

GUE, RUSSELL, THORINGTON

Neither the three names singly nor as a group arouse quick interest to the average Iowan in Iowa's Centennial year—Benjamin F. Gue, Edward C. Russell and James Thorington. It was not always so. These names loomed large on the political picture of early Iowa. The group helped to direct the political currents in their day and some of the currents were swift and dangerous. They strongly impressed themselves upon their times and their influence is felt even today.

Gurney C. Gue, son of the first named of the trio is still living at Merrick, Long Island, interested in eugenics even as he was sixty years ago when associated with John H. Wallace in the genealogy of trotting horses. He has also delved into family history and compiled the pedigrees of his mother and his father, tracing every line back to the immigrant ancestors where possible. The father, Lieutenant Governor Gue, it will be recalled, was associated with Mr. Aldrich in starting off the great work of the State Historical department and later published a History of Iowa. From Gurney Gue we have some of the old letters preserved by his father. They serve to throw light on what was in the minds of leading men at the time. Their controversial aspects have faded out by lapse of time and they are given simply as contributions to history.

The three became associated when all were young in political affairs when Scott and other counties of eastern Iowa were dominant in state affairs. B. F. Gue was a farmer who never lost his interest in agriculture, became a state senator and lieutenant governor, helped the State Agricultural college to get started and edited farm journals. E. C. Russell was a lifelong editor and was best known as editor of the *Davenport Gazette*. James Thorington was a member of congress for the

northern Iowa district and active in state politics. All three were in at the formation of the Republican party.

THORINGTON TO GUE

The year 1857 was one of great historic interest in Iowa. The people of the new state broke old bonds, adopted a new constitution, freed the spirit of enterprise, elected a new kind of governor, located the state capital in the central valley, and set out to build railroads and factories and cities. James Thorington took over direction of the newly assembled political group rising to power. He had been a Carolina man who had hunted and trapped in the far west before becoming a lawyer at Davenport. His brilliant career in congress was cut short by the fact that he lived too near the border of the district. He served as sheriff of his county and President Grant gave him a job as U. S. consul to Aspinwall. The big issue of the day was that of getting the new and better constitution adopted. Mr. Thorington in his letter to Mr. Gue indicates his deep concern over this issue. The letter follows:

Davenport, Iowa, July 10, 1857

At the request of the State Central Committee of Iowa (Messrs. Samuel S. (J) Kirkwood, William Penn Clarke, George D. Woodin, Iowa City, Henry O'Connor, S. Muscatine, and Hiram Price, of Davenport) I have consented to take charge of the correspondence of that Committee and to act as Secretary.

The most important political matter coming before the people of Iowa at the ensuing August election is the adoption or rejection of the Constitution framed by the Constitutional Convention which assembled at Iowa City last winter.

The adoption of this Constitution is of more importance to the Republican party in Iowa than the members of the party are generally aware. It is unquestionably a Republican measure—got up by Republican Legislature; put forth by a Republican Convention. Now it rests with the Republicans of Iowa to say whether they will ignore their own acts or act in concert to sustain a measure that will aid to sustain them as a party, and which is far preferable to the present Constitution.

If this question was debatable the so-called Democratic party have planted themselves against it as a party measure. The

defect (defeat?) of our ticket this spring was through our own supineness as much as from any other cause. Today that party is bolder from their success than from any other cause. A defeat now on our part will generally be regarded as a victory on their part, and will have a telling effect on the next general election to come off in Iowa. Let me solicit, in the name of the Committee—on behalf of the Republican party—on behalf of equal rights, that the opportunity now presented be embraced to rid the State of an odious instrument that has and will ever continue to cramp the energies of a State like ours. Section 10, on page 5, of the Constitution, reads as follows:

Section 10. In all criminal prosecutions and in cases involving the life or liberty of an individual, the accused shall have a right to a speedy and public trial by an impartial jury; to be informed of the accusation against him; to have a copy of the same when demanded; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory processes for his witnesses, and to have the assistance of counsel.

Which (section) the administration papers pronounce UNCONSTITUTIONAL as conflicting with the Constitution of the United States. If we had no other reason for voting for it, this section alone should be sufficient to determine our action. We are told by the remnant of that MIGHTY PARTY, whose light is now flickering in the socket before its final extinction on FREE SOIL, that "an individual accused of crime involving life or liberty shall not have a right to a speedy and public trial by an impartial jury."

The gist of the whole matter is that a negro might not be returned to his master and the question of the Negro's freedom be tried by a jury of slave-owners. We are to jeopardize all our rights to life and liberty secured to us by a speedy and public trial before an impartial jury, through a sickly political opinion of the slave owner's rights. Let us therefore brand this as false, and be free in our State Government, if it is a mockery by a General Government as administered by the powers that be.

