The Palimpsest

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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

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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THE COLESBURG POTTERY

THE PALIMPSEST

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The Colesburg Pottery

Beside the main street of Colesburg, in northeastern Iowa, is an empty lot, with a sunken well, a few stones of a discarded kiln, and the torn, uneven surface of what once was the floor of a large basement. A rubbish pile adds its discordant note. To the observant onlooker who knows the story, this unused, rubbish-filled lot recalls a once promising enterprise, the Colesburg Pottery. Here, for over half a century, the manufacture of clay products was a pet project of several ambitious men, who had visions of making Colony Township, Delaware County, the pottery-producing center of the nation, as Mason City later became known as the world's center for the manufacture of drainage tile.

But these visions have disappeared; and today few people in Colony Township realize the possibilities of this local project. The pottery began humbly in 1857, when David Roberts recognized the possibility of using the rich deposits of Ma-

quoketa shale in Delaware County. Upon the SE ¼ of the NE ¼ of Section 3 in Colony Township, about two and a half miles east of Colesburg, great quantities of blue clay, produced by the weathering of the shale, were found, part of the formation which extends from Bellevue, Jackson County, to Winneshiek County on the Minnesota line. These deposits, the oldest of the geological formations exposed in Delaware County, vary from one to fifteen miles in width and extend for over a hundred miles across the northeast corner of Iowa. In the deep valley cut by the rampaging Little Turkey, the Maquoketa shale and clay were left exposed and tests proved the excellent quality of this clay in making high grade wares.

Roberts remodeled an old church building to house the manufacturing unit, but he had just made a beginning, when fire destroyed the premises during the latter part of 1858. Without substantial financial backing to rebuild, he was compelled to discontinue the project. Today David Roberts is best known as the father of George E. Roberts, who later became Director of the United States Mint, but in his own right, he had envisioned an industrial project that many men were to develop during the next half century.

At that time the lack of transportation was the main obstacle in the way of many manufacturers

in interior Iowa, for they had to have an outlet for the disposal of their products. This handicap was to plague the pottery concern at Colesburg during its entire history. The early roads were nearly impassable in some seasons, as they followed the many hillsides or by-passed the numerous sloughs farther south in the valley of Plum Creek. Nor did railroads offer much encouragement. The Illinois Central Railroad did not begin its march westward from Nottingham, later renamed Earlville, until 1859, and the Chicago Great Western Railroad did not reach Dyersville until the eighties. Even then Colesburg had no railroad.

In spite of these difficulties the clay quarries found another champion in E. Jones, of whom little is known except that he rebuilt the pottery upon its original site in 1859. Jones continued his enterprise upon a small scale until 1871 when he sold out to Michael Stegner and Philip Stillinger. A year later another partnership, F. A. Grimes and R. C. Currie, purchased the plant, and it remained in the possession of these men for fourteen years.

It was during the Grimes-Currie ownership that the pottery first reached a substantial production level. As the earlier owners had done, Grimes and Currie devoted most of their efforts to the manufacture of ceramics or glazed wares. In 1878

these articles were described as including fine patterns of hanging baskets, milk jars, jelly cups, bowls, and other articles too numerous to mention. Flower pots, however, soon became the backbone product of the business, and plans for 1878 called for the production of 100,000 of these articles during the year, all finished by hand with only crude machinery to prepare the clay.

F. A. Grimes was an important figure in the early development of northeastern Iowa. In later years he was spoken of as a capitalist. He became president of the Delta Lumber Company in Mississippi, and was an instrumental factor in establishing the Colesburg Farmers Savings Bank.

At the peak of this period eight men were employed. The clay, dug two and a half miles east of the plant, was hauled in by sled or wagon and stored in the basement of the factory until it could be used. A passerby could see the smoking 10-foot kilns, fed by basswood which abounded in the wood-covered hills nearby. This wood cost a dollar and a half a cord. Just outside the building, a horse moved in a circle, giving power to a pugmill or mixer. The horse, hitched to a beam, pulled a sweep that turned a shaft having fin-shaped projections or knives which rotated and kept kneading the clay in the large vat. By this means the clay was mixed with water until its texture was

right for molding. Screening was necessary to remove the stones.

