

FRANK FIALA WHO HAS WRESTED COMFORT FROM FATE

Wonderfully Romantic Story of a Man Born to Serfdom but Risen to Prominence Through His Own Individual Courage and Never Flagging Thrift and Industry

FEW men have made a longer, a braver, a more successful and a more interesting climb up the ladder of success than Frank Fiala, leading citizen of Ravenna, has made. He was born at the very bottom of the ladder, born in a condition where he was virtually a slave. He has fought his way up, and though jealous misfortune stood on the rungs above and beat him back, sometimes throwing him to the bottom, he persevered and won.

Some men climb to success carefully, stolidly, prosaically. They fasten themselves well to one rung while they reach for the next. They allow no circumstance to let them lose their hold and fortune seems satisfied to let them pursue their slow progress. Frank Fiala's climb is full of dramatic interest. The rise of a man from slavery to wealth when his rise leads through the winning and losing of half a dozen fortunes, over two continents and across an ocean, through two great wars and several of the bloodiest battles of the world's history, the climb of such a man is absorbing in its interest.

Frank Fiala was born in 1843 in the village of Horelice, nine miles from Prague, the capital of Bohemia. His father and mother were serfs, for at that time the serf system still existed in Europe. The land was in the hands of the barons, who inherited it under the law of entail from generation to generation. The serfs belonged to the land and when an estate was sold the human chattels went with it. They were compelled to work without pay five days a week for their lords. On the other two days they received payment, which for the women was 10 cents a day and for the men 35 cents. Before daylight drummers passed through the streets of the villages, beating their drums and warning the serfs to their work in the fields. Overseers were set over each group of serfs and it was their privilege to beat them as though they were animals.

To such a life Frank Fiala would have been condemned had it not been for the revolution of 1848. The seeds of tyranny had been sown and had brought forth the inevitable crop of anarchy. The downtrodden serfs arose, gave battle to the tyrants and threw off the yoke. Peace was declared only when Emperor Ferdinand of Austria by royal decree abolished the serf system.

Other Steps Upward

Thus did the boy gain his first start upward by emerging from the mud of slavery to the lower rung of the ladder up which he was to climb. From his sturdy parents he inherited that strength of character and of brain which stores itself up under oppression as steam in a boiler, and which is so frequently seen in the descendants of those Bohemian peasants, many of whom with the burden of slavery cast off have grown up by the power of their personalities to be colossal figures in the world.

Frank started to school in the village and when he was 12 years old went to the city of Prague and entered the great university there. He was a lad of 16 years immersed in his studies when in 1859 war broke out between Austria and Italy. Prague was a great center of patriotic enthusiasm. From the university 800 students enlisted and among them was Frank Fiala. He was assigned to a company of sharpshooters and during the war was kept on skirmish duty. He received pay of 6 cents a day and daily rations of two and a half pounds of black bread. He was in the thick of the fight during the eight months of his service, the principal engagement in which he participated being the storming of the fortress of Verona in Italy. When he was discharged at the close of the war he returned to Horelice, his native village, and took a position as accountant and timekeeper in an iron mine, which position he held until he was 21 years old.

Every Sunday the young man walked to Prague, and during these years he formed a close friendship for Vojto Naprtek, who, though only a young man, had almost a world reputation as a writer and champion of the people's rights. He had been in the United States and had established Bohemian papers in St. Louis and Milwaukee. He had been one of the chief agitators in the excitement leading up to the revolution of 1848 and a price had been set upon his head at one time by the Austrian government. It was this young man who first fired Fiala's ambition to go to America. Frank Fiala had already, in 1863, sent his mother and his stepfather to the new country and was preparing to follow them when the government called him to enter the eight years' military service required of all men in the empire.

Another War and America

It seemed misfortune had pushed him down several rungs on the ladder. He entered upon his duties in 1863, being attached to the Seventh regiment of cuirassiers. During his enlistment the Austro-Prussian war was fought and Mr. Fiala again saw very active service. This war culminated in the terrible three days' battle at Kenig-Krac, in which Mr. Fiala participated. This battle was one of the bloodiest in the world's history, lasting three days and numbering nearly 70,000 among the killed. Mr. Fiala received a sabre cut across his cheek and another over the forearm. Two horses were shot under him and the ear of a third horse was cut off by the sweep of a Prussian sabre aimed at him. The Austrians were three days without food or water during this engagement and when they reached Vienna they were so famished that they devoured raw flesh.

