for the future dwellings of a nobler race. Since the first soft protozoan form emerged in the distant dawn of life, myriads of types from amoebas to men have spread their kind through endless generations. By far the greater number have lived true to form; but a few have varied from the normal type the better to maintain themselves; and slowly, as eons of time elapsed, old species died and new ones came into existence. Thus mice and mastodons evolved.

"All the world's a stage" for the drama of life wherein creatures of every kind — large and small, spined and spineless, chinned, and finned — have had "their exits and their entrances" along the streams, on the plains, among the mountains, in the forests, and on the floor of the ocean. The theme of the play has been strife, and all through the acts, be they comic or tragic, two great forces have always contended. The one has aimed at construction, the other has sought to destroy. The air and the water were ever at odds with the earth, while the principal objects of animal life have always been to eat and escape being eaten. No one knows when the play began, no one knows the end; but the story as told by the rocks is as vivid as though it were written by human hand. This drama of life is the history of Iowa before the advent of man.

The record begins at a time when Iowa was under the sea. The only inhabitants were plants

and animals that lived in the water. Very simple in structure they were: it was the age of the algae in plant life while in the animal kingdom the noblest creatures were worms. The duration of time that the sea remained is altogether beyond comprehension. Slowly, ever so slowly, the dashing waves crumbled the rocks on the shore and the rivers brought down from the land great volumes of sand to be laid on the floor of the ocean. Ten millions of years elapsed, perhaps more, until at the bottom of the sea there lay the sediment for thousands of feet of proterozoic rock. This is the story as told by the Sioux Falls "granite" in northwestern Iowa.

After a great while the sea over Iowa receded. Then, for possibly two million years, the rocky surface of the land was exposed to wind and rain. Over the vast expanse of barren territory not a sign of life appeared. No carpet of grass protected the earth from the savage attacks of the water; no clump of trees broke the monotony of the level horizon: the whole plateau was a desert. As the centuries passed deep gorges were carved by the streams, and at last the down-tearing forces succeeded in reducing the land almost to the sea level.

Gradually from the south the sea encroached upon the land until all of Iowa was again submerged. Its history during the next ten thousand centuries or more is told by sandstone cliffs in Allamakee County. All sorts of spineless crea-

tures lived in the water. Crab-like trilobites swam to and fro, ugly sea worms crawled in the slime of Cambrian fens, the primitive nautilus "spread his lustrous coil" and left his "outgrown shell by life's unresting sea," while jellyfish and sponges dwelt in quiet places near the shore.

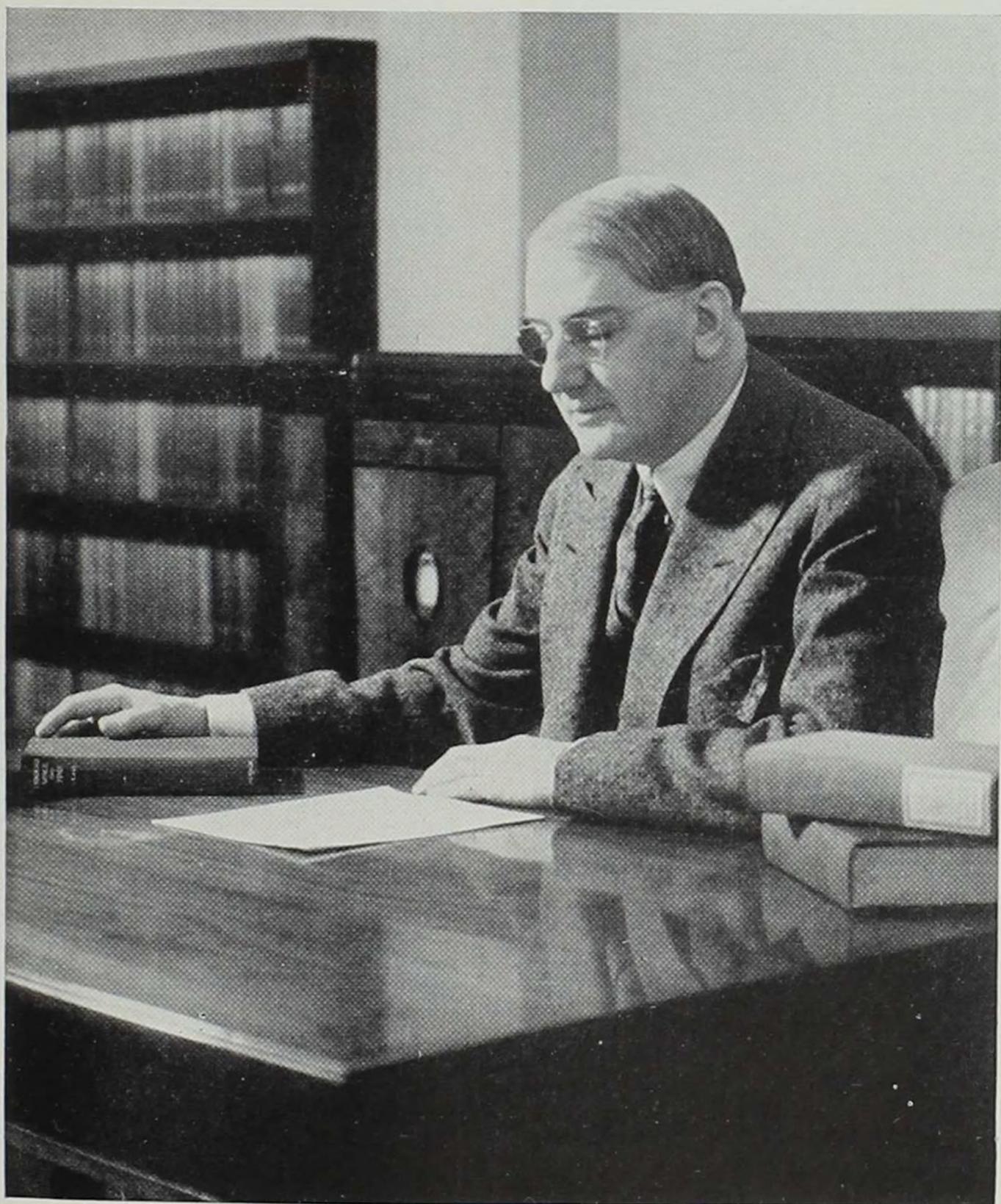
At last a new age dawned. The all-pervading sea still held dominion over nearly all of North America. So small was the area of land that the sand carried away by the streams was lost on the bed of the ocean. The principal upbuilding forces were the primeval molluscs that deposited their calcium carbonate shells in the shallow arms of the ocean. By imperceptible accretions the Ordovician limestones of northeastern Iowa were formed. Gradually the water receded and the newly made rocks were exposed to the weather. As the floods from summer showers trickled into the earth during the ages that followed some of the minerals were dissolved and carried away to be stored in cavities and crevices to form the lead mines for Julien Dubuque. That was millions of years ago.

