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# The Fairfield Ledger

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# THE PALIMPSEST

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## The Fairfield *Ledger*

On June 12, 1847, Fairfield's first newspaper, the *Sentinel*, was launched by Augustus R. Sparks, its owner and publisher. It was an exponent of Democratic principles at a time when the Democratic party was in the majority in Iowa, in Jefferson County, and in the nation.

The Fairfield *Ledger* did not appear until November, 1849. It was founded by Orlando McCraney, a Whig, who hoped to interest the youthful William Wallace Junkin, then only eighteen years of age, in becoming a partner in the venture and in assuming full charge of the mechanical department.

Junkin had entered the printers' trade at the age of twelve in his home town of Wheeling, Virginia (now West Virginia). His parents and family had come to Fairfield in 1847 where Junkin worked for more than a year in the mechanical department of the *Sentinel* till a short time before Sparks sold that paper to Ezra Brown and R. B. Pope. Junkin then helped Barlow Granger launch



the *Iowa Star*, the first Des Moines newspaper. During the winter of 1848-49 he assisted J. H. D. Street and Richard H. Warden in the publication of the [Ottumwa] *Des Moines Courier*, which was destined to become the *Ottumwa Courier* in 1857.

William Junkin then accepted McCraney's offer to work on the *Ledger*, remaining with that paper till May, 1851, when he took a position in the state printing office at Richmond, Virginia. After serving Virginia two years, Junkin returned to Fairfield, where he found A. R. Fulton sole owner of the *Ledger*. Three days later young Junkin, who was branded a "tramp printer" by the editor of the *Sentinel*, purchased a half interest in the *Ledger* for \$450. From that day in 1853, there has never been a moment when a Junkin, or an immediate relative, has not been the owner, or part owner, of the *Ledger*.

The following year (1854) the partners saw that there was not enough business in Fairfield and Jefferson County "to make it profitable" for both of them so Junkin offered Fulton \$450 for his half of the property which Fulton accepted without a moment's delay. The following week Fulton wrote a lengthy "Valedictory" in which he praised the youthful Junkin highly and predicted a glowing future for the *Ledger*. He concluded:

Let me express my confidence that this journal will continue to merit the patronage of the public. May it go on



doing great good in political reform, and may a generous public truly appreciate its efficacy.

William Junkin was a slave to brevity — never using two words in his conversation when one word would answer the purpose. This fact was proven by his salutatory in the following week's edition of the *Ledger*. It reads:

Ledger Office, Fairfield, Iowa  
August 24th, 1854.

Kind Patrons:

I have bought all *The Ledger* and it is under my control. If anything appears in it which you do not like, just lay the blame at my door.

Truly yours,  
W. W. Junkin.

William Junkin placed the imprint of his personality on his newspaper. In format it was much like any other Iowa four-page weekly newspaper of the period. It had seven columns to the page, and by using small type, it contained a good deal of news.

The price was \$1.50 per year paid in advance, or \$2 if payment was delayed over three months. In September, 1857, delinquent subscribers were advised: "The *Ledger* will not be sent to subscribers outside the county until paid for."

At the same time advertising prices were raised from \$50 to \$60 for one column for a year with the explanation that the new type just purchased would enhance the appearance of the paper, and,



since it was smaller than the old type, would actually print more words in the same amount of space. A new Wells Power Press also insured a better type of job-printing.

In April of 1860, with a presidential election in the offing and politics at fever heat, Junkin did his bit for the Republican party by offering his paper to clubs of five subscribers for six months at the low rate of 65 cents each. If the club had ten members, the price was 60 cents, if fifteen, 55 cents, and if twenty, 50 cents. Again, in May of 1867, Junkin made a similar offer saying:

We must meet them [the Democrats] and fight them on every corner, and to do this the newspapers are our most effective weapons . . . For the purpose of doing our share of the glorious work we must extend the circulation of the *Ledger*. For the good of the cause we will depart from our rule, and to every new subscriber . . . we will send the *Ledger* for six months for seventy-five cents.

The year 1865 found the *Ledger* reduced in size to six columns, probably as a result of the war. It was still printed on excellent rag paper but the price of single copies had risen to five cents. In 1866 the former seven columns were resumed, and the price raised to \$2 a year, or \$3 if payment was delayed three months.

It is interesting to note the changes in advertising practices through the years as illustrated in the *Ledger*. In W. W. Junkin's day the ads were small items relegated to pages three and four and



one column on page one. Some were set vertically on the page or patterns were made by spacing the words in pyramids, circles, or other geometric patterns. Doctors, dentists, and patent medicines "good for man and beast" promised to cure all ailments, and popular "oyster saloons" vied with the Georgia and Delaware state lotteries for space. Columns headed "Keokuk" and "Burlington Advertising" told of the wares of merchants in those neighboring towns.

After the Civil War ads became larger, some occupying three columns in width and at intervals the *Ledger* found it necessary to issue a special sheet filled with additional ads. Hoop skirts with "duplex elliptic pure refined steel springs" and patent medicines to "cure the decay of manhood" and all other ills held the center of attention.

By 1905 Lydia Pinkham's vegetable compound and Dr. Caldwell's Syrup of Pepsin were popular items. One advertisement would often fill a whole page of the eight to which the *Ledger* had expanded by that time, and instead of being segregated, advertisements were scattered throughout each issue on every page except the first.

Carriages were a feature of the 1910 *Ledger* advertisements, along with rocking chairs, couches, and hammocks. Sloan's Liniment and Old Dutch Cleanser also put in their appearance. By 1918 natty Fords, Oaklands and Studebakers were boasting of their speed, Bull Durham to-



bacco was the best ever, and phonographs, library tables, and sideboards were offered at "panic prices." Full page advertisements of "thrift" and "war savings" stamps were naturally prominent.

The first page of the *Ledger* was invariably given over to long poems, continued stories, and world news, with occasionally the President's or Governor's messages, the speech of some noted Congressman, a copy of the city charter, state laws, or delinquent taxes. As local news began coming into its own in 1857, a section headed "Local Column" began usurping advertising space. During periods preceding an election, however, when Junkin seems to have felt that the subscribers needed to be informed on the issues of the day rather than neighborhood trivia, the local column would disappear almost completely.

Page two was the editor's own special domain and in it he gave vent to his feelings, prejudices, and politics with a joyous abandon that was ample proof both of his editorial ability and his love for a good fight. Before each election, Junkin worked up to a pitch on political issues — national, state, and local — giving the editor of the *Sentinel*, and later the *Jeffersonian* and the *Iowa Democrat*, sly digs, baiting them with questions, and refuting all of their allegations with a fervor that was the style of the day.

Junkin's editorials covered a wide range of subjects touching most of the problems troubling Io-



wans. In between elections he found time to boost the Female Seminary and the County Fair, advocate a county poor farm, urge the re-establishment of Fairfield University, defend abolition and, of course, support the railroads. The Burlington and Missouri Railroad was thirty-six miles west of Burlington and pushing rapidly west to Ottumwa in 1857, bringing with it the prospect of increased trade for Fairfield. Junkin was an enthusiastic advocate until it was discovered that the depot was to be changed to a location out of town when he rose in wrath to defend the citizens' interests, in a series of editorials. On November 23, 1857, he wrote:

We draw the deduction that after the agents of the B. and M. Railroad Company had given out that the Depot was located on the grounds north of the square, and our citizens had, for two years or more, acted with a view to such location, the company had no right to change that location, and place their depot entirely beyond the limits of our city, to the injury of the city and the citizens thereof. That the company had no right to perpetrate a fraud nor to aid others in the perpetration of a fraud. That by every moral obligation they were bound to act in good faith, notwithstanding they might act in bad faith without laying themselves liable to a direct remedy at law. A great many things may be done under color of law, which men would blush to do, and would only skulk behind the law to hide their shame . . . Cowards and rogues act in that manner.

