

The  
**PALIMPSEST**

MAY 1932

CONTENTS

First in the Mile Relay 181

FRANCIS O. WILCOX

Roasted Eggs 198

E. D. NAUMAN

The Riverside Band 202

N. TJERNAGEL

Comment 215

THE EDITOR

PUBLISHED MONTHLY AT IOWA CITY BY  
THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

ENTERED AS SECOND CLASS MATTER JULY 28 1920 AT THE POST OFFICE AT IOWA CITY IOWA  
UNDER THE ACT OF AUGUST 24 1912



### 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

*Superintendent*

---

### THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests 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 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.

---

PRICE—10c per copy: \$1 per year: free to members of Society  
ADDRESS—The State Historical Society      Iowa City Iowa



# THE PALIMPSEST

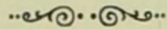
EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

VOL. XIII

ISSUED IN MAY 1932

NO. 5

COPYRIGHT 1932 BY THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA



## First in the Mile Relay

"The next e-event", sang the announcer of the Tenth Annual Kansas City Athletic Club Indoor Meet, "is the one mile re-elay. Running in lane number one, Mor-row of I-oway; in lane two, Shan-non of Kan-sas."

"Are you ready?" called the starter, as the two runners nervously took their places. They nodded automatically.

"To your marks. . . Now get set. . ."  
Bang!

The athletes shot from their marks as though their lives depended on the outcome of the race. Around the board track they sped, now shortening, now lengthening their strides, weaving in and out in order to miss the patches of tin which splotched the indoor track of the Kansas City Coliseum. For a few seconds the race was even. Then the stocky, smooth-striding runner in the



black jersey forged ahead. It was Harry C. Morrow, a junior dental student from the University of Iowa. Morrow held the State record in the half-mile run and his endurance had often proved valuable to the Iowa team. With a final spurt he passed the baton to Iowa's second runner with a three yard lead over his Kansas opponent.

Gerhard B. Noll, running next for Iowa, could be expected to hold his place of advantage. He was "a large wiry fellow" who had tremendous lung capacity and plenty of speed. With long machine-like strides he maintained the lead that Morrow had won and by means of a perfect baton pass he sent the third Iowa runner, Eric C. Wilson, off to an unusually fast start.

Wilson was no ordinary athlete. Later in the season, the *Detroit News* declared that the captain of the Iowa team, then in his third year of varsity competition, was the "fastest 220 and 440 man alive." Tall and graceful, he ran with "a smooth easy motion" and always seemed to have more strength in reserve. Apparently without exertion Wilson gradually pulled away from his Kansas rival and, with a brilliant burst of speed, finished his quarter mile over ten yards in the lead.

Charles R. Brookins, the Iowa anchor runner,



was an exceptionally fast starter, and as Wilson handed him the baton he leaped ahead to gain several additional yards. Brookins was a flashy runner, even in the 440, though he showed his form to best advantage as a hurdler. With the race apparently won, Brookins nevertheless sprinted through a fast quarter mile to break the tape for a new meet record of three minutes, twenty-nine and four-fifths seconds.

The mile relay was the climax of the meet. Inasmuch as the event had not been staged until eleven o'clock at night, however, the coach and the team "had to run another race to catch the train home."

The Iowa relay team had made an auspicious start for the season of 1923. Although none of the runners was naturally a quarter miler, George T. Bresnahan, Iowa's nervously dynamic coach, had recognized the possibility of combining speed and endurance in the selection of Morrow, Noll, Wilson, and Brookins to bear the colors of Old Gold in the relay meets. Moreover, Coach Bresnahan had conceived of the non-visual baton pass and perfected the technique of a runner accepting the baton from an incoming runner without looking back. This enabled the exchange to be made while both runners were going at full speed, a great advantage to Iowa relay teams.



One week after the Kansas victory, the Iowa quartet of Chan F. Coulter (running for Morrow), Noll, Brookins, and Wilson easily defeated a Wisconsin team and set a new Armory record of three minutes and thirty-four seconds for the mile relay. Coulter finished a step ahead of his opponent, "Noll was far in the lead on his lap, Brookins widened the gap still more, and then captain Wilson aided in setting a new record by stepping off his stuff in great shape." Thus far, however, the potential strength of the team had not been severely tested.

Spring was in the air on March 3, 1923, when five thousand spectators crowded into the huge Armory at Urbana to witness the Illinois Indoor Relay Carnival, as nearly six hundred athletes representing forty-seven colleges and universities vied for supremacy in "the fastest meet in the history of the carnival." The mile relay proved to be the feature event of the games. Morrow, running first for Iowa in the outside lane, got away to a bad start, but was gaining rapidly on the leading Chicago man as he passed the baton to Noll who started at full speed and kept that pace the entire distance. Brookins, running third for Iowa, was away in front like a flash and never was headed. Wilson, who had just run two heats of the special three hundred yard dash, took the



responsibility of the final quarter. Could he hold the advantage gained by his teammates? The crowd was in an uproar as the Chicago anchor man strove desperately to overtake the flying Iowa captain. But his efforts were unavailing, and Wilson finished fifteen yards ahead of the nearest rival. "And the time", called the announcer, "was three minutes and twenty-six seconds. A new re-relay rec-ord!"

A dual meet with the University of Illinois on the afternoon of March tenth proved to be little more than a practice session for the fleet Hawkeye relay team. The most decisive test came the following week in the Western Conference Indoor Track and Field Meet held in Patten Gymnasium at Evanston, Illinois. There again Iowa met the challenge of the fast Chicago team and the potential threat of other contenders. The results of event after event were chalked up on the score board until only the mile relay remained on the program. Chicago and Iowa were tied for fourth place. The final race would decide the issue between them.