Centuries elapsed while the Iowa country was a desert-like waste. Then again the sea invaded with its hosts of crabs, corals, and worms. Thousands of years fled by while shell by shell the Anamosa limestone grew. But as the world "turned on in the lathe of time" the sea crept back to its former haunts and the land once more emerged.

No longer was Iowa a desert. The time had arrived when living things came out of the water and found a home on the land. The ferns were among the first of the plants to venture ashore and then came the rushes. Forests of gigantic horse-tails and clubmosses grew in the lowlands. Slimy snails moved sluggishly along the stems of leafless weeds, while thousand-legged worms scooted in and out of the mold. Dread scorpions were abroad in the land.

It was the age of the fishes when the ocean returned and the process of rockmaking was resumed. Endless varieties of fish there were, some of them twenty feet long, and armed with terrible mandibles. Enormous sharks infested the sea where now are the prairies of Iowa. The crinoids and molluscs were also abundant. It is they, indeed, that have preserved the record of their times in the bluffs of the Cedar and Iowa rivers. He who will may read the chronicles of those prehistoric days in the limestone walls of the Old Stone Capitol.

Then came a time when the climate of Iowa was tropical. Vast salt marshes were filled with rank vegetation. Ugly amphibians, scaled and tailed, croaked beneath the dripping boughs and left their trail in the hardened sand as they fed on the primitive dragonflies millions of centuries ago. Cockroaches and spiders were plentiful, but not a fly or a bee had appeared. Giant trees, enormous ferns,



BENJAMIN F. SHAMBAUGH  
Superintendent and Editor, State Historical Society, 1907-1940

Editors of THE PALIMPSEST, 1920-1945



JOHN C. PARISH  
Associate Editor, SHSI, 1919-1922  
Editor, THE PALIMPSEST, 1920-1922

