

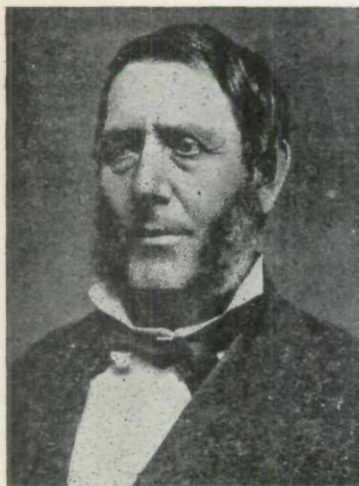
Four Giants of Iowa Political History



Sen. William B. Allison



Gen. James B. Weaver



Sen. Samuel J. Kirkwood



Sen. James Harlan

Portraits of Period From 1875 to 1880

Annals of Iowa

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THIRD SERIES

WEAVER IN ALLISON'S WAY

Senator William B. Allison's Interest in the Election of
Samuel Jordan Kirkwood as Governor in 1875
and United States Senator in 1876

By LELAND L. SAGE¹

One of the truly dramatic events in the history of Iowa politics was the rejection of General James B. Weaver as the gubernatorial nominee and the "stampede" to ex-Governor, ex-Senator Samuel Jordan Kirkwood by the Republican state convention of 1875, held in Des Moines on June 30 and July 1. As the story is assembled from various published sources,² a reader with the least bit of historical imagination pictures for himself a convocation of the politically great and near great Republicans of Iowa, in bearded or mustachioed splendor, met for the purpose of formally nominating for governor the man to whom a majority were already pledged, the man who was their knight in shin-

¹ This article is based upon a portion of a manuscript in preparation on the life of Senator William Boyd Allison (1829-1908). The author is Professor of History at Iowa State Teachers College, Cedar Falls.

² Brief versions of the story may be found in Edgar Rubey Harlan, *A Narrative History of the People of Iowa* (5 vols., Chicago and New York, 1931), II, 82-87; Johnson Brigham, *Iowa, Its History and Its Foremost Citizens* (3 vols., Chicago, 1915), I, 336-337; Benjamin F. Gue, *History of Iowa* (4 vols., New York, 1903), III, 72-73; Dan Elbert Clark, *Samuel Jordan Kirkwood* (Iowa City, 1917), 328-335; Fred Emory Haynes, *James Baird Weaver* (Iowa City, 1919), 74-80; Cyrenus Cole, *Iowa Through the Years* (Iowa City, 1940), 344-345. Weaver gives his own account in a letter published in the *Des Moines Register and Leader*, October 30, 1911, p. 4.

ing armor, the favorite of the Prohibition forces and the harbinger of the "common man" element in Iowa politics by virtue of his role of opponent of the "heartless corporations"! Then something goes wrong with the majority's plans. A venerable, white-bearded giant, six feet four inches in height, of stentorian voice, suddenly and paternalistically announces the name of a great hero against whom no one can prevail; the delegates are swept off their feet and "stampeded" into the camp of the hero, who all the while does not want the nomination and accepts it with the poorest grace and only after pressure is applied by telegrams and by messengers who had dashed to his home on a chartered engine. (Not even in a caboose!) The defeated candidate then deserts his former comrades and organizes a new host.

Actually this is not altogether a parody of the things that did happen which were visible to the innocent bystanders who might have been present at the convention and therefore felt themselves to be creditable witnesses and *ipso facto* "authorities" on the story of the convention. It is a not much exaggerated paraphrase of the fragments handed down as serious history to Iowa readers. Yet, it is far from being a *complete* account of the story of Weaver's defeat and Kirkwood's victory, and it well illustrates the superficiality of the eye-witnesses' account of an event which had so many hidden factors behind it. The complete and truly definitive account never can and never will be written because there were too many people involved in the action and it will never be possible to gather testimony from all of them as to what they had done, heard, or seen. Fortunately, there are certain historical participants whose testimony, now available, can be used as a check on that which has already been published and as the basis of a much more realistic account of the reasons why Kirkwood was chosen and Weaver was rejected, and some of the consequences thereof.

