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Reporting for the Register

Don L. Berry

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Reporting for the *Register*

In the fall of 1899 I wrote my first newspaper copy as Indianola and Simpson College correspondent of the *Des Moines Register*, then under the editorial management of Frank Clarkson. In the spring of 1901 the *Register* entrusted me with covering the Hossack trial, a somewhat sensational murder trial in Warren County, to which the two Des Moines evening papers sent staff reporters.

In 1902, George E. Roberts, of Washington, D. C., former publisher of the *Fort Dodge Messenger*, bought and consolidated *The Des Moines Register* and *The Des Moines Leader* under the title of *Register and Leader*. Upon graduation from college in June, 1903, I applied for employment on the news staff of the paper. Then I went to work as a farm hand on the Wadsworth farm, half way between Des Moines and Indianola, to await an opening. Early in August I received an offer of eight dollars a week which I accepted. I wanted to get into newspaper work, which had been my ambition since my middle teens.

The most vivid recollection of those first days on the *Register and Leader* is the feeling of utter

uselessness. I wished I were back on the farm amongst the livestock. It was a relief to be sent out of town to report an old soldiers' and settlers' reunion in Lovilia, Monroe County, where my experience would be a story in itself — nothing sensational, but a picture of sixty years ago.

However, it was not long until I began to get somewhat the hang of things and in a few weeks was assigned to the police and fire department run. This was a somewhat tough assignment because my paper was at outs with the city administration, which at that time probably had the worst reputation for rottenness and inefficiency of any administration in the history of Des Moines.

Gambling houses were running practically wide open; prostitution was virtually protected by the police, the "girls" being herded into police court once every month or two, fined ten dollars each and sent back to carry on their trade until the next roundup. The police judge, W. A. Tris, was not a part of the city hall gang. He would not co-operate in this licensing of crime. When he could be caught out of town for a day, the chief of police would order all the "girls" brought in before a Justice of the Peace, who acted as temporary police judge, and was a part of the City Hall machine.

As I said, the *Register and Leader*, under the editorial guidance of the late Harvey Ingham,

was not popular with this kind of city administration. Prying news out of the police department was uphill business, especially for a reporter still in the cub stage. However, in fairness I will say that the night captain and most of the patrolmen were square shooters and gave me all the help they dared. They gave the city as much protection as they could, under the circumstances. It was rugged training, but worth while. After two weeks my salary was raised to ten dollars a week, and in another month or so went to twelve.

In the fall of 1903 Gardner Cowles bought the *Register and Leader*. Roberts had found it not a paying enterprise when managed at long distance from Washington. That change of ownership was, as everyone knows, a milestone in journalism in Iowa, if not in the Middle West. Not long before his death Mr. Cowles told me that he "just about lost my shirt" before he put the paper on a satisfactory paying basis and on the way to fame. I think I am the only survivor of the editorial and news staff at the time Cowles acquired it.

Around the turn of the year I was changed over to cover public schools, charities, and related topics. This proved an interesting field and I believe I developed it pretty well. During the months I was on the school beat there was the regular school election, two special votes on consolida-

tions, followed in each case by an election of directors for the consolidated district. So I had five school elections to cover within eight months. The school board met regularly in the evening so we could always scoop the afternoon papers. The members of the board, the secretary, and the superintendent were all friendly to the paper, and to me, and made the task of covering their doings pleasant. They welcomed a good coverage, which many school boards do not.

One of the high points in my journalistic career was covering a called meeting of the board in the summer of 1904. The North Des Moines district had consolidated with the old West Des Moines district. The board was seriously considering, in the interest of economy, closing North High and bringing all high school pupils to old West High on Center Street, which at that time was a modern building.

This talk caused almost a rebellion in the old North district. Emerson DePuy, publisher of *The Merchants' Trade Journal* and *The Northwestern Banker*, and E. H. Hunter were delegated to present the protests of the north side folks to the school board at a called meeting one afternoon. I do not remember what Hunter's ostensible business was, but actually he was the lobbyist and political strategist for the old railroad political machine which had dominated Iowa government for years, and which Albert B. Cummins

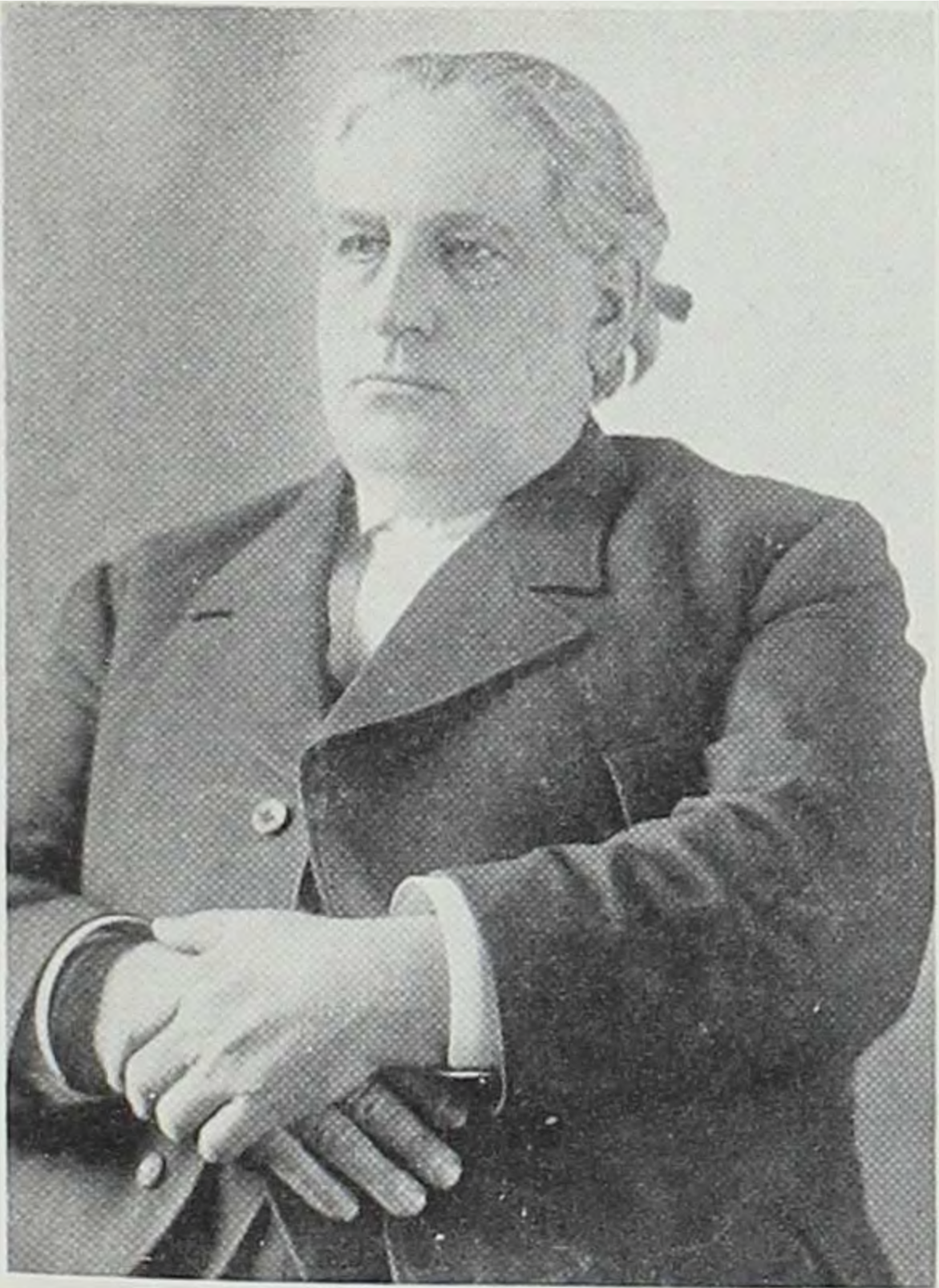
was trying to shake off. I was a Cummins man in Republican politics, an attitude perhaps inherited.