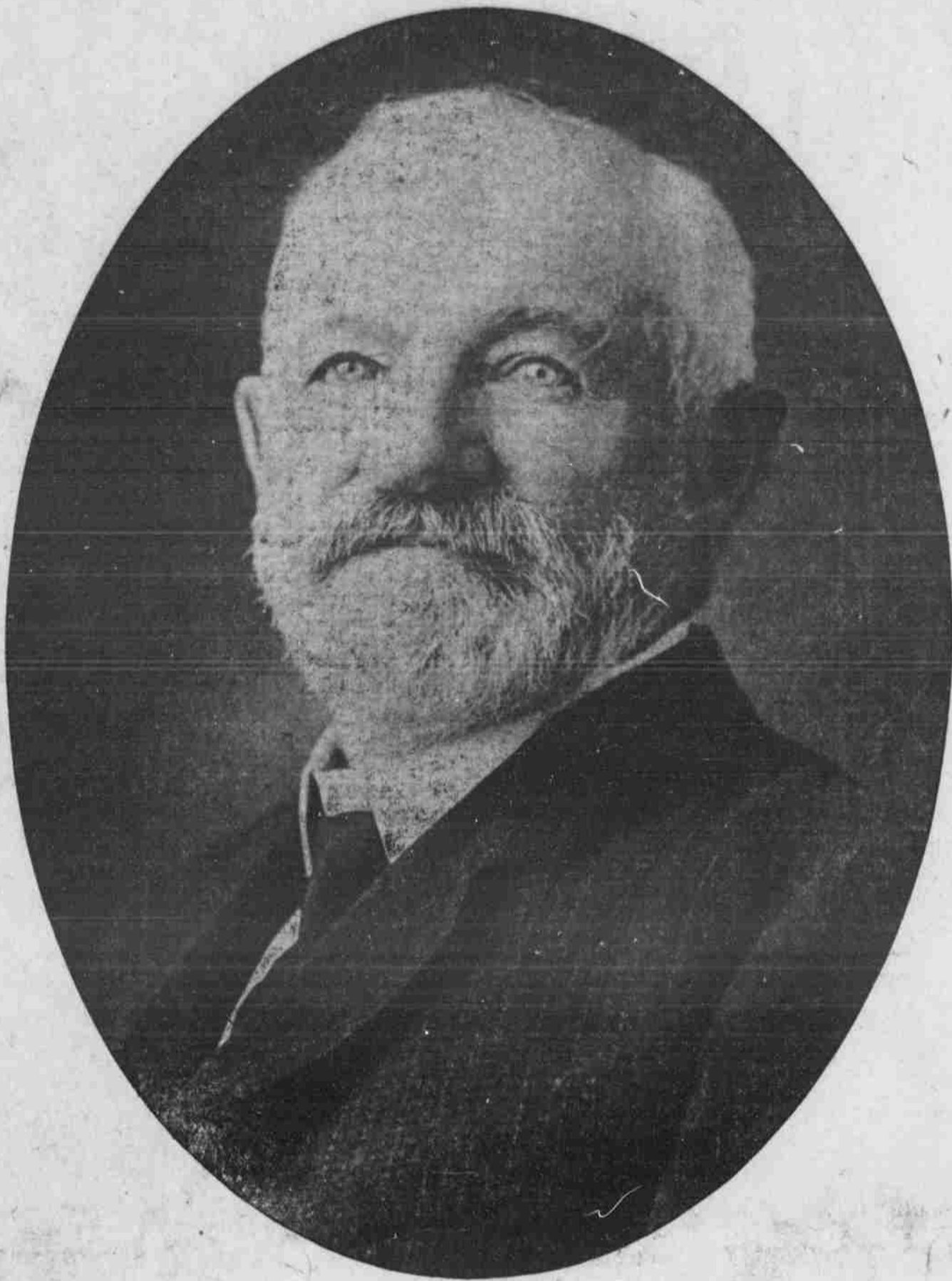
The war closed soon after the battle of Kenig-Krac. Young Fiala spent two monotonous years doing garrison duty and still only five of his required eight years' of service were gone. Ambition refused to be kept down longer. He asked for thirty days' furlough, which was granted, but the end of the furlough found him disembarking in New York instead of returning to duty with his regiment. He was accompanied in this flight by Martin Fisher, father of Mrs. W. F. Richardson of Ravenna and of the Fisher brothers of that city. He arrived in New York without a cent February 20, 1869. He found some of his friends and countrymen, who loaned him \$20, and with this he paid his way to Chicago, the trip by immigrant train taking a week. He was again penniless when he arrived there, but by virtue of his linguistic ability—he spoke German, Bohemian, Hungarian and Italian—he secured a place as runner for an immigrant hotel. With the money he earned here he paid his fare to Iowa, where his mother, stepfather and others whom he had sent to America five years before had settled. He worked a year on a farm in Iowa and then he was married.