Inside the building the "turning" — the term applied to the molding of the product — took place. This was done by hand and was an expert's job. Most turners were men brought in from eastern potteries. With the help of plaster of Paris molds, the pliable clay was shaped into the desired patterns, and the articles were then placed in drying rooms. After the products were dry they were baked to complete the hardening process. After vetrification, ceramics were dipped into a chemical solution that gave them a hard, glazed, and lasting finish.

In 1885, after a profitable period of operation, the partnership of Grimes and Currie dissolved. Frank Brock then took possession of the pottery, but sold it in 1889 to a new adventurous duo, C. J. Jacobs and A. L. Landis. The growth of nurseries in the Midwest had accelerated the demand for flower pots, and building brick and drainage tile were seen as profitable products. Never, in all of the twenty-two years of its existence, had the pottery industry seemed so promising.

Realizing the necessity of increasing their production output, Jacobs and Landis looked for new capital and in 1901 they persuaded T. A. Foote, then superintendent of the Colesburg schools, to

join them. His selection proved to be a fortunate choice. Foote, who had inventive talent, advocated modernizing the business. A 40-horse power steam engine was installed and the plant was equipped with modern machinery for preparing the clay. Other innovations followed. The plaster of Paris molds were discarded in favor of custom steel molds. A machine for molding flower pots was added, and soon it became possible for an expert to turn out 7,000 units within the customary 10-hour working day.

When business boomed almost magically and the enterprise faced future expansion, associates advised the partners to incorporate and in 1904 the Colesburg Pottery Company was organized with a capital of $20,000. J. F. Wilcox, a well-known florist of Council Bluffs, became president, Joe Klaus, a farmer near Colesburg, was vice president, and Mr. Foote become secretary and treasurer.

Production of flower pots was now accelerated to meet carload orders, and the manufacture of ceramics was discontinued. Complete production lines were installed in both stories of the 70-foot building. The upper story was equipped to make two-inch flower pots — the size in most demand; while the ground floor handled those up to a 16-inch diameter. A chaser, or modern pugmill,

weighing 15,000 pounds, was installed. This power-driven device had three-foot cast-iron wheels which, rotating on a bed of cast-iron plates, ground the clay and rocks into a pliable mass. Screening was no longer necessary. Steam was piped from the engine through 3,000 feet of steel pipe to make the drying units.

In 1905, 10,000 flower pots could be turned out in one day, instead of the 100,000 a year forecast in 1878. The new corporation employed fifteen men and looked toward a national market. An advertising campaign began, and space was bought regularly in *The Florist Review* and *The American Florist*. Mr. Wilcox, who was also president of the largest nursery west of Chicago, kept up sales through his personal contacts.

The company had a right to have faith in its product. The Maquoketa shale was almost free of the usual calcareous fossiliferous bands and a yellow clay needed to make the flower pots more porous was also found near the plant. In 1903 exhibits were sent to the St. Louis Exposition, and the company was awarded second prize for quality. The A. A. Hughes Company of Cambridge, Massachusetts, in business for a century, was the only clay ware producer to excel the Iowa company in this line.

Sales expansion soon reached into sixteen

States. Flower pots were shipped as far west as Idaho Falls, Idaho, and as far south as Roswell, N. M. Carload lots were sold in St. Louis, the Twin Cities, and Kansas City. Many nurseries in Dubuque, Cedar Rapids, and Iowa City offered a strong local market.

But the men who guided the destiny of the growing business were still beset with transportation worries. They, as those who had preceded them, sought constantly for a railroad outlet. This seemed a possibility when M. W. Savage of Minneapolis, millionaire manufacturer of stock feed and owner of the famous horse "Dan Patch", planned the Dan Patch Airline Railroad between Minneapolis and Dubuque. Surveying had been completed through Colesburg in December, 1907, but the project ended in bankruptcy. The nearest railroad outlet was at Osterdock on the Milwaukee Railroad about eight miles north of Colesburg, but the roads in this direction were hilly and often impassable.