After the war, in 1865, Junkin was a leader in advocating that Jefferson County citizens do their



utmost to secure the line of the St. Louis and Cedar Rapids Railroad. He urged:

Everyone who is in the least interested in the construction of a Railroad that will give us a Southern outlet for our products, is earnestly and seriously urged to be present at said meeting and hear the report which the members of the committee from this county has to make. Whatever we do must be done soon. Other points East and West of us are making strong efforts to secure this road, and we cannot expect to get it by lying supinely by and doing nothing. The initiatory step has been taken, and if we but follow it up with energy and perseverance we shall in all probability secure what we so much need and what our wants imperatively demand — a Southern and Northern outlet. The location of such a road would enhance the value of all kinds of property in an eminent degree.

On state issues Junkin hued strictly to the Republican line. In 1855 the *Fairfield Ledger* made the first recorded effort to summon an Iowa convention of those in the new Republican movement when it proposed a meeting in conjunction with the Jefferson County agricultural fair. While the proposal was not carried out, it did lead to other suggestions for a Republican convention. James Falconer Wilson, who was a guest editorial writer on the paper at that time, was probably behind this proposal as he had recently come from Ohio and was in touch with the movement there.

When the adoption of a new constitution was before the people in 1857, Junkin wrote a series of arguments defending the banking section, the



Bill of Rights, and the articles on education, three of the hotly debated issues. He had this to say on banking:

This presents a safe and reliable basis for banking to the people of Iowa . . . The anti-bank wing of the sham-Democracy will oppose the adoption of the amended Constitution for the very reason that it contains this article. Nearly all the private bankers and brokers of that party will oppose it for the same reason. They prefer making from 20 to 50 percent by loaning to the people the worthless rags issued by the irresponsible banking concerns which have sprung up as thick as Egyptian locusts in Nebraska, to furnishing the people of the State with a sound home currency at from 6 to 10 percent.

Junkin was against state aid to railroads. When a Railroad Convention met in Iowa City in 1858 and passed resolutions in favor of "a judicious system of such aid to Railroads as are of state importance by loaning the credit of the state to an amount not exceeding eight millions of dollars" Junkin expressed strong opposition.

Our State government is now one of the cheapest in the Union. We ought to keep it so, and if possible improve on it. We want our state taxes to keep on the downward scale and never rise again to what they have been formerly. Economy will insure this, but economy consists not in railroad aid and extra sessions.

On the importance of manufacturing in Iowa, Junkin republished a letter in 1865 which had appeared earlier in the *Iowa City Republican*:

Our future is wrapped up in the development of western



manufactures. We have all the materials for the production of articles for which we yet remain wastefully dependent on the industry of others. Wool and hides . . . furnish but two illustrations out of a great many.

On national issues the *Ledger* generally agreed with the accepted Republican platform of support for the homestead bill, a Pacific railroad, home markets, and the Fourteenth Amendment. Junkin wrote ringing editorials giving arguments in their favor and conversely, stinging editorials on anything and everything supported by the Democrats — President Buchanan, slavery in the territories, the Dred Scott decision, Stephen A. Douglas, and Jefferson Davis. President Andrew Johnson's reconstruction policy drew his special ire and was the subject of a number of scathing denunciations.

During these years W. W. Junkin continued to influence state and local Republican politics. At the same time he attended strictly to the business of getting out a profitable newspaper. In 1868, Ralph Robinson purchased one-half interest in the *Ledger*, paying \$2,500 for the same. Clearly, the paper had increased in value and popularity with the passing of the years. In 1875, when Robinson's health began to fail, he sold his interest back to Junkin for \$4,500. About the same time Charles M. Junkin, eldest son of W. W. Junkin, entered the business as co-manager. In 1878, he became partner with his father.

During the 1880's publishers began to realize



that little if any benefit could be derived by rebuking or criticising fellow editors and publishers. The newspaper men began to ignore their competitors and devote more time and effort to their own interests and that of their readers. Up to that time there was relatively little local news. Attention was paid to affairs in Des Moines, Washington, New York, London, Paris and distant lands. Local weddings were given three or four lines, the last line being "thank you" to the bride for a generous slice of the wedding cake. Occasional death notices were run in four or five type-lines. The minister who conducted the services, or some friend, was called on to add a few inches in body type, praising the departed before consigning his or her soul to eternity.

C. M. Junkin was a believer in local news. At first he carried nearly a column of such news, gradually expanding it to several columns. His local items ran something like the following: "Mrs. Hard Worker spent last week in Birmingham with her sister. The ladies will leave soon to visit friends in Illinois." "John Nevertires, near Lockridge, took three loads of hogs to Ottumwa Tuesday, and received the top market price." "John E. Lovermuch makes Sunday afternoon trips to Batavia. We will announce the lady's name early next June." Of course, the names are fictitious, but the statements were facts.

By 1880 Fairfield had four other newspapers



besides the *Ledger* — the *Republican*, the *Tribune*, the *Weekly Journal* and the *Daily Journal*. However, W. W. and Charles Junkin were not perturbed. They continued to attend strictly to business and to give their readers the very best weekly newspaper they knew how to produce.

Those were the years well-to-do farmers from other states east of the Mississippi and from parts of Iowa began to discover that many rich acres, known as "Grade A" land, were to be found in southeast Iowa. New land agencies were accordingly organized in Fairfield and other parts of Jefferson, Wapello, and Keokuk counties and the *Ledger* began to do a brisk business in job printing.

W. W. Junkin passed away in 1903 after fifty years of continuous service as owner, or part owner, but at all times the guiding heart and hand of the *Ledger*. The name "Junkin" always was, and still is, a strong asset.

After the death of his father, Charles M. Junkin continued to carry out his father's policies as sole publisher. Despite the fact that five newspapers divided the field (and one of them a daily) the *Ledger* continued to prosper. Although many of the *Ledger's* readers subscribed for one or more of the other papers, they still felt the need of the *Ledger*.

During the three years prior to the death of W. W. Junkin, three of the five Fairfield papers



changed hands. The *Daily* and *Weekly Journal* were sold to B. J. Taylor and his two sons, Dean and Alfred, who shortly thereafter discontinued the weekly paper. The *Tribune*, which had both a weekly and a daily edition, was sold to Ross Walker, who discontinued the daily.

When C. M. Junkin died in 1915, his nephews, William J. McGiffin and E. D. Hinkhouse, published the *Ledger* for a year until Hinkhouse purchased a paper in western Iowa. The late Don McGiffin, then Congressman C. W. Ramseyer's secretary, resigned at that time and returned to Fairfield to assist his brother William in the management of the *Ledger*. In 1917 they secured the *Ledger* from the Junkin estate.

In 1920 the *Ledger* and the *Journal* merged with W. J. and Don McGiffin and Dean Taylor as the owners. This merger left Fairfield with only one daily paper. For a year or more the daily and weekly publications retained their former names after which the title became the *Ledger-Journal*. On April 9, 1923, the *Tribune* was consolidated with these publications and the principal title became the *Fairfield Daily Ledger*.

After Dean Taylor was appointed postmaster of Fairfield by President Harding, P. S. Junkin purchased Taylor's interest in the *Ledger* and shortly thereafter he formed a corporation, with Col. W. G. Heaton and C. J. Fulton, which purchased the interests held by W. J. and Don Mc-



Giffin. This realignment gave P. S. Junkin the majority of the stock. He served as publisher with Herbert McDougal as editor until June 1, 1930, when he was appointed postmaster of Fairfield.