Marriage Part of Romance

Even the marriage of this young man whose life was so full of events was different from the ordinary marriage. He met his wife, Anna Bratsnovsky, a young Bohemian girl, at a country dance and married her the next day. He was penniless at the time and did not have even enough money to pay for the marriage license. On the evening of his marriage day he was struck over the head with a club and for nine hours lay unconscious between life and death. This blow was struck by an intoxicated young man during the customary charivari which follows country weddings.

The young couple, though penniless, possessed plenty of the pluck which was their heritage from their ancestors. They rented a forty-acre farm, but poor crops and prices worked together against them, so that at the end of a hard year's work they had only \$70 as their profit. Mrs. Fiala's father had been a cigar-maker and she was an expert at the trade. She suggested that they go to New York. They did so, reaching there with \$2. They hired a cab to take themselves and their possessions to the home of one of Mr. Fiala's friends. The cabman charged them \$2 instead of the \$1 which they had agreed on before they started. So they walked into the house of their friend absolutely penniless. Next day Mrs. Fiala secured work making cigars. Later they started a factory of their own and were soon clearing \$35 a week. Mr. Fiala adopted the trade as his own and was the first president of the Cigar Makers' union of New York City.

They were climbing steadily up the ladder of success, when, in 1873, the panic devastated the country and blotted out their business. However, they had saved \$1,600. They decided to return west, did so and settled in Iowa City, Ia., where they established a



FRANK FIALA.

cigar factory. The business grew. They employed eight men at one time. But in 1878 fire destroyed the entire plant. The insurance had lapsed and Mr. Fiala was a ruined man, his loss being \$20,000.

Stunned by this heavy stroke of misfortune, Mr. Fiala came to Omaha and consulted with his old friends, Edward Rosewater of The Bee and John Rosicky, publisher of the Pokrok Zapada. They pointed out to him the opportunities existing in central Nebraska. Acting on their suggestion, Mr. Fiala went to the United States land office in Grand Island and secured plats of eleven townships in Sherman and Buffalo counties. He drove over the land and selected a place. Then he returned to Iowa City and, accompanied by his family, his step-father, Joseph Horak, and his brother-in-law, James Novy, filed and settled on land in southern Sherman county, within a radius of three miles of the present site of Ravenna. That was thirty years ago.

Thrives in Nebraska

For a time the struggle here was hard. But these people seemed to thrive best on a nourishment of adversity. The first year they built their sod house and places to keep their few farm animals. They

put in their spare time working for neighbors and carefully hoarded the small sums thus earned. The second season they raised some crops on the newly broken land and thus they gradually got the foothold. During their first eight years on the homestead the nearest market for their grain was Kearney, more than thirty miles away, and the next Grand Island, forty miles away. Two days of hard hauling were required to get a load of grain to market.

With the years success and prosperity came to Mr. Fiala and it seemed misfortune had ceased to buffet him. His lands increased in value, his crops were good, his flocks and herds grew and multiplied. He branched out, became vice president and a director of the Farmers' Union Insurance company, wrote extensively for the Bohemian press, became a very influential public speaker and, in short, a leader among his people.