See that there are tickets in every township in your county. I herewith enclose a few as specimens. You will perceive that the candidates' names for the several offices in your county are to be filled. When you have access to printing offices of course it will be advisable to have an abundance printed, leaving no blanks.

JAMES THORINGTON

RUSSELL TO GUE

In the year 1859, the town of Le Claire had 2,500 of the total 25,000 in the county and was to be reckoned

with in all matters. The new leaders of that date who were engaged in whipping the free soil and free enterprise elements into the semblance of a political party were establishing newspapers here and there to become educators. Edward C. Russell established one such publication at Le Claire and sought support quite naturally from Mr. Gue, who had been a member of the convention that had formally established the new Republican party. It is interesting to note that associated with him as printer was William H. Fleming, who years afterwards was secretary to several governors and whose last years were spent in the State Historical building writing his reminiscences.

The Le Claire newspaper did not long survive. Editor Russell wrote to Mr. Gue:

Le Claire, Iowa, March 17, 1859

I thank you for the interest you manifest in the *Republic* and can fully appreciate the difficulty you speak of in obtaining subscribers for a newspaper in a time of severe pecuniary trials. And because you are interested in our effort to maintain a Republican paper here allow me to state a few facts to you which would not under other circumstances be divulged.

When, at the earnest request of several Republicans here, I assumed the editorial control, I knew nothing of newspaper publishing. Now I know just what it takes to support a paper, and how well the labor on it can be paid. The *Republic* was started free of debt, its proprietor is a responsible man, possessed of some property, and does not seek to make money by the operation; he only asks that the journal thus published shall be made to pay the expense of paper and employees. It has been published three months and has not done this. The proprietor (Dr. J. Van Horn) works the press and sets the type, devoting some eight or ten hours each day to that labor. Mr. William H. Fleming devotes all his time to setting type and overseeing the printing. For this the Doctor gets nothing, and Mr. Fleming less than half journeyman's wages.

I am working at my trade (carpentering) by day to obtain a living for my family, and editing the paper at night for the public gratuitously. When we ask the Republicans of Scott County to make a little sacrifice to aid the *Republic*, do we ask too much? You are already aware that this township is not so sure for

Republicanism that it can safely be left to the especial care of Laurel Summers and others of that ilk. You are also aware that an earnest journal here located can, if properly supported, exert a strong influence on the vote of the northern half of the county. The *Davenport Gazette* is the only Republican journal in Scott County. It is undoubtedly an ably conducted newspaper, but it is firmly established, and the farmers of Winfield, Liberty and neighborhood could well afford to bestow their patronage on a more needy journal, if indeed, they could not afford to take both.

The *Republic* was started under the pledge of continuance for six months. It will be published for that term, pay or no pay. Whether it shall aid in rolling up a triumphant vote for Freedom and Humanity next October, or cease to exist at the expiration of another three months, rests with the Republicans of this and adjoining townships to decide.

You will see from the above that we cannot depute one of our number to canvass the county for subscribers, but must rely on the voluntary efforts of our friends, who, we trust will, if they can without neglecting their own interests, do something to swell our subscription list.

Trusting you will excuse the freedom which thus addresses you, I remain,

Yours respectfully,
E. RUSSELL

REWARDS FOR POLITICAL SERVICE

One day in November, 1860, the American people awoke to a realization that a political revolution had made great changes in the national picture. For the first time in many years all federal officeholders in the states and territories would come from a new group. The discovery was shocking. Distribution of federal patronage would stem from an Illinois man who had just been elected president. Mr. Gue was a member of the Iowa legislature. Mr. Thorington was sheriff of the county. Mr. Russell had closed his shop at Le Claire and was at work in Davenport. His employer seems to have been already selected for next postmaster. He wrote to his old friend Mr. Gue as follows:

Davenport, Iowa, November 30, 1860

You will please accept my sincere thanks for proffered aid in my behalf for any position to which I may aspire. Inasmuch as you have introduced the matter allow me to make a candid statement and thus "define my position." During the campaign I had

no thought of office or position for myself. Being placed in a position where nearly the whole management of the campaign in this county devolved on me, I endeavored to perform the duties of the onerous trust with promptness and fidelity. If I labored with zeal it was because actuated by the same earnest desire which has been the key note of all my political action since first I had a vote, and before. Loathing and abhorring American slavery from my very soul, I have longed to see the day when by emphatic and overwhelming majorities the people of the free North, at least, should place the seal of their condemnation on the system and on the man and party by whom it has been so long sustained. The day so long desired HAS come; and if my efforts have contributed to the glory of the triumph in this county, I am sufficiently rewarded in the consciousness that those efforts are appreciated and commended by those whose respect I value.