CLARKSON AS HISTORIAN

It is the intention of the present writer to review the story in the light of information some of which was not available to previous writers herein referred to, with special attention to the version given by James S. ("Ret") Clarkson, once the famed editor of the Des Moines *Iowa State Register* and later an Eastern business man. This account which has been so generally accepted appeared in the *ANNALS OF IOWA* in 1913, as adapted from correspondence with the editor.³ It well illustrates the time-honored rule of evidence that an old man's unchecked and unverified reminiscences are not completely reliable.

At the time of its writing Mr. Clarkson was seventy years old and living in retirement on his farm near Tarrytown, New York, full of beautiful memories and sentiments about certain Hoosiers of his beloved native state and not untroubled memories of his relations with certain Hawkeyes of his adopted state. For years he had promised himself and others that he would sort out his papers and write a history of Iowa politics, a biography of the Clarkson family, essays on various subjects.⁴ Be it said, with great emphasis, no one was better qualified from the vantage point of brains, experiences, political insight, and forceful and captivating literary style. Such works carried through at nearer the prime of his life and adequately checked by a competent research assistant would have been a tremendous contribution to Iowa historiography. Unfortunately he did not take the time to write when at his prime and in this fashion; instead it was his wont to sit down and dash off from the top of his memory

³ James S. Clarkson, "The Stampede from General Weaver in the Republican Convention of 1875," *ANNALS OF IOWA* (Third Series), 10:561-569 (January, 1913). The editor of the *ANNALS* at this time was Mr. Charles Aldrich.

⁴ Clarkson, "The Stampede . . .", 562-3. A portion of the Clarkson Papers are on deposit in the Iowa State Department of History and Archives (Des Moines) and some in the Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. These papers are replete with references to these intentions towards authorship.

an article for the *Iowa State Register* on some person whose name appealed to him at the moment. The marvel is that these essays were so well done and as free from error as they were. After he retired from his post as Surveyor of the Port of New York in 1908, his health declined and more and more he lived in his memories of the past and became increasingly sentimental about them.

Furthermore, in 1912, Mr. Clarkson was writing as a strong Progressive Republican. A little known fact about him is that his career contained a complete metamorphosis from Radical Republicanism through a period of adoration of James G. Blaine over to enthusiasm for Theodore Roosevelt's "New Nationalism" and finally to Woodrow Wilson's "New Freedom." As he says in the letter in question, he approves "the great popular movement to resist the tendency to make our Republic a government of money, by money, for money, and not of men, which is now nation-wide, and so valiantly led by Roosevelt and other gallant spirits following on these higher paths where Weaver led"; he believed that Weaver was a forerunner of this movement by his policy of "fighting the Republican party, because of its growing tendency no longer to keep human rights and human interests above all property rights and property interests."⁵ It seems to be a warranted conclusion that Mr. Clarkson would never have written this article about Weaver had he not become a warm supporter of Progressive Republicanism.

Granted that General Weaver came into the convention as the strongest candidate, why was there an opposition to him? The key to the understanding of the anti-Weaver feelings of 1875 is to be found in an analysis of the factionalism within the Republican party in Iowa. Part of this factionalism was purely personal, a straightout struggle for power. One aspiring group was led by General Grenville M. Dodge, James F. Wilson, of Fairfield, William B. Allison, Samuel J. Kirkwood and James S. Clarkson. The other group "Clarkson, "The Stampede . . .", 567-8.

was led by James Harlan backed up by George D. Perkins of the *Sioux City Journal*, Frank Hatton of the *Mount Pleasant Journal*, Dr. Charles Beardsley of the *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, and General James B. Weaver of Bloomfield. This alone would have sufficed to account for an opposition to Weaver. But there was another black mark against him in the Dodge-Wilson-Allison book. Weaver had accepted appointment to office by President Andrew Johnson and such consorting with the Conservatives was not tolerated during Reconstruction days by the fierce Radicalism of the Dodge-led faction. (The Harlan faction was also Radical but accepted Weaver's support in spite of this.) In addition, Weaver had taken a stand as an unrelenting Prohibitionist, and Prohibition was the great divider of Iowa Republicanism in the post-Civil war era.⁶ Still one more count against him as a possible Republican nominee was his sympathy for the anti-monopoly idea. Forthright man that he was, he never learned the art of straddling on these issues.

