

# The **P**ALIMPSEST

APRIL 1948

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## THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

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## THE MEANING OF PALIMPSEST

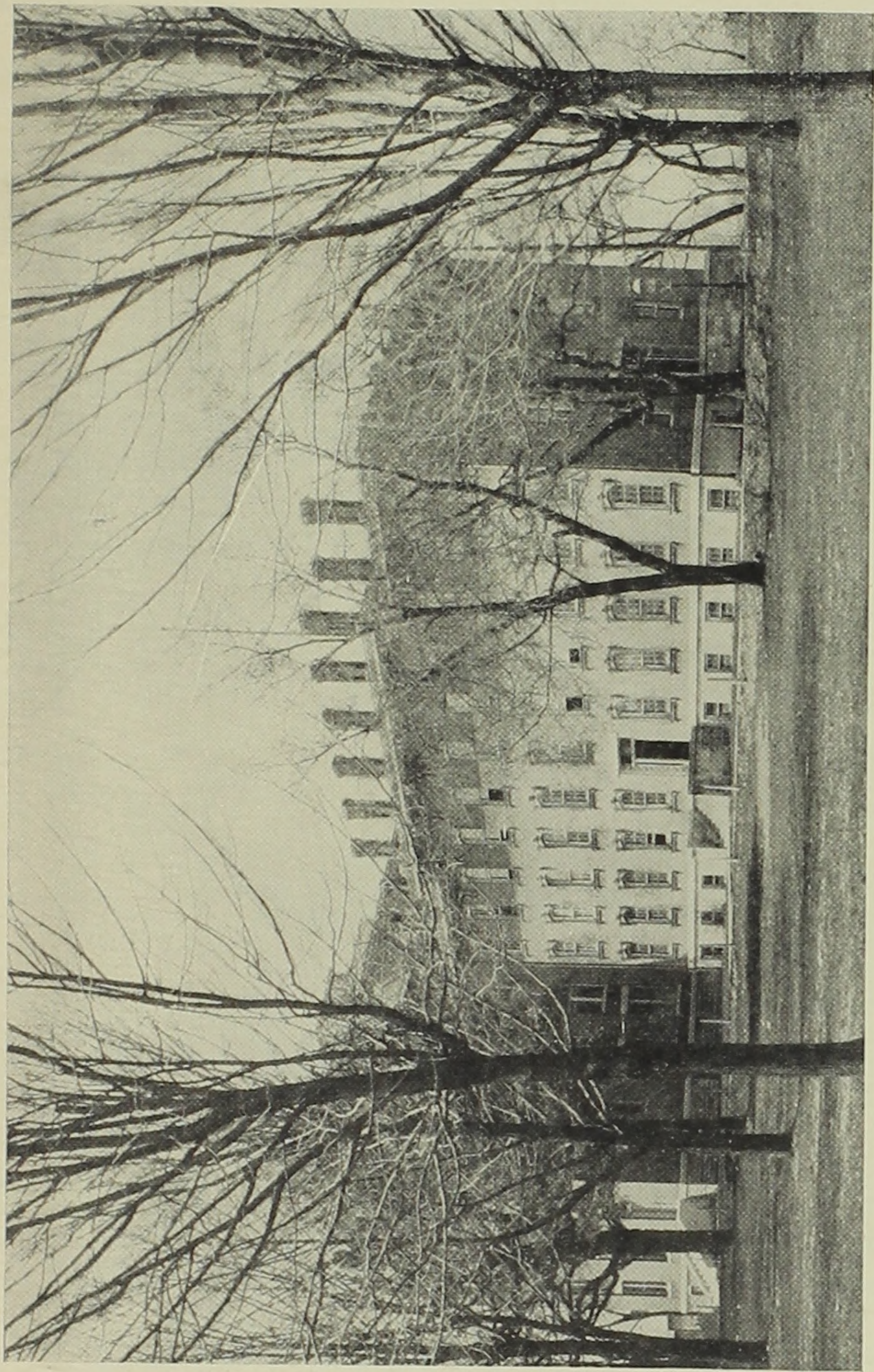
In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the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