Grateful for their manifestations of interest in my future, my reply to all has been that I was not a candidate for any office, either under Federal appointment or otherwise. And this, not because indifferent to the honors or emoluments of office, but because unwilling to swell the already crowded ranks of aspirants for office, and preferring rather to wait until the voice of associates and fellow laborers should find the place which in their judgment I ought to fill, instead of obtaining any position by my own seeking. If in process of time some suitable place thus offered—well: if not, still well, rather than to crowd myself before the public as a candidate for honor or profit.

Now, however, my position is somewhat changed. Recently, and since I have been working for Charles H. Eldridge, that gentleman (at the suggestion of his friends, I believe) quite unexpectedly to me, offered the Deputyship of the Post Office for my acceptance should he obtain it. This offers a good living for self and family at the cost of unremitting industry and application. It is all I need and is accepted. If therefore you or any other friends are disposed to assist me, by giving influence and aid to Mr. Eldridge they will do so very effectually. As yet I have solicited no man's support for C. E. on my own account. Since, however, you kindly express a desire to serve me, you will allow me to request your influence in behalf of the application of Mr. Eldridge for the office he desires. A letter of recommendation to the President, signed as a member of the Legislature will have considerable weight. I have written thus freely of myself and much more fully than under other circumstances would be justifiable because feeling that you will receive the above as intended and pardon the apparent egotism.

Respectfully yours,
EDWARD RUSSELL

THE HEAT OF WAR TIME

Then, as now, war time produced much heat and angry words were heard and repeated. Mr. Gue had kept in touch with friends in Le Claire and a letter to him from an old friend discloses a little of the excessive bitterness of the time. The letter follows:

Le Claire, May 9, 1861

Hon. B. F. Gue, Dear Sir:

I take the liberty of posting you a little in regard to the Democratic nominee for representative, Mr. J. M. Talmage of this place. He has until within a very few days avowed the strongest secession principles, fully sympathizing with the rebels. Of the southern states, soon after the proclamation of Mr. Lincoln was issued, he made the remark that "he was ashamed of his country and wished he had never been born in America." I hope the loyal citizens of Scott county will on the 15th of May express in unmistakable terms their unmitigated contempt for all such sentiments. I hope the farmers will see the importance of polling as heavy a vote as possible on that day. I will see that LeClaire township is thoroughly canvassed—will you have the time to do the same in your township? I have no doubt about the result of the election, but I would like to see this treason (what else can we call it?) so effectually killed that there will be no resurrection. Our country needs the moral as well as physical support of all our union-loving men. May old Scott county show an undivided front on Wednesday next and seal forever the political doom of all the traitors within her borders. Yours "for the Union one and inseparable."

JOS. H. WHITE

P. S.: Mr. Talmage with the president and several members of the so-called Democratic convention of yesterday from Le Claire rejoiced openly over the fate of Lt. Sorrenten.

C. FOSTER

DISILLUSIONMENT ON THE TARIFF

The story of what happened in the next quarter century would make a library of good books. The Union had been saved from dissolution. The star of empire was on its way to the westward coasts. Reconstruction troubles had been endured, but left deep scars. Iowa was becoming industrialized. The transcontinental trains were long

and heavy. An Iowa statesman (Kasson) had written into the platform on which Lincoln had been elected a promise as to the tariff that schedules should be so adjusted as "to encourage the development of the industrial interest of the whole country." But Iowa had more corn and pork for sale than tin cans and pig iron. It was becoming hard to go along with those who had used the tariff schedules to become barriers. At one time, or perhaps more than once, the Iowa Republicans had put "tariff for revenue only" in their state platform, then later called this "free trade." Russell had long been the editor of the *Davenport Gazette*. Gue had been writing for farm papers. The national convention held in Minneapolis where President Harrison was renominated seemed to them to have stretched the protective tariff idea beyond all reason. Some who had participated in formation of the Republican party took a position "on the fence." Mr. Gue had written to Mr. Russell and the latter responded with the following, which throws a bright light on the political mix-up of that day:

Minneapolis, Minnesota, Aug. 31, 1888

FRIEND GUE: Your kind favor of the 27th came to me as a very welcome messenger; and the more grateful to my feelings because wholly unexpected. It is indeed pleasing to know that in the position I have been compelled to take, under a sense of loyalty to conviction and sincerity, in relation to the present Presidential campaign, old political associates like yourself approve and commend instead of censure.