Later, the Chicago Great Western Railroad established a spur some ten miles south of Colesburg and a small station was opened through the combined efforts of the pottery men at Colesburg and the people of Petersburgh, a German settlement. Other outlets used for shipping were Earlville and Dyersville, both on the Illinois Central, and Al-

moral on the Great Western, about fourteen miles from Colesburg, but the pottery was never closer than eight miles to the all important iron rails.

In 1910 Mr. Foote, whose big white team had hauled many a two-ton load to Dubuque in one day, decided to utilize the coming mechanical transportation. He purchased an Avery Truck in Peoria, Illinois, and delivery was made to Des Moines. A four-cylinder job, weighing 7,000 pounds, the Avery had the distinction of being the first truck in northeastern Iowa. It had steel-tired wooden wheels forty-two inches in diameter. Wooden pegs driven through the six-inch rims gave traction. The vehicle was the outstanding novelty of the countryside, and if Mr. Foote had charged admission he could easily have paid the $2,500 list price. On his overnight stop in Marshalltown on the way from Des Moines to Colesburg, nearly fifty people were counted at one time about the vehicle, which caused as much of a sensation as a rocket ship would cause today.

The Avery was an interesting spectacle as it pulled two loaded wagons behind it on its four mile an hour trip to the railroad but it could not go when a team failed. Many times the company had to refuse or cancel telegraphed orders because the shipment could not be transported to a railroad. At the sale price of three dollars a thousand

for two-inch flower pots, transportation overhead devoured most of the profits.

Brick manufacture, hollow building tile, and even drainage tile were added to promote a more stable output. The Platt funeral home upon Colesburg's main street (later a tavern) and several homes in Colesburg were constructed of irridescent tile made at the local pottery. Several farms in both the Colesburg and Petersburgh vicinity used its drainage tile, but the local market could not support the company.

Finally, in 1916, when the modern truck and improved paved highways were still hopes rather than realities and with little prospect of a railroad, the company decided to disband. Small factories making clay wares were closing all over Iowa. In 1898 there were 349 producers of pottery in 87 counties of Iowa; in 1929 there were only 53 such plants in 31 counties.

For several years the unpainted, grey-colored frame structure stood deserted, like an old sawmill after the timber had been felled. The weathering of the lumber indicated where additions had been made. Attempts were made to use the pottery plant for other purposes but it remained empty, a playground for school children in the daytime and a club house for the local poker club at night. Colesburg residents still chuckle as they

recall one cold December night when the husbands, challenging straights and three of a kind in their snug retreat, were routed by the irate spouses who gathered at the kilns, made a smudge pot out of green basswood, and then smoked out their husbands. The men ran from their den in their shirt sleeves, and to this day no one knows who had won the last stake.

After a number of years, fire of unknown origin razed the building, and the kilns were torn down. Now only the vacant lot marks the place where one of northeastern Iowa's most ambitious industries once gave promise of success.

LOREN TAYLOR

The YMA of Mount Pleasant

When the Civil War was over and the boys returned home, Mount Pleasant renewed the cultural offensive it had begun when it established the Collegiate Institute more than twenty years earlier. The citizens had struggled all those years to gain permanent possession of the title, "the Athens of Iowa". By 1856 the Burlington and Missouri River Railroad had made the outside world more accessible and had brought many advantages to the ambitious town.

Counted among the cultural assets of the community were Iowa Wesleyan University, the Mount Pleasant Female Seminary, the Howe Academy, and F. R. Walker's Academy of Music. The Mount Pleasant *Home Journal,* a thriving weekly, supplied intellectual, moral, and cultural stimulation. Iowa politicians had recognized the community when they sent James Harlan, the president of Iowa Wesleyan, to serve in the United States Senate. Only nearby Iowa City gave any competition serious enough to threaten Mount Pleasant's cultural ambitions.