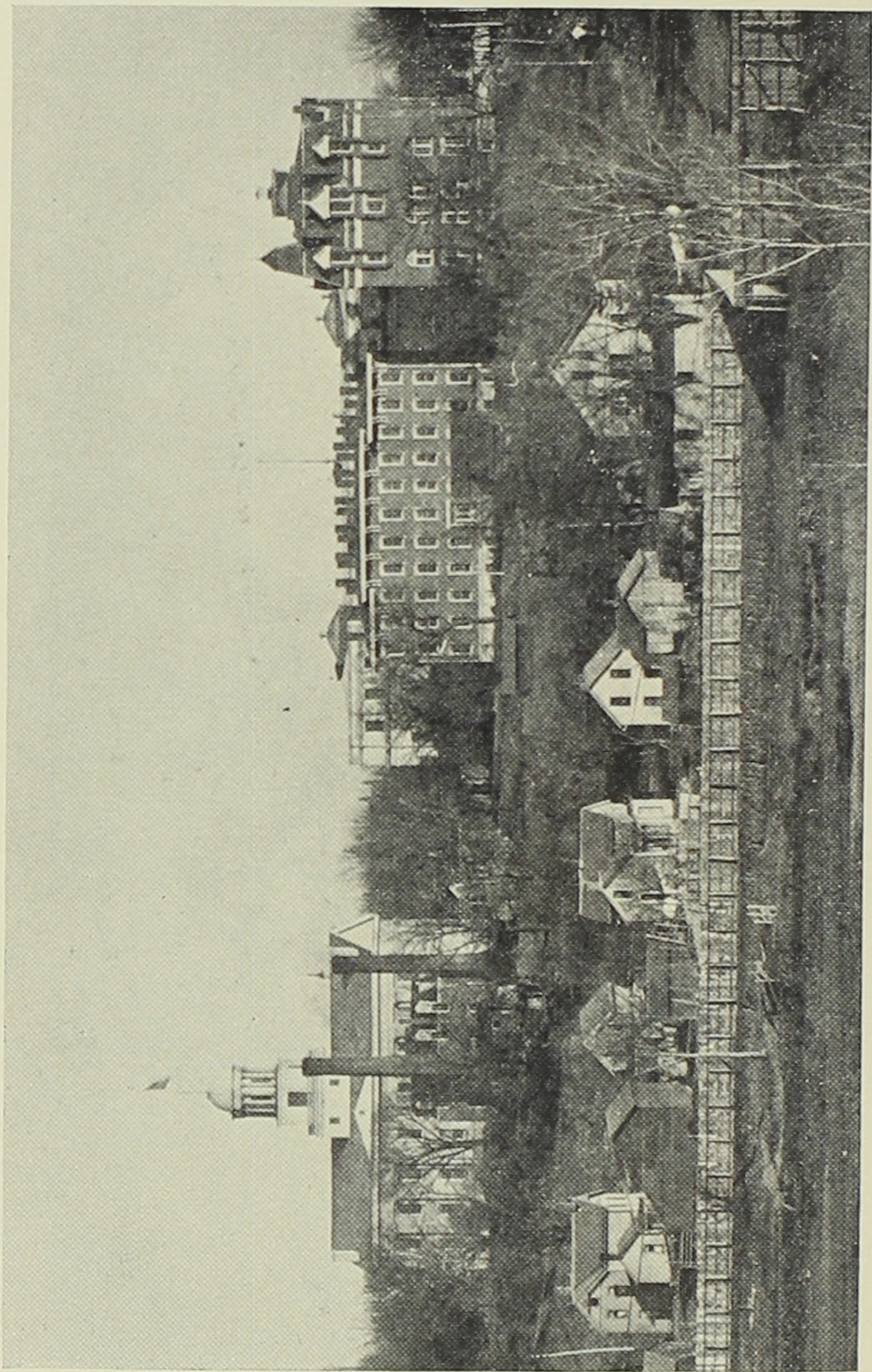
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OLD SOUTH HALL



WEST VIEW OF UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

# THE PALIMPSEST

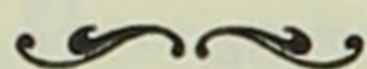
EDITED BY RUTH A. GALLAHER

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## Old South Hall

Very early on Sunday morning, March 10, 1901, the night clerk of the Kirkwood House (later the Burkley) happened to look north across Washington Street. There stood the uncompleted Hall of Liberal Arts, now Schaeffer Hall, and west of it in a row stood the Medical Building, Old South Hall, the Old Capitol, and beyond Old Capitol the remodeled chapel building known as North Hall and the Dental Building (now the Old Dental Building). The Iowa City streets were wet, and sleet covered the walks, paving, trees, and buildings. The view was familiar but the sleepy clerk saw that something was wrong; a glare came from the southeast corner of the basement of the Medical Building. Fire!

By the time the alarm had been turned in and the volunteer fire department had arrived, the fire was out of control, sweeping quickly up the stairway and elevator shaft of the four-story Medical Building. The clanging of the fire bell and the

piercing whine of the whistle at the waterworks roused the sleeping city. It was evident from the first that the Medical Building was doomed and the volunteer firemen turned their attention to Old South Hall, only a few feet north of the Medical Building. Could it be saved?

The flames reached out across the space and licked hungrily at the frame cornice of the three-storied, many-chimneyed South Hall. Soon the top part of the second building was burning and the pressure was so low that water did not reach the flames. The destruction of this building was slower, since the fire worked its way down instead of roaring upward as it had done in the Medical Building, but in two hours Old South Hall was also in ruins.