When I appeared at the school board offices to cover this called meeting, I was told by the secretary, Harry Keeseey, that he was very sorry, but the board had granted the request of the north side representatives to hold an executive session. I was out. I didn't leave. I hung around. Finally DePuy and Hunter came out of a side door into the hallway. I headed them off. To my surprise they were in a quite jovial mood. They refused to say what had taken place, assuring me that everything was lovely, but all had agreed to keep the proceedings in confidence.

I remonstrated that surely the board did not sweetly change its attitude without any argument. To this Hunter admitted that they had to present their side of the case, but everything was fine "now." DuPuy, however, could not restrain his sense of triumph.

"I tell you, Ed," he said to Hunter, "when you brought your fist down, they knew we meant business." This was illustrated by hitting his left hand a crack with his right fist. That was all I could get out of them. Eventually, it was enough.

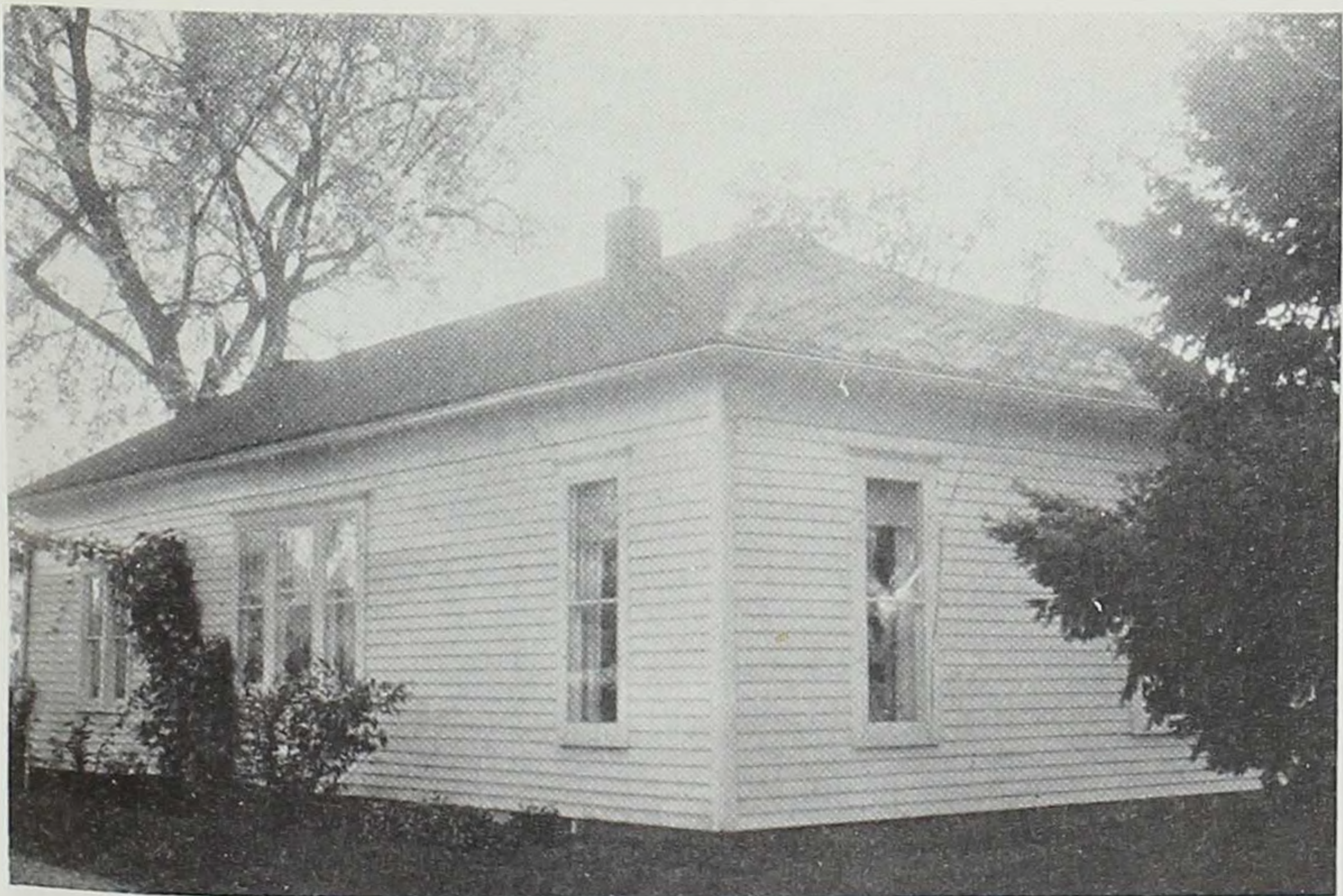
One of my best friends on the school board was L. C. Kurtz (a friendship which continued so long as Mr. Kurtz lived). But neither he nor any other members of the board would give me a thing. They had agreed to keep still.