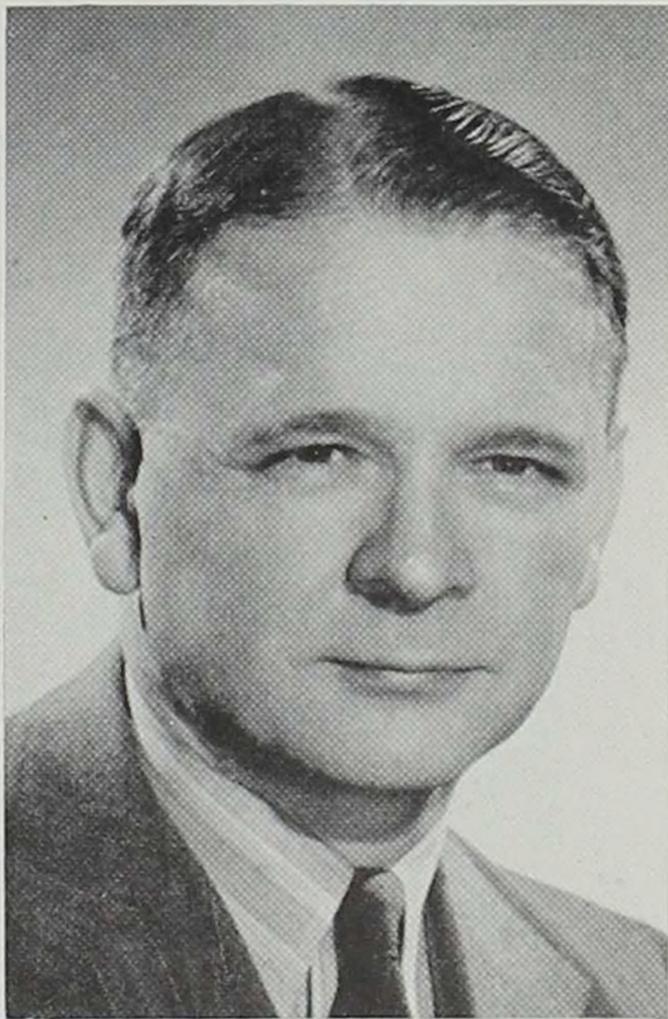


JOHN E. BRIGGS  
Professor, Political Science, SUI,  
1914-1952  
Editor, THE PALIMPSEST, 1922-1945

Editors of THE PALIMPSEST, 1945-1955

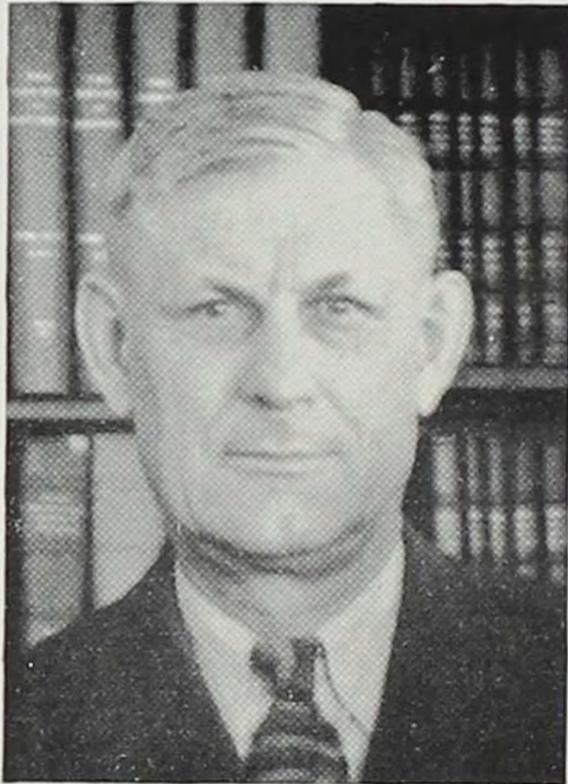


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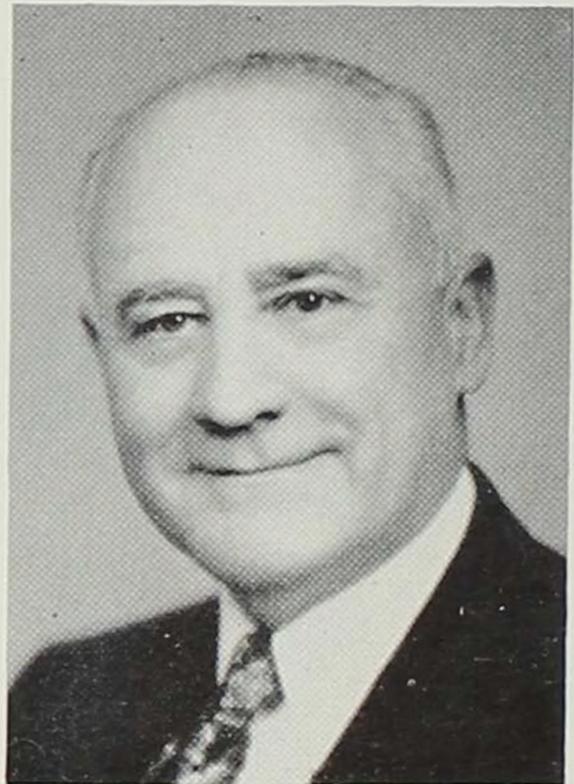