At the start, Morrow gave Noll a ten yard advantage, and Noll gained five more. The widely-heralded Chicago team failed to keep the pace set by the fast-stepping Hawkeyes. But the third Illinois man, with an almost superhuman effort,



picked up the lost ground and passed Brookins! Had the Iowans met their masters in a team they had twice beaten during the year? Stride for stride the slender Iowan matched his leader's pace around the curve, and then, seeing his opportunity, streaked past the Illini runner on the back stretch. Exhausted by his early effort, H. M. Fitch, the Illinois star who was later an Olympic runner, was unable to accept the challenge of a final sprint. Brookins passed the baton to Wilson with a fifteen yard lead. From that time the outcome of the race was never in doubt, and Wilson broke the tape just three minutes and twenty-nine and three-fifths seconds after the bark of the starting gun. It was the fifth successive victory for the Iowa team and gave them the indoor one mile relay title of the Middle West.

Early in April intensive preparation was begun for the outdoor meets. Stimulated by the success of the indoor season and a big drive for additional track men, scores of ambitious athletes crowded the Armory every afternoon. Conspicuous among them was the mile relay quartet. In the early-season races, the men had gained confidence and developed a remarkable team spirit. It was noticed that they always warmed up together, that they had no use for wintergreen liniment, and that they practiced regularly and



kept in good condition. To further insure physical fitness, Dr. Walter Fieseler, the medical advisor, insisted that Iowa City water be taken with the Hawkeyes on their trips. Meals, too, were carefully planned, and baked potatoes, peas, hard bread, beef, and similar substantial foods found a predominant place on the menu.

“ ‘We’re from Ioway, I-o-way,’ chorused a delegation of husky athletes from the Hawkeye state as they left the Kansas stadium at the close of the first Kansas relay meet Saturday afternoon [April 21st], carrying with them trophies won in ten different events in the meet.” And of the Hawkeyes, the mile relay quartet had sparkled most brilliantly. Because of Friday’s rains, the Kansas track was soft, and the fact that the relay event appeared last on the program made matters doubly bad. However, the Iowa team drew lane number one — always a distinct advantage in the days when the system of rotating lanes was not yet in use.

With the crack of the gun the men were away from their marks. At three hundred yards Morrow trailed his opponents by at least five yards, and Iowa fans began to fear the outcome. Trexler of Nebraska and Westermeyer of Kansas were both 220 yard dash men, however, and Morrow’s endurance swung the balance in his



favor. On the last curve he stretched his stride and, slipping by the tiring Nebraska and Kansas men, passed the baton to Noll for a five yard advantage. On the back stretch Noll increased the lead to fifteen yards and Brookins picked up five more. Not content with this Wilson ran a splendid forty-eight and four-tenths quarter to cross the finish line forty yards ahead of his nearest competitor. Considering the soggy track and the fact that it was Iowa's first outdoor performance, it was a brilliant exhibition of running and of team work.

That the Drake Relays on April 28th were to be the big event of the year there could be no doubt. It was reported from Des Moines that "for weeks a corps of men have groomed the oval as carefully as though preparing it for a king." Certainly royalty was to be there! Had not the Iowa relay combination proved to be the best running team in the West? Since the Kansas victory sports writers had been unreserved in praise and now they were to try for their seventh straight victory — traditionally the most important of the entire year.

Nearly ten thousand eager fans thronged the gates of the Drake stadium on the day of the meet and among the number were over four hundred Iowa partisans who occupied a special sec-



tion of the stands and rooted for a Hawkeye triumph. They were not to be disappointed, for in a carnival in which "records came tumbling down like autumn leaves" the Iowa team ran "the fastest mile relay that has been stepped in many years." Each member of the quartet contributed his best effort of the year, and when the timers' watches were checked the announcer proclaimed that the Iowa team had set a new world's intercollegiate record. Illinois, the closest competitor, had been left fifty yards in the rear. The time of the race, three minutes, sixteen and nine-tenths seconds, had been equalled only once in the history of track and field. Coach Bresnahan and his team were acclaimed by sport followers far and wide, for to develop four such quarter mile runners in one institution was a feat to be marvelled at.

Scarcely had Wilson broken the tape after his final lap of the record-breaking relay, when a youthful fan, full of admiration and enthusiasm, ran out on the track and offered him a reward. "Mister, you sure done noble", he blurted out worshipfully, "here's a prize for you" — and proffered a nearly full sack of pop corn to the panting Iowa runner.

An analysis of the team's time made in the record race at Drake disclosed that Morrow ran