Illustrative of Mr. Fiala's alertness on public questions is his work in the defeat of the sugar beet bounty bill, which the state legislature nearly passed at the time Henry T. Oxnard, the sugar magnate, was trying to establish a factory in Nebraska. Mr. Oxnard happened to be talking of the sugar beet industry in Grand Island and inadvertently remarked that if the bounty bill was passed the industry would be a bonanza for the manufacturer, as the bounty

would more than pay for the raw material. Mr. Fiala at once took up the matter of defeating the bill. He communicated with Representative Capek of Omaha and Mr. Herman of Saline county, then speaker of the lower house. Governor James E. Boyd had such an opinion of his judgment that he called him to Lincoln for a personal conference regarding the matter. Mr. Fiala prepared a bill giving the bounty to the grower instead of the manufacturer and the Oxnard lobby was defeated. His services in this one matter saved the taxpayers of the state thousands of dollars.

Failure in Florida

Climbing steadily up the ladder of success, Mr. Fiala one day, in 1894, thought to go up two or three rungs at a time. He thought he saw a fortune in Florida timber lands. He went south with Frank Valek to investigate. The prospect was so good that he returned to Nebraska, sold his fine farm, loaded his horses and stock and moved to Punta Forda, Fla. The transportation charges alone amounted to \$1,200. He reached the country of his hopes in September. Within six weeks all his horses and cattle were dead. By the trickery of a dishonest agent he lost heavily on his land investments. Florida was devastated that year by frosts, which killed the fruit crop and consequently paralyzed business. Mr. Fiala was taken sick and nearly all the other members of the family were sick. One son died and they lacked money enough to bury him. Truly misfortune had pushed him back, back nearly to the bottom of the ladder. Many a man would have despaired and never have attempted to climb up that ladder from which he had been so often pushed back. Not so with the descendant of those sturdy people who had struggled beneath the servile yoke of Austria for generations. As soon as they were well enough to travel they turned their faces to the north and by spring had reached Missouri. There a farm was rented. The income for the season of the labors of all the family amounted to \$65.

The following fall found them back again in Grand Island penniless in that country which they had left a year before with many thousands of dollars. But they went courageously to work. Mrs. Fiala and a daughter being employed in a cigar factory and Mr. Fiala securing a place as traveling representative for a Bohemian newspaper. Five years of work and thrift brought them enough money to buy a farm two miles from Ravenna and a few years later they added another eighty-acre area to this. There they now live in happiness and contentment in the evening of their eventful life.

Evening of Life

Fourteen children have been born to them and eleven of these are living, three sons having died. The living children are Mrs. Antoinette Balzek of Prescott, Ia.; Mrs. Anna Vesely of Ravenna, Frank Fiala, who is conducting a successful harness-making business at Odell, Neb.; Charles Fiala, a farmer of Ravenna; Mrs. Emma Chaney of Grand Island; Joseph Fiala, who is engaged in the creamery business in Spokane, Wash.; Mrs. Clara Nelson of Omaha; William Fiala, who is also connected with the creamery business in Seattle, Wash.; Miss Libbie Fiala, James Fiala and Viasta Fiala, who reside at home with their parents.

Mr. Fiala is now in his sixty-fifth year, very active and alert, straight as an arrow in carriage and with a heart as young as ever. It is related that at a ball given recently by some of the Bohemian pioneers of the vicinity of his home there was a contest to see who could wait the longest. By changing partners four times Mr. Fiala continued waiting more than two hours and was apparently then as fresh as when he started. It is impossible to say how long he would have continued, for the orchestra was completely tired out and gave up in despair.

He still continues to be a leader among his countrymen. He is a writer of force and power and a ready and fluent public speaker. He has been the means of bringing lasting fortune and wealth to hundreds of his countrymen. Coming to a new land with a great future when it was in its infancy, he lost no time in sending back good reports to his friends and in exerting himself to see that they, also, partook of the good things with him.