WILLIAM H. BERRY

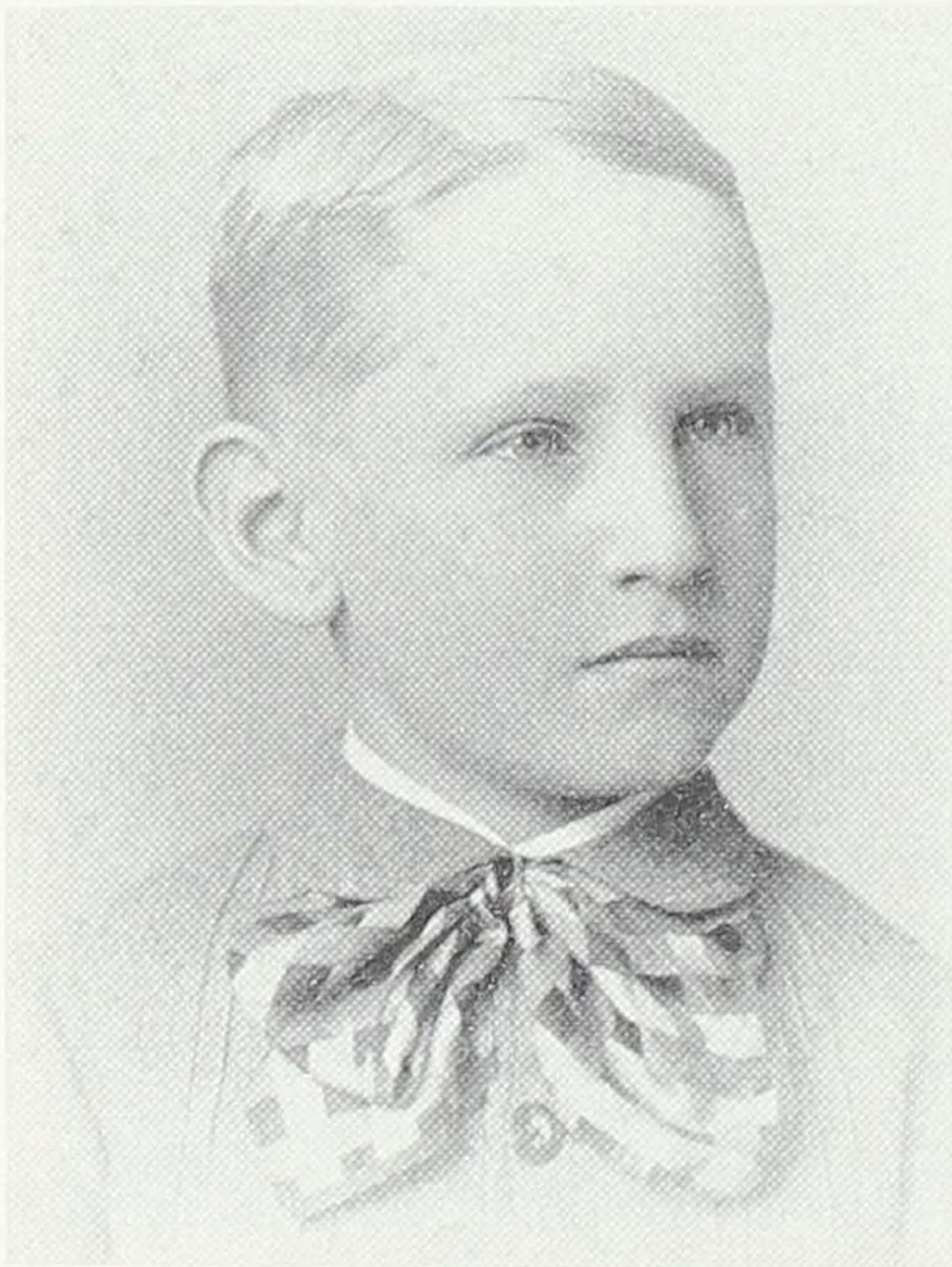


ALICE M. BERRY

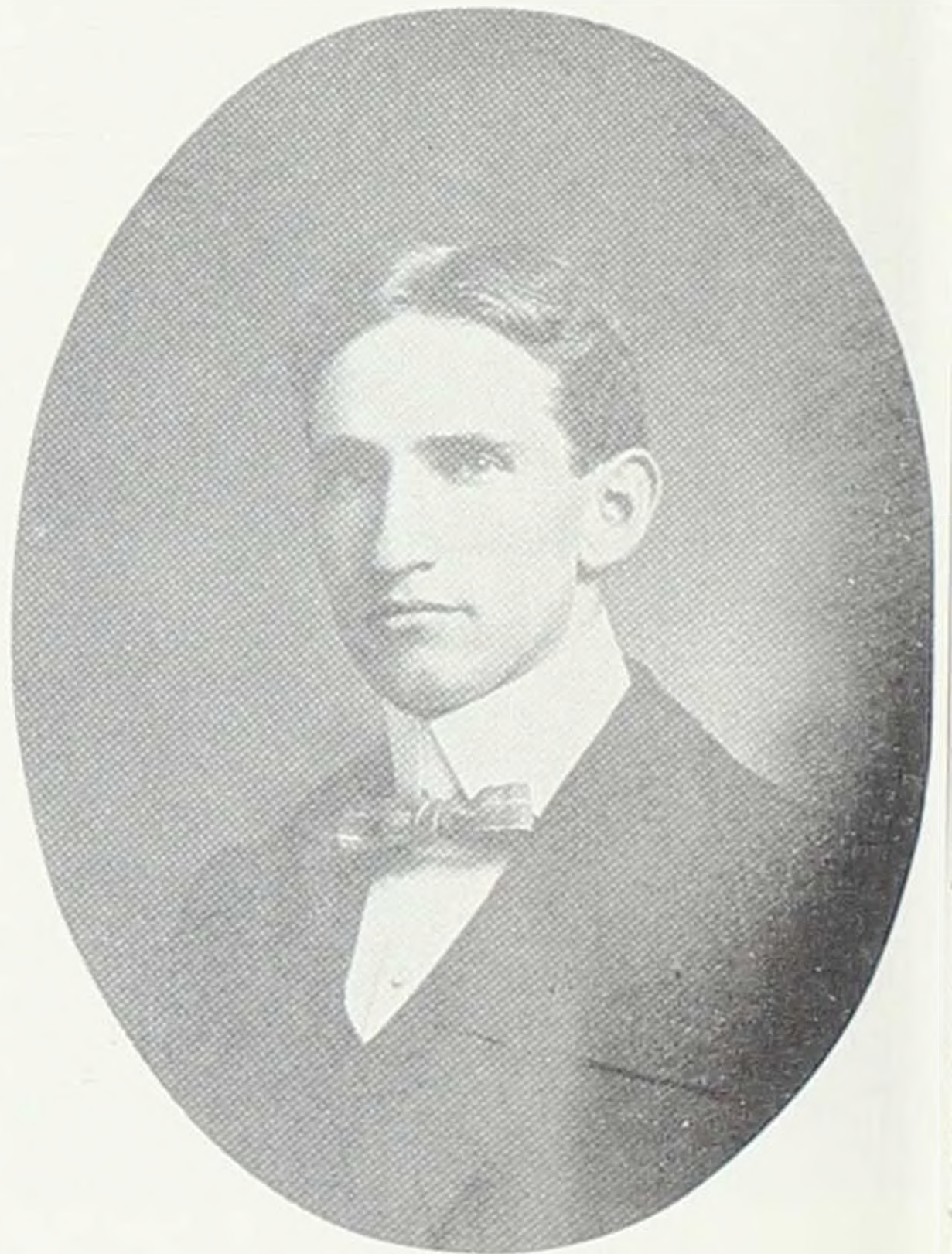


Birthplace of Don L. Berry in Indianola.