In this case, however, it was possible to save much of the furniture, books, and equipment. Firemen, faculty members, students, and townspeople carried out everything movable. The Zeta-gathians and members of Irving Institute saved most of the belongings of the four literary societies from the rooms on the third floor, except one carpet. The second floor was occupied chiefly by offices and classrooms of the Liberal Arts College and the first floor and basement housed the engineering department. Most of the furniture, equipment, and books, including the engineering library

of some 750 volumes, were saved. Fortunately the fire did not spread to the historic Old Capitol nor to the new building of Bedford stone just being completed — the present Schaeffer Hall — which sustained only minor injury.

Irving H. Hart, now on the staff of Iowa State Teachers College at Cedar Falls, a student at the University at the time of the fire, described the incident as follows:

"My roommate and I were awakened sometime after midnight on the night of the fire by the glare of the flames. When we reached the campus, the Medical Building, which then stood south of South Hall at the head of South Capitol Street, was a roaring caldron of flames. South Hall was a three-story brick-veneer building with a wooden cornice, and when we reached the scene of the fire, South Hall was not yet in flames. Soon after, however, the cornice of the south end of South Hall burst into flames. . . .

"Dr. W. C. Wilcox, Head of the Department of History at that time, and later Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, had his office on the third [second] floor of South Hall. I was one of four or five students who endeavored to remove as many of Dr. Wilcox's books and possessions as possible from his office before the building was abandoned to the flames. We had just come down

from what we considered our last possible trip from the third [second] floor where the smoke was absolutely stifling when we met Dr. Wilcox at the north entrance of the building. . . . When we told him that we had been able to save a good many of his books, he still insisted that he must himself go up to his office in order to secure his class records, lecture notes, and other personal belongings from his desk. . . . We students dissuaded Dr. Wilcox from attempting to go up to his office and two of us volunteered to make the trip again and get what we could. . . . When we reached the office we realized that we had no keys, but we broke the roll-top, ripped the pigeon holes out of the desk and released the mechanism which automatically locked the desk drawers, and each of us took two of the desk drawers in his arms and started back for the lower regions."

Byron J. Lambert, another engineer who was present at the fire, recalled that on the night of March ninth he had taken the part of the father in "Little Women", a play given by the Zetagathians and Hesperians. For one scene he had borrowed some plated silverware from his landlady. All he ever found of it was one table knife, entirely unsilvered. He did, however, help save the cherished 100,000-pound Riehle testing machine, which was in the basement of Old South Hall, by

playing a stream of water over it. The machine is still in use.

So Old South Hall passed into the realm of history. For forty years it had served the University. What had happened in those forty years? What had they meant to the University and the State of Iowa? Let us go back to the beginning of the University for an answer.

Although the University had been officially established in 1847 and opened its doors in the spring of 1855, it had no home to call its own until the State capital was moved to Des Moines in the autumn of 1857 and the stone Capitol was transferred to the University. For the preceding two years classes had met in a small rented building, the Mechanics' Academy, two blocks east of Capitol Square.

Soon after the University opened, the faculty pointed out to the Board of Trustees that more space was needed for classrooms. Two departments were carrying on their recitations in a single room and other rooms were separated only by board partitions, resulting in interruptions and confusion. Furthermore, the faculty pointed out, housing conditions in Iowa City made living costs too high for students of limited means. Rates for board and room in private houses were prohibitive and, as a result, so many of the students were

from the vicinity of Iowa City that the University had been derisively described as the "Johnson County High School".

Some State officials had recognized the need of the University for more room. In his report submitted to the General Assembly on December 1, 1856, James D. Eads, Superintendent of Public Instruction, had suggested an appropriation for a new building. In his biennial message to the General Assembly delivered two days later, Governor James W. Grimes had stressed that proper organization of the University demanded suitable accommodations for students. These suggestions apparently produced no results at the time, for a year later the faculty submitted a second petition, asking for a boarding hall with study rooms and dormitories, large enough to house one hundred students. They estimated the cost at between \$20,000 and \$25,000.

South Hall became more than a fond hope when, on February 16, 1858, Senator Samuel J. Kirkwood of Coralville introduced an act appropriating \$27,000 for the University, \$20,000 of which was to be used for the construction of a new building. The act was amended, reducing the building appropriation to \$10,000, but finally, on March 11, 1858, the first campus building constructed specifically for University use was au-

thorized. The Board of Trustees met immediately and appointed a building committee of five members — E. C. Lyon, Hugh D. Downey, Morgan Reno, William Burris, and Edgar Wright. Details of construction were left entirely to the discretion of this committee. Thomas Banbury was employed as superintendent of construction, with his compensation fixed at \$4.00 a day.

The ground-breaking ceremony occurred on Monday morning, June 7, 1858, at 7:00 A. M., attracting a large crowd to the University campus in spite of the early hour. The local newspaper, the *Iowa Weekly Republican*, reported: "The designs are very beautiful, and if built in accordance with those, the building when finished will not only be an ornament to University Square, but will subserve the higher good of the State University." The editor added this comment: "To build it out of the fund it will require the utmost economy and good management."

