

Comment by the Editor

THE TRADITION OF CULTURE

"It is confidently believed that there is no town in the west where there is a larger proportion of men and women of education and culture", declared the author of *A Brief Description of Fort Dodge* in 1858. As evidence of this opinion he cited "the maintenance of a weekly Literary Society, at which original essays, poems, and rhetorical exercises are exhibited."

The significance of the cultural atmosphere in Fort Dodge was not its rarity, as this enthusiastic promoter supposed, but its common existence in most of the bustling new settlements on the Iowa frontier. There was scarcely a town that did not boast of a similar literary club. Though the pioneers who conquered the prairies of Iowa may have been seeking fortunes, they were also concerned with establishing communities of homes in which the amenities of civilization could flourish. To that end schools were supported generously, adult education was encouraged, and societies for the advancement of mutual interests were organized.

The men's study club in West Union is, indeed,

unique in its procedure and longevity, but it sprang from the same intellectual soil that nourished the young men's library associations, the dramatic clubs, and the lyceums of an earlier day. The roots of these organizations for educational recreation were planted in the district schools where, with little pedagogical training, resourceful teachers like Carl E. Seashore adapted instruction to the needs and aptitudes of the pupils. Perhaps the spirit of this general aspiration was most clearly expressed by the seven remarkable girls in Iowa Wesleyan College who instituted a sisterhood that has extended its cultural influence far and wide.

Lest the stress of present circumstances should distort our vision, it may be well to pause occasionally and recall the aims of the men and women who founded this Commonwealth. They, too, encountered many hardships, but their high purpose triumphed over the distractions of current emergencies.

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