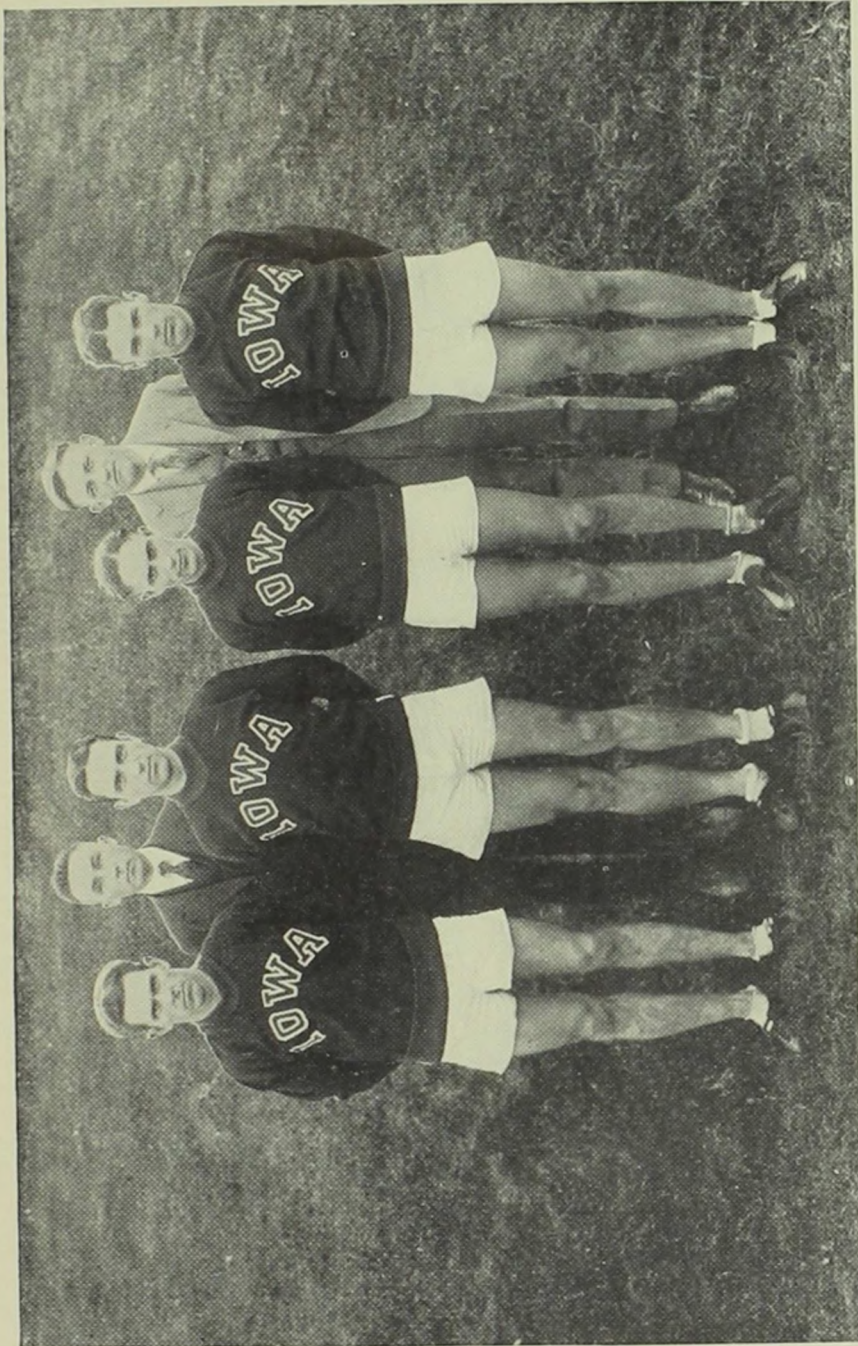


his quarter in 49.8 seconds, Noll in 49.8, Brookins in 49.3, and Wilson in 48 flat. All of the men except Morrow, who ran first, were timed from a running start.

During the next few weeks the members of the team forsook the mile relay and concentrated on their individual events in preparation for the outdoor dual season. Meets were scheduled with Northwestern and Chicago but the mile relay did not appear on the program.

The Thirty-first Annual State Track and Field Meet on May 18th and 19th at Iowa Field offered little competition for the Iowa mile relay team. The first day of the meet was dark and murky, but since "admission was free" several thousand spectators were in the stands. "The wind was blowing twenty miles an hour picking straw hats off the heads of bald officials, whirling powder puffs, remnants of the women's track meet last Thursday, around in miniature tornadoes, and blanketing runners in a wall that sapped their strength and lowered their speed." On Saturday the Iowa band played and entertained the crowd of two thousand onlookers, made up mainly of "men with here and there a sprinkling of brightly dressed girls." Coach Bresnahan, electing to save Brookins and Wilson for the hurdles, sprints, and broad jump, sent





COURTESY OF F. W. KENT

G. T. BRESNAHAN      W. FIESELER  
H. O. MORROW      G. B. NOLL      C. R. BROOKINS      E. C. WILSON

THE 1923 MILE RELAY TEAM



Crawford and Coulter into the mile relay. With only two regular members, Morrow and Noll, the team won handily in the good time of three minutes, twenty-eight and two-tenths seconds.

And now Iowans awaited the Western Conference Meet at Ann Arbor on June 1st and 2nd with confidence. Although the Iowa track team had little hope of winning the meet, a record breaking performance was expected of the relay team. In the last race of their intercollegiate careers, one supreme effort, one grand finale might be anticipated.

"The meet opened in true Olympic style. Athletes, coaches and officials marched around the field behind the Michigan band and then came to attention in front of the flag pole as the band played the Star Spangled Banner." As the events progressed, it was evident that Iowa followers were doomed to disappointment. Coach Bresnahan chose not to concentrate his men on the relay. When the time came for the final event, Brookins had just set a world record in the low hurdles. Wilson, during the course of the afternoon, had competed in four other races. Noll had failed to place in the quarter mile. Coulter, running in place of Morrow, who had won second place in the half mile, was the only fresh Iowa man. As a result Iowa was relegated



to second place in the mile relay. If the Iowa men, all in prime physical condition, had been saved for that final race, and, running against a strong competitor in ideal weather, they might have earned a classic victory. But team strength must always be considered above individual performance, and undoubtedly Coach Bresnahan's decision resulted in more points for the Hawkeye squad than would otherwise have been possible. Iowa placed fourth in the meet.