By August, with construction at full speed, it became apparent that the funds were insufficient to allow completion of South Hall and the Trustees voted to borrow \$5,000 from the University fund, the loan to be paid from future appropriations. This action later became the basis of much criticism. February of 1859 saw South Hall still far from completion. Accounts showed that \$16,-

000 had been expended already and that an estimated \$10,000 would be required to finish the structure. Again the Board of Trustees appealed to the General Assembly for a second appropriation. After much bickering and reprimanding for mismanagement of funds, the legislators solved the problem by transferring the remaining saline lands to the University, with the provision that no more than \$10,000 of the proceeds of the sale of these lands were to be used in completing South Hall.

The scarcity of funds necessitated the modification of plans several times, but when the construction was finally completed in 1861, South Hall was a red brick building measuring 108 feet north and south by 45 feet east and west. It had three stories and a basement. Its most conspicuous feature was the horizontal row of ten chimneys along each side, for the rooms were heated by stoves or fireplaces. The lights were candles or kerosene lamps.

When the University opened in September, 1861, rooms in South Hall were available for occupancy by men students at the rate of \$3.00 a term for single rooms and \$6.00 a term for double rooms, a sharp contrast to the present dormitory rates. A section of the south end of the building was rented to Professor Theodore Sutton Parvin

for living quarters at \$150.00 a year. Professor Parvin made his garden just east of South Hall. In 1865, a Mr. Jordan was employed to manage the boarding hall, which was to be operated on the "European plan". This dormitory-boarding hall arrangement lasted only a short time, for both the enrollment and curriculum expanded and, because of the scarcity of classroom space, most of South Hall was taken over for recitation rooms.

During the following years, University students manifested an interest in the welfare of South Hall. In 1870, the editor of the *University Reporter* remarked on its need for a new roof, an improvement which came two years later. The students were pleased with the construction of a new walk between the stone steps of Old Capitol and South Hall. This, it was said, was "much more pleasant than the alternate brickbat heaps and mudholes that were formerly found there." In 1877 the student paper — quite correctly — labelled South Hall a fire hazard. Revolving chairs were apparently an innovation in 1885, for the campus newspaper of that year carried an account of the refurnishing of rooms in South Hall for use by the Board of Regents. The furniture included twenty-four new chairs, eighteen of which were the revolving type.

In the 1860's and 1870's, the chief source of

social life for University students was centered in the activities of the literary societies. To provide a permanent home for these organizations, the Board of Trustees, in 1863, voted to spend \$1,200 for finishing four rooms on the third floor of South Hall. This amount was later increased to \$1,500. In 1865, \$500 was appropriated by the trustees to prepare the southeast room for use by the Zetagathian Society and a like amount was later given to fit up the northeast room allocated to Irving Institute. Later the southwest room was assigned to the Hesperians and the northwest room to the Erodelphian Society. In 1870, the north and south partitions were removed, and the Zetagathians and Hesperians occupied the enlarged south room jointly. The Irvings and Erodelphians made a similar coalition at the north end.

For many years, before the advent of movies, dances, competitive athletics, and an organized social program, South Hall was the scene of the Friday evening literary programs, which brought students and faculty together to hear debates, orations, essays, and drama, sponsored by these literary groups. To promote social life in the early days of the University, parties, socials, oyster suppers, and other festivities were frequently on the entertainment schedule.

A prominent social event in early days was the

annual Thanksgiving celebration. A social program was presented in the chapel building (North Hall), and a dinner in the traditional manner was then served in the dining room of South Hall. The student newspaper carried a brief account of this gathering in 1869:

"At 10 o'clock, refreshments were announced and all were invited to repair to the South Hall, where we found tables nicely arranged and decorated and supplied with a great variety of good things pleasing to the palate."

While all these things were occurring on the top floor of South Hall, the two floors below and the basement hummed with various activities. Although the building was planned as a dormitory, it served in that capacity for only a few years. The second floor was soon remodeled to provide recitation rooms and offices for Liberal Arts classes and professors — English, foreign languages, history, and public speaking. When the University organized its College of Medicine in 1869 the south part of the first floor (previously occupied as an apartment by Professor Theodore S. Parvin) and the basement were assigned to the new department for lecture rooms and dissection laboratories.

It was apparently about this time that gas lights were substituted for the kerosene lamps and can-

dles which had served the early occupants of South Hall, for the Zetagathian Hall was equipped with gas burners in 1870. Some ten years later, 1880-1882, steam radiators were installed in place of the stoves, the steam coming from boilers in a small brick building west of Old Capitol.

When the Medical Department moved into the new Medical Building in 1882, the Dental Department, newly separated from the Medical Department of which it had been a part since 1870, was assigned a large room across the southern end of the first floor of South Hall as an infirmary and lecture room, and the southern end of the basement was used as a laboratory. By 1894 the dental clinic had outgrown its quarters and the faculty requested that the Board of Regents either ask for \$15,000 to remodel South Hall or request an appropriation of \$50,000 for a dental building. The second alternative was chosen and in 1895 the Dental Department moved out of its unsanitary quarters in Old South Hall into the new (now the old) Dental Building.