The open fight between "Dodge and Co." and "Harlan and Co." began in 1866, when Harlan resigned under pressure from Johnson's cabinet and sought return to the United States Senate. His victory over Kirkwood proved to be decidedly Pyrrhic. In 1870 the Harlan-backed Judge George G. Wright beat Dodge's Allison for the senate, but in 1872 Dodge gambled on Allison against no less than Harlan himself and won. From that date until his death in 1899, Mr. Harlan was never allowed to hold another elective office and Harlan supporters found it tough business to overcome the taint of Harlanism without complete surrender and transfer to the camp of "Dodge and Co." Yet, Weaver was a Harlan man in the 1872 contest and his manager in 1876!⁷ The real explanation of Weaver's repudiation

⁶ Haynes, *Weaver*, 68-69, 74-76; Dan Elbert Clark, "The History of Liquor Legislation in Iowa 1861-1878," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 6:339-374.

⁷ James Baird Weaver, "Two Iowa Men of Power and Their Contemporaries," *The World Review* (Chicago), November 30, 1901, pp. 351-354.

in 1875 is, therefore, not to be found in the sudden bit of drama contained in the "stampede" to Kirkwood. Rather is it to be sought in the larger story of state politics beginning long before that June day and not ending until many years had passed.

After his election as senator, Allison quickly, easily, and naturally took over the direction of the Dodge political machine. Dodge's business affairs took him all over the country and to Europe; the machine now became an Allison-James F. Wilson-Kirkwood organization to which Dodge could give prestige, advice, and financial support. The natural aspiration of this machine would be to secure the other senate seat for one of its members. The next senatorial election would come off in January, 1876. This would make it advisable to win the governor's office in 1875, for all the obvious reasons and especially for reason of its power to influence the legislature's election of a senator.

ALLISON GROUP WOOS KIRKWOOD

An accident of history almost deprived Mr. Kirkwood of involvement in these affairs of 1875. As long as the other senate seat was held by Judge George G. Wright it was useless to scheme for its capture, and as yet he had shown no signs of an inclination to retire. Consequently, it would seem that Allison was sincere when he (with the help of Congressman James Wilson of Tama) secured an appointment for Kirkwood as minister to Turkey, and tried hard to persuade him to accept the post. An exchange of letters and telegrams was capped with this persuasive appeal:⁸

Your letter just rec'd. Salary \$7500. The duties must be very light from the fact that we have very little business with Turkey. . . . If we should be beaten in '76, the term would not be long & you would have a most interesting and delightful voyage, as I know from the fact that I went as far on the road as Vienna & was

* Allison to Kirkwood, January 8, 1875. The Correspondence of Samuel Jordan Kirkwood, Iowa State Department of History and Archives (Des Moines), Box IV, hereinafter cited as Kirkwood Correspondence. Allison was in Europe in 1873 on his honeymoon.

sorry I could not go down the Danube through Hungary, etc. [sic] . . .

Mr. Kirkwood rejected the opportunity — just why cannot be vouchsafed from the documents. We can assume by inference that he did not want to leave his bank and other business interests to which he was devoted, especially in a time of such financial difficulties; and that he wanted to stay closer to the scene of political opportunity. It was only a few days later that he received this letter from Senator Wright:⁹

. . . [re Louisiana and Arkansas questions . . .]

I am tired. Want to get home. Sick of this life. Don't you want my place? Come & take it. As I now feel, & believe I shall, you or any other man can have it two years from now, for all . . . [illegible]

Thus narrowly had Kirkwood escaped being "kicked upstairs" to a pleasant but unimportant post in the foreign service and consequent unavailability for the race for Judge Wright's seat.

As the days went by, it became necessary for Allison's friends to make some decision as to the race for governor. Allison could not afford to be indifferent about such an important office. Again it was to Kirkwood that they turned. As early as April 16, Jacob Rich, publisher of the *Dubuque Times*, and rapidly becoming Allison's manager and mentor, wrote a strong letter to the war governor urging him to run because he was the man who could assure the party of success in carrying the legislative ticket, so necessary in winning the senate seat that would be up in the following January. Mr. Rich went on to assure Kirkwood that winning the governorship would not remove him from the list of possible senatorial candidates. On the contrary, it would enhance his chances. In his opinion George W. McCrary, the brilliant representative from the First District, would be the second best man for the party to put up for governor, but he could not be

