

A Letter from Claude G. Bowers to Shortridge High School, 1948

*Contributed by Jean Grubb**

Edited by Lorna Lutes Sylvester

During the editing of the correspondence from Claude G. Bowers to William Everett, Miss Jean Grubb, director of publications at Shortridge High School, provided the editors of the *Indiana Magazine of History* with a photostatic copy of the letter reproduced below. Written by Bowers in 1948 to J. W. Hadley, principal of Shortridge, the letter amplifies information found in the earlier Bowers-Everett correspondence, provides further descriptions of Shortridge and its illustrious alumnus, and illustrates that Bowers remained "a dreadfully poor speller" throughout his life. The occasion for the letter was the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of *The Daily Echo*, the high school newspaper. Bowers, who was serving as United States ambassador to Chile in 1948, was unable to attend; but his letter indicates a continuing interest in his high school alma mater and his gratitude for the education he received there. Although Bowers throughout the letter refers to his days at Shortridge, the Indianapolis High School was not so renamed until 1898, shortly after Bowers' graduation. Grateful acknowledgement is made to Shortridge High School, which holds the photostat of the original, for permission to use this letter.

Santiago, January 24, 1948¹

Dear Prof. Hadley:—²

An invitation to participate in the anniversary celebration of The Echo reached me from Dorothy McCullough after the event but had I been within the United States at the time I would have made an effort to attend. What

* Miss Jean Grubb is a teacher and director of publications at Shortridge High School, Indianapolis, Indiana.

¹ The punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and spacing of the original typewritten letter have been retained as nearly as possible in this reproduction. Bowers apparently typed the original letter himself, hence many of the mistakes are typographical in nature. Several written corrections, presumably in Bowers' handwriting, have been included. The editor was aided in identifying persons and places by Holman Hamilton and Gayle Thornbrough (eds.), *Indianapolis in the "Gay Nineties"*: *High School Diaries of Claude G. Bowers* (Indianapolis, 1964); Claude Bowers, *My Life: The Memoirs of Claude Bowers* (New York, 1962); and Miss Jean Grubb, director of publications, Shortridge High School, Indianapolis, Indiana. Bowers wrote this letter from Santiago, Chile. He served as United States ambassador to this South American country from 1939-1953 and recorded his impressions of it in *Chile through Embassy Windows, 1939-1953* (New York, 1958).

² Joel W. Hadley was principal of Shortridge High School from 1948-1960. He is now retired and resides at Arlington, Indiana.

a record—fifty years! I was in Shortridge when the paper was launched, but I am a bit confused as between *The Echo* and *The Comet* which I think preceded it a year or so and I assume that the latter was merged with the former.³ I remember a meeting in which Pax Hibben and Fletcher Wagner were the inspirers to discuss the publishing of a paper.⁴ I was on the board of *The Comet*. That it continued in some form as late as March 1898 is clear in that I have a copy of the issue celebrating the winning of the oratorical contest in Richmond, the binding in the colors of the school.⁵ My first venture in print was in the writing of articles on my impressions of great orators I had heard, published in several issues of one or the other of these papers.

I doubt if any one knows that two boys, George Langesdale⁶ and I, almost gave Indiana a new *Edinburg Review* while we were in Shortridge. I had read an autobiography of Lord Brougham and it seemed to me—ah the optimism of youth!—that there was no reason why Indiana should not have an *Edinburg Review*.⁷ I wrote letters to almost every literary

³ Miss Dorothy McCullough is an alumna of Shortridge and of the *Shortridge Daily Echo* staff. She served on the committee which planned the observance of fifty years of continuous publication. In January, 1967, Miss McCullough retired from her position as chairman of the English department at Tudor Hall, Indianapolis, Indiana. *The Comet* was a weekly magazine published at the Indianapolis High School in 1897 and 1898. Paxton Hibben, originator of the magazine, was its editor. *The Shortridge Daily Echo*, the school's newspaper, began publication on September 26, 1898, and is still being published. Fletcher Wagner was its first editor.

⁴ Paxton Pattison Hibben, a native of Indianapolis, graduated from Princeton and Harvard, entered the diplomatic service, did some newspaper work, and served in the United States Army. He authored brilliant biographies of Henry Ward Beecher (New York, 1927) and William Jennings Bryan (New York, 1929). Always a controversial figure, Hibben's character intrigued the more staid Bowers. Fletcher Wagner graduated from Shortridge in 1899, attended Leland Stanford University and then Harvard. Shortly after failing to receive a Rhodes Scholarship for which he had been nominated, Wagner left Cambridge and was never heard from thereafter.

⁵ Bowers won the state oratorical contest held in Richmond, Indiana, on March 25, 1898. His topic was "Hamilton the Constructionist." The Richmond city newspapers as well as the school publications described the event and the Indianapolis High School delegation, nearly 400 strong, which accompanied Bowers to Richmond. The contest and preparations therefor are described in Bowers, *My Life*, 39; Hamilton and Thornbrough, *Indianapolis in the "Gay Nineties,"* 124-27, 155, 156, 158, 159-60, 162, 164, 165, 166-68.

⁶ Bowers often spoke of George J. Langsdale, Jr., whose father was president of the Indiana Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument Commission. After the younger Langsdale graduated from the Indianapolis High School, he served for a time as private secretary to his brother-in-law, United States Senator Albert J. Beveridge. He later lived in the West.