With the school year ended there came several attempts to shatter the world's record for the mile relay. The first such attempt, at Lincoln, Nebraska, on June 30th ended in failure, for the Saturday morning rains rendered the track unfit for use. A few days later, however, it was announced that the Hawkeyes would make another trial on the Roosevelt stadium track at Mason City, which Coach Bresnahan said was "even faster than the Drake track." On August 17th, the greatest crowd that had ever packed the stadium turned out to watch the famous Iowans. The stands overflowed and the spectators were forced to occupy positions on and along the track, greatly hindering the competitors.

The teams took their positions at the starting line. The gun sounded and the starters were off in a manner which could have been developed



only through constant training. Morrow, obviously not in the best of condition, lost ten yards to his Chicago Athletic Association opponent, and Noll, running second for Iowa, lost five more. Brookins, taking the baton with a fifteen yard handicap, ran the greatest race of his relay career, cutting the lead of the Chicago team to a few scant yards. But the final lap proved to be the most thrilling of all. Wilson took the baton behind "Whitey" Hagen, former Northwestern star, and gradually gained as the two flying runners rounded the oval. When the final curve was reached Wilson cut loose with all his reserve strength and sped past Hagen into the final straightaway. Six thousand Iowa fans roared their approval as the speedy Iowa captain broke the tape five yards ahead of his blond Northwestern rival. The time of the race, three minutes, twenty and four-tenths seconds, was very good considering the short period that the team had trained.

Two matches remained on the summer's schedule, and the team returned to Iowa City to engage in two weeks of intensive drill. At the National A. A. U. championship meet held at Stagg Field on September 1st, the Iowa runners seemed primed for a supreme attempt to break the world's record for the mile relay. On this occasion Jupi-



ter Pluvius frowned on their efforts. Toward the end of the afternoon a "shower broke over the field", and while the "crowd, a sensible one, came in out of the rain" the athletes continued to race. The "end of the program was finished in a drizzle."

In spite of the elements the Hawkeyes again emerged victorious. The team had drawn the third lane, but Morrow broke through for the lead as was his custom. Noll then ran the fastest race of his career and gave Brookins a five yard lead. The final time of the race was three minutes, eighteen and one-tenth seconds — a new A. A. U. record.

On the following Saturday the fast travelling Hawkeyes were in New York City, scheduled to run against a picked team of eastern stars. Captain Wilson wrote to the Athletic Department that they were in excellent physical condition and enjoying their trip. "The Iowa men are being well taken care of," he said. "A landaulet and a chauffeur has been placed at their disposal and Thursday they will be given a sight-seeing tour".

The day of the meet! On the Yankee Stadium track the Iowa runners appeared nattily attired in clean new uniforms — in distinct contrast to other competitors. One man wore a uniform which had not been laundered for two years, and



the others were nearly as dirty. The liniment, sawdust, and cinders collected in past meets was supposed to be a talisman of good luck, a superstition which they would not endanger by washing their suits. "What do you think this is", one Easterner asked the Iowa team, "a dress parade?"

Rain fell during the early part of the meet, and pools of water formed on the track so that it looked like "Manhattan beach at low tide". By six o'clock, when the teams took their places for the start of the mile relay, most of the spectators were yearning "for the feel of a subway strap." From the time of the starting signal the East seemed destined to win, and the Hawkeye runners were gradually outdistanced. Wilson, running the final lap for the Iowans, crossed the finish line nearly six yards back of Driscoll, the eastern anchor man. The time of the eastern team, three minutes, twenty-one and four-fifths seconds, was exceptionally fast considering the track, as the turns were treacherous and the last thirty yards completely submerged. That night the Iowa team viewed "a different type of speed" in Flo Ziegfeld's Follies.

In the following spring of 1924, Coach Bresnahan arranged a return match with the picked team of eastern stars. Although the members of the Iowa team were not all eligible for varsity compe-



tition, they were in Iowa City and glad to train for another race. The event was scheduled as an "extra added attraction" of the Dad's Day program on May 3rd. A crowd of nearly four thousand spectators turned out to see the final race of the 1923 champions.

During the first three laps of the relay, Iowa's hopes alternately rose and fell. Every quarter was a race royal in itself. When the gun sounded for the final lap, Wilson took the baton three yards behind his rival. Then came "perhaps the greatest quarter mile ever seen on Iowa Field." For over two hundred yards Wilson failed to gain on the speeding Driscoll of Boston. At the four hundred yard mark he had reduced the lead to two yards, and as the men rounded the turn to the final straightaway he was only a yard behind. The two flying runners sprinted the last forty yards as they had never sprinted before. Inch by inch Wilson overtook the fast-stepping Driscoll. All the Iowa captain needed was a little more distance — only a few more yards and the race would be won. But Driscoll was determined too, and he maintained his lead of a scant few inches. The time, three minutes, seventeen and two-tenths seconds, came dangerously close to the record established the preceding spring at Des Moines.



In their last attempt, the Iowa team had gone down to defeat, but they had gone down gloriously. And, even in defeat, they still retained their well-earned title — the best mile relay team ever produced by any college or university.

FRANCIS O. WILCOX



## Roasted Eggs

When the Indians with their simple tastes and requirements inhabited this country, the natural fauna and flora were not disturbed a great deal. Crude weapons and a disinclination to cultivate the soil prevented the red men from doing much harm to the wild life. The squaws might scratch up the ground in some unoccupied places and plant patches of corn, but nothing happened that really spoiled the face of the earth, from a naturalist's point of view.

But the white man came in much larger numbers and with more elaborate wants, so that the natural products of the country did not suffice. A variety of crops had to be raised and domestic animals introduced to furnish food and raiment for the larger and more exacting population. It became the first duty of every pioneer to destroy. Forests were cleared away to make room for the wheat fields. Many wild creatures were killed for human food, and the predatory animals and birds were destroyed to save the more productive domestic flocks and herds. The settler, being hard working and generally poor, had no time to contemplate the beauties of nature, to consider



the conservation of natural conditions. His greatest struggle was with nature; a conflict to reduce the wilderness and to prepare the soil for the production of the necessities of life.