⁹ Wright to Kirkwood, February 14, 1875. Kirkwood Correspondence, Box IV.

spared from Congress. A few days later, M. C. Woodruff, the able editor of the *Dubuque Times*, wrote to Kirkwood using the same reasoning in even more forceful style. Rich repeated the arguments some ten days later.¹⁰ Thus we have the revelation that a group of politicians *no less important than members of Allison's own circle* had decided that Kirkwood should be their candidate for governor for whom victory could be taken for granted; if later he wanted to try for the senatorial honor in the election to be held in the very month of his inauguration, that would seem quite all right. "One thing at a time" seemed to be their motto; *control must be maintained at any cost.*

There were several names ready to go before the Republican state convention on June 30, but only one prospect, General Weaver, had worked hard at lining up delegates. It was generally conceded that a majority of the delegates were pledged to him. The other candidates for governor, John Russell, W. B. Fairfield, John H. Gear, and Robert Smyth had spotty local support only. The modern reader must remember that this Weaver of 1875 was a pre-Greenbacker, pre-Populist Weaver. He was a gentleman of high standing, of excellent war record and long service to the party before and after the war, a commanding speaker, and had a magnetic personality as well. If the professional politicians should use their power to defeat him, their instrument in such dealings must be a man of impeccable character and outstanding merit and popularity. Such a man was Samuel Jordan Kirkwood, but his code of honor would not permit him to run for an office whose term he knew he would not complete if later he could win the office that he really wanted, namely, the senatorship.

KIRKWOOD WINS — OR WAS IT ALLISON?

The strategy indicated under these circumstances was that of delaying the nomination until Kirkwood's con-

¹⁰ Rich to Kirkwood, April 16, 1875; Woodruff to Kirkwood, April 21, 1875; Rich to Kirkwood, April 30, 1875. *Ibid.*

sent could be gained for the use of his name. Telegrams to Iowa City did not produce the desired result. In desperation the pro-Kirkwood men resorted to a scheme that clearly deserves the label of "strong arm." At a critical moment in the proceedings, after the available candidates had been placed in nomination, and just when it appeared that the success of General Weaver was inevitable, "by preconcerted agreement among some of the leaders," the voice of the gigantic Dr. S. M. Ballard of Audubon county roared out the name of the old war governor. Now General M. M. Trumbull, a delegate from Allison's county, came to the front of the stage and asked the leading question, "By what authority do you give his name?" Dr. Ballard answered, "By the authority of the people of the State of Iowa."¹¹

This magnificent piece of effrontery has usually been described as the act of a grand old man of the party whose venerableness gave him the right to ride roughshod over the will of the delegates and the voters who had instructed them. This view is not upheld by the evidence contained in the innocent-sounding clause in Benjamin F. Gue's account. In view of the other evidence adduced here, this clause takes on sharp meaning and great significance. It was, he said: "by preconcerted agreement among some of the leaders." Gue was a careful historian of the scholarly editor-politician type, whose authority and insight were frequently derived from participation in the events he described, as was the case here. Furthermore, there is evidence, cited below, that the move by Dr. Ballard was not spontaneous and sincere but a strategic device carefully planned by the pro-Kirkwood group. As to Dr. Ballard, he was not a patriarch of unquestionable reputation. In 1851 he had given up his combination career of physician and publisher at Iowa City to become a large-scale landowner and farmer in Audubon

¹¹ Gue, *History of Iowa*, III, 72. Clarkson, p. 566, errs in naming the spokesman "Ballou". This was the name of a leading Allison man from Dubuque.

County, in which capacity he acquired a most unsavory local fame.¹²

The convention was thrown into an uproar by this bit of drama; some of the candidates tried to withdraw, but a vote was taken and Kirkwood formally nominated. There was some embarrassment due to his well-known attitude of stubborn opposition to his nomination. At some time in these proceedings an engine was secured from the Rock Island railroad and Jacob Rich and Joseph Morgan, the latter now beginning his long service to Allison as private secretary, made the trip of some one hundred miles to Iowa City to work their personal persuasions on the reluctant nominee. Apparently they were successful, as a grudging and half-hearted assent was sent by telegram.¹³