At that time the stock in the company was purchased by Don McGiffin, Dean Taylor, and Walter Williams, who took possession on July 1, 1930. McGiffin became publisher, Williams business manager, and Taylor editor. The *Ledger* continued to make a steady growth.

When Don McGiffin died in 1939, W. J. McGiffin became trustee of his brother's estate and Walter Williams became publisher and general manager. Dean Taylor died in 1943 and the McGiffin estate and Williams bought the Taylor shares from his heirs. Later James McGiffin, son of Don McGiffin, became trustee of his father's estate and advertising director of the *Ledger*.

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On December 8, 1943, I came to the *Ledger* as editor of the editorial page. Shortly thereafter Uncle Sam decided he needed eight key men out of the *Ledger* personnel: James McGiffin, Frank Simmons, Dale Simmons, George Hollis, Glen Spray, Dean Gabbert, William Baker, and Ben Taylor.

Walter Williams and W. E. McWilliams did a master job in keeping up the advertising lineage. Taking Baker and Gabbert out of the news room and putting me in their place, was like replacing



an Elgin mainspring in an Elgin watch with a mainspring from a Swiss watch. It had been more than twenty years since I had sat at a telegraph desk. Those were the days when the Morse system was the only system used in transmitting "flash" stories. I made many mistakes by misplacing the dots, spaces, and dashes.

The day I arrived, or a few days previous, the new teletype arrived. It was the first one I had ever seen at work. As I watched the paper unroll to receive the copy the fears I had brooded over for days vanished. The only "gnat in the ointment" was the fact that INS could not supply us with an automatic switch that would turn on the teletype at 3 o'clock in the morning.

The solution of that problem was not difficult. During the ten years that I had been working exclusively on weeklies, many times I had to work thirty-six hours without a wink of sleep. But that never happened after coming to Fairfield. I retired at 7 P.M. and arose the following morning at 2:30. I thrived on it. My weight increased nine pounds during that period. I could see that something was bothering Mr. Williams. One day, after we had "put the paper to bed," he came into my office and wanted to know if I thought I could keep up the "pace" I had set. I nearly laughed in his face as I told him about the nine pounds of fat I had gained since I had come to Fairfield. He grinned and left my office.

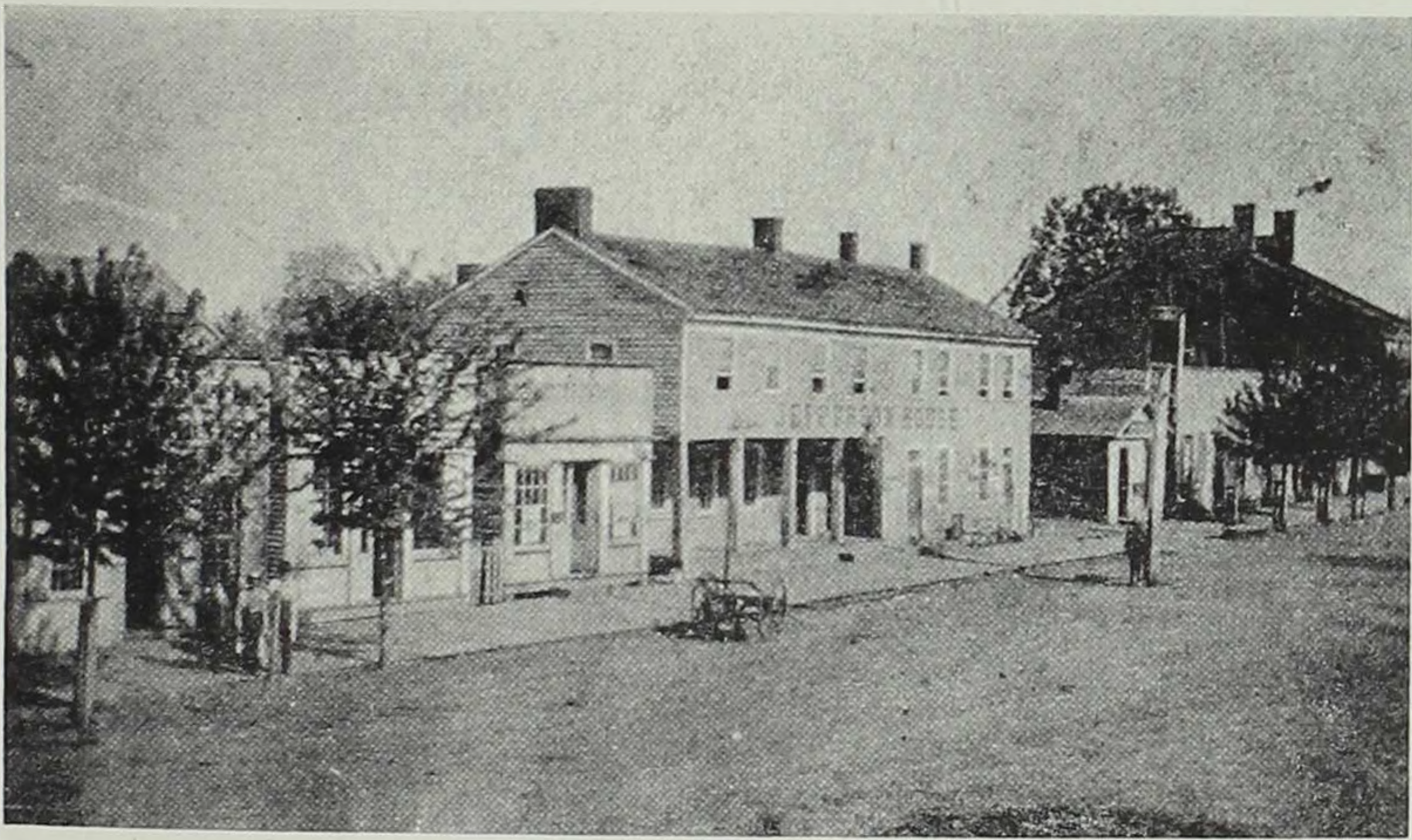


The next pay day, I found several extra dollar bills in my pay envelope. I thanked him a bit profusely. "Don't mention it," he replied. The same number of extra bills were in my next envelope. Again I thanked him, but told him not to overlook the help in the news room and in the back shop — they were all doing marvelously good work. Then I got the surprise of my life. He wanted to act a bit peeved that I would think he would overlook anyone. But he had, and still has, an expression of gratitude that he cannot erase, when he is convinced that one of his staff members thinks of his fellow workers as well as himself.