My father's first duty after coming to Keokuk County, Iowa, in 1853, was of course to carve a farm home out of the wilderness. By hard and unceasing toil a log cabin had been erected and sufficient oak rails cut and split to fence the portion of the farm that had been cleared of trees and brush and converted into a garden and field. Inasmuch as all kinds of live stock were permitted to roam at large in those days, outside fences were imperative. At intervals of several years additional tracts were cleared and broken to enlarge this field, and the rail fences were correspondingly extended.

In the spring of 1870, father had finished clearing a tract of about ten acres for the breaking plow. All trees and bushes had been removed but patches of hazel brush, pussy willows, and briers covered most of the ground. Among the undergrowth was also a thick carpet of the last year's blue stem and other dead prairie grasses, interspersed with considerable growth of green grass, as the season was advanced. The man with the oxen and breaking outfit who had been engaged to turn under this tract of brush, willows, and sod



undertook the work on condition that it should be carefully burned over first, for the mat of grass and brush was too heavy for the capacity of his outfit.

On the day that father decided conditions were right to burn off the tract, he invited me (then five years old) to go with him and see the fireworks. As an exhibition of pyrotechnics this field of burning grass and brush was a grand success. Showers of crackling sparks rose to the sky and great clouds of black smoke ascended mountain high. All of a sudden and with a loud whir of wings that sounded like a burst of distant thunder, a large bird flew out of the smoke and disappeared over the hills. "That's a prairie chicken", said father. "It must have gotten too hot in there." At the same time we noticed a marsh hawk flying uneasily about over the burning area and occasionally uttering shrill screams of rage. Smaller birds were darting away in every direction.

When the fire had died down and the smoke had blown away we walked about over the charred and blackened turf. In the vicinity from which the prairie hen had appeared so suddenly we found her nest with nine nicely roasted eggs. Father examined one, found it to be fresh, and "done to a queen's taste". We had a rare feast



of roasted eggs on the "half shell" for dinner that day.

Before returning to our cabin, however, we walked over the remainder of the charred tract. The marsh hawk's nest contained five eggs which were also roasted brown, but we left them for the foxes and skunks. Further search revealed a quail's nest containing about a dozen eggs, burned black and so nearly destroyed that it was difficult to determine their number.

These were all the nests we found, but the thicket must have contained a large number of smaller nests with eggs or young birds which were completely annihilated. Fortunately prairie fires at that season of the year were not common, but the incident was a vivid demonstration of the tragedy of cultivation to the wild life of the prairie.

E. D. NAUMAN



## The Riverside Band

The musical tradition in our neighborhood, a settlement of Norwegian immigrants in the southeastern part of Hamilton County along the Skunk River, began with "*Store Per*" (Big Pete), my father's elder brother, the strong man of the prairie, who made music on the violin and who had once with his playing touched the better natures of a warlike host of Indians. My father was a good accordion player and the neighbors loved to drop in to listen to his performance of "Oh, Susanna!", "Nellie Gray", "From Greenland's Icy Mountains", "Auld Lang Syne", and other favorite tunes of those days. Francis Wier, located a mile south of us, played the same melodies on his flute. The two Kittelson brothers led the hymn singing of the congregation, then always rendered in unison. Lars Henryson, a near neighbor, bought a harmonium quite early, and Osmund Weltha had a "psalmodikon", a unique Norwegian stringed instrument. Henryson's three oldest boys, Henry, Oscar, and Tom, organized themselves into a drum and fife corps. Homecoming soldiers helped them obtain fifes. As for the drum the magic workmanship of Thomas



Tunge, a neighbor who was also a cooper, wrought an instrument from two calf hides which produced such a volume of sound that it could be heard as far as eight miles. So declared Sam Hegland who lived at Roland that distance away. He had just come from the war where he had heard the "identical tunes" now played on the drum by our boys at home.

My earliest recollections go back into the seventies when the prairie reached to our very threshold, the wagon trails zigzagged past our door, and the hunch-backed painter, Nils Meland, came and went as he plied his trade among the neighbors. He was a lover of children and sang as he worked to the delight of us little fellows who constantly hung on his heels. When we stumbled over his paintpots and smeared ourselves with red, white, and blue, he laughed and sang a ditty for our benefit as with wry faces we submitted to mother's soapbrush. Ole Sandness, a neighbor who was a carpenter, worked for us at the same time and, possessing a good tenor voice, he and Meland sang duos the like of which we had never heard. This was our initial introduction into the art of musical harmony and soon the old church hymns resounded to original settings of our own, not unharmonious, but scarcely according to the accepted rules of counterpoint.



We became more and more interested in the singing in church and soon took part with others in the local singing-school. Our musical pastor, Reverend Nils Amlund, encouraged us and Hans Dale, an academy student from Norway, became our instructor. He gratuitously taught us the art of four-part singing. We met in the old Sheldall Schoolhouse mostly — though not infrequently in private homes where a bountiful spread followed the practice hour. Courting, of the shyer sort, was in order. Through the efforts of the pastor and Mr. Dale a church choir was organized. Mrs. Amlund's Norwegian harpsichord was a grand revelation to us, and no Hoffmann ever thrilled his audiences more keenly than did that worthy lady when playing before her rustic listeners. We counted the days between each visit. Hans Dale not only led the congregational singing and church choir, but organized a male quartet with himself as first tenor, Lars Dale second tenor, Peter G. Tjernagel first bass, and Anfin Brandvig second bass. This excellent quartet rendered Behren's fine arrangements of Norwegian folk-melodies and other songs on uncounted occasions before appreciative home audiences.