CARPENTER'S VIEW

Perhaps it was not all so dramatic as we have been led to believe. The comment of Governor Cyrus C. Carpenter is instructive. In his diary he made the following unemotional entry:¹⁴

Arrived at home [Des Moines] this a.m. at 4 o. c. Slept until six. Was in the office during the a.m. and in the p.m. went over to the convention. It was largely attended. After the organization, and nominations were declared in order, Gov. Kirkwood was put in nomination and received the endorsement of the Convention. I do not know how this will work but am disposed to think it a mistake. Time will show, however, but I believe

¹² See fn. 15; on Ballard see H. F. Andrews, ed., *History of Audubon County* (Indianapolis, 1915), 70-71, 100-111.

¹³ The Kirkwood Correspondence, Box IV, contains telegrams and letters pertaining to this episode. Cole, *Iowa Through the Years*, 344, asserts that only Rich and Morgan made the trip. Jacob Swisher, "A Convention Stampeded," *The Palimpsest*, 9:349-356 (October, 1928), includes the name of Senator Allison. In a letter to the author, November 5, 1951, Dr. Swisher agrees that it is doubtful if the senator went along. There is no mention of this topic in the Allison Papers, Iowa State Department of History and Archives (Des Moines) and no reference in the Kirkwood Correspondence to the presence of Allison.

¹⁴ Carpenter Diary, Carpenter Papers, State Historical Society of Iowa, (Iowa City). These papers were used through the kindness of Miss Mildred Throne, whose biography of Cyrus C. Carpenter is in progress.

it would have been better to have nominated one of the [avowed?] candidates.

Thus was the day saved for the Old Guard, but at what a price! The simple truth is that the Allison people were using the governorship to hold off the Harlan people in the senatorial election of January, 1876. The correctness of this analysis is borne out by the letters to Allison and to Kirkwood and James S. Clarkson in the following months. We do not have to wait for and depend solely upon Clarkson's incomplete explanation of many years later. Clarkson says merely that "history took its inexorable way, and Kirkwood was elected Governor, then United States senator . . ."

The first letter is from R. S. Finkbine, a prominent merchant and politician of the day. Writing the very next day he explains to Kirkwood how the nomination came about. Very astutely he played on Kirkwood's prejudices by first asserting that D. N. Cooley [a prominent lawyer, Methodist layman, and anti-Allison man of Dubuque] was leading a movement of some preachers and temperance men to put Weaver to the front. Something had to be done to head this off and so his [Kirkwood's] friends held a conference. Other candidates were being nominated by *counties*, hence the decision to have Dr. Ballard nominate him in the name of the *state* of Iowa. Finkbine then explains the many telegrams that were sent and ends forcefully: "Had that answer not come [acceptance] you would have had a delegation of at least 100 there this morning . . . Now do not buck the inevitable. Get some one else to take care of your little bank. . . ."¹⁵

A few days later Al Swalm of the *Fort Dodge Messenger* wrote to Allison on other business and closed with this report: ". . . The numerous Harlan people here are not well pleased with Kirkwood's nomination,

¹⁵ Finkbine to Kirkwood, July 1, 1875. Kirkwood Correspondence, Box IV.

now that they have news from old Mr. Ditsworthy's pard himself." The same writer, one of Iowa's most effective politicians, wrote a long letter to James S. Clarkson later, reporting on a conversation with Allison about the forthcoming senatorial contest. "... He has some fears of the Harlan combination, for it means his death . . ." ¹⁶

More impressive is the letter from J. Fred Meyers, the bitter anti-Harlan editor of the *Denison Review*. The letter reveals much of the inner workings of politics. Writing to Kirkwood, he says: ¹⁷

In reply to your note of the 25th, I would state that my first choice [for senator] is Gen'l. W. W. Belknap and my second yourself. Should the General not develop sufficient strength, or should there be danger that Mr. Harlan or some second-class man like Price ¹⁸ be elected, I should prefer you as a first choice. I was an eye witness, as one of the Secretaries of the late State Convention, to the scenes which attended your nomination. Nothing could have prevented the success of the Adams-Weaver combination except the bringing forward of your name. With Weaver, as he himself proved it during the evening session, in his foolish and intemperate speeches, we would have lost a number of counties which we saved by your nomination. ¹⁹ . . .