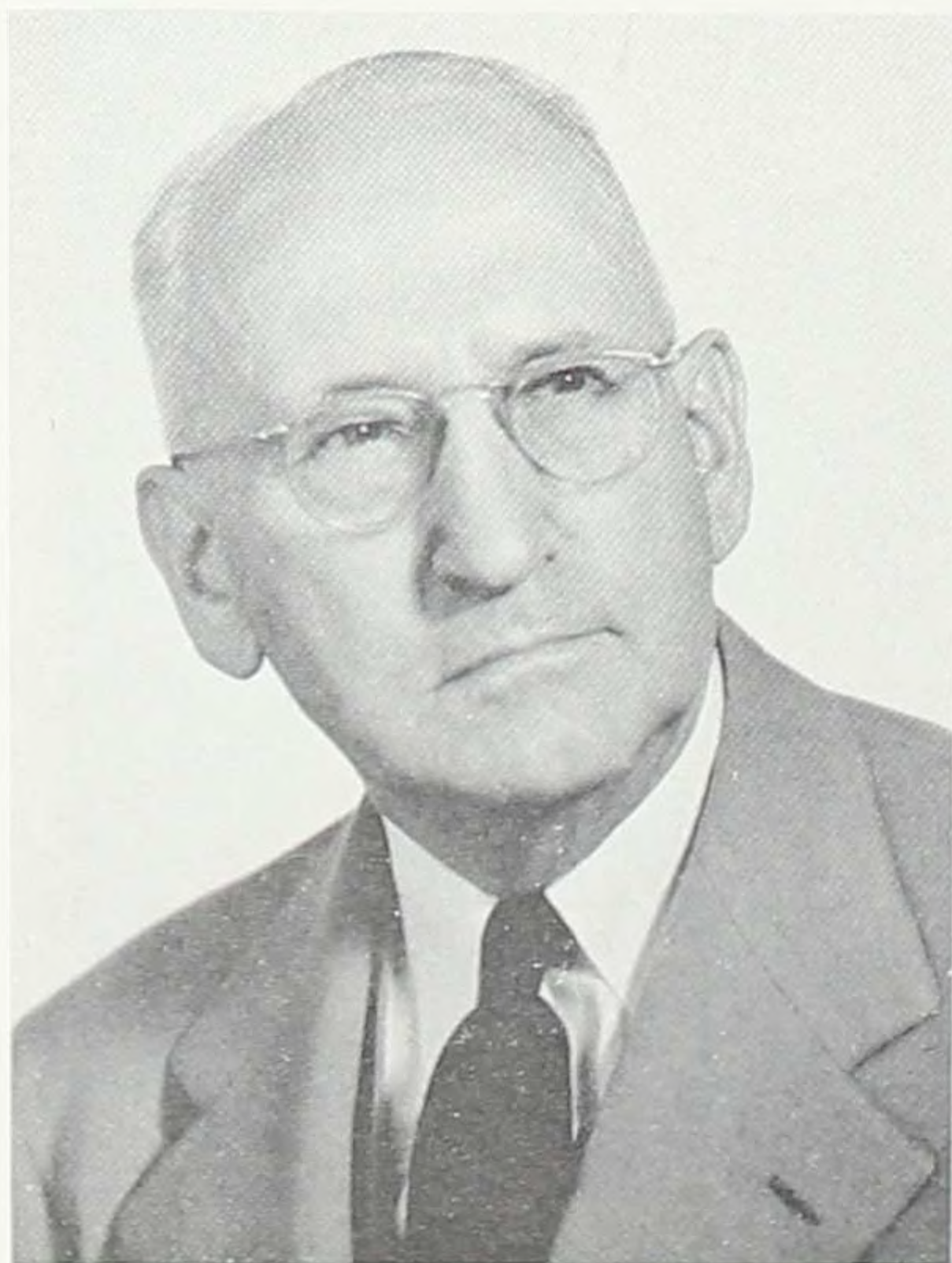
FOUR AGES OF A MAN



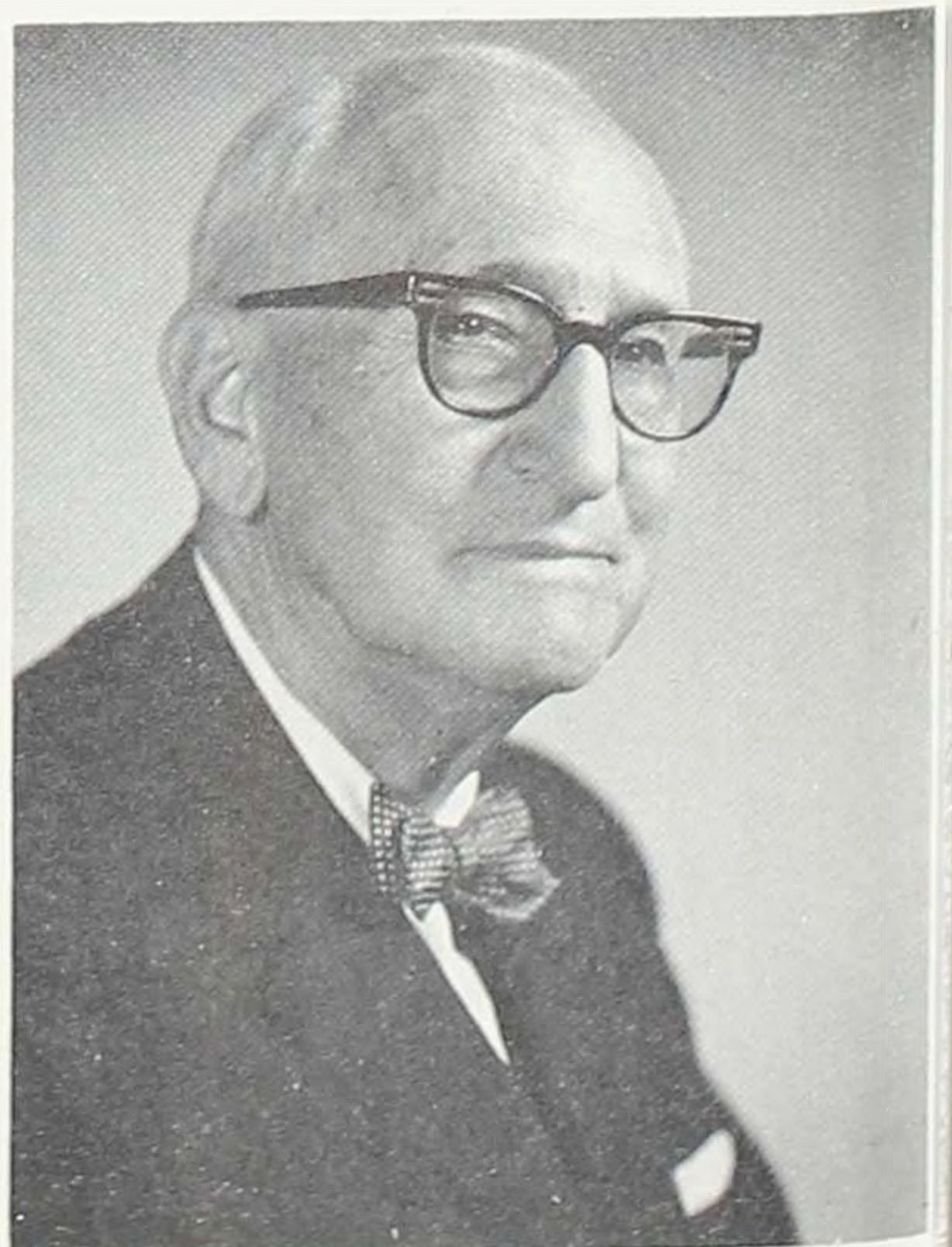
Student of McGuffey



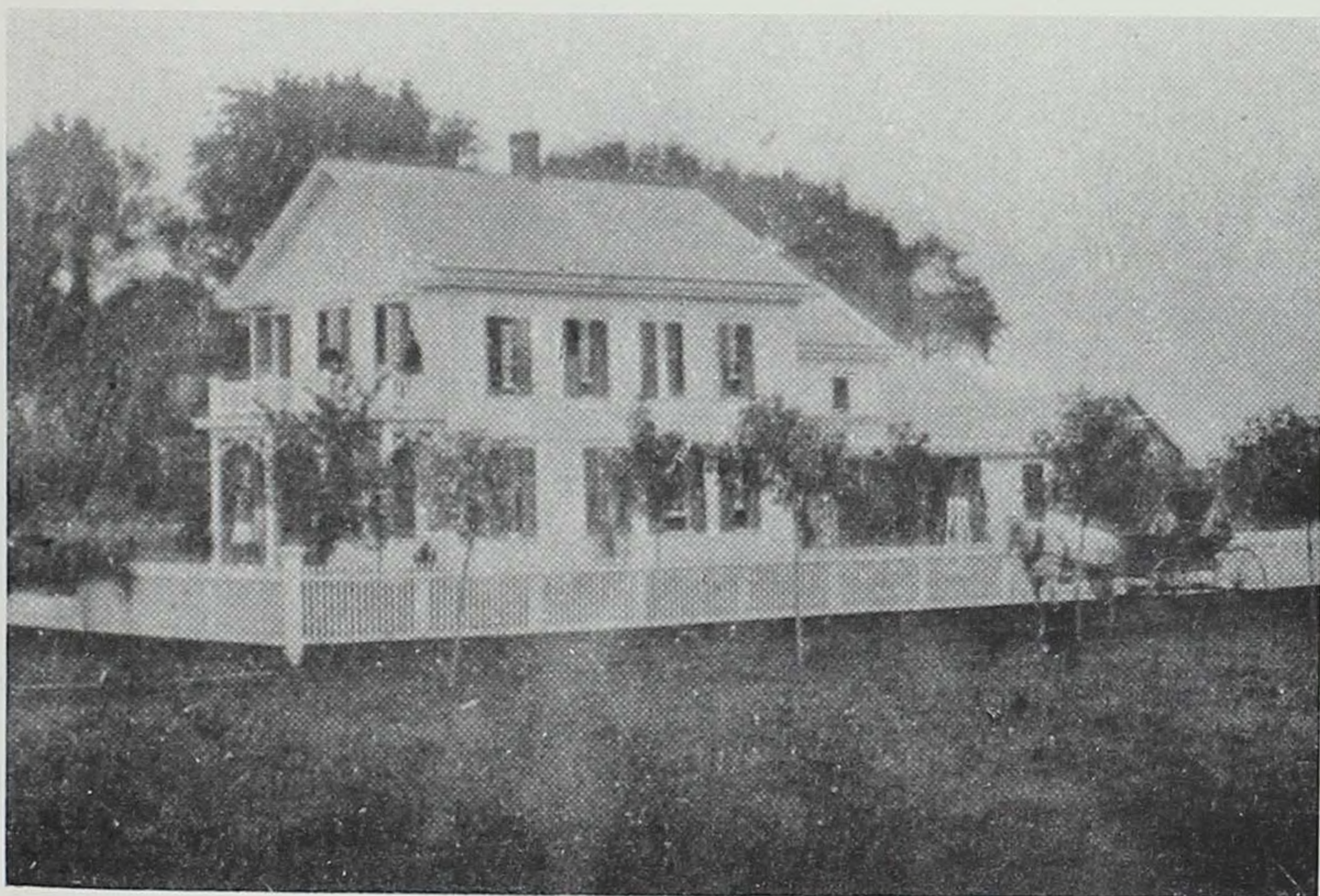
Cub Reporter



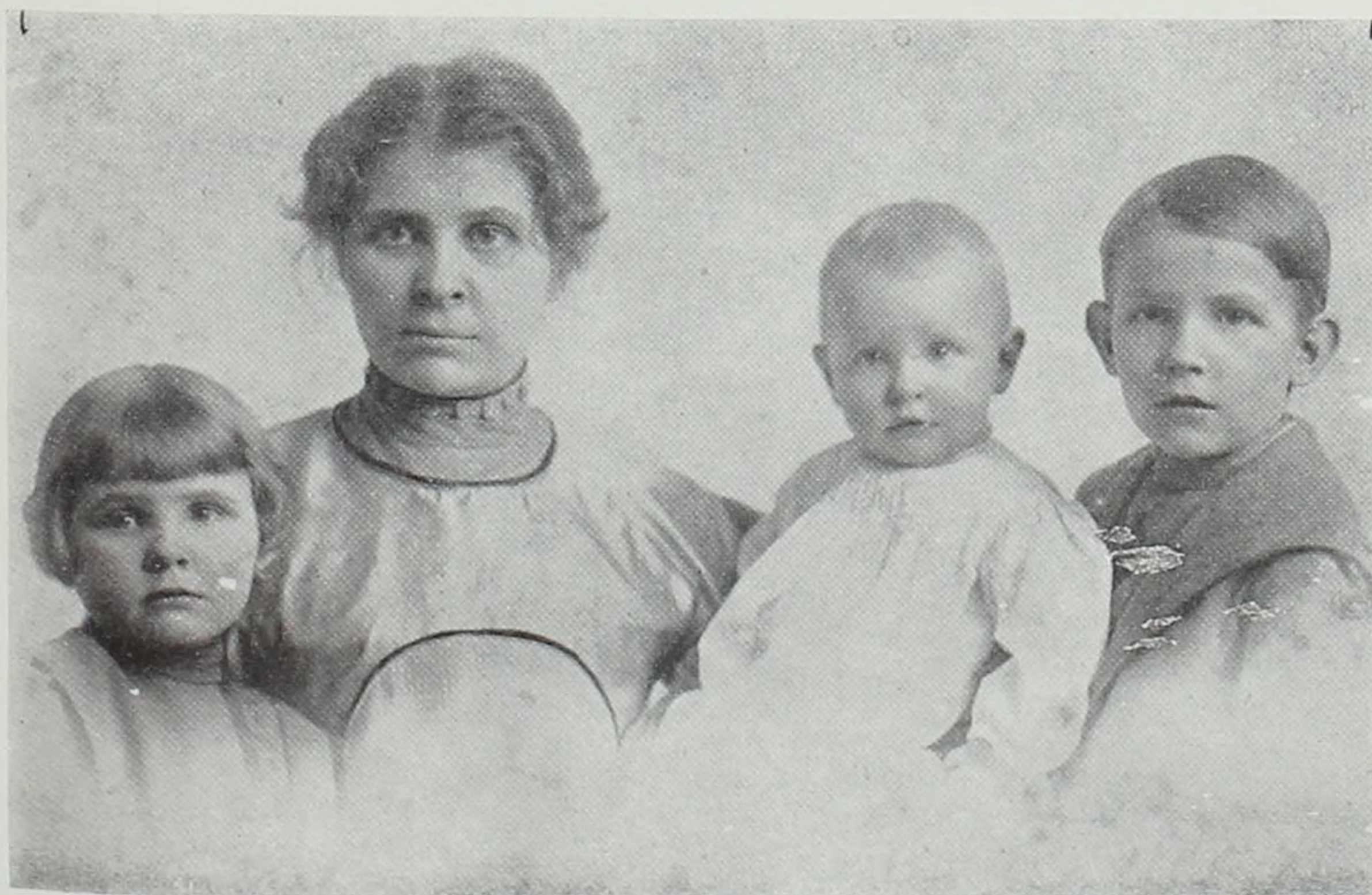
Fighting Editor



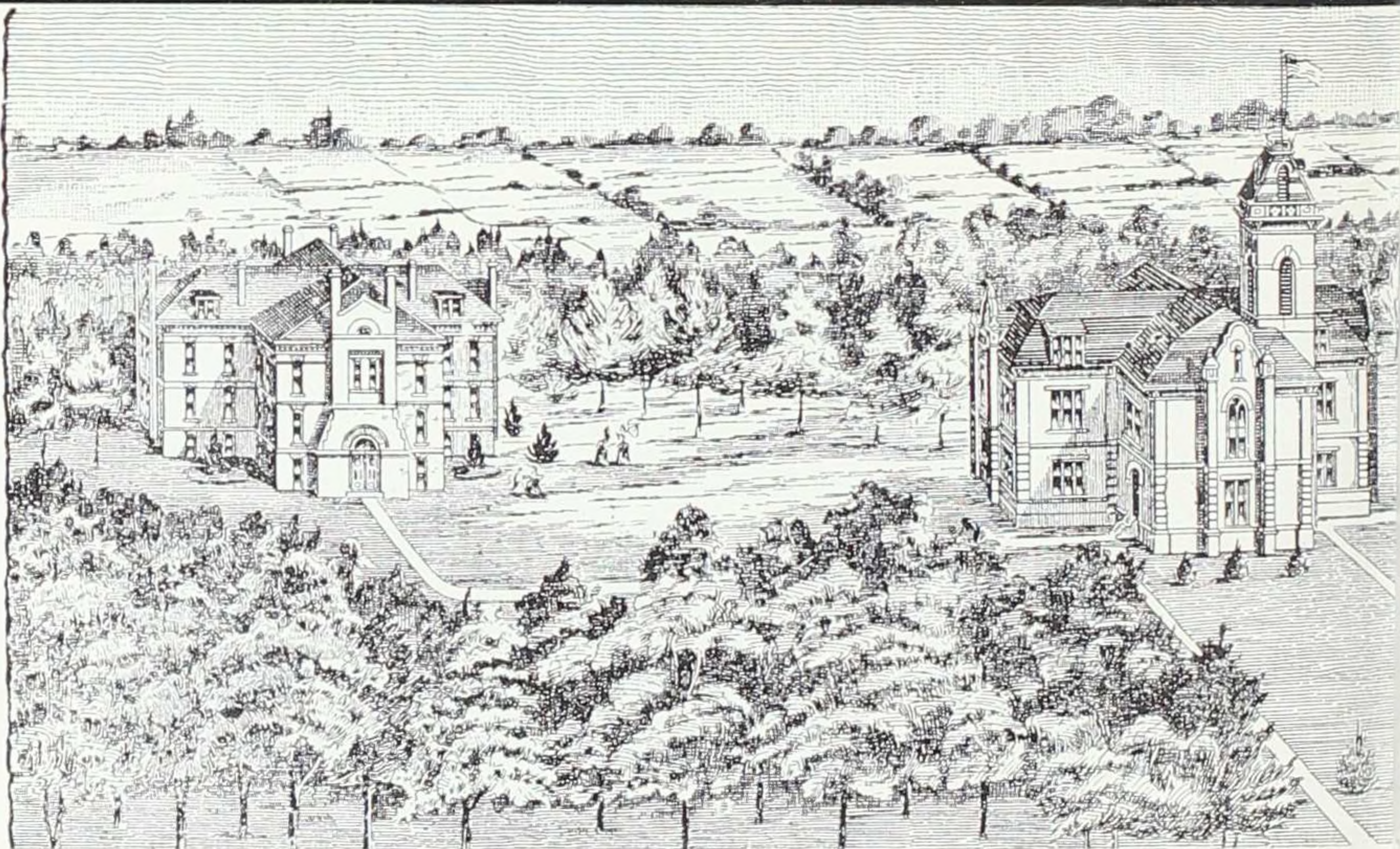
Sage of Indianola



Farm home to which the Don Berrys moved on their wedding night. The home was erected in 1867 and burned down December 3, 1908.



Bertha Sloan Berry and her three children.



FACULTY.

AND OTHER OFFICERS.

1903-1904.

FACULTY.

CHARLES ELDRED SHELTON, A. M., LL. D., PRES'T.

Iowa Wesleyan University.

Professor of Pedagogy and History.

REV. W. E. HAMILTON, A. M., D. D.,