The musical *geist* being aroused, we were not content merely with vocal expression but con-



ceived the idea of starting a "string band". We had but the vaguest notions concerning instrumentation and orchestration, but by obtaining information here and there we decided that two violins, a cello, flute, cornet, clarinet, and snare drum would serve our purpose. Our neighbor boys Martin, Michas, Annas, and Alex Henderson and three in our family, Peter, Nehemias, and Henry Tjernagel, joined forces in the undertaking. Lack of funds put a damper on our enthusiasm, but odd jobs gradually produced some revenue. Annas, in due time President of the Iowa Bankers' Association, coaxed back to health a sickly calf which he sold to help augment his share, and Henry, now Synod president, tended a feathered flock for some of the eggs. Such contributions, together with help from our parents, finally enabled us to order the instruments.

That the train did not run off the track was, as no one will doubt, due to our fervent prayers that its precious burden might come through safely. The wait seemed interminable. After unpacking our treasures we feasted our eyes on the shiny things for the longest time in unalloyed delight. How to manipulate the wind instruments, especially, we had not the slightest idea. We thrust the mouthpieces generously between our lips and blew and blew till our cheeks bulged; the tears

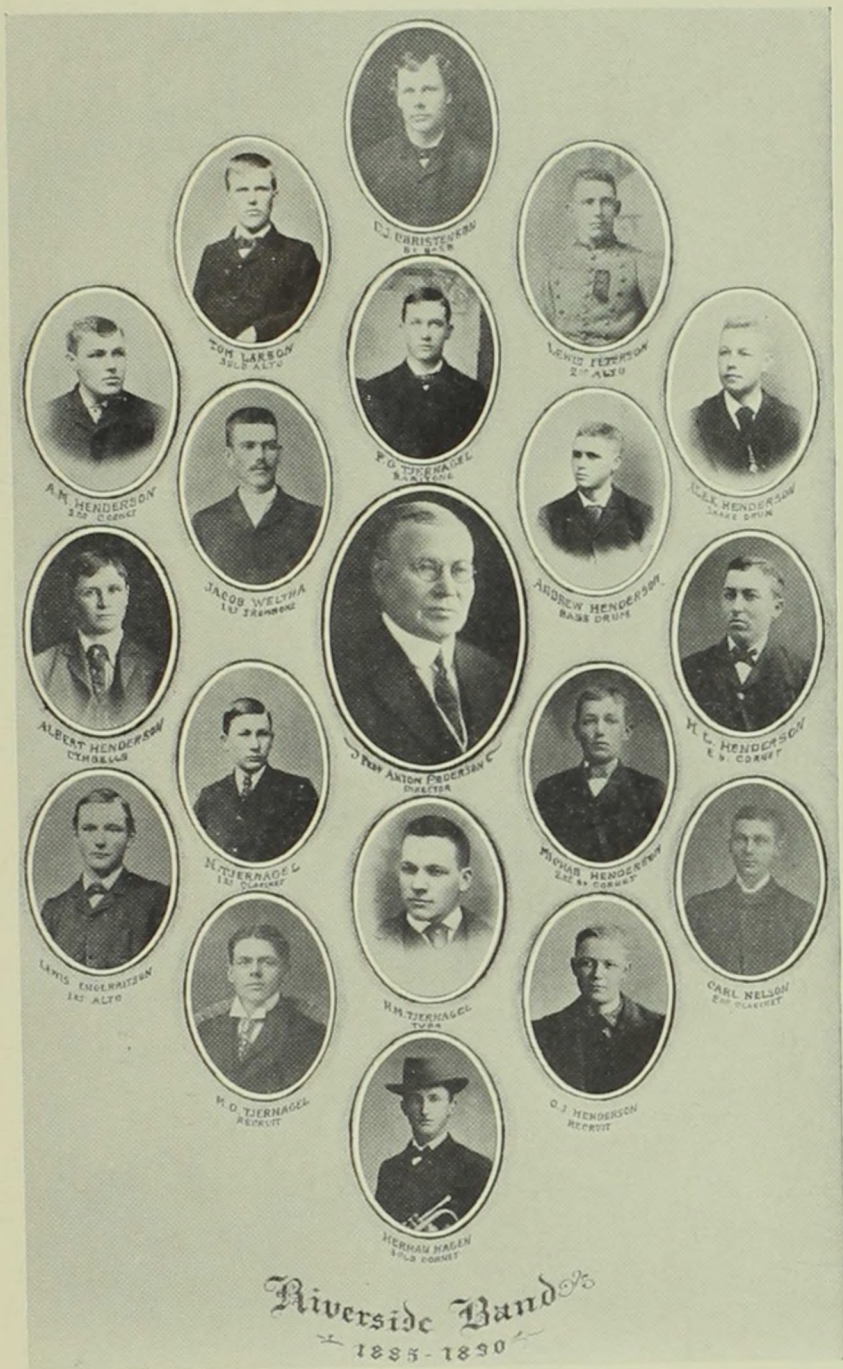


came, but no sound. They were wind instruments sure enough, we thought. The never-ending yowling of the violins as they were intuned proved a sore trial to our doting mothers, but they bore it with fond patience. Music of its kind followed in due time and the string band was soon heralded as the eighth wonder of the world in Scott Township where we lived.

Once gratified, our ambition soared to even greater heights in the hope of organizing a brass band. Twelve of the neighbor boys including the members of the orchestra, all sons of Norwegian immigrants, began devising ways and means to bring our plans to fruition. But the age-old ogre, money, always seemed to stand in the way when we wanted to do anything of this kind. Nevertheless we worked valiantly and gradually accumulated coppers, nickels, and dimes, but alas, far from enough to enable us to make the desired purchase. Though our parents had their hands full on their own account, they noted the seriousness of our purpose and wisely decided to help.