⁷ This is the magazine to which Bowers refers in his correspondence with Everett. Lord Henry Peter Brougham assisted in the promulgation of the *Edinburgh Review* and wrote many articles for it.

and political celebrity in the country modestly soliciting articles, poems, stories —*free*. It is still astonishing to me that almost all responded favorably. I remember a morning in the too Victorian front room of President Harrison's when he agreed to write something for us, and I can see him still, old, with innumerable tiny wrinkles, sitting facing the yard and testing our faith with innumerable objections.⁸ At length we had enough articles to make a magazine as large as Harpers for a full year. Taking no one into our confidence, we went to a job printer for an estimate on the cost and the amount crushed us. So we sent the articles back. When I was Ambassador in Spain the manuscript division of the Congressional Library sent me a copy of my letter to Carl Schurz, found in his papers there,⁹ and I was shocked by its crudity and I marveled all the more on how we ever got favorable replies. We asked Joaquin Miller "Poet of the Serras" for a poem and he replied from Cincinnati that Indiana was his native State and he had not been back since he left for the gold rush in California, and that he not only would give us the poem but would stop off in Indianapolis and deliver a lecture we might arrange and give the proceeds to the magazine. We importuned the editors of the papers for editorials on "the home-coming of Joaquin Miller" and we packed the old Plymouth Church with the leading citizens and Riley made the Introduction. We saw him bending over his desk on the balcony of the Bobbs-Merrill Compan[y] then on Washington Street writing this introduction, which was a prose poem, and the only relic of the Hoosier Edinburg Review is that introduction which was used as the introduction later to Miller's complete works.¹⁰

I give this to illustrate the literary flavor of Shortridge in those days when Charity Dye and Mrs Carey and Mrs

⁸ Bowers describes his visit to former President Harrison's home in Bowers, *My Life*, 27-29. Harrison's home in Indianapolis is located at 1230 (674 old style) North Delaware Street.

⁹ Bowers served as ambassador to Spain from 1933-1939 during the troubled Spanish Civil War years. He records his life there in *My Mission to Spain: Watching the Rehearsal for World War II* (New York, 1954). Carl Schurz was a German-American statesman and reformer who was prominent in the Republican party during and after the American Civil War.

¹⁰ Plymouth Congregational Church was located at the southeast corner of New York and Meridian streets. The Bobbs-Merrill Publishing Company, formerly Bowen-Merrill, published most of Riley's books; and according to Bowers, the "Hoosier Poet" had a desk at the publishing house which was located at Number 9, West Washington Street. Bowers, *My Life*, 30-31. Riley's introduction of Miller may be found in Harr Wagner, *Joaquin Miller and His Other Self* (San Francisco, 1929), 163-64.

Hufford¹¹ were pounding literary appreciation into the heads of the youngsters.

My recollections of Hufford and Mrs. Hufford are vivid, but Laura Donnan¹² was one of the most remarkable of teachers. I have known many great women, some of international repute, and I have seen none that seemed to measure up to this old Shortridge teacher. She did more to awaken the civic consciousness of the young and to make them useful citizens than all other agencies in Indianapolis combined. My own debt to her is beyond measure. Is there a bust of her at Shortridge—Mrs. Richards?¹³ There ought to be and that would not be enough.

Please give the editors of The Echo my congratulations. A school paper that has survived fifty years is distinguished, and the editors should be proud of their association with it. I am proud of my meagre part in introducing journalism or newspaper work into Shortridge.

Sincerely,
[Signed] Claude G. Bowers
Ambassador

Prof. J. W. Hadley
Shortridge High School
Indianapolis, Indiana.

¹¹ Charity Dye taught in the Indianapolis school system for thirty-eight years, most of the time in the English Department at the Indianapolis High School. Her interest and example greatly influenced Bowers. Miss Dye wrote many books for young people, *Some Torch Bearers of Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1917) being among her best-known. Mrs. Angeline P. Carey also taught English at the Indianapolis High School and was one of the four teachers who became known as the "Shortridge Immortals." (Laura Donnan, Eugene Mueller, and Amelia Platter were the other three.) Mrs. Lois Grosvenor Hufford taught in the Indianapolis schools for fifty-one years, fourteen at the high school where she headed the English Department. She wrote *Shakespeare in Tale and Verse*, published by Macmillan Company, New York, in 1906. Her husband, George W. Hufford, taught in the high school until 1889 when he transferred to the Indianapolis Industrial Training School as principal. Hufford returned to the Indianapolis High School in 1892 and served as principal there until 1902.

¹² Of all his high school teachers Laura Donnan most influenced and impressed the young Bowers. She taught classes in civil government and political economy at the high school for forty-five years from 1883 until 1928. She was founder of the high school Senate, which Bowers frequently mentions, and was the author of a widely used text entitled *Our Government*. Miss Donnan was herself a product of the Indianapolis High School and the Indianapolis Normal School. She obtained her A.B. and A.M. from the University of Michigan and later attended Columbia University. Bowers pays her a glowing tribute in *My Life*, 34-36.

¹³ After Miss Donnan's death former students placed a bust of her by Laura Richards in Shortridge High School "as a memorial to a truly great woman who made an indelible impression on the thinking of a great community." Bowers, *My Life*, 35-36. Apparently Bowers is asking if Miss Richards' bust of Miss Donnan is still in the high school.