

Making Our Newspaper Collection More Available

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ANNALS OF IOWA

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

MAKING OUR NEWSPAPER COLLECTION MORE AVAILABLE

A fair and common criticism of collections of materials, serviceable alike for historical and administrative ends, is that such collections are difficult to use. They are often in bad order of arrangement, untidy, or inconvenient of access. Often their place in the scheme of care and custody of the institution in which they repose is only, or largely, according to the public interest in them. Perhaps the Western, or at least the newer and more provincial institutions, are more deserving of such criticism than are the older, Eastern, better established repositories.

Under such apprehensions our institution has labored for now some ten years to devise and procure such stacks, files and apartments as shall permanently preserve our collections and make them convenient to use. In the special instances of our Newspaper and Archives divisions we have tried to bring into existence such aids to their users as are the pride and recognized obligation of our own and other good libraries.

Thus the practice of a mercantile establishment's taking of stock, adapted to library administration, has been by us recently carried into our Manuscript, Museum, Archives and Storage divisions. The element of money value upon which mercantile institutions rely so greatly as a basis of proceeding, is being applied by us through an appraisalment in process that will fix the value in money of each object in our collections.

But the numbering, cataloging, arranging in accessible stacks and determining the money value of a great newspaper collection, is not enough to justify the outlay in overhead and current cost of acquisition and administration. Such collections are like a deposit of fine stone which, in the ground, has been drilled and tested. It is worthless until uncovered, until transportation,

quarrying and cutting machinery is provided, and until a sales system is established producing a demand for the product.

So we have designed those facilities which shall put student, attorney, or others interested into immediate and fair contact with the *contents* of our newspaper collections. These facilities are to be, first, a complete briefing of all files we possess, especially revealing the pertinent points in the history, location, complexion, editorship and ownership of each newspaper. Second, an index from the earliest to present time of a series of newspapers that will afford quick knowledge of the existence in Iowa of press interest in public affairs, local, state and national.

The first of these facilities is under preparation in our institution by our editorial assistant, Mr. David C. Mott. We know of no one in Iowa better equipped through experience and acquaintance with the field. He came into Iowa from Ohio in 1862 at the age of four. He came from Quaker ancestry, fulfilled the family incentive toward thorough primary education, attended one of the Iowa academies of blessed memory of those times, taught school for a while in his young manhood, bought the *What Cheer Patriot* in 1888 and owned and edited it until 1892, owned and edited the *Tipton Advertiser* from 1894 to 1897, the *Audubon Republican* from 1897 to 1905, and the *Marengo Republican* from 1907 to 1913. He thus illustrates the itinerant character of many of the earliest and strongest newspaper men in early Iowa, and yet is of the recent and so much altered character of newspaper experience in our state. He served Audubon County in the Iowa House of Representatives in the Thirtieth and Thirty-first general assemblies, and by appointment of Governor Carroll and reappointment of Governor Clarke was a member of the State Board of Parole during the years 1911-1919.

In the present ANNALS Mr. Mott sets out his researches among our files and references, his recollections of the newspaper friends of his youth and mature years, the exchanges which have passed under his hand and, we believe, has thereby done a distinguished service to his fraternity and to the general public.

The present study is of the period earlier than the Civil War. With characteristic modesty Mr. Mott disclaims perfection in his work. But our institution, on his behalf and in its own name, believes he has covered the field with measurable thoroughness. So much so, at least, that no one who hereafter seeks names, or

influences and tendencies in public affairs in early Iowa shall ever be able to exhaust a study embracing the early newspaper phase of the beginnings of Iowa, without having resorted with profit to Mr. Mott's present work.

Thus a beginning has been made toward readier presentation of the scope and contents of one of the very valuable collections of Iowa and Western source materials. Hitherto it has called for more exahusting time and labor of those who have made use of it than will be now required. When similar work shall have been done upon the papers founded in Iowa during and after the Civil War, a fair sailing chart through the newspaper sea of Iowa materials will exist. Then there remains to be prepared the second or index phase of the work, and this we have begun.

THE SINCLAIRS OF OLD FORT DES MOINES

Hon. Johnson Brigham, State Librarian, has recently published his romance of the above title. Of the numerous complimentary letters concerning his book Mr. Brigham has permitted us to publish the following:

Thanksgiving Day.

24th November, 1927.

My dear old friend Johnson Brigham:

You have given me and Miss Thompson, a great pleasure with your charming story of Old Fort Des Moines. We read every word of it aloud. Any one interested in dear old Iowa should like to read this romance of the state's beginnings.

It is a simple story simply told and well told. It takes me back to the days too, when, as a boy, I knew and loved the Des Moines river. Once I tramped six miles, bare-footed, just to see one of the early steamboats pass up the river to Des Moines; yes, that was long ago, for that bare-foot boy is in his ninetieth year now. I recall too, how that one of the very first little poems I ever wrote was about the *Des Moines* river. It was great to me then and nothing brings it back to me so vividly now as the pages of your little book. The other night when Miss T. was reading one of its little touching and simple episodes I turned my face away to hide some tears that came in spite of me. I know of no better praise of a book than that. . . .

Yours,

S. H. M. BYERS,
Los Angeles, Calif.

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