KIRKWOOD'S OWN STATEMENT

The most convincing evidence comes from Kirkwood himself. This old Roman could not be deceived by anyone, and his matter-of-fact statements come like sledge-hammer blows. Shrewd politician that he was, he was worried over the possibility that the governorship might be used to knock him out of the coveted

¹⁶ Swalm to Allison, July 20, 1875, Allison Papers, Box 25; Swalm to Clarkson, October 28, 1875, Clarkson Papers, Division of Manuscripts, Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.), Box 2, File U.

¹⁷ J. Fred Meyers to Kirkwood, October 28, 1875. Kirkwood Correspondence, Box IV.

¹⁸ See Benjamin F. Gue, "The Public Services of Hiram Price," *ANNALS OF IOWA* (Third Series), 1:585-602 (January, 1895).

¹⁹ Haynes, *Weaver*, 80-81, describes the evening session debates on Prohibition, but makes no reference to "foolish and intemperate speeches" by Weaver.

senatorship. Writing to James S. Clarkson early in November, he asserts the very things that constitute the thesis of this article.²⁰

I notice in your paper articles from some two or three other papers in the State, opposing my election to the U.S. Senate for the reason that I have been elected to the office of governor. I also learn from letters to me that Mr. Price is using the same argument against me.

Now you know (perhaps better than I do) how I came to be nominated for Governor — you know as well as I do that I did not seek that nomination, on the contrary that I did all I could to avoid it and only accepted it when it was in a manner forced upon me. You know also that the controlling reason for nominating me was the fear that if someone else were nominated such nomination might result in the loss of the General Assembly and the consequent loss of the Senatorship. Well, the nomination was made and accepted — I made as good a canvass as I could and we have the General Assembly by an overwhelming majority and the Senatorship is secure to our party. Under these circumstances, is it fair that my name must be ruled out as a candidate for the Senatorship because I did the very thing that many of our most clear-headed men deemed absolutely essential to prevent the loss of that office to our party [?].

My object in writing you is to request that you at your own time and in your own way will say just what you think touching the matter . . . I do not seek to commit you to my support, although I should be glad to have your aid if you should think the giving it the proper thing to do. But you can without at all committing yourself or your paper say your say as to the fairness and justice of the attempt to rule me out for the reason assigned.

The information I get in regard to the Senatorship shows that the matter is very much "mixed." I think Price has more positive strength than either Belknap or Harlan. I think I have more positive strength than Price. I am still "seeking information" and am getting a raw deal of various kinds. After a while I will be prepared to determine what I shall do. I will be glad to hear from you touching the mention [*sic*] of this letter.

Inasmuch as published letters from the very able

²⁰ Kirkwood to Clarkson, November 6, 1875. Clarkson Papers, Library of Congress (Washington, D.C.), Box 5.

and very worthy George W. McCrary are so scarce, and inasmuch as he was a potent force in the campaign for the senatorship, it is of some value to publish herewith his own direct comment on the politics involved in this race. Written on the stationery of his law firm of McCrary, Hagerman & McCrary, it was directed to his friend Clarkson of the *Register*.²¹

Keokuk, Iowa, Nov. 19th, 1875

Dear Clarkson,

I regret very much that my engagements were such when you were here that I could not get a chance to have a talk with you. I then expected to be in Des Moines in a few days on professional business, but the case in which I am engaged took a turn which rendered the trip unnecessary. I had a desire to have a frank talk with you on the senatorial question, as I want you to understand exactly my position. I am not such a fool as to pretend that I don't want to be senator, or that I should be indifferent to the honor, if I were elected to that place. At the same time I am not so crazy about it as some others. The candidacy of Gen. Belknap is of course somewhat embarrassing inasmuch as it compels me to choose between comparative inactivity and a personal contest with him. I choose the former. I do not do so, however, because I think that I or the Republican party, owe it to Gen. B. to make him Senator, not because I think him the fittest or purest man for the place, but for two main reasons only. 1. I am averse to making a personal fight with anybody for any office. 2. A fight between two candidates both from here would of course defeat both.