The Mount Pleasant citizens, however, felt the need of a winter lecture series and a library, so,

on December 1, 1865, the editor of the *Home Journal* suggested that they revive the "Library Association", an organization that before the war had met weekly at the courthouse for discussions, debates, and speeches. He was recalling the stimulating programs the men and women had enjoyed when their more learned members and visitors from neighboring towns discussed such questions as the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, the Fugitive Slave Law, and women's rights.

"Now that the war is ended", the editor urged, "let us hasten to renew our prosperous days and make our long evenings profitable and pleasurable. If we cannot secure the service of professional public lecturers, we know of gentlemen in our own midst who could be induced to give us a lecture occasionally." To the modern movie fans or sport enthusiasts, to whom a lecture is something to be endured for culture's sake, this plea, no doubt, sounds a little strange, but at that time a winter lecture series was considered in many towns the most exciting and gayest event of the season.

Taking the editor at his word, the following summer (1866) the young business and professional men of Mount Pleasant, like similar groups all over the North, organized a Young Men's Association, popularly known as the YMA. Sim-

ilar associations sprang up in towns like Lyons, Dubuque, De Witt, Independence, Cedar Rapids, Clinton, and Davenport. The Mount Pleasant YMA took for its primary objective "the procuring of lectures". Ultimately it intended to establish a library and a reading room.

The first president was T. W. Woolson, a lawyer, but the names of the other officers have slipped into oblivion. However, on January 18, 1867, the Mount Pleasant *Journal* (by this time both the name and editor of the newspaper had changed) announced the selection of a second slate which included: E. A. Van Cise, president; John A. Woolson, vice president; J. H. Whiting, corresponding secretary; W. I. Babb, recording secretary; and J. B. Ritner, treasurer.

The lecture course of 1866-1867 was ambitious, but it was successful, bringing to Mount Pleasant some of the outstanding lecturers of the period. The task of finding such talent was probably made easier through a coöperative association, the Western Association of Literary Societies, that booked lecturers for the member societies throughout the Middle West. For these lecturers, Mount Pleasant was, of course, just one of the stops along the way.

Reverend John C. S. Abbott made the initial appearance on October 31, 1866, with a lecture

entitled "France and Her Emperor", a eulogy of Napoleon I. The *Journal* recorded that he spoke to "a large and attentive audience and although there were many present who differed with him on some of his points, all will credit him with being perfectly sincere and honestly believing himself to be correct in all that he said."

On November 12th, Anna Dickinson, advertised as the "queen" of lyceum, spoke to the largest audience of the season. Union Hall was filled "to its utmost capacity with citizens of Mount Pleasant and vicinity all anxious to see and hear the great female lecturer." According to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Miss Dickinson was accustomed to sweep "the rough floors of many a barnlike lecture room with expensive silks" and she probably impressed her auditors at Mount Pleasant with the elegance of her apparel.

On this occasion her subject was "Something to Do", a lecture that probably pleased many of the women and irritated at least part of the men; for she argued that "woman is in every way equal to and in many cases superior to men." The *Journal* quoted her as advising the women not to "care a snap for public opinion." The editor, undoubtedly shocked by such boldness, commended her on her delivery but added his belief that "there are a score of young ladies in this city who could

get up a lecture containing more reason, more logic and more common sense than Anna's".

On December 10th, the YMA presented as its third number, Theodore Tilton, "the faithful, fearless and able editor" of the New York *Independent*. In contrast to the previous speakers, Tilton chose to discuss a current problem under the title, "The Corner Stone of Reconstruction". The Washington *Press* of January 17, 1867, summarized his talk at Washington, a few weeks later, as "argumentative, pictorial, radical, eloquent, picturesque, witty . . . in fine, a many sided, well compounded whole which with his glowing utterance, elicited from the audience cheers, spiced with hisses from a few incorrigible democrats present." Whether any "incorrigible democrats" were among his Henry County auditors has not been learned, but the door receipts indicated that he spoke to one of the smallest audiences of the season. The New York editor, however, made an impression favorable enough to receive two additional invitations to speak under the auspices of the YMA.