In the meantime engineering had entered the University, at first as a separate "chair" established in 1873. Professor Philetus H. Philbrick, selected to occupy that chair, was assigned two small rooms on the second floor of South Hall. With the development of engineering more room

was urgently needed and when the Medical Department moved into its new building in 1882 some of the space on the first floor and basement of South Hall was allotted to civil engineering students. Apparently this was in the north end, for the southern part was used by the Dental Department. When the Science Building (now the Geology Building) was completed in 1885, the engineering department was installed there temporarily, but ten years later it was returned to South Hall, where it occupied the basement and first floor, the Dental Department having moved to its new building in 1895.

Old South Hall during these years had something to offer women students. When the Medical Department moved out of South Hall in 1882, one of the vacated rooms was allocated to classes in elocution and as a gymnasium for women students. In the summer of 1886 the northwest room on the first floor was carpeted and fitted up as a study room for girls and it was still in use for that purpose in 1901.

So it happened that when fire broke out that raw, sleety morning of March 10, 1901, the four literary societies occupied the third floor of Old South Hall, various departments of the Liberal Arts College were located on the second floor, the engineering department had its classrooms, offices,

library, and laboratories on the first floor and in the basement, and one room was reserved as a study room for girls.

That was a gloomy March morning for the University and for Iowa City. Those who gathered about the ruins of the two buildings that Sunday no doubt recalled the early morning fire which had swept North Hall on June 18, 1897, and destroyed a large part of the University Library. North Hall, rebuilt, now looked trim and serviceable. The new Liberal Arts Building (Schaeffer Hall) seemed to weigh down one corner of the campus. Only a few broken windows and minor damages, all estimated at some \$500, had resulted from the fire. Old South Hall was gone. The Medical Building, less than twenty years old, was a mass of smoke-blackened brick walls. The Old Capitol still stood serene and beautiful upon the hill above the Iowa River, looking down upon the ashes. Few of the shivering, curious onlookers that Sunday morning realized that the old era of buildings had ended; that the University was entering upon a new age.

KATHERINE V. BATES

## Samuel Mercer Clark

A little more than one hundred years ago, in a pioneer community near Keosauqua in Van Buren County, there lived a zealous and courageous Methodist minister — Reverend Samuel Clarke — who at an early date had migrated from Virginia. His father was George Henry Clarke, a native of Ireland, who had come to America in 1777 and was serving as a soldier in the American army at the surrender of Yorktown. The minister's mother was Jane Mercer of Virginia. Before coming to Iowa, the young minister had married Elizabeth Reynolds, a member of a Maryland-Pennsylvania family whose genealogy touched much of the history of the American Revolution and the War of 1812.

This sturdy and distinctive family tree bore, as the seventh child, Samuel Mercer Clarke, who was born in Van Buren County on October 11, 1841. The young man later dropped the final "e" from his family name and even abbreviated his Christian name to Sam. M., but he retained always that abundant supply of "patriotism, poetry, humor, pride, shrewdness, belligerency and force of character" that had come down to him from a

long line of worthy ancestors and had been cultivated and developed under the guidance of his watchful pioneer father, the sturdy follower of John Wesley.

Samuel M. Clark was educated in the country schools of Van Buren County and at Des Moines Valley College at West Point in Lee County, but his education continued through the years of his maturity. He read the best of literature, the deepest of philosophy, the broadest of history; he read "omnivorously and continuously". In this manner he assimilated an immense amount of information, learning, and culture. "His text books were the writings of the wise of all ages and the actions of the wise and unwise of his own time." He read nature as he read books, and he was familiar with birds, trees, and shrubs. The majesty of a great river gave him inspiration. "His mind gathered riches from all things, as a bee gathers honey."

Clark became interested in politics at an early age. He was not yet nineteen when he made a political speech for Abraham Lincoln in 1860. He learned early, too, that politics has its disappointments and its broken pledges. He had worked hard for the election of a county official, with the promise that he would be appointed as a deputy, but when he went to town to receive confirmation of the promised appointment, he found that it had

been given to another. His future seemed to be ruined, and he went back to the farm. But not for long. An ambitious, aggressive, and responsible young man was not to be permanently restrained or limited by a broken promise. He decided that there was but one thing to do with an unfortunate circumstance, and that was to forget it. He would lift himself above his difficulties.

