

10-1-1929

Comment

John Ely Briggs

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest>

Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Briggs, John E. "Comment." *The Palimpsest* 10 (1929), 387-388.

Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol10/iss10/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the State Historical Society of Iowa at Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Palimpsest by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

Comment by the Editor

THE FIRST DIRECTORY OF KEOKUK

In a small "book and job printing" shop on the third floor of a building at 52 Main Street the first *General Directory of the Citizens* of Keokuk was compiled and published by Orion Clemens in 1856. It was a credit to the shop and to the city. Printed clearly from clean type on fine rag paper, the directory was a good example of commercial printing at that time. And after nearly three-quarters of a century the paper is still white and soft and the ink is as black as ever. Orion Clemens had a right to be proud of the contents, typography, make up, and press work.

Besides containing a list of Keokuk residents (though very few women were mentioned), the directory was prefaced with a "Sketch of the Black Hawk War and History of the Half Breed Tract" and included statistics of commercial prosperity as well as the inaugural address of Mayor Samuel R. Curtis. Despite a seductive title, as long as the name of a Puritan theological dissertation, the supplementary material in the directory was reasonably conservative and entirely dignified.

Mr. Clemens's history was accurate and fair, while the optimistic implications of remarkable business developments were balanced by the sound poli-

cies of Mayor Curtis who curbed his municipal vision with sensible circumspection. Indeed, so much care was taken to avoid exaggeration and "tell the plain, simple truth, without any varnish at all" that the publisher was criticised for making the list of civic improvements five hundred per cent too small. Nevertheless people bought enough directories at a dollar a copy and advertisers contributed sufficient life-blood to justify a bigger and better *Business Mirror* in 1857.

While Orion Clemens was adventuring on the perilous frontier of book publishing, his younger brothers, Henry and Sam, bore the burden of the job work. One night Mark Twain (to be) stood manfully at his "little press until nearly 2 o'clock" while the "flaring gas light" over his head "attracted all the varieties of bugs which are to be found in natural history". What he thought at first was only a local bug picnic turned out to be a gigantic entomological mass meeting. A venerable beetle that occupied a prominent position on his head sounded the key note of a grand chorus sung by 47,000 mosquitoes (treble), 23,000 house flies (alto), 32,000 locusts (tenor), and 97,000 pinch bugs (bass). The next morning Sam combed 976 beetles out of his hair, "every one of whose throats was stretched wide open, for their gentle spirits had passed away while yet they sang".

J. E. B.