The instruments were ordered from Lyon and Healy in the spring of 1885. In due time the station agent at Randall reported that "The horns have come!" As soon as possible our old Alma Mater, the Sheldall Schoolhouse, resounded to an ear-splitting din. Presently the clamor spread all





MEMBERS OF THE RIVERSIDE BAND



over the community, and eventually resolved itself into music. Unaided, except for an occasional consultation with our friend Captain W. A. Wier of Story City, we taught ourselves to play so that in a few months we were able to furnish a program of elementary music at a Fourth of July celebration held in a nearby timber-nook. Though we received a great deal of praise, much of it, I fear, was unmerited. It encouraged us, however. When Herman Hagen, a good cornetist who had played in a military band in Norway, joined us we were fairly well under way.

We engaged as teacher Professor Anton Pederson of Jewell, Iowa, who was a professional musician and had but recently come to this country from Norway where he had played in orchestras and military bands. He was an exceptionally fine flutist as well as a very able performer on the clarinet, piccolo, and violin. Eventually he moved to Chicago where he was engaged as flutist, often as soloist, in the Theodore Thomas Symphony Orchestra. He had come to Jewell to visit relatives and, becoming interested in the local musical work, he prolonged his visit till he became a resident and was loath to leave even when better opportunities were open to him.

Under Pederson's leadership the band soon became one of the best in Hamilton County and



eventually gained a Statewide reputation. In 1887 we decided to enter the Storm Lake band tournament, but to get our parents' consent, especially since the date of the event happened in the midst of corn plowing, took much tactful persuasion. Besides, the bothersome money question obtruded itself again and caused more difficulty. We had worked, begged, and borrowed the price of uniforms — thick, heavy ones, that made us sweat like troopers at the least exertion. Fervent entreaties, mingled with tears and rosy promises to work extra hard when we came back, finally moved our respective sires to furnish us with railroad fare. The joy in our hearts was almost too great to bear.

As our train left before cockcrow in the morning there was not much sleep for us the night before. We were determined not to miss that train and an eager throng was seen promenading up and down the station platform long, long before the glimmer of dawn. We stopped for breakfast at the Wilson Hotel in Webster City. Being ravenously hungry we were astonished at the size of the portions served which seemed only a meager introduction to a meal. There was not a morsel left on a single one of the sixteen plates at the finish. Aboard the train the passengers looked upon us with some wonderment not unmixed with



amusement, for the like of this red-necked, gaily caparisoned crew they had scarcely seen in all their lives. Arrived at our destination we were assigned quarters and could eat our fill, especially of fried potatoes. The other bands consisted largely of dapper, richly uniformed city youths, dudes we called them in those days, contrasting noticeably in appearance with the green-and-purple-accoutered farmer lads. But we were not met for a fashion display and to our surprise stood up favorably with the others musically. Thanks to our excellent instructor, our ensemble and choice of classical music drew interest away from many of the other bands whose strength lay in the firecracker effect assumed in the rendition of musical misery called ragtime.

During the recreation hour one evening we slipped off by ourselves and Pederson, meaning no harm, took forth his flute and played a little for our benefit. Soon one, then another, joined us, and directly the whole camp was afire with curiosity as to who this remarkable performer might be. The next day, and thereafter, considerable attention was focussed on our particular group, and when our teacher and several members of the band appeared as soloists it came as a revelation to the audience and the bands present, none being able, it seemed, to present varied programs



of this kind. Mr. Eadie, the tournament manager, had hunted in distraction for accompanists for some singers that were to appear, but without success. Hearing this, Pederson volunteered assistance and forthwith arranged parts for our orchestra members, suitable instruments were secured, and the singers were furnished the support required. It was said by many that the Riverside Band did itself credit and ranked with the best bands present.

Covered with glory, but empty of purse, we be-thought ourselves of home. We went by train as far as Fort Dodge, but found there no suitable connection for Webster City — and we were hungry. Though we combed our pockets for coin, precious little did they yield that did not infringe upon the transportation fund. Having ransacked the town for possible conveyances, we finally came upon a grouchy Irishman who had two rickety wagons and a couple of scare-devil teams to match. We piled in and all went merry as a marriage bell till one of the aged wheels sagged with a groan. Our driver swore, ordered us out without apology, and returned to the Fort for another wheel.

But this mishap turned out to be sheer good fortune for it saved us from starvation. A camp-meeting was in progress right by the place where



we were wrecked, and no sooner had the host in the farmstead where it was held taken note of our predicament before he invited us in. A band was the very thing they wanted to put the capsheaf on their doings, and he for one preferred that we promptly play "Yankee Doodle". Besides, they were just sitting down to dinner and he wanted to know why we couldn't join them and eat a bite. We did! Though the pretty girl waiters made us bashful, we managed to consume what they offered, and not a few accepted helping after helping thinking it was the thing to do to show our appreciation of their willingness to serve. Filled to bursting with choice edibles galore, we nevertheless valiantly played that favorite medley, "The Good Old Tunes", and other pieces, to the delight of the assembled host. Meantime, our Jehu had arrived and we were off again much to the regret of our kind benefactors. We reached a late train at Webster City and stepped off at Randall poor in capital but rich in experiences.