The success of Anna Dickinson probably encouraged the program committee to try another suffragette, Grace Greenwood (Mrs. Sarah Jane Clarke Lippincott), author and poet. On January 18, 1867, she gave a lecture entitled "Heroics

and Common Life". Although her crowd was larger than that of the previous month, the Mount Pleasant *Journal,* still in a critical mood and perhaps skeptical, if not even a little irritated at the advocates of "female suffrage", called her effort "interesting and well prepared, but a little old and not well delivered." The reporter added, "Grace has a world wide reputation, as a writer, but her lectures do not add to her reputation."

Next on the agenda was Frederick Douglas, the celebrated negro orator. This "Cicero of the negro race", as the *Journal* called him, had been raised a slave, had escaped to New England many years before the Civil War, had, at one time, been spirited to England to avoid arrest, and was now much respected and in great demand as a speaker. On February 28, 1867, Douglas spoke on "Sources of Danger to the Republic"; in his eyes these were: the immense power at the disposal of the President, secret diplomacy in times of peace, and the vice presidency. According to an account of the same address which appeared in the Washington *Press,* Douglas accused President Johnson of "complicity in the murder of President Lincoln". The *Journal* reported that Union Hall was overcrowded with "both white and black, old and young", but the door receipts failed to equal those derived from the Anna Dickinson lecture.

On the tenth of March, as its sixth offering, the YMA presented Wendell Phillips, a national figure and one of the most polished speakers of the century. At Mount Pleasant, as in other Iowa towns that year, he presented a "double bill". First he gave his perennial favorite, "The Lost Arts", a lecture originally prepared in 1838 and subsequently delivered to some two thousand audiences scattered from Maine to Iowa, in which he criticized the self-conceit which had led many to believe that their generation had made all of the significant discoveries, but pointed out that in the nineteenth century knowledge was no longer hidden in monasteries and palaces.

For the second half of his program Phillips presented "Reconstruction or Perils of the Hour". Newspaper accounts suggest that he advocated the removal of President Andrew Johnson and a firm reconstruction program designed to plant "northern ideas", meaning Republicanism, in the South. According to the *Cedar Valley Times,* this double bill was intended to appease "the less radical elements in the community", who probably disagreed with the political ideas which Phillips expressed in the second half of his presentation. "The Lost Arts" contained little with which such persons could disagree.

The calm, conversational delivery of Phillips

did not impress the Mount Pleasant lecture-goers. The *Journal* reported that "numbers were half asleep . . . Phillips is a dry lifeless lecturer." No doubt his reputation as a leading abolitionist caused many to anticipate a fiery advocate, entirely different from the scholarly Phillips. Other Iowa newspapers expressed their disappointment in the New Englander's performance. The *Keokuk Gate City* (March 16, 1867) described him as "a placid countenanced, benevolent, quietly speaking old gentleman . . . who could scarcely be the terrible abolitionist". The *Cedar Valley Times* explained sympathetically that, because his double bill had hurried him, "the audience missed the fire, the pathos, and argument of Wendell Phillips."

Henry Vincent, an English lecturer, closed the 1866-1867 season on April 5th, speaking on the timely topic, "The Great American Conflict and Friends and Enemies of America in England".

A financial statement concerning the first season of the YMA was published in the Mount Pleasant *Journal* on April 26, 1867. Admissions, probably between twenty-five and fifty cents per person, had produced the following amounts: John C. S. Abbott, $87.25; Anna Dickinson, $386.00; Theodore Tilton, $81.25; Grace Greenwood, $134.65; Frederick Douglas, $306.00;

Wendell Phillips, $246.25; and Henry Vincent, $95.00, making a total of $1,336.40 received. The total expenditures, including payments to the seven famous lecturers, amounted to $873.25, leaving a balance of $463.15. The sums paid the various lecturers are not recorded, but that season the Dubuque Young Men's Library Association paid Tilton and Abbott each seventy-five dollars for a lecture and Wendell Phillips one hundred and ten dollars.