With this resolve, Sam. Clark entered the law office of George S. Wright of Keosauqua and began the study of law. A little later, he volunteered for service in the Civil War, but was rejected because of his frail physique. He was a giant intellectually, but all his life he was handicapped by physical conditions. In 1863, he moved to Keokuk and entered the law office of John W. Rankin and George W. McCrary. In June, 1864, he was admitted to the bar, "but he preferred the philosophic serenity of the arts to the contentious turmoil of the law" and it was a day of triumph for young Clark, when, soon after he was admitted to the bar, he was invited to become associated with James B. Howell on the editorial staff of the Keokuk *Gate City*. Soon he was associate editor and when Mr. Howell was named United States Senator in 1870 Clark assumed all the editorial duties, and became editor-in-chief and part owner of the *Gate City*.

Early in his editorial career, Clark distinguished himself as a maker of phrases and as a lucid, effective, and able columnist. Illustrative of his abilities along this line were five editorials in the *Gate City*, descriptive of the Upper Mississippi River, written in June and July, 1868. After paying high tribute to "the officers of the good steamer *Itasca*", and to the congenial companions that he met, Mr. Clark described scenes and incidents along the way, as only Clark could describe them. Past Fort Madison and Burlington, and Muscatine and Davenport, with whatever attractions they and the country and the river between them offered, the *Itasca* went. "It was past mid-afternoon, Friday", Clark continued, "as our boat passed through the railroad bridge at Clinton. There the sun came out cheerily and brightly as though glad enough to see the face of the earth — and she looked up cheerily and brightly, smiling through tears, as though glad enough to get out of her moods and to see the face of the sun, never caring that he was at the same time coquetting with a score or more of other planets . . . Clinton and Lyons are upon the Iowa side, three or four miles apart . . . You take in both towns and the whole of the plateau at one sweep of the eye; it is a site for one large town, not for two little ones, and in the future when the large town shall

be there, Clinton and Lyons, the upper and lower suburbs of it, will find only matter for amusing recollection in their present serious rivalry."

Then on northward along the Father of Waters. "The memory of that evening boat-ride, approaching Dubuque is so pleasant to us, that if with our blunt lead pencil we could reproduce the tranquil beauty of the river, as we caught glimpses of it through opening vistas of green trees, where it ran miles above us amid low wooded islands, with the constantly attending green cliffs to the one hand; the clouds silver, and purple and gold, in the rays of the sun that had disappeared to us, and painting the waters in a line ahead of us with the mild reflection of their own various hues — if we could reproduce this in pencil-picture most distantly resembling the scene itself we would delay your approach to Dubuque."

Thus with word pictures, Mr. Clark continued to describe the Upper Mississippi — "a river with a pedigree", a river which "has written in the rock tables along shore its geological history."

Onward up the river! "Saint Paul", Clark said, "is a pretty little city of twenty thousand inhabitants, or thereabouts", built upon "a bed of the handsomest building stone, apart from marble, to be found in this country" — a new city "of wood or stone, or seldomer brick with no torn down, old

or racked buildings anywhere about it." Mr. Clark looked with disapproval upon the name which had been selected for the capital city, with all its newness and beauty. "Why call it Saint Paul", he questioned. "A very respectable, godly and much esteemed ancient" was the Apostle Paul, he said, but "is that any reason why Minnesota, abounding, as it does, in its Indian vocabulary, with the softest, and prettiest and most euphonious of native names" should call its capital city for any Saint, "ancient or modern"?

By the time Clark had returned to Keokuk, readers of the *Gate City* were no longer in doubt about the beauties of the Upper Mississippi. Nor was there any doubt about the ability of Sam. M. Clark to portray in word pictures the beauties which he saw all about him. He was widely recognized as a man of rare ability in his chosen field.

But Clark was more than a maker of phrases. He was a man of courage and conviction, not failing to express his views on local or national issues. In politics, he was a staunch Republican, yet party politics, as such, was not the determining factor in his attitude on public affairs. "Personal differences there will be", he said, "some will be Republicans and some will be Democrats; there will be adherents of different creeds and policies, but all should be champion for each and each for all, the

right to that diversity of belief, and the work of all should be to make the government the most beneficent possible, for North and South, for East and West, alike". Again he said: "I think the true end of government is to help every soul to live the best and noblest life possible to it. To help every man and woman to do this, they must be left free."

He believed that governments must be progressive and that their benefits should be of long duration. "All Progress is along one line", he said, "and God has a single purpose through it all. The battles you have fought, the victories you have won, are not for yourselves alone, nor for the present time, but for all peoples and every generation. They are an indispensable term in the world's future development. That future cannot be other than your debtor. Your faithfulness and constancy to Human Rights . . . shall further the coming of that time:

"When the war drum throbs no longer, and  
the battle flags are furled

In the Parliament of man — the Federation  
of the world;

When the common sense of most shall hold  
the fretful realms in awe,

And the kindly earth shall slumber, lapt in  
universal law."

Clark's editorial work on the *Keokuk Gate City* covered a period of thirty-two years from 1868 to the end of his career, in August, 1900. Happy is the man who finds his chief joy in his work. This was eminently true of Mr. Clark. "Able and always interesting in the discussion of politics, economics, education, science, art, poetry, philosophy and mythology, he made his page a banquet of food for the mind." He was bold, original, and independent in his thinking and writing, a journalist rather than a newspaper publisher. Much of his writing was done at home and men are said to have worked for the paper for some time without seeing him at the office.