One year the band went to Des Moines sixteen strong, with shining instruments and well-brushed uniforms, to play at the State Fair. Our music was well received at the Exposition Building and afterward we were besieged to play in front of concession stands at the rate of a dollar a number. We lodged in a small hotel in the city, where the



entire troop was quartered in one room. A veterinarian neighbor, with professorial mien and prophet's beard, who sometimes posed as our drum major, kept us in an uproar with his antics until the landlord protested. Said the horse doctor, "I have tried my best to keep order, but you see I stand helpless."

Hearing band music in the vicinity, Herman Hagen exclaimed, "Pshaw! That's nothing but a quick-step band. Let's give the crowd some real music." We played some classical numbers and lo, the fickle assemblage, motivated largely by curiosity no doubt, formed a jam about us. Later we learned that the other was the official band.

At this period our Riverside Band made several concert trips and succeeded in giving a number of creditable performances. Our expenses on these ventures usually exceeded the profits but, nothing daunted, we worked away with unabated enthusiasm. Money was not our primary object anyway, but pastime and inspiration for ourselves and entertainment for the community in which we lived.

Sometimes our fund-raising expeditions took us to country picnics and political rallies. On one such occasion we played at Webster City in connection with a meeting at which L. S. Coffin of Fort Dodge was the principal speaker. In compensation for our services we were to have all of



the money that accumulated during the day in the numerous slot boxes in Rosencrantz Park where the gathering was held. Inspired by those inviting boxes and noting the big crowd, we played generously and finished with a triumphant fanfare of rousing music. Flushed with a feeling of success we accepted our reward — one hundred and thirty-five cents!

The band fared a little better financially when we participated in the program of a joint debate at Webster City between Jonathan P. Dolliver and Joseph O. A. Yeoman during the congressional campaign of 1888. Much wit and wisdom was heard in that memorable discussion and the band interspersed musical numbers to fit the fray. Dolliver was particularly apt in repartee. At Ellsworth in the free silver campaign he reached the climax of a stirring arraignment of his opponent with the words, "And this is what he said." Just then a donkey brayed dolefully and Dolliver instantly retorted, "I did not know this was to be a joint discussion."

Though the old Riverside Band finally rested on its laurels, the spirit of the enterprise was perpetuated by new aggregations. There was no jealousy, however, for the parent organization regarded the success of its offspring with easy complacency. The pioneer band benefited not only



its own members, but also succeeding local organizations; and its influence extended to towns, schools, and colleges, at Decorah, Northfield, Jewell, Ames, and other places.

We were fortunate to have in our community during the eighties and some years later Professor John Dahle, pioneer song instructor and composer, designated as the Lowell Mason of music among the Norwegian-Americans. The lofty impulse he gave in fostering worthy singing and vocal work generally, combined with the excellent service performed by our old band instructor, has set its seal on the entire community; for have we not choirs, vocalists, and musicians galore in all the towns and rural districts hereabouts?

Some measure of credit for the development of such a condition is surely due to the musical pioneer work of the old Riverside Band and orchestra. The world-famous Kneisel quartet would scarcely have come straight from New York to Story City, the smallest town visited by them on their concert tours, unless the musical background of the community had warranted it. And when Walter Damrosch announced that the most numerous and appreciative radio responses came from Iowa, we felt that we, too, were partially responsible.

N. TJERNAGEL



## Comment by the Editor

### *THE PLIGHT OF THE HISTORIAN OF SPORT*

A race is a complete dramatic episode. With the crack of the starter's pistol the action begins. Instantly a scene is created. Each of the actors assumes a rôle and plays his part with all the spirit in him. Nobody knows the plot of the race, not even the runners, and none can foretell the finish. Given the elements of rivalry, ambition, honor, skill, and endurance, a drama is made that has action, suspense, and a climax. The character of the runners is clearly portrayed as the contest proceeds. Whether the race is a plain exhibition of speed or of strategy, it is a thrilling cross-section of life, revealing the forces of conduct as truly as a play on the stage.

Though a race or a game is a ready-made drama, the writers of sport ignore their natural advantage and write insipidly according to a standard formula. When almost every contest is replete with incidents that make spectators cheer, the wistful fans who can not go must be content to read the names of contestants, a list of events, and the records or the score. Colored sport pages are filled with statistics and pictures, as if a reader



could reconstruct a game from an abbreviated box score and a likeness of the shortstop. Such an account is just about as exciting as a market report to a boy who has never invested.

But the plight of the historian is even more tragic. He finds no satisfaction in asking some casual observer for the details of the game, because the particulars of athletic competition are not remembered accurately. Dependent almost entirely upon the meager jargon of the sport page, he is grateful for play-by-play reports, box scores, and diagrams. With all the statistical aid that the papers furnish, he must still supply the vital elements of color, character, and circumstance from the resources of his own imagination. While a devotee of baseball might visualize a game in detail from the record in the score book, not much of the action in a race can be gleaned from the distance and time.

If journalists are unduly reticent in the use of graphic verbs, their deficiency is abundantly compensated by the sustained exuberance of radio announcers who are obliged to tell the world exactly what they see and think. Phonograph records could be made of the vivid descriptions they broadcast. And the historian of the future may verify his explanations with motion pictures.

J. E. B.



# THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

Established by the Pioneers in 1857  
Located at Iowa City Iowa

---

## PUBLICATIONS OF THE SOCIETY

The Quarterly Journal of History  
The Palimpsest—A monthly magazine  
The Public Archives Series  
The Iowa Biographical Series  
The Iowa Economic History Series  
The Iowa Social History Series  
The Iowa Applied History Series  
The Iowa Chronicles of the World War  
The Miscellaneous Publications  
The Bulletins of Information

---

## MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the State Historical Society may be secured through election by the Board of Curators. The annual dues are \$3.00. Members may be enrolled as Life Members upon the payment of \$50.00.

*Address all Communications to*

THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
Iowa City Iowa