The young men of Mount Pleasant could be justly proud of their net profit of $463.15, which gave them a nice balance to start the following season. The *Journal* concluded that it considered the above "a good showing and would like the 'city' of Burlington to compare figures." Having participated in several ticket sales campaigns in recent years for similar causes, the author believes that the Mount Pleasant YMA of 1866-1867 accomplished a feat which would be difficult to duplicate even today.

The YMA continued to function three more seasons. The year 1867-1868 saw the appearances of Benjamin Franklin Taylor, Josh Billings (Henry Wheeler Shaw), Rev. W. H. Millburn, Anna Dickinson, Henry Vincent, and Edward Livingston Youmans. Included in the 1868-1869 program were Theodore Tilton, Judge George

G. Wright, an Iowan, Petroleum V. Nasby (David Ross Locke), and, for the third time, Anna Dickinson. The 1869-1870 season brought Susan B. Anthony, Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Theodore Tilton, and perhaps others. Evidence points to the conclusion, however, that the initial season was the best.

It appears that the YMA of Mount Pleasant made at least an effort to make good its second plank; in 1868 a library was opened in the office of a Dr. Marsh and Miss Laura Marsh served as librarian. The nucleus of this library was several boxes of books which had been acquired by the old "Library Association" before the war and stored in the office of the *Journal*. From the earnings of the lecture courses, the YMA was able to pay the rent for the reading room, hire a librarian, and buy additional books, but the project was short-lived. In the summer of 1870 the members of the YMA decided to disband, possibly because of the rising cost of the more popular lecturers. The library was abandoned, the books purchased with funds of the YMA were divided among the members, and the volumes of the earlier group went back into their packing cases.

A more successful start was made in 1872 by an energetic group of women under the leadership of Mrs. Louisa M. Marsh and Mrs. C. T. Cole,

who formed the Mount Pleasant Ladies Reading Circle, later known as the Ladies Library Association, or simply L.L.A. It still meets. Standing as a monument to their many struggles and discouragements is the present Mount Pleasant Public Library.

In spite of its brief life of only four seasons, the YMA played a commendable part in the struggle to make Mount Pleasant the Athens of Iowa. Like similar groups in the State, some of which had long lives, it had brought to the community a number of the most popular lecturers of the day and awakened the community to the significance of hearing various shades of opinion on public issues and the need of a library to provide books for all.

WALDO W. BRADEN

Take a Letter

The fingers of the official reporter at the Johnson County courthouse fly over the keys of his stenotype machine, noting every plea and accusation, every question and answer. A young secretary in an office at the University Hospital follows the rapid dictation of the physician as she records in Gregg shorthand the history of a case. In a downtown Iowa City office an older woman, working now that her children are away, takes shorthand by the Pitman method which she learned twenty-five years ago. With earphones clamped on her head and her feet manipulating the pedals of a dictaphone, the secretary in a University office transcribes on her typewriter the correspondence recorded the night before. Such are the secretaries of 1948.

Few outsiders realize how much hospitals, schools, government, and industry depend on these secretaries, how much credit must be given to them, or how slow has been the evolution of their training. Words making modern history — judges' decisions, politicians' speeches, ministers' sermons, lawyers' pleadings, businessmen's letters, even entire newspapers — are being re-

corded efficiently and accurately by the indispensable secretary — the clerk or amanuensis who keeps secrets.

Although ingenious machines and complicated techniques have greatly extended the modern secretary's skill and speed, the otherwise fleeting words of men have been captured and recorded ever since the beginning of history. The ancient Greeks experimented with short cuts in writing and Cicero's lowly slave-secretary, Marcus Tullius Tiro, invented a shorthand system almost two thousand years ago. Even Emperor Julius Caesar is said to have attempted to learn to write this shorthand. But Tiro's shorthand system — the *Notae Tironoanae* — was lost with the fall of the Roman empire and the emergence of the new languages, and it was almost 1400 A.D. before his ancient manuscripts were discovered by an abbot at the Spanheim monastery and it was another three hundred years before anyone deciphered these manuscripts.