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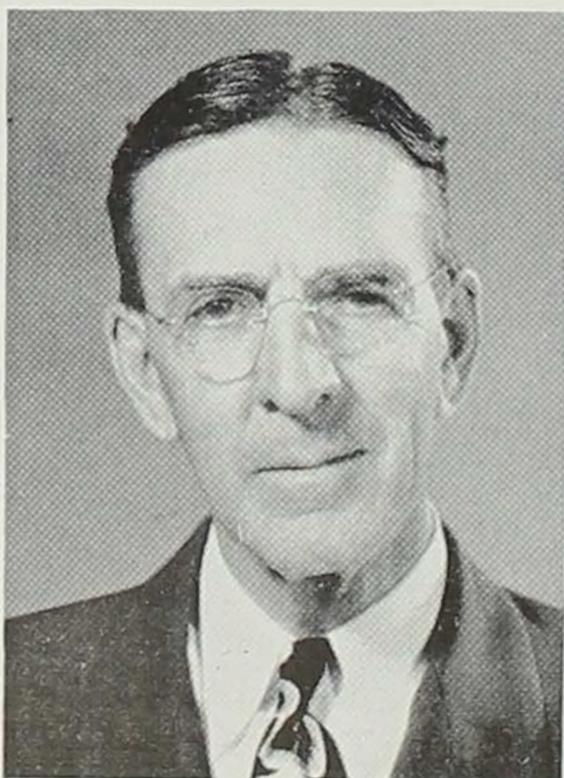
Some Leading Authors of THE PALIMPSEST



LOUIS PELZER  
Professor, History, SUI,  
1911-1946



BRUCE E. MAHAN  
Associate Editor, SHSI,  
1923-1929



JACOB A. SWISHER  
Research Associate, SHSI,  
1922-1950



JACK T. JOHNSON  
Professor, Political Science,  
SUI, 1940-1952

and ever-present rushes stored up the heat of summer suns and dying, fell into the water. As thousands of years went by, the reedy tarns turned into peat bogs and slowly decomposition continued until little but carbon remained. Such is the story the coal mines tell.

But the old earth heaved amain, the Appalachian mountains arose, and here and there a great salt lake or an inland sea was formed. The supply of fresh water was exceeded by evaporation and so at the end of a long period of time only a salt bed remained or an extensive deposit of gypsum. So it has come to pass that in the age of man stucco comes from the Fort Dodge gypsum mines that were prepared at the end of the Paleozoic era.

Enormous segments of geologic time elapsed during which the sea had receded and Iowa was exposed to erosion. At first the climate was arid so that plant life was scarce, but as humidity increased vegetation developed apace. In the animal kingdom the reptiles were dominant. Crocodiles, lizards, and queer looking turtles were here in abundance. Gigantic and ungainly monsters called dinosaurs roamed over the land, while from the flying Jurassic saurians the birds were slowly evolving.

During countless ages the wind and water were engaged in their persistent work of destruction. Gradually the land was reduced to the sea level and the ocean crept in over Iowa. This time the

water was muddy and shale and sandstone resulted. As sedimentation progressed great marshes appeared by the seashore and finally the ocean receded, never again to encroach upon Iowa. In the west the lofty peaks of the Rockies were rising.

Permanently disenthralled from the sea and possessed of a favorable climate Iowa became the abode of the flora and fauna of Tertiary times. To the east the Mississippi River probably followed its present course, though its mouth was much farther north, but the streams of interior Iowa were not in all cases where we find them at present. The valleys were young and the drainage was very imperfect. Luxuriant forests of oak, poplar, hickory, fig, willow, chestnut, and palm trees covered the hills, while moss-mantled cypresses grew in the marshes. There were flowers for the first time in Iowa, and with them came the bees and the butterflies. The ancestors of squirrels and opossums busied themselves among the branches while below on the ground there were creatures that took the place of beavers and gophers. Giant razor-back swine and something akin to rhinoceroses haunted the banks of the streams. In the open spaces there were species that closely resembled cattle, while from others deer have descended. An insignificant creature with three-toed hoofs passed himself off for a horse. All sorts of dog-like animals prowled through the forests and howled in the moonlit wastes. Stealthy panthers and fierce

saber-toothed tigers quietly stalked their prey, while above in the branches large families of monkeys chattered defiance to all. Bright colored birds flitted in the sunny glades or among the shadowy recesses. Snakes, lizards, and turtles basked on half-submerged logs or fed upon insects.

The majestic sweep of geologic ages finally brought to an end the era of temperate climate in Iowa, and after hundreds of thousands of years ushered in the era of ice. It may have been more than two million years ago that the climate began to grow rigorous. All through the long, bleak winters the snow fell and the summers were too cool to melt it. So year by year and century after century the snow piled higher and higher, until the land was covered with a solid sheet of ice. The plants and animals suffered extinction or migrated southward.