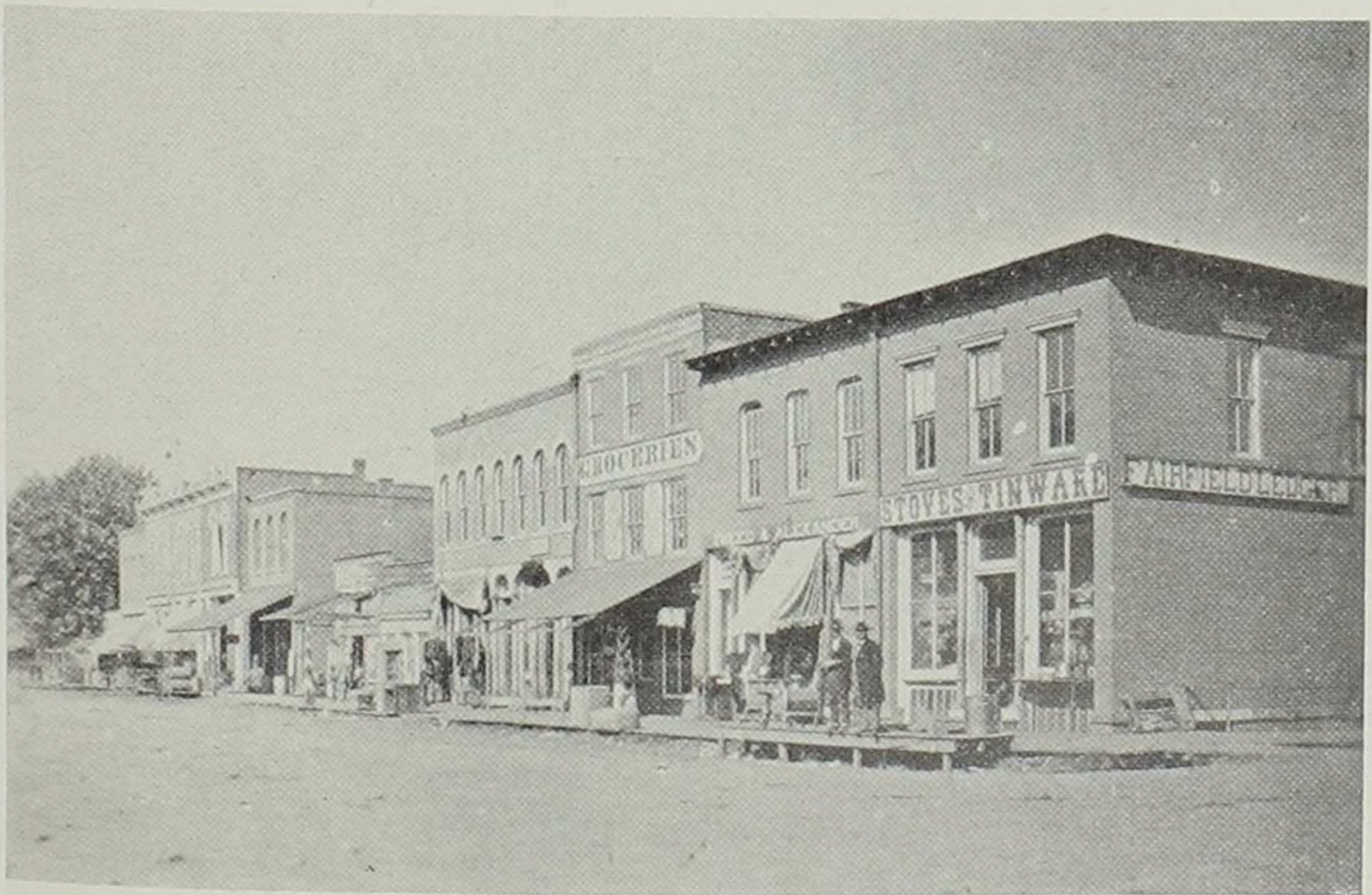
A few months later the war ended and our eight boys returned to their old Fairfield jobs. I got the impression the *Ledger* would be over-manned, at least I reasoned it would be sufficiently manned without me. I laid the matter before Williams who appeared really surprised. Finally, his face a bit flushed, he said: "Did you think when you came here that you were to serve us only for the duration of the war?" I replied that as I remembered it nothing was said about how long I should serve. Then Mr. Williams came back at me, that I was not hired for the duration of the war, but to fill the late Mr. Taylor's editorial shoes.

About eight years later — the latter part of January, 1953 — I told Mr. Williams I wanted to quit September 24 — my eightieth birthday. He replied: "Ah, that's a long time yet, see me later."





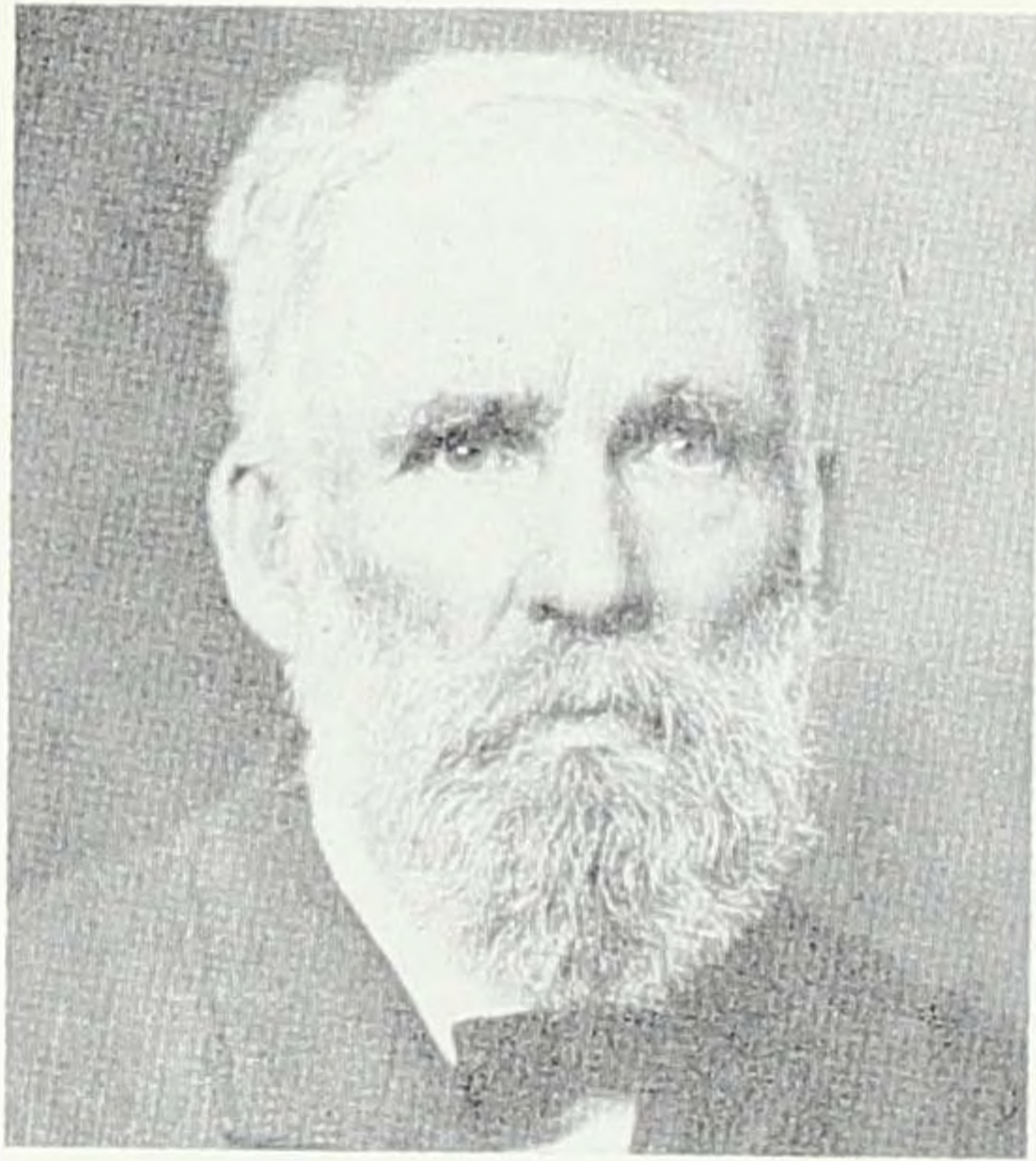
The home of the *Fairfield Ledger* in the 1850's was the small building to the left of the Jefferson House.