Iowa Wesleyan University.

Professor of Moral and Intellectual Philosophy.

On the William Buxton Endowment of the Chair of Moral Science.

JOHN L. TILTON, A. M.,

Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut; Harvard University.

Professor of Natural Sciences.

JOANNA BAKER, A. M.,

Cornell College; De Pauw University; University of Chicago.

Professor of Greek Language and Literature, and Secretary of the Faculty.

MARTHA A. STAHL, PH. M.,

Simpson College.

Professor of Latin Language and Literature, and Librarian.

W. B. READ, A. M.,

Northwestern University; Simpson College.

Professor of Mathematics and Astronomy.

IDA B. STEYER,

Leipzig, Germany; Dr. Sauveur's College; University of Vermont.

Professor of German and French.

ELIZABETH C. BENTLEY, A. M.,

Missouri Wesleyan College; Boston University.

Professor of English Language and Literature.

Legge, Bertha
Smith, Rowena

Cain, Alice
Sloan, Bertha

McGee, Walter
McCutchan, R. G.

Genung, Edmund
Pratt, Ira

Kephart, George
Emslie, Alexander

LADIES' QUARTET

Smith, Rowena
Halley, Bernice
Peasley, Leone
Rehkopf, Katherine

MALE

Ruby, A. Ira
McCutchan, R. G.
Snell, Clark
Middleton, Arthur D.

MIXED QUARTET

Marlatt, Nell
Sloan, Bertha
McCutchan, R. G.
Middleton, A. D.

SIMPSON COLLEGE

MADRICAL CHORUS

SERENOS.

TOS.

NORS.

SSER.