As this ponderous glacier moved over the surface of Iowa it ground down the hills and filled up the valleys. Slowly the ice sheet moved southward, crushing the rocks into fragments and grinding the fragments to powder. At length there came a time when the climate grew milder and the ice was gradually melted. Swollen and turbid streams carried away the water and with it some of the earth that was frozen into the glacier, but much of the debris was left where it lay. Even with the slow movement of glaciers, still there was time during the ice age for huge granite boulders

to be carried from central Canada to the prairies of Iowa.

The first glaciation was followed by an interval of temperate climate when vegetation flourished and the animals returned as before. But the age of the glaciers was only beginning. Again and again the ice crept down from the north and as often disappeared. Twice the glacier extended all over Iowa, but the three other invasions covered only a part of this region. Rivers were turned out of their courses. At one time an ice sheet from Labrador pushed the Mississippi about fifty miles to the westward, but in time the river returned to its old course, and the abandoned channel was partly appropriated by the Maquoketa, Wapsipinicon, Cedar, and Iowa. Again, as the ice retreated great lakes were formed, and once for hundreds of years the waters of Lake Michigan flowed into the Mississippi along the course of the Chicago drainage canal.

The earliest glaciers laid down the impervious subsoil of clay while the later ones mingled powdered rock with the muck and peat of the interglacial periods to form the loam of the fertile Iowa farms. Probably a hundred thousand years have fled since the last glacier visited north-central Iowa, but the region is still too young to be properly drained, so nature is assisted by dredges and tile. It was during the glacial period that mankind came into existence, but no man trod Iowa soil un-

til after the last glacier was gone. Compared with the inconceivable eons of time since the first Iowa rocks were formed, it was only as yesterday that the ancient mound builders flourished.

Such is the geological history of Iowa. No one can say when the first record was made, but the story through all of the ages is indelibly carved in rock by the feet and forms of the mummied dead that lie where they lived. Age after age, as the sea and the land contended and the species struggled to live, the drama of the world was faithfully recorded. Sometimes, to be sure, the story is partly erased, sometimes it is lost beneath subsequent records, but at some place or other in Iowa a fragment of each act may be found. The surface of Iowa is a palimpsest of the ages.

JOHN E. BRIGGS

## THE PALIMPSEST In Retrospect

In July of 1920 Dr. Benjamin F. Shambaugh, Superintendent of the State Historical Society of Iowa, sent "A Personal Letter" to members of the Society announcing the publication of a monthly magazine to be entitled THE PALIMPSEST. The primary purpose of the new monthly was to be the "popularization and more general dissemination" of Iowa history in a form that was "attractive" and in a style that was "popular in the best sense — to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished." Dr. Shambaugh pointed out, however, that readers were not to infer that articles in THE PALIMPSEST were any the less "real history" because the subject-matter which they contain was "presented in a style that is more popular and less monographic."

A great deal of thought was given to the naming of the new magazine. Dr. Shambaugh declared:

The name of this new monthly magazine of history — THE PALIMPSEST, pronounced with the accent on the first syllable, Pal' imp-sest — will at first seem strange and unfamiliar. Indeed, in choosing a name a very deliberate effort was made to avoid the stereotyped or anything in common use and to select a title that would be recognized at once as something new and distinctive in the field of historical publication.

The name PALIMPSEST was chosen because it seemed to furnish a title that is both distinctive and full of meaning that harmonizes with the character of the publication to which it is applied. Thus palimpsests in early times were parchments or other materials from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to read and translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts. (Note the suggestion of an ancient palimpsest in the cover design of the new monthly.)

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

Fifty-seven years ago The State Historical Society was the pioneer in the publication of a *quarterly* magazine devoted to State and local history — *The Annals of Iowa* being the first periodical of its kind in the United States. In the same spirit of pioneering the Society now ventures to bring out a *monthly* magazine devoted to State and local history.

In concluding his letter Dr. Shambaugh hoped that members would offer "opinions, suggestions, and criticisms" of this new historical venture. The Iowa press was not slow in responding. The *Des Moines Register* of August 8, 1920, declared the first number of this "unique magazine" was both "readable and artistic" and its career would be "watched with interest by all who know the publi-

cations of the State Historical Society." The Des Moines *Capital*, after explaining the significance of the word Palimpsest, concluded "after we get used to the name, Palimpsest, we shall like it. . . . The State Historical Society is conferring a great obligation upon the people of Iowa by collecting and publishing chapters of our state's early history and settlement."

The new magazine was not overlooked by staid professional publications. In April, 1921, the *American Historical Review* declared that the new magazine was "written in a style which will no doubt draw to the Palimpsest many readers for whom the more sober historical articles have no appeal."