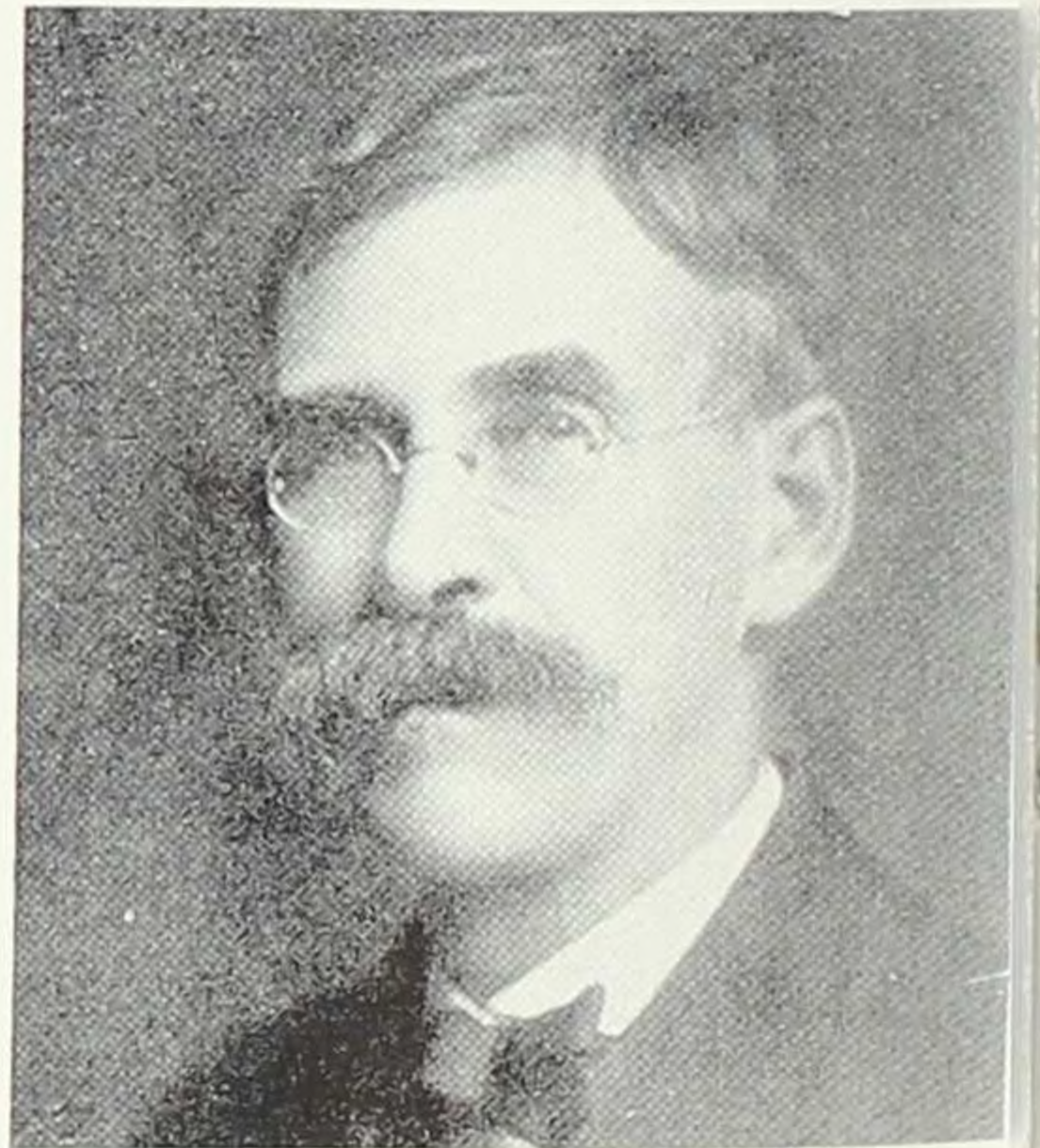
The home of the *Fairfield Ledger* in 1876 was the second floor of the building on the northeast corner of the square.