The ringing words of your generous letter are to me as echoes from a memorable and noble past. They sound as did the utterances from your lips nearly thirty years ago, when, in Scott County, your voice was raised in denunciation of the "Trust-deed" processes by which your fellow farmers were then being robbed and "evicted." Out in Winfield, I think, was held the mass convention made effective largely by aid of your words and your enthusiasm for the cause of Justice. A worse and greater, because a much more extensive and vastly more powerful, and, seemingly at times, resistless "trust" process now impoverishes the many for the enrichment of the few. Some of us have long contended against yet too frequently been constrained to excuse and condone the growth and encroachments of that combination of wealth and arrogance.

At last, we are now driven to choose between abject servitude to this monster of evil, or unequivocal resistance to its further spread. Forthwith it is discovered that we are renegades and traitors; that we are bought by "British gold"; that we are emissaries of the Cobden Club, and that we are lawful targets of detraction and abuse. As against and in comparison with a whole million of words from such sources, a single sentence from your epistle is as Truth to Falsehood, Honesty to Villainy, common sense to driveling idiocy. So, I thank you heartily for your volunteered approval and cheer. It delights me, also, to know that you, too, are decided to vote in November directly in the line of your old-time faith. Greatly would it increase my pleasure could I see you face to face and with you take council in our effort to right by popular vote the gross injustice to Republicanism resulting from machine management and cooperation and monopolistic adroitness and greed.

At times since the Chicago convention met, I have wished myself again in Iowa, and there so situated as to be able to devote labor and voice to continuous advocacy of the real reform now just entered upon in the enactment by the House of the Mills bill. Their beginning of direct attack on the so-called "protective" principle is one that should enlist the support of honest friends of the masses in all our land. It seems to me that for such a support I could argue and plead from tribune to tribune, from stump to stump, from this date until the day of election, were not my time elsewhere demanded in the necessary pursuit of my business. The reform of the war-tariff abuse may well enlist our best endeavours.

In Boston a few weeks ago I attended the Republican ratification meeting in Tremont Temple. As a Republican demonstration—that is as a demonstration of devoted adherence to the "grand old party" that meeting was a veritable success. But the substance and form of the entire affair was, simply a presentation of the existing tariff as a sacred thing, to be continuously deified and unceasingly worshiped. To so exalt and adore was declared to be the "sole issue" of the campaign. THAT settled me. With the platform I had been utterly disgusted. The decree that all who would continue Republican must stand on that platform or none, challenged me to protest and revolt. Yet, I really wanted to find some sort of a decent excuse to vote the Republican ticket still. At first my thought was to emulate Horace Greeley in 1852—vote for the candidate but "spit upon the platform." But the course of Republican campaign leadership and utterances leave me no sort of chance or excuse for such a negation of principle by a positive adherence to party. So, I have said so squarely, whenever occasion has demanded.

Well, Friend Gue, while we cannot clasp hands we will have our sentiments pulsating and our hands voting together. Ought we not to do more if we can? It is my purpose to answer, by action, affirmatively, if possible. At least with my pen in a small way. The *Democrat-Gazette* has asked me for a series of articles. As yet I have not entered upon the task. My business presses me very close. To at all neglect that is to ensure an increase of poverty that it were a sin to invite. But I will do the little I can soon. Cannot you aid, also? Your influence in Iowa is still maintained. Words from you will stir and enthuse many a one whose convictions are already on the side of tariff-reform. More, they would stimulate thought and provoke investigation on the part of others who are as yet disposed to vote with entrenched abuses and gross injustice only because they are ignorant of the real issues involved.

You and I have a profound satisfaction. We did our best to keep the party of our early love and earnest devotion from being made the servitor of the monopolists and money-grabbers. Senator Allison and others could tell you I often pleaded with them in person. Mr. Blaine could recall my long letter to him, availing myself of our personal relations, urging that he should use his best endeavor to prevent the very thing that has now happened—such a formulation of party profession and purpose must drive from the Republican ranks every intelligent friend of genuine tariff reform. But all has been of no avail. The fact is that Republican leaders have of late and now see only the interests of the speculative and money-getting crowd among whom Mr. Blaine has of late years found his chief associates. The Steve Elkins, the Phelps, the Jones, the Oliver, the Carnegie, the Jay Gould and the Pacific mail crew are not the men to care for the interests of the people. So, the people must and *will* repudiate the whole of them. Mr. Blaine has led the Republican party on the high road to perdition. To perdition it will go and ought. Again thanking you for your good letter.

Yours truly,
EDWARD RUSSELL

These few letters with faded ink snatched from the litter of the attic gave but one side of the story, and it is unfortunate that the reverse letters are not available. They may serve to fill in some of the blanks that historians so often find necessary in their stories of nineteenth century events. In them were discussed the new constitution, the new party, the new industrial policy, the new America.

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