As the years passed THE PALIMPSEST continued to attract favorable comment. In 1927 the Iowa City *Daily Iowan* declared the little magazine had grown "more interesting and useful with each issue." The editor of the *New York Times* asserted on July 29, 1928, that the "appropriately" named PALIMPSEST presented a "continual source of unhackneyed and various inquiry into the whole life of the State." The Dubuque *Daily American Tribune* was convinced THE PALIMPSEST contributed much to Iowa history and culture. "We often reflect that of all our Iowa institutions the State Historical Society is quite possibly doing the most to build into the state consciousness that kind of self-respect that Iowans need. . . . Do you

read the Palimpsest? It is the delightful little magazine that popularizes bits of Iowa history and sets them before the average reader each month so that he may feel familiar with them."

On February 21, 1931, as the magazine entered its twelfth year, the editor of the Mason City *Globe-Gazette* declared:

I doubt if there is published anywhere a more thoroughly enjoyable magazine for persons possessed of an interest in history than the Palimpsest. . . . Month after month the writers in this remarkable little magazine deal with interesting bits of Iowa history, some of it pioneer and some of it more nearly contemporary. . . . In conception and in execution the little magazine is worthy of the state historical society and I commend it to all who wish to invest each year a dollar in a sure dividend payer.

Up to 1948 THE PALIMPSEST used only occasional pictures and maps, but in 1950 the format was changed by the addition of pictures of historical significance. The result was even greater popularity with Iowans. Thus, in 1936 the Society had printed 2,600 copies of Bertha M. H. Shambaugh's *Amana — In Transition*. Two hundred copies remained in 1950 when Dr. Petersen determined to pictorialize the identical 1936 *Amana* text. The results were electrifying! An edition of 10,000 copies was sold in six weeks. A second edition of 5,000 copies was sold in six months, and a third edition of 10,000 copies was exhausted within a year.

Other issues have been equally popular, ranging from 15,000 to 25,000, while one issue actually totalled 54,000 copies. When it is remembered that the monthly printings of THE PALIMPSEST for thirty years barely averaged 2,000 copies, the magnitude of these printings becomes apparent.

The popularity of THE PALIMPSEST was not limited to members of the Society. A new and wider body of readers was being exploited in Iowa schools, where institutional school memberships increased from 30 to over 300 between 1949 and 1955. It was soon apparent that teachers and students alike profited from their reading of THE PALIMPSEST. Thus, in the spring of 1950, Mrs. Bernice Black, an instructor in the Webster City Junior College, took a poll on the popularity of twenty magazines studied by her freshmen students. Included in the survey were the *American Mercury*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Christian Century*, *Commonweal*, *Congressional Digest*, *Current History*, *Fortune*, *Forum*, *Harper's*, *Life*, *Look*, *Nation*, *New York Times Magazine*, *New Yorker*, THE PALIMPSEST, *Saturday Review of Literature*, *Survey*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Scientific American*, and *Theatre Arts*. Although pitted against such outstanding magazines. THE PALIMPSEST ranked third in popularity. The students commented that THE PALIMPSEST touched subjects "dear to the hearts of Iowans." They also liked the magazine because its articles "tie the past to the present."

The change in format was approved by the students who hoped that the policy would be to continue the publication in its "present attractive design."

During its thirty-five years THE PALIMPSEST has had four editors — John Carl Parish, John Ely Briggs, Ruth A. Gallaher, and William J. Petersen. In addition to editing the little magazine, each of these contributed many articles to it.

John Carl Parish, the first editor, was born in Des Moines and did his college work at Iowa State Normal School and the State University of Iowa, receiving his Ph.D. from the University in 1908. Dr. Parish served as assistant editor for the State Historical Society between 1907 and 1910, during which period he wrote three biographies — *Robert Lucas* (1907), *John Chambers* (1909), and *George Wallace Jones* (1912). Parish also edited *The Robert Lucas Journal of the War of 1812* and the *Autobiography of John Chambers*. One historical novel, *The Man with the Iron Hand*, appeared under his name in 1913.

After teaching at Colorado College from 1914 to 1917, and serving in World War I, Parish returned to the Society as associate editor and as lecturer in Iowa history in the University. His writing skill made him a logical choice to become the first editor of THE PALIMPSEST. He held this position from July, 1920, to August, 1922, inclusive, when he accepted a position on the history

staff of the University of California at Los Angeles, where he continued until his death in 1939.