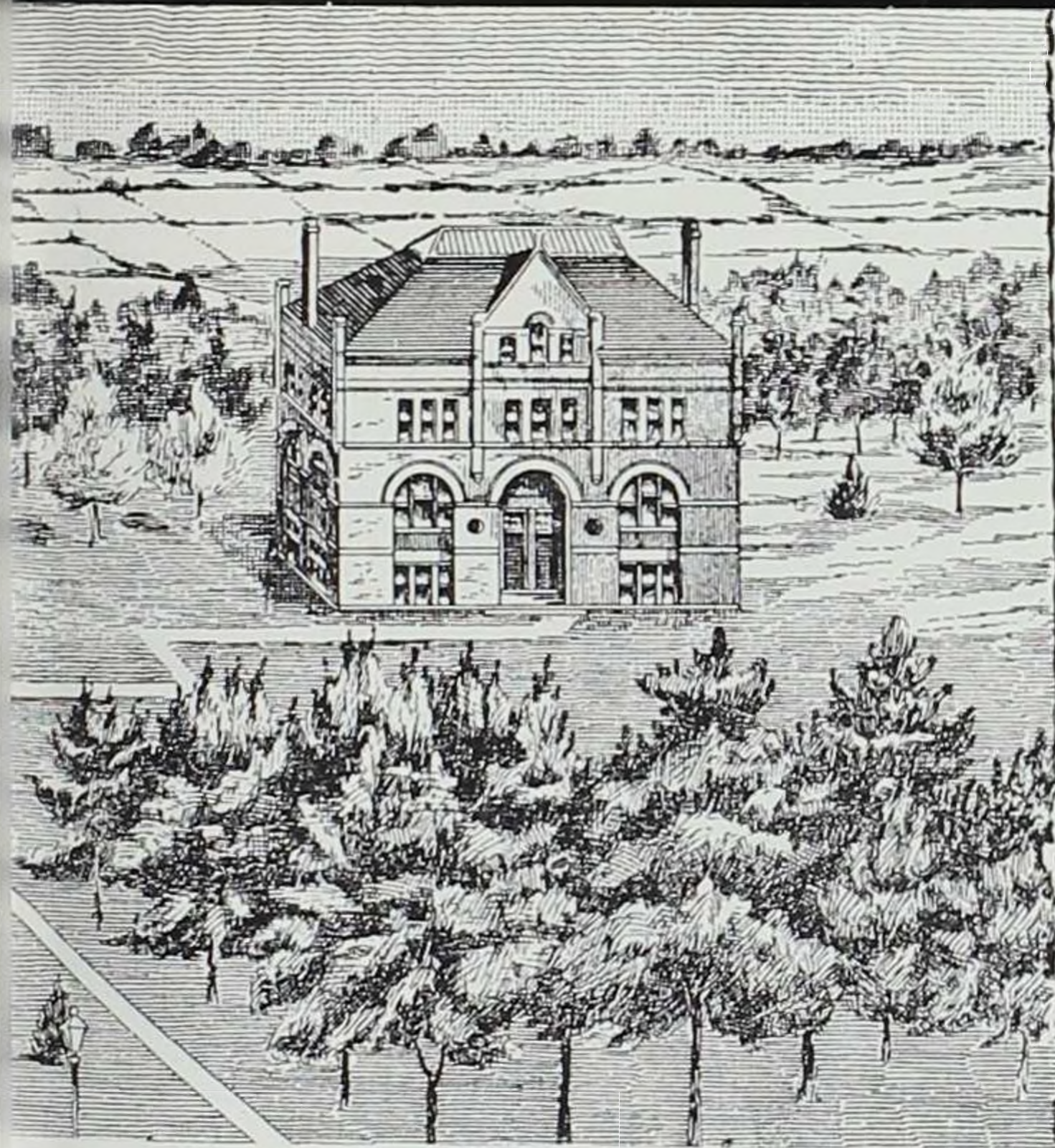
ude, Acco

ander, Di

WARTET

WARTET

WARTET



SIMPSON COLLEGE
CAMPUS

Note the faculty listed all their degrees; that Mrs. Berry (Bertha Sloan) sang in the Madrigal Choir and in the Mixed Quartette; that Robert Guy McCutchan (tenor) became the editor of the *Methodist Hymnal* and Arthur D. Middleton (bass) became a famous recording star.

SIMPSON COLLEGE

SIMPSON COLLEGE

CHOIR.

DEGREES CONFERRED IN 1903.

SOPRANOS.
White, Gertrude
Halley, Bernice
ALTS.
Rehkopf, Katherine
Peasley, Leone
TENORS.
Ruby, A. Ira
Carpenter, Dr. L. D.
BASSES.
Youtz, Ernest
Middleton, Arthur D.
Accompanist.
Alexander, Director.

Rev. John T. McFarland . . .	LL. D . . .	Topeka, Kansas
Rev. J. W. Hackley	D. D	Burlington
Forrester, Robert Herman . . .	A. M	Denver, Colo.
Bair, Chas. R	A. B	Hancock
Beatty, Clifton W	B. S	Boone
Beebe, James A	A. B	Harlan
Berry, Don L	Ph. B	Indianola
Brown, Carl F	Ph. B	Indianola
Crandall, May	Ph. B	Red Oak
Crandall, Grace T	Ph. B	Red Oak
Ellison, Besse	Ph. B	Indianola
Everett, Roy F	A. B	Mingo
Everett, Jennie Maxson	A. B	Indianola
Griffith, Dudley D	A. B	Council Bluffs
Gunn, Frank E.	A. B	Villisca
Hagler, Lora	Ph. B	Shenandoah
Hohanshelt, Nina	Ph. B	Indianola
Jenner, Edwin A.	B. S	Indianola
Kennedy, Fredric G.	B. S	Indianola
Krell, S. Arthur	A. B	Indianola
Marmon, J. Asa	A. B	Mitchellville
Mitchell, Claire H.	A. B	Weldon
Perry, Anna H.	Ph. B	Indianola
Picken, Robert J.	A. B	Indianola
Rae, James	B. S	Dow City
Reid, Catherine Myrtle	Ph. B	Indianola
Riggs, Clarence H.	Ph. B	Indianola
Rogers, Elton B.	A. B	Bagley
Talbot, Loren C.	Ph. B	Indianola
Talley, M. Roy	Ph. B	Diagonal
Turner, Etta B.	Ph. B	Adair

MIXED QUARTETTE.

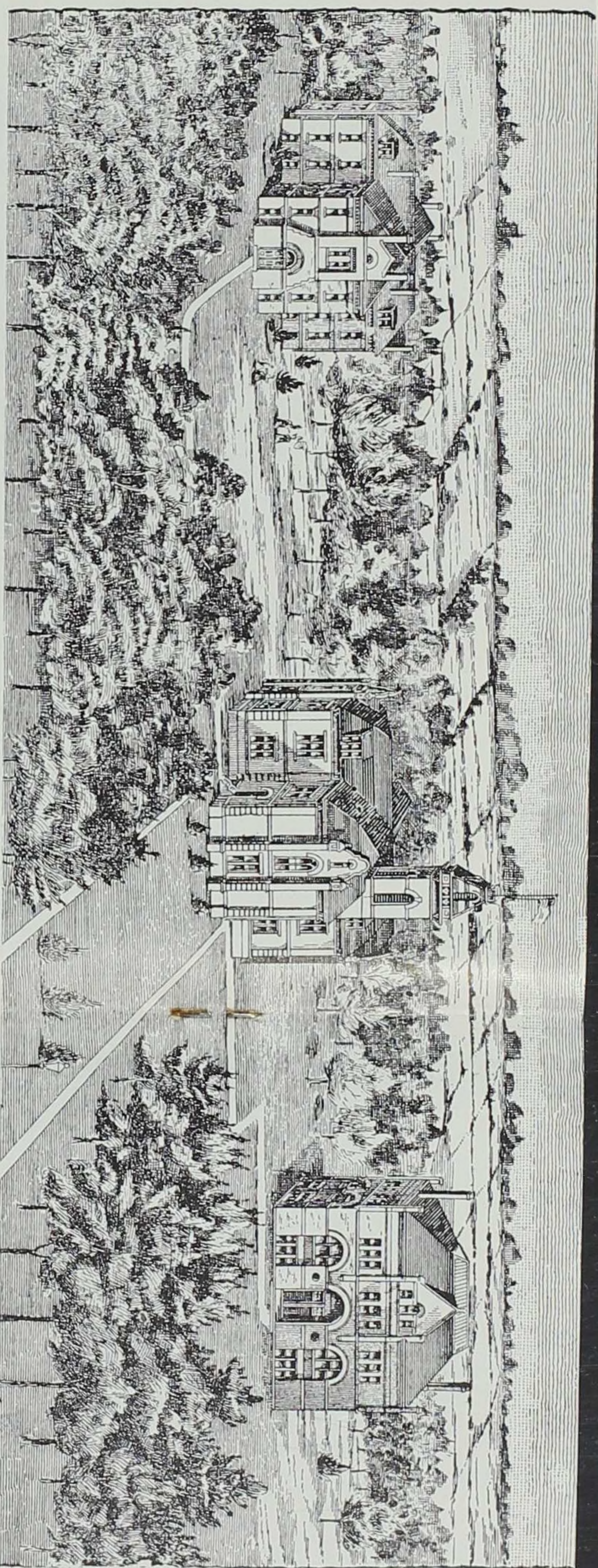
First Soprano
Second Soprano
First Alto
Second Alto

TENOR QUARTETTE.

First Tenor
Second Tenor
First Bass
Second Bass

MIXED QUARTETTE.

Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Bass



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Ruby, A. Ira	First Tenor
McCutchan, R. G.	Second Tenor
Snell, Clark	First Bass
Middleton, Arthur D.	Second Bass

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Marlatt, Nell	Soprano
Sloan, Bertha	Alto
McCutchan, R. G.	Tenor
Middleton, A. D.	Bass

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Rev. J. W. Hackley	D. D.	Burlington
Forrester, Robert Herman	A. M.	Denver, Colo.
Bair, Chas. R.	A. B.	Hancock
Beatty, Clifton W.	B. S.	Boone
Beebe, James A.	A. B.	Harlan
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Talbot, Loren C.	Ph. B.	Indianola
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Winter scene at Berry home on December 22, 1961. West side view showing dining room and kitchen.