In the meantime, the awakened intellectual curiosity which followed the Renaissance led to a new interest in writing. Men's minds moved faster than their fingers. In 1588 Dr. Timothy Bright, an English physician, published a treatise entitled *Characterie* in which he presented a system of "short, swift, and secret writing in character." In

that age of intrigue it may be that the "secret" was as important as the "short, swift". The idea of short cuts in writing took root in England, but it was not until 1837 that Isaac Pitman of Bath devised a new and more successful system of shorthand, based on representations of the sounds in words. He used a sign for each sound, making light and heavy strokes to distinguish "paired sounds" — including such letter combinations as th and ng.

Pitman's system continued in general use up to the 1920's, but half a century after Pitman announced his new shorthand method, still another Englishman, John Robert Gregg of Liverpool, developed what was to become the standard system for our modern secretarial technique. Gregg introduced his shorthand system to America in 1893 and it is still the most popular method used in the United States, England, India, and Mexico. Gregg shorthand is taught in almost all American colleges and business schools. In 1940, an American, Charles H. Thomas, a former teacher of Gregg shorthand, developed a system of his own and published a textbook entitled the *Thomas Method of Shorthand.*

With the mechanization of industry came attempts to record the spoken word by machines, and various recording devices came on the market.

One of these was the dictaphone, a variation of the phonograph, by which the words are recorded and the secretary types from the record. Another invention is the stenotype, a machine on which the operator types a system of shorthand. These machines, however, are expensive and few secretaries or offices can afford to purchase them.

Meanwhile men were working along another line — mechanical writing, using some form of the type used by printers. As early as 1714 an English inventor patented a writing machine, the forerunner of the typewriter of today. Many machines based on the movable type used by printing offices were invented but it was not until 1875 that the first typewriter appeared on the market. The trilogy of making records and writing letters was complete — dictation, shorthand, and typing.

Iowa and Iowa City, only a little more than a century old, have witnessed this evolution of secretarial techniques. Robert Lucas, the first Governor of the Territory of Iowa, brought with him from Ohio as his secretary, young Theodore Sutton Parvin. There is nothing to indicate that Parvin knew any shorthand; he was, rather, an amanuensis and confidante. Unfortunately for research workers of today, Lucas wrote most of his letters in longhand. If duplicate copies were desired, a very thin sheet of nearly transparent paper was

placed over the manuscript to be copied, dampened slightly, and some pressure was applied, until a readable facsimile of the letter or other manuscript appeared through the thin sheet. These copies were frequently bound together in "letter books".

It was not long, however, before trained bookkeepers and secretaries were in demand in Iowa City. In 1865 "Professor" J. Shrock opened the "Spencerian Writing Academy" in Iowa City. This, apparently, was intended to train young men for office work by improving their penmanship. The first school for business training in Iowa City seems to have been the Iowa City Commercial College, opened in September, 1866, by J. T. Craig. On October 2, 1866, the college was combined with the Spencerian Writing Academy under the partnership of Craig and Shrock.

In the fall of 1867 William McClain purchased the Writing Academy and the Commercial College and consolidated them into one institution. Three years later he divided his school, this time having a cultural section — the Iowa City Academy — and a business school which retained the name, Iowa City Commercial College. McClain took charge of the Academy and supervised the Commercial College which was directed by a principal.

In 1875 F. R. Williams succeeded C. R. Rogers

as principal of the Iowa City Commercial College and after McClain's death in 1877 Williams conducted the college for the estate until 1878 when he purchased it. Three years later, F. R. Williams and his brother, J. H. Williams, entered into partnership and the college continued under their supervision until it ceased to function in 1905.

The 1871-1872 catalogue of this Iowa City Commercial College offered "Full scholarships, including Book Keeping, Commercial Law, Commercial Arithmetic and Business Penmanship . . . $45.00". For "Ladies and Disabled Soldiers" the fee was $10.00 less. It is interesting to note here that seventy-five years later women no longer need such encouragement to attend schools of higher education, whereas veterans of World War II are being given a financial incentive to study. Instruction in "Ornamental Penmanship" and "Short Hand Writing" was given at "reasonable rates". Under "General Remarks" the catalogue had this to say: "Iowa City has become one of the great educational centres of the West. . . . the high moral character of those who assemble here from year to year to pursue their studies . . . make it a very desirable place of residence. . . . Its location is remarkably pleasant and healthy."