One of his biographers has said: "He must have read Ruskin's 'Sesame and Lilies' for he was a literary miner, digging for the meanings of words". Some of his editorial admirers called him "the master stylist of the Iowa press". Others frequently referred to him as the Dean of Iowa Editors, and one young editorial writer expressed the view that he "would gladly give five years of his life to be able to think and to write like Sam Clark".

Mr. Clark was domestically inclined. A lover of the quietude and serenity of home, he married Kate Avery Farrar, a native of New York, in Keokuk, June 3, 1868. Their married life is re-

ported to have been one of "blissful happiness", and Mr. Clark never quite recovered from the sadness of her death on November 2, 1885. To this union one child — Arthur Farrar Clark — was born, to inherit the richness and blessings that come from a happy home and many friends.

Interested always in public welfare, Samuel Mercer Clark devoted much time and energy to his duties as a good citizen. He prized most highly the work which he did as a member of the Keokuk Board of Education for twenty-one years, 1877-1898, serving as president of the board for fourteen years. In 1883 he received every vote cast for his position on the board. He was a firm believer in the beneficent power of the public school, and followed every phase of its activity.

Always active in Republican politics, he was three times chosen a member of the Iowa delegation to national convention, serving in 1872, 1876, and 1880. It is said that he attended every Republican State convention except one, from 1864 to 1900, and that he frequently played a major role in writing the Republican State platforms.

In 1889, he was United States Commissioner of Education at the Paris Exposition. From 1895 to 1899, Mr. Clark was a member of Congress, representing the first Iowa district in the fifty-fourth and fifty-fifth Congresses. During this time, he

did excellent work as a member of the committees on education, and post offices and post roads. He also served as postmaster at Keokuk for several terms.

Mr. Clark was sometimes called an agnostic, but he himself told a young man who was with him shortly before he died: "I claim to be a believer. The life of Jesus has been an inspiration to me; but because my mind could not grasp the dogmas that were put before it, I have been fenced by them without the enclosure. My Christianity is satisfactory to me, and if my end should come I go satisfied. This has been a beautiful world, and though I have suffered much, I go satisfied." His religion was to live the good life among his fellows each day.

Clark died on August 11, 1900, at the age of fifty-eight, far short of the goal of three score years and ten, but the amount of his work was noteworthy, and his editorial record is a rich heritage for Iowa editors of today. "With a body delicate and pain-racked like that of Robert Louis Stevenson, he possessed a similar golden mind and the same indomitable spirit. Triumphant over his physical handicaps, he made his life and labor inspiring to us all."

JACOB A. SWISHER

### Letter from Iowa

A yellowed letter, written in a small, cramped hand, has survived almost one hundred years to rest at last in the document collection of the State Historical Society of Iowa. The envelope, also yellow with age, is addressed to Mr. Chester B. Orvis, Rutland Center, Jefferson County, New York. In place of a stamp, a notation in the upper right-hand corner indicates that nine cents had been paid for postage. There is no postmark, but "Jaynesville June 8" appears in handwriting in the lower left-hand corner.

Neither the letter nor the envelope give the year, but the reference to the Indian scare in Bremer County, which occurred in the autumn of 1853, the fact that it was written in June, and the 1856 census record that the family had been in Bremer County for about two years indicate that it was written in June, 1854. The writer was, it is probable, Mrs. Melissa Orvis, although she appears as "Malissa Orvan" in the State census of 1856 and as "M. Orvice" in the Federal census of 1860. Apparently she was living in the home of her daughter, Laurancia, whose husband was Matthew L. Stewart. According to the 1856 cen-

sus the Stewart family included three boys — Franklin, William, and Charles, aged eleven, nine, and five — and two small daughters, one three and one a year old. The Chester Orvis, to whom the letter was addressed, was evidently a son and it seems that Henry was another son, whose wife, Prudence, had recently died. Since Mrs. Orvis and her daughter were both born in Illinois, one wonders how Chester Orvis and Henry happened to be in New York, but no answer to this question is even suggested. Mrs. Orvis's name does not appear on the Bremer County census rolls in 1870, although the Stewart family, then including nine children, was still listed.

The letter is reproduced as written except for minor changes in punctuation and capitalization which have been made to render the account more readable.

Janesville Bremer Co. Iowa June

Dear Chester

More than one year has passed since I last wrote you and almost two since I left you and I am here two hundred miles farther west. While all of my number here have been spared to me one of my number from Jefferson Co [New York] has been taken. Sad news it was. I was unprepared for it. Why should I sorrow for her as one who had no hope when I believe she has gone to a better land?