Under these circumstances I have considered the question whether I should withdraw entirely. I have submitted this question to my friends here, who say no. They insist that the Republicans are a unit for me in this Co. and that the General is only their second choice at least. Meantime a number of friends throughout the State and some members of the legislature have declared for me without solicitation & voluntarily. I have therefore made up my mind to let it be known that I would gratefully accept the place, but that I will personally solicit no votes; that I will make no war upon any other candidate; that I will make no combinations,

²¹ McCrary to Clarkson, November 19, 1875. *Ibid.*

bargains or pledges, and spend no money to secure it. In a word, that I will take the seat if I take it [at] all, untrammelled, and discharge its duties to the very best of my ability. Judging from the usual course of these matters my chance is slim, but still, I believe that if a few influential and earnest men were to go in for me I might be elected. The time has come in Iowa politics when the most anxious and active candidates are not the most likely to succeed. I think the *Register* could at the proper time turn the tide in my favor, but of course I know that I have no right to ask such a favor, nor to complain if you should maintain an attitude of indifference or espouse the cause of another. I have written but few letters on this subject & of course desire that you will regard this as *strictly confidential*.

Very truly yours,

Geo. W. McCrary

P.S. I have read the evidence in the Kasson case. I am amazed that there was no attempt to rebut your evidence. The inference to be drawn from Mr. K's failure to go on the witness stand and deny the charges must be most damaging.

GWM.

HARLAN'S ACTIVITY

To return to the senate race, we next find a fascinating example of the attitude and technique of former Senator Harlan. Writing to Allison he says:²²

It is possible that my name may be used in connection with the election of your next colleague. I am curious to know whether your friends understand that one feature of the warfare likely to be made against me, in that event, would weigh as heavily against you, should they desire your re-election; such as the "Credit Mobilier" nonsense, getting "vastly wealthy" in the public service. And do they understand the sourness of some of my personal friends caused four years ago, could probably be cured now?²³

Should you see proper to write me, I need hardly say, I will not abuse the confidence.

It might be hoped that Allison did not see proper to

²² Harlan to Allison, November 23, 1875. Allison Papers, Box 224.

²³ Harlan is referring to charges that had come up in previous campaigns. In the Allison-Harlan fight for the senate in 1872 each man had "thrown the book" at his opponent.

answer this effort at political blackmail. The letter shows if nothing else, how eager Harlan was for the post and the lengths to which he was willing to go. There is in the Allison Papers a draft copy of a letter to Mr. Harlan which could have been the basis for Allison's reply.²⁴ It is a fine example of Allison's non-committal style. He writes to say that he hopes the campaign is being conducted in good spirits; he hopes no friend of his will say anything unkind, and if so, it will be wholly unsanctioned. He further says that he is taking no part and wishes to welcome as a friendly associate anyone elected by the people of the state of Iowa. This of course has to be taken as an exercise in the privilege of diplomatic deceit for political purposes. Probably Mr. Harlan was not at all fooled by such evasive language.

On December 2, the *Fort Dodge Messenger*, edited by that very eccentric figure, Al Swalm, carried an editorial boosting General Belknap for senator, also pro-Belknap reprints from the *Spirit Lake Beacon* and the *Algona Upper Des Moines*. On December 6, Swalm wrote to Allison on business matters and added this item: ". . . I shall come out for Gen. B. for your colleague this week . . ." True to his statement, the issue of December 9 carried a long editorial article strongly in favor of Belknap. After the usual praise of the favorite's character and ability and an assertion that his conduct of the affairs of the War Department had been very successful and beyond faultfinding or censure, the editorial continued:

In addition, he was a brave soldier and all other things being equal, we are for the soldiers for the offices. At the present time and since 1860 Iowa has chosen *no* soldiers as senators and only a few soldiers as representatives — Capt. Orr and Capt. Walden, General Dodge, Capt. Donnan, Captain Sampson and Col. Ainsworth. The 70,000 or so ex-soldiers ought to combine and get at

²⁴ Draft copy of letter, Allison to Harlan, December 16, 1875. Allison Papers, Box 223.

least one soldier senator, especially now that there are 80 ex-rebels in Congress.²⁵

Harlan left no stone unturned; on December 13 he wrote one of his artful letters of inquiry to Governor Carpenter. If Carpenter were not to be in the race for himself, then Harlan hoped that he would not interfere with the work of those who thought that he (Harlan) should be elected. The honest governor recorded in his diary for that day: ". . . I received