In his patriarchal capacity he continues. He is a guide, counselor and friend to those of his countrymen who need assistance. In the early days his roof sheltered hundreds of immigrants and the distressed found in him material assistance as well as kind words and wise advice. He has been called upon frequently to speak the last words at the grave, and those words spoken in a strange land in the tongue of the home country have rendered the final parting less bitter and made the future seem less dark.

When the Spanish-American war broke out in 1898 Mr. Fiala tendered to Governor Elias A. Holcomb his services to raise a regiment of American-Bohemian volunteers. The governor personally thanked the experienced soldier for the patriotic offer and promised him he should be given the opportunity of raising a regiment should any more soldiers be required. The shortness of the war made the raising of this regiment unnecessary.

Mr. Fiala has reached the upper rungs of the ladder of success. He is a living example of the result of perseverance and of the reward of unconquerable courage on the upward climb of life.

Bellevue's Debaters and Their Rivals from Doane

WHILE one Bellevue college debating team is contesting at Lincoln with a team from Cotner, another team will meet the debaters from Doane college at Bellevue Thursday evening, March 26. The question will be, "Resolved, That the Federal Government Should Have Exclusive Control of All Corporations Doing an Interstate Business."

The team which will take the negative side

against Cotner is shown in the upper row, reading from left to right—Primrose, Carey and Rice, together with Ohman, the alternate.

In the lower row, reading from left to right, is the team which will debate with Doane college, the Bellevue team taking the affirmative side of the question—Crossman, Quigley, Phelps and McCormack, the alternate.

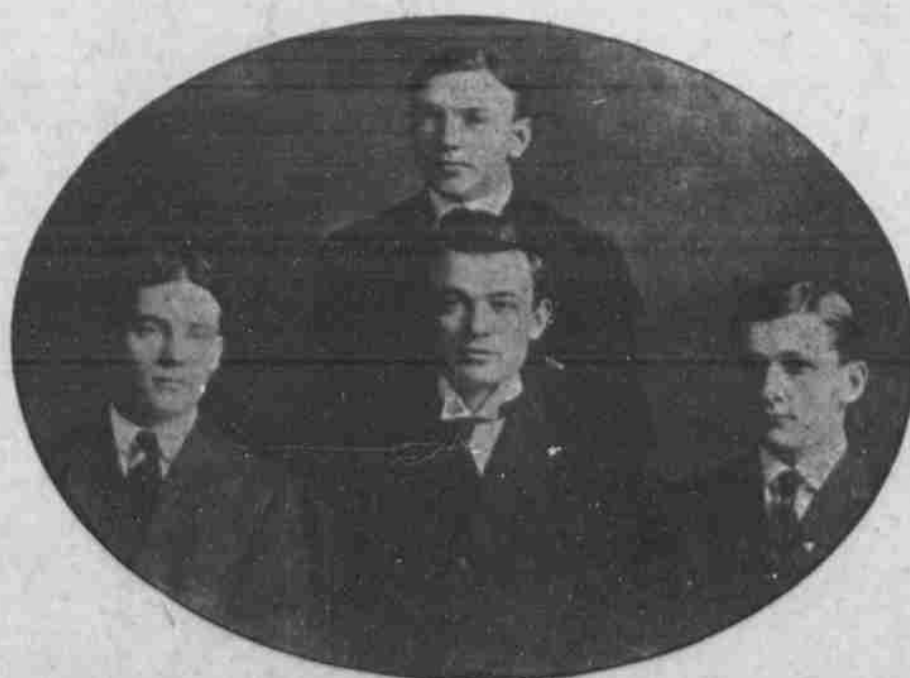
Judges for the debate, with Cotner, have been selected, and consist of Dean Coghlan of the Ne-

braska Law school; President Charles Lewis of Union college, Lincoln, and George W. Berge, also of Lincoln.

Judges for the Doane-Bellevue debate have not been definitely selected, but it is announced at Bellevue that they will probably be Victor Bender, editor of the Council Bluffs Nonpareil; Superintendent Davidson of the Omaha schools and J. B. Wootan, city editor of The Bee.