I sorrow for those little ones that she has left for they miss her more than I can. She was first to leave our number and I often ask myself who must follow? Is it I? How lonely Henry and her mother must feel without her. When I last wrote I did not expect to go any farther west and made up my mind not to go. I never have been sorry I came though the children have been sick some and we run from the Indians. I got pretty badly frightened. We went back over sixty miles, one night and two days drive that was harder on us all than our whole journey to Iowa. We expected they would come and destroy all our clothes, provision, and cattle but thought our lives of more account than all. Some of the inhabitants said it was an affair got up by speculators to scare people off the land. Most of the inhabitants left for thirty miles north of Janesville. All the change we discovered was a very formidable fort built in the village on our return. We were gone over a week. Matthew carried fifteen in his wagon. After his return he purchased two lots in the village and built him a small cheap house, which we lived in through the winter. He paid \$60 for the lots and sold them this spring with the house on them for \$175.

During the winter M—— built him a house on his farm 18 by 24 and we moved into [it] about

two weeks ago. It is not finished but it is comfortable for summer. We are a half mile from the village and handy to school and meetings which we have every sabbath, though we have no meeting house but a small poor school-house, but there is stone drawn for a nice one to be built this summer. I like the country here much better than I did at Belvidere [Illinois] when I first went there. There is more hills and less sloughs, and it is a great deal cleaner country. The timber on the streams here [is] the same as in Illinois only in larger bodies and larger and better timber. The streams are very beautiful. We are on the east side of the Cedar. Two miles west of us is another stream called the Shellrock and plenty of excellent fish in both streams and them you know I prize. Plenty of walnuts, butternuts, plums, grapes and berries of all kinds. We go to the Cedar every week to wash.

William Stewart and his wife, Harriet, and her husband and Bingham are living with us now. They will live in about a mile of us when they get their house done. Daniel Wheeler's two oldest sons are about seventeen mile up the river from us. Dianna's husband lives about thirty miles from here. There is a great many Belvidere people settling near here. If I understand right I am entitled to another land warrant. I wish you or Henry or

both would see and get it and send it to me and I will have it on some land here and when I can sell it for enough more I will come and make you another visit. Please say to Henry that I have not sent Prudence's daguerreotype for I could not bear the idea of having it lost, and as soon as an opportunity permits that I can have one taken from it that I will send it, and not to be looking for it yet. Lurancia has received one letter from Henry since the death of Prudence. He was then about to start for New York. How is he, and where is he, and why don't he write? and why don't you write often? I will own that you have reason many times to think that I have forgotten you all but it is not so. I will own that my time is too much taken up with the labors of each day. I will make the promise now that you shall hear from me oftener, that means you and Ester and Henry. Not that mine is so much better or contains any more knowledg but that there is three of you and only one of me. How have you done since you took the farm and how are you doing? You never wrote me the day or the month you were married nor any of the particulars, only that you were married and that Ester was your wife. Tell me all about Prudence sickness and death how she felt and what she said about herself and children and Henry. All that I know [is] where

you are. Henry says you are living as snug as mice at the old homestead. I should like to ask a great many more questions but cannot for want of room. Kiss Esther for me.

Do come once and fetch Esther. I was in hopes Henry could come this summer and bring David. How is Mrs. Howland and how does she bear up under her loss?

Has there ever a thought pass through your mind that you shall ever come west if you are prospered and see where [we] live. Matthew and the boys are chopping in sod corn today.

My love to all,

Your Mother

## Comment by the Editor

### *VAGARIES OF THE CENSUS*

The census taker is instructed to remind each person who gives the intimate details of his own life and that of his family that all replies must be the truth and the whole truth. So insistent is the government on this, that census records are considered good authority as to age, but a critical researcher soon discovers that census records are sometimes fallible. Memory is not always a true guide and heads of families — usually the fathers — do not, it seems, always remember the ages of their children. Then, too, the census taker may make a mistake in recording the data given him.

Take, for example, the Stewart family as recorded in the Iowa census for 1856 and the Federal enumerations in 1860 and 1870. The head of the family, M. L. Stewart (Mathew L. Stewart in 1870), gave his age and the age of his wife correctly, but his wife appears as Lawrancy in 1856, Lancy in 1860, and Larency in 1870. The age of twin daughters, Emaline and Evaline, is given as one year in 1860, but Eva and Emma, apparently these same twins, are reported as nine years old in 1870. Mrs. Orvis, herself, is listed as

forty-eight in 1850 and fifty in 1860, but a son-in-law might well merely guess at the age of his wife's mother. Another puzzle is the identity of Martha and Harriet Stewart. Harriet appears in the 1856 census at the age of one year. She is not listed in the 1860 census, but reappears in the 1870 census and her age is given at fourteen. The 1860 census has a Martha and her age is given as five, but there is no Martha in either the census of 1856 or 1870. Are Martha and Harriet the same girl? Perhaps her name was Martha Harriet or Harriet Martha. Perhaps the parents did not agree on the name. Whatever happened, it appears that the census records for those years might be considered somewhat inconclusive evidence as to age.

R. A. G.

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