LEDGER PERSONNEL OF YESTERYEARS

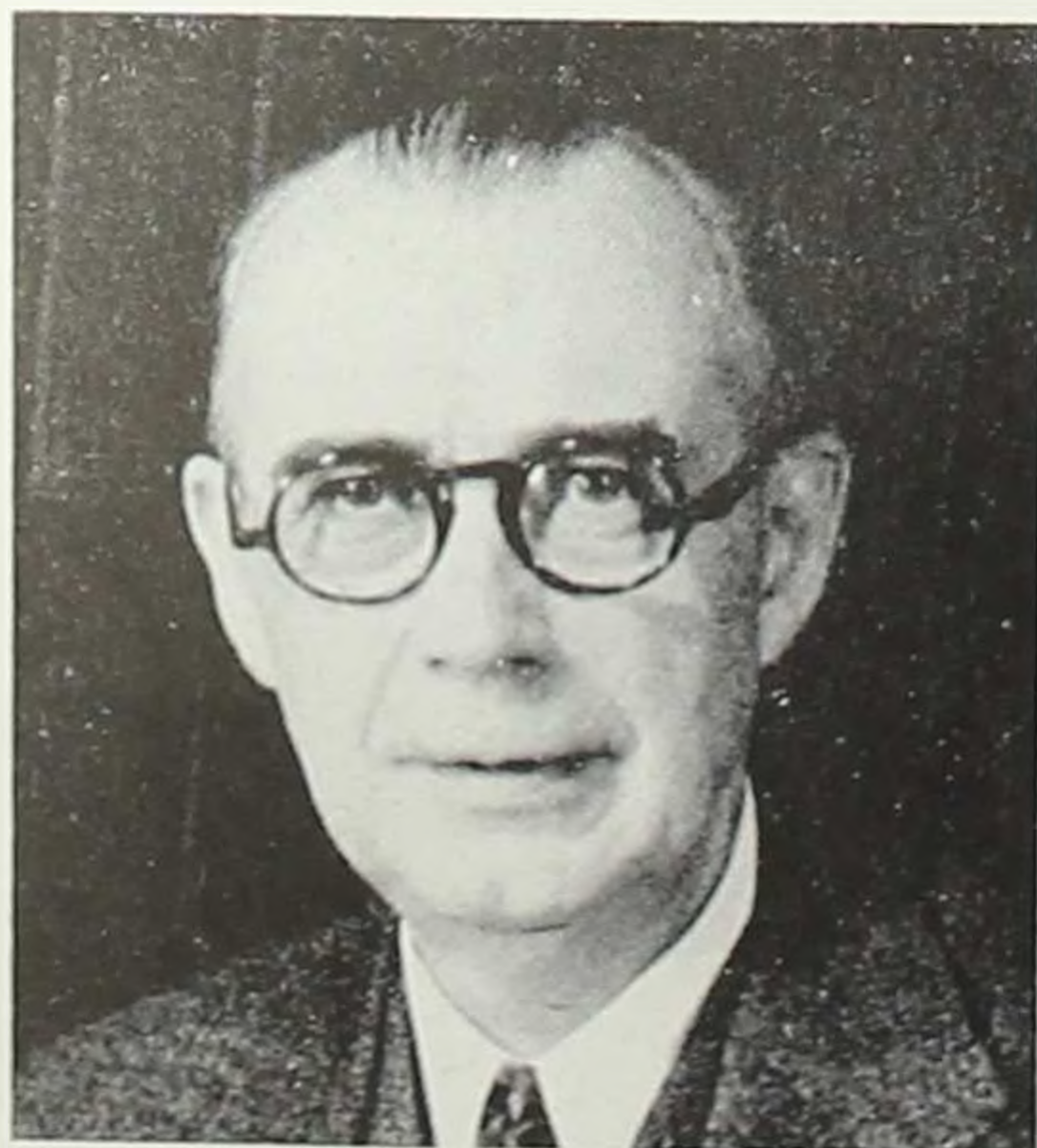


WILLIAM WALLACE JUNKIN  
Owner-Editor, 1853-1903



CHARLES M. JUNKIN  
Co-owner-Editor, 1878-1915

JENNIE PRINCE  
Correspondent, 1891-



DEAN TAYLOR  
Part Owner-Editor, 1920-1943



DON MCGIFFIN  
Part Owner-Publisher, 1916-1939



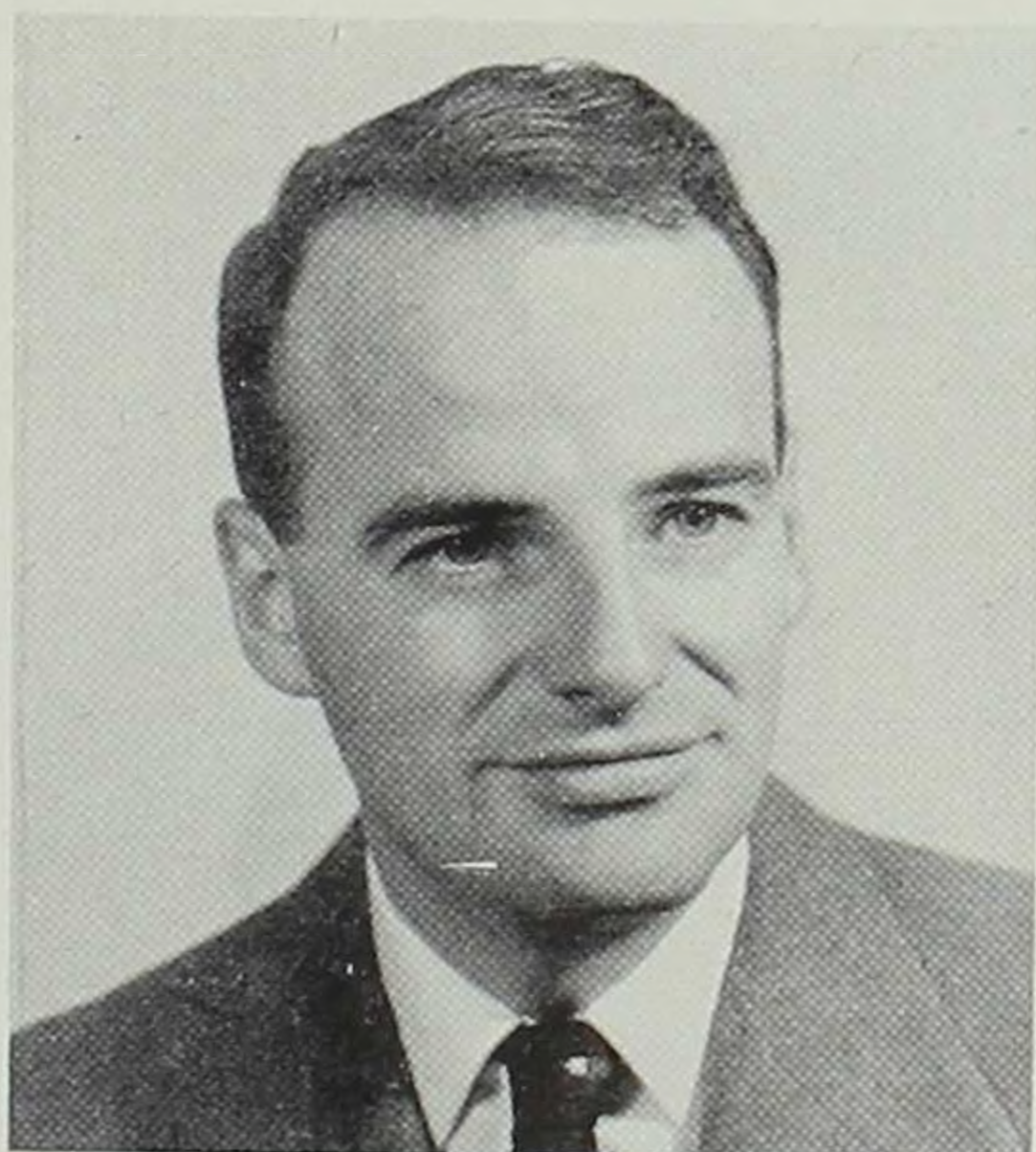
AUTHOR AND PRESENT PERSONNEL



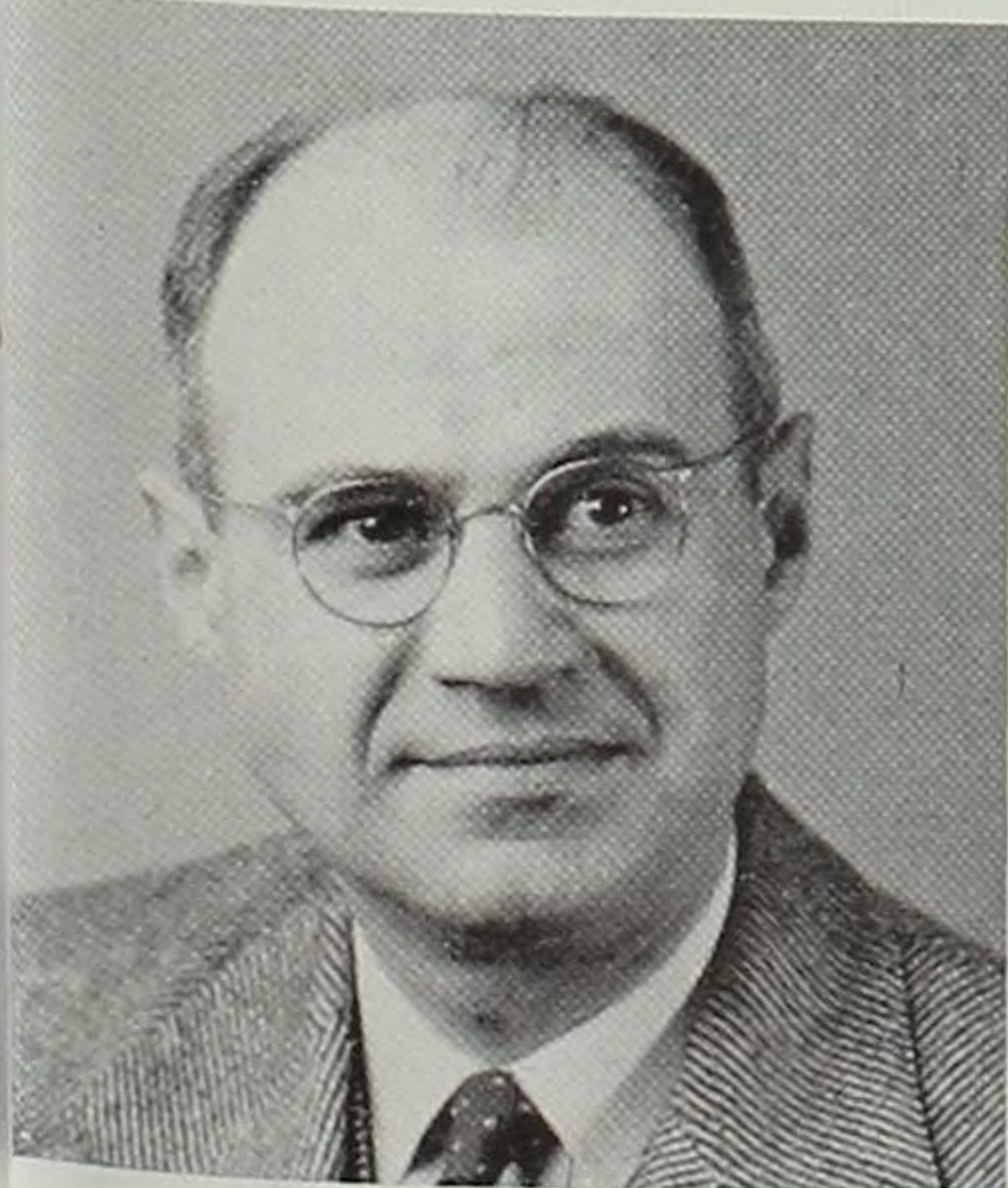
WALLACE E. SHERLOCK  
Editor, 1943-1953



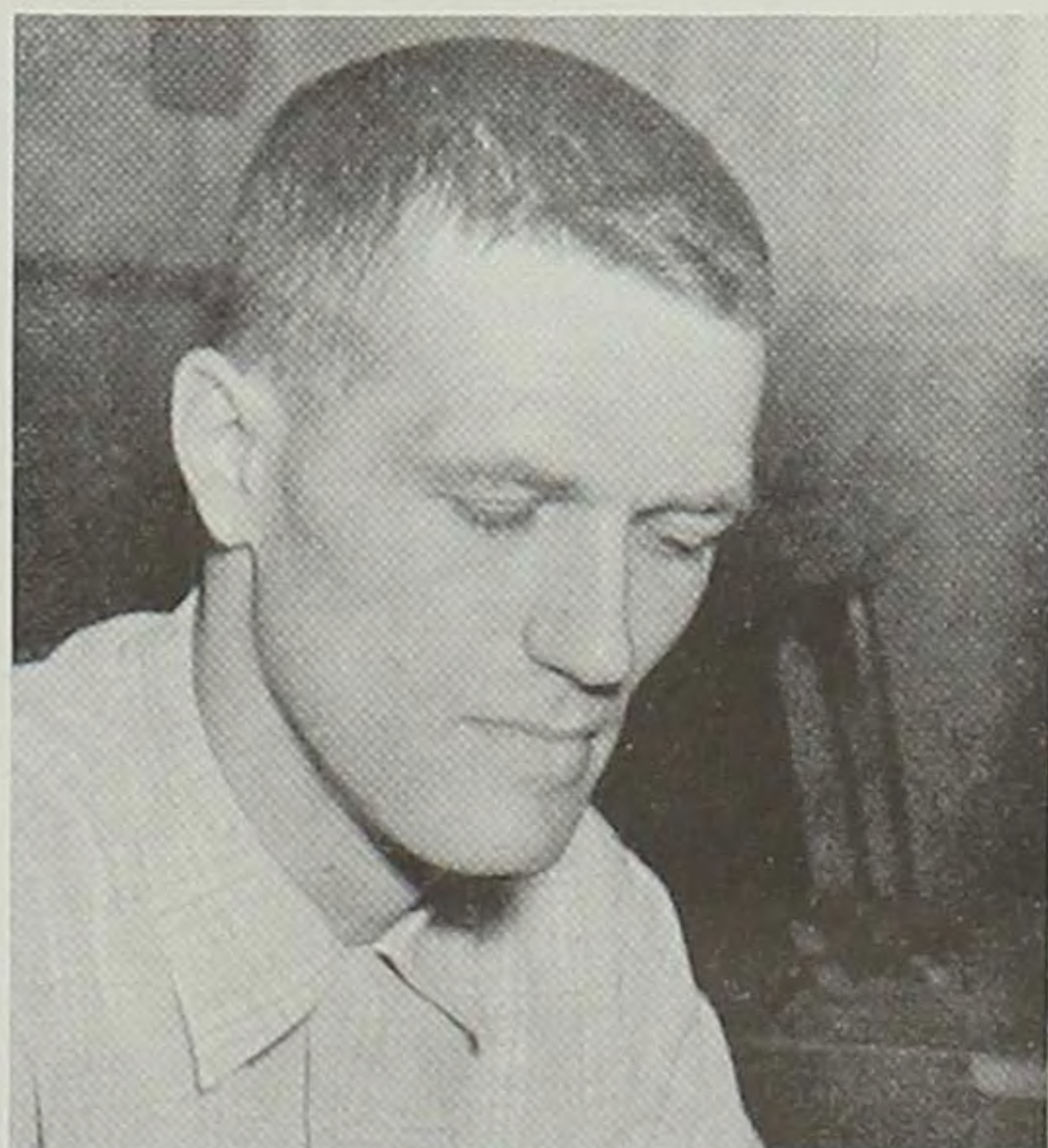
WALTER E. WILLIAMS  
Publisher-Editor



JAMES J. MCGIFFIN  
Advertising Manager

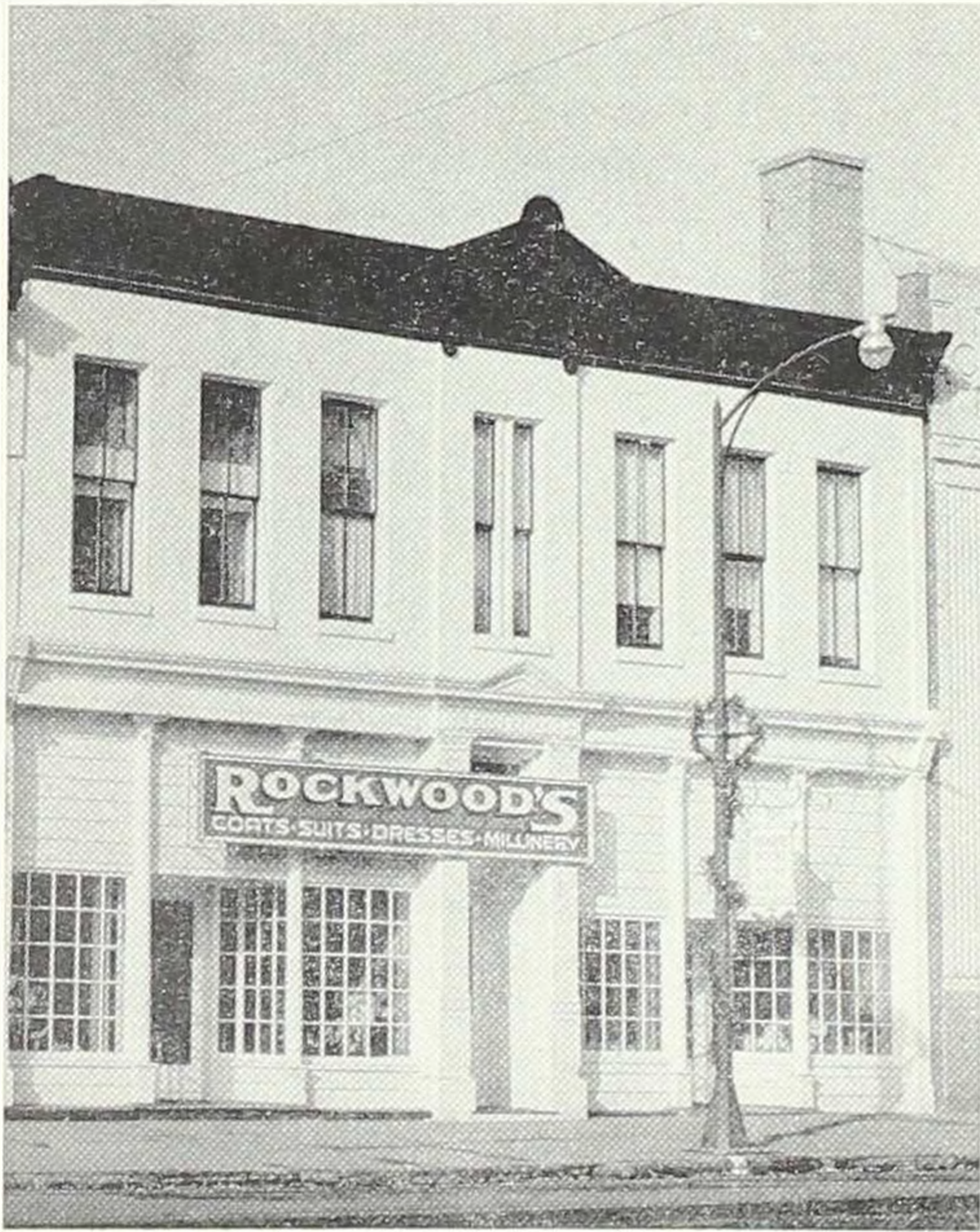


BEN J. TAYLOR  
Retail Advertising Manager



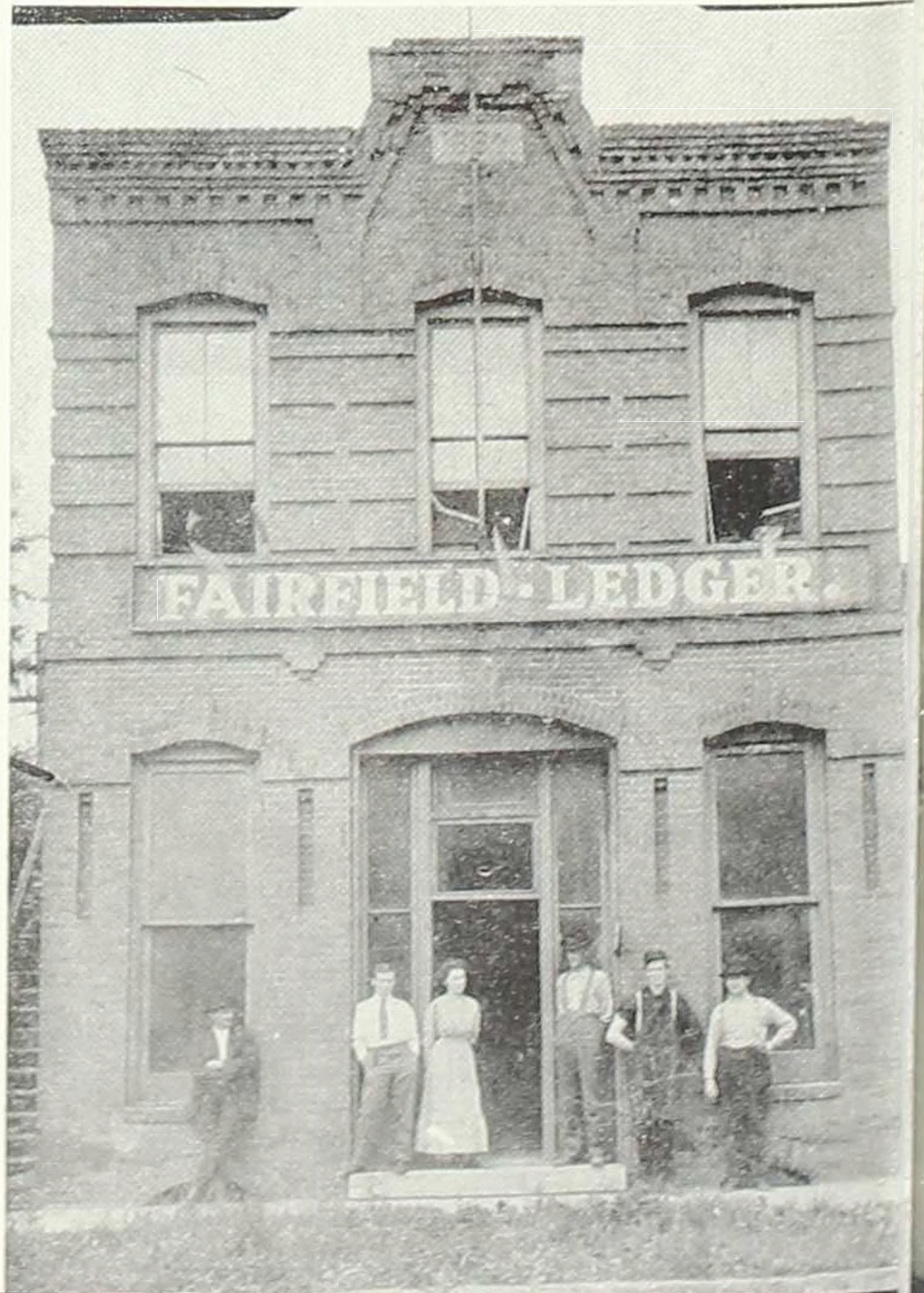
DEAN GABBERT  
Managing Editor





A recent picture of the building occupied, both upstairs and down, by the *Fairfield Ledger* during the late 1870's and probably all of the 1880's.

The *Fairfield Ledger* building of 1906.





Early in September, 1953, I again reminded him that I had advised him I wanted to quit on September 24, my eightieth birthday — that would be the end of my fifty-sixth year in the newspaper business. I was getting a bit tired!

I shall never forget the expression that took possession of his face. It was not only paternal to a superlative degree, but there was a slight elevation of his eyebrows that plainly indicated that he was not provoked at my comment. After a few seconds silence, he said: "You do not look a bit tired, can't you stay with us a few weeks after you become an octogenarian?" I told him I would be glad to do that. My records show that my last pay check was dated October 10, 1953. A nice bonus was added to the check.