One reason the Iowa City Commercial College closed in 1905 may have been the competition of-

fered by another business college, founded by Hannah Elizabeth Irish, a pioneer among women in business. Miss Irish was a graduate of McClain's Iowa City Academy and had had wide experience in business offices in Iowa and California. She is said to have been the first woman stenographer in Iowa City and the first woman in Iowa City to use a telephone. She opened the doors of her school in August, 1895.

Smith's directory of Iowa City and Johnson County for 1897-1898 ran an advertisement in which Miss Irish offered to "Every Boy and Girl (and older people, too)" a six-months course in shorthand and typewriting for thirty dollars, nine months for forty dollars. Students could enroll for shorthand alone or typewriting alone for five dollars per month. The Pitman method of shorthand was taught exclusively until 1908 when one student started to learn the Gregg system.

Iowa Citians remember Elizabeth Irish as a strict teacher and a businesslike woman, received on a par with her men associates, but she had many hobbies and knew how to have fun. One of the former teachers at the Irish Business College recalls that students came at 8:00 a.m. and the doors were then locked until noon. At 1:30 — or whenever Miss Irish finished her lunch — the doors reopened and students were again locked in

until 4:00 p.m. No one was permitted to leave during school hours and the tardy were out of luck. A student, later an Iowa City insurance dealer and real estate broker, is said to have escaped the rigors of such training by climbing down the fire escape.

The Irish Business College continued to train students until December, 1940, when Miss Irish retired. During those 45 years, more than 12,000 students were enrolled. Except for the 10 years (1924–1934) that Brown's Commerce College was operated by J. White Brown, Miss Irish had no commercial competition in Iowa City from 1905 to 1940.

Elizabeth Irish sold her school in 1940 and it was operated for a number of years under the management of William F. Morrison, an attorney. In June, 1946, the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Frank H. McCabe, purchased the school and equipment and renamed it the Iowa City Commercial College. Mr. McCabe received his training at the University of Iowa and Coe College in Cedar Rapids. His wife is a graduate of Brown's Commerce College.

Approximately seventy-five students, of whom thirty were veterans, enrolled in the 1947-1948 term. Six full courses are offered and the veteran rate (paid by the Veterans' Administration) for

the stenographic course is now $280 per nine months of training. For the secretarial course (10 months) the fee is $325. Non-veteran students are charged $25 per month, with books and supplies extra. Night classes are available to students unable to attend during the day.

The schools in Iowa City did not include commercial education in the course of study until 1918 when University students were offered a stenographic course in the University High School, to be taken without college credit. In 1925 "stenography" became a part of the College of Commerce curriculum, with credit. Not until February, 1947, was even partial credit given for typing. In 1920 shorthand and typing were, for the first time, offered in the Iowa City public schools.

Since July, 1947, there has been an Iowa City chapter of the international honorary business sorority, Alpha Iota, and in November, 1947, the fraternity, Phi Theta Pi, was organized. Social and educational events are planned by these organizations for members. Membership is restricted to persons who are high school graduates and have attained a grade average of 90 or above in their business courses.

Cartoonists like to represent stenographers and secretaries, now usually young women, as gum-chewing, rattle-brained sirens, addicted to relax-

ing on the boss's knee; but the office worker of today is, in most cases, a trained woman who works hard from 8:00 or 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (or later), uses her head when some employer occasionally loses his, keeps track of business and personal appointments, and, contrary to popular belief, keeps office secrets. But even the most efficient secretary seldom thinks of the many men and women who have contributed to her skill and efficiency — of Tiro, Pitman, Gregg, and the inventors of the machines she uses, as day after day she responds cheerfully to the words heard millions of times in modern offices over the land — "Take a letter, please, Miss Jones".

MARY CULBERTSON LUDWIG

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