In the Berry living room about 1955.

Mrs. Thomas S. Berry, Richard C. Berry, William H. Berry, Thomas S. Berry, and Bertha S. Berry.



The Berrys relax in their study.



Harvey Ingham and Gardner Cowles, Sr. (1937) Celebrate Ingham's 35th Anniversary as *Register* Editor.

Qualities That Make a Real Newspaper

by

HARVEY INGHAM

Two avenues of popularity are open to the newspaper. The first is to yield, to flatter, to cajole. The second is to stand for right things unflinchingly and win respect. . . .

A strong and fearless newspaper will have readers and a newspaper that has readers will have advertisements. That is the only newspaper formula worth working to. . . .

After making all allowances, the only newspaper popularity that counts in the long run is bottomed on public respect.

I was sitting at my typewriter that evening in the old *Register and Leader* building on Fourth and Court, wondering what on earth I could write about that meeting, in which I knew thousands of people in West and North Des Moines school districts were vitally interested. I knew practically nothing for sure. I was about whipped.

Mr. Kurtz came in and sat down by my desk. Evidently he came to express his sympathy and offer me apologies for the secrecy. But he said they had all given their word of honor to keep the proceedings to themselves and he could not break his word. I countered that surely DePuy and Hunter did not go in and with merely smiles and shoulder pats bring the board to their way of thinking. "Well, not quite that easy," said Kurtz; "they mentioned secession, but we didn't take that too seriously."

Our conversation drifted on briefly and Kurtz went away. Secession and DePuy's blow with his fist! I had enough. I knew I had "busted the code" of Ed Hunter, the great political strategist of Iowa. I knew all the arguments and just about all that would have been said. Swiftly I typed:

Secession, rather than submission, was the ultimatum of the North Des Moines residents delivered to the West Des Moines school board yesterday afternoon by Emerson DePuy and E. H. Hunter, emphasized by a resounding thwack of Hunter's fist on the conference table that sent the penholders and the ink wells dancing.

Then followed the routine recounting of the arguments on each side.

I had been in the local room the next afternoon only long enough to look over my assignments, when I received a call from Hunter.

"I don't know where you got it," he exploded, "but you got the main points. Meet me at the Savery at 3 o'clock and I will give you the rest of it."

I had beaten the renowned Ed Hunter at his own game! I felt I had become a newspaper man.

I was extremely fortunate in the men with whom, and under whom, I was privileged to work in my first year. Robert M. Lee went on to become managing editor of the *Chicago Tribune* and member of the faculty of the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. Neal Jones went to Omaha as managing editor of the *Daily News*, and later to New York as managing editor of the *Tribune*. Dan Maloney became co-publisher of a daily in Santa Ana, California. A. L. Frisbie Jr. went to the *Grinnell Herald* as co-publisher and spent his life there.

I owe most to Fred W. Beckman, managing editor, and to Leon Brown, who was city editor during most of my time on the *Register and Leader*. Beckman was a thorough newspaper man, with very high ideals of the paper's responsibility to its readers and to the community. He had none of the "get-the-hell-out-of-here" attitude which

stories and plays attribute to newsroom executives. He was a Christian gentleman, if there ever was one. His whole purpose was to help those under him to succeed. He ultimately became head of the School of Technical Journalism at Iowa State University at Ames, and in his later years was co-publisher with his son of the *Knoxville Journal*.

Leon Brown gave me a year's course in objective reporting in five minutes one morning about 2:30, when only he and I were left on duty. He waited until I had done a rather good job under pressure, for which he commended me most highly, saying no one on the *Chicago Tribune* or the *New York Times* could have done it better.

"BUT" — Then he gave me what was coming to me in no uncertain terms. He told me I was too "d - - d opinionated" in some of my stories. "Who in the h - - l cares what a young reporter thinks," he ripped out. "Your business is to get the facts and write them. Leave it to Harvey Ingham and Frank Moorhead to give the opinions of the paper if any are to be given. We didn't hire you for your opinions. All we want from you are the facts and we don't want anything more."

That speech soaked in. I always loved the man who made it from that moment until his death. I appreciated him waiting until he could compliment me on something I had done before he

waded in to take my hide off for my errors. Not a great while before his death, some ten years ago, I asked him if he remembered the occasion.

"You bet I do," he replied.

I told him I had always loved and respected him for the way he did it.

"I knew you could take it," he commented.

Then, there was "The Chief," Harvey Ingham — one of Iowa's newspaper greats. My contacts with him were few. He left the management of the news staff entirely in the hands of the managing and city editors. He always spoke cordially if we met and often stopped for a word of encouragement or to inquire about my father and mother. His influence on the general policy of the paper was great and gave the public a high respect for it, which was tremendously useful when I was trying to interview persons who would rather not be interviewed. It gave them confidence that their story would be fairly handled.

One experience with Ingham stands out in my memory "like Mars at perihelion." It was in one of the numerous school election campaigns. So far as I knew I was getting along very nicely with both sides; but the facts did favor one more than the other. The unfortunate side must have gone to Mr. Cowles with some complaints. He stopped me in the local room one afternoon and cautioned me to be very careful what I wrote, as we had subscribers and advertisers in both camps and

we must be careful not to offend them. (I did not know then what a struggle he was having to keep the business in the black.)

With all my heart I had been trying to tell the simple truth. I went to Ingham with my quandary, told him of Mr. Cowles' caution and asked his advice. Without hesitation he answered with snap and vigor: "Write the truth and let the chips fall where they may." From that day to this, Mr. Ingham's advice has been my guiding light in handling news, although it has taken some floor walking to drive myself to it when I knew the truth would hurt some innocent person. But there is no other honest way.

As a reporter I think that was my only contact with Mr. Cowles. In later years we became warm friends. Let it not be assumed from this incident that Gardner Cowles lacked courage.

At the end of a year with the *Register and Leader* I was receiving \$16 a week; I don't believe anyone on the news staff below an executive position was drawing as much as \$25. Some of the fellows from Des Moines papers had gone to Washington and were doing pretty well, at least receiving recognition, for instance: Jud Welliver, Robert Armstrong, Henry Jones, John Snure and George Authier. However, taking reporters as a class, by the time they reached thirty-five or forty years, they had fringe on their pants and were looking for jobs at the court house or the state

house. I had become engaged to that girl to whom I was never introduced. It seemed to me that the chance of feeding her well on a farm was brighter than caring for her on a reporter's salary. I had spent a spring and two summers working on a farm and loved every minute of it. My father said he would buy a farm and help me get started if that was my desire.

I tendered my resignation to the *Register and Leader* in September of 1904. I was offered \$18 a week to remain. I had the satisfaction of having Leon Brown, who had given me such a grilling lecture only eight months before, tell me now that, if the management had the money to reward and the ability to appreciate my work, it would never let me leave. He put it a bit strong, but it was a thrill to have that come from Brown, for he was no syrup peddler.

Late in September I left the *Register and Leader* office, supposedly leaving the newspaper business forever. Printers' ink has a terrific pull, once a fellow gets it on his fingers. In fifteen years I was back in the business again, for a forty year try-out — but that's another story.

DON L. BERRY