I have gone to some length to define the kind of a boss Walter Williams is to his employees. Probably the *Ledger* leaders before him were just as good, but I know they could have been no better. I had served twelve different publishers before coming to the *Ledger*. The majority of my experience had been in the circulation departments, the most difficult to promote of the four all-important departments — circulation, advertising, editorial and news copy, and mechanical. Many were the times I opposed both the general manager and the advertising director in outlining circulation campaigns, but we always remained good friends. Williams was an altogether differ-



ent general manager. He occasionally commented favorably on an editorial I had the previous day, but never did he object.

I cannot close this bit of newspaper history without paying tribute to Mrs. Jennie Prince, who has served the Beckwith neighborhood as correspondent to the *Fairfield Ledger* for over sixty years, beginning her services early in September, 1891. Living on a farm a few miles east of Fairfield, she has probably furnished more news items for the *Ledger* than any town or small city correspondent in the state. She was one of the first country correspondents on Iowa weekly newspapers and she served for probably the longest period of time.

Those were the days when country newspapers did not want their township correspondents' names known to their readers. Jennie selected a whole flock of pseudonyms that kept the folks guessing down around Beckwith. First it was "XYZ," followed by "Simple Simon," "4 Get Me Not," "Young Democrat," "Cro. K," "Eyes and Ears," "Nixty," "Ino and U. Dontno," and many others. In time, however, the folks in and near Beckwith "got next" to the lady and she had to admit the guilt.

Since that period of her life, the *Ledger* has reminded its readers about every ten years that Jennie is still on the job and going strong. In the *Ledger* of September 3, 1943, she called the atten-



tion of readers to the fact that that day marked her "fifty-third year as a *Ledger* correspondent." It also called the readers' attention to the fact that Mrs. Prince had a very interesting news item in that edition of the *Ledger*. The story read as follows:

A new club, known as the Laf-a-lot group has been organized in the Fairfield Central Park with Mrs. Bert Couser as president.

City and rural ladies in good standing are eligible to join this social group who have taken the quotation: "Laugh and the world laughs with you" as their motto. There are no dues or refreshments; the purpose of the club is to hold jolly, get-acquainted sessions.

Thirty-five ladies attended the meeting last Saturday, between 2:00 and 4:00 o'clock.

The same organization may still be in existence. A few days ago I called the *Ledger* to ask if Mrs. Prince was in town. I was informed that she was, and that I would find her in Central Park. That delightful gathering place, the finest in Iowa, is only a block from my apartment. I found Mrs. Prince and, possibly, a dozen ladies, seated on park benches, holding some kind of a community meeting. And was it a jolly gathering? I'll say it was.

WALLACE E. SHERLOCK