The editorial style evolved under John Carl Parish during the first twenty-six issues of THE PALIMPSEST, was carried on by his successor, John Ely Briggs. Born on a farm near Washburn in 1890, young Briggs early evinced editorial skill when he served as editor of the Eagle Grove high school annual and the Morningside College annual. After his graduation from Morningside in 1913, Briggs received his M.A. from the University of Iowa in 1914 and his Ph.D. from the same institution in 1916. In 1914 Dr. Shambaugh appointed him research assistant in the State Historical Society, promoting him to research associate in 1917. The Society printed his *History of Social Legislation in Iowa* in 1915 and his biography of *William Peters Hepburn* in 1919.

Meanwhile, in 1917, Briggs became assistant professor of political science at the State University of Iowa from which rank he rose steadily to a full professorship in 1937. He continued to be identified with the State Historical Society, succeeding Parish as editor of THE PALIMPSEST in September, 1922, and continuing in this post through September, 1945, editing 277 issues of THE PALIMPSEST during this period. In addition, Dr. Briggs wrote 54 articles and 184 sparkling philosophical comments that were always a delight to readers of THE PALIMPSEST.

When John Ely Briggs resigned as editor of THE PALIMPSEST in September, 1945, he was succeeded by Dr. Ruth A. Gallaher, who had joined the Society staff as library assistant in 1915 and had made frequent contributions to both THE PALIMPSEST and the *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, before becoming editor of the quarterly in July, 1930. Born in Warren, Illinois, in 1882, Miss Gallaher taught school in Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Idaho, before becoming a graduate assistant and part time employee of the Society while working on her doctorate which she received from the University of Iowa in 1918. Between 1918 and 1930, Dr. Gallaher was library associate and made frequent contributions to the Society's publications, including one book—*Legal and Political Status of Women in Iowa* (1918). Dr. Gallaher continued as editor of THE PALIMPSEST until July, 1948, when she retired after thirty years of service for the Society.

In August, 1948, Dr. William J. Petersen became the fourth editor of THE PALIMPSEST. Born in Dubuque in 1901, Petersen received his B.A. from the University of Dubuque in 1926, his M.A. from the University of Iowa in 1927, and his Ph.D. from the same institution in 1930. He was appointed research associate with the State Historical Society and lecturer in Iowa history in the University. During the next seventeen years he contributed over one hundred articles to THE

PALIMPSEST and many monographs to the Society's quarterly. In addition, he wrote *Steamboating on the Upper Mississippi* (1937), *Iowa: The Rivers of Her Valleys* (1941), and *A Reference Guide to Iowa History* (1942). In July, 1947, Dr. Petersen was appointed Superintendent of the State Historical Society and thirteen months later assumed the editorship of THE PALIMPSEST. He continued a frequent contributor to both the monthly and the quarterly, wrote a two-volume history — *The Story of Iowa*, and published widely in other historical magazines. When THE PALIMPSEST was pictorialized in 1950 the initial volume contained more pictures than did the first twenty volumes.

The following box score reveals the contributions of the four editors to THE PALIMPSEST.

	Editorial Years	Issues Edited	Articles Contributed	Editorial Comments
John C. Parish	1920-1922	26	16	26
John E. Briggs	1922-1945	277	54	184
Ruth A. Gallaher	1945-1948	34	51	13
Wm. J. Petersen	1948-1955	83	157	2

The June, 1955 issue marks the end of 35 years of publication for THE PALIMPSEST. During these thirty-five years THE PALIMPSEST has appeared regularly each month, touching on all phases of Iowa history. A total of 327 different authors has

contributed 1,412 articles about which the editors from time to time have written 227 comments. The leading contributors over the past thirty-five years with the number of articles they have contributed are presented herewith.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Articles</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Articles</i>
Petersen, William J.	157	Throne, Mildred	17
Swisher, Jacob A.	109	Parish, John C.	16
Briggs, John E.	54	Haefner, Marie E.	15
Wilson, Ben Hur	51	Ross, Earle D.	15
Gallaher, Ruth A.	51	Frederick, John T.	14
Mahan, Bruce E.	50	Donovan, Frank	13
Johnson, Jack T.	29	Grahame, Pauline	13
Wright, Luella M.	27	Richman, Irving B.	12
Shambaugh, Benj. F.	24	Gingerich, Melvin	12
Rutland, Robert	22	Nye, Frank T.	12
Kuhns, Frederick I.	20	Robeson, George F.	11
Keyes, Charles R.	19	Lyon, Bessie	10
Jordan, Philip D.	17	Hoffmann, M. M.	10

Most of the above contributors were either full-time or part-time employees of the Society. Dr. Jacob A. Swisher was a regular contributor to both the monthly and quarterly while serving as research associate of the Society between 1922 and 1950. Dr. Bruce E. Mahan wrote most of his articles while associate editor of the *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*. Ben Hur Wilson compiled his unusual record while a high school teacher at Joliet. Jack T. Johnson was a part-time employee while Frederick Kuhns and Robert Rutland were full-time employees.