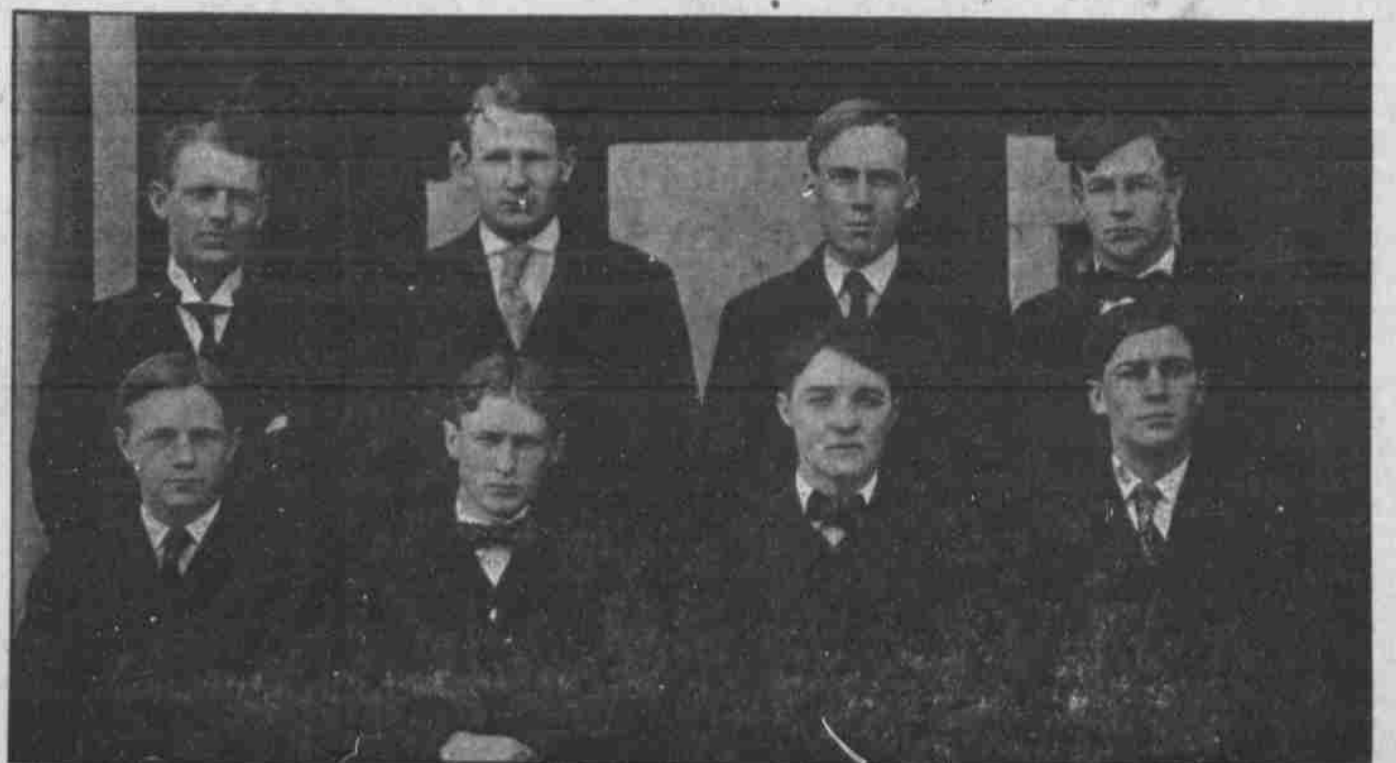
Realizing that Doane will send the pick of its

school to Bellevue to meet the local debaters, the students are utilizing every spare minute toward perfecting their arguments. The two teams from Bellevue are about equally divided and strenuous efforts are being made to win both debates. However, a hard proposition will be met at both places and it is a toss-up as to who will win. This triangular debating league was organized last fall and this will be its first trial. If it is satisfactory it will be made a permanent feature in state collegiate activities.



Griffiths. Bermaster (Alternate). Hall. Rifa.

DEBATING TEAM OF DOANE COLLEGE.



From Left to Right, Upper Row—Primrose, Carey, Rice, Ohman (alternate). Lower Row—McCormack (alternate), Crossman, Quigley, Phelps.

DEBATING TEAM OF BELLEVUE COLLEGE.