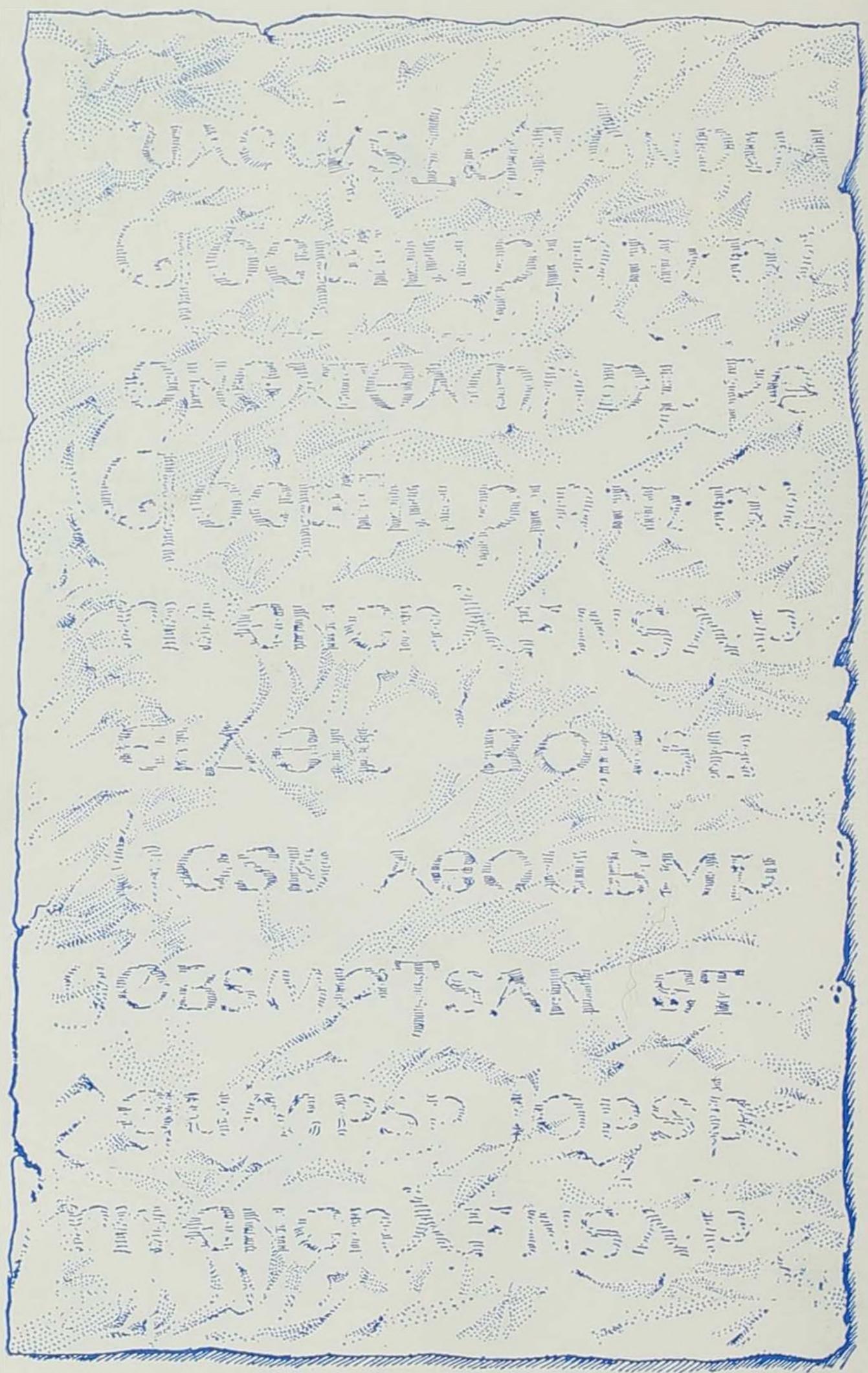
Other outstanding Iowans have contributed one or more articles including such men as Johnson Brigham, J. Brownlee Davidson, Virgil Hancher, Herbert Hoover, Frank Luther Mott, Louis Pelzer, M. M. Quaife, Irving B. Richman, Earle D. Ross, and Henry A. Wallace. On the opposite page are the names of 327 contributors to THE PALIMPSEST during its thirty-five year history.

The material covered during these thirty-five years embraces 15,888 pages of accurate, readable, and significant historical material that has served as grist for editors, magazine writers, radio and television commentators, and school and study club programs. In the years ahead THE PALIMPSEST will continue to explore the varied facets of Iowa history and present them accurately and colorfully to its ever-increasing family of readers.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

## THE PALIMPSEST'S Authors, 1920-1955

- |                          |                          |                         |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
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The Background Design of *The Palimpsest's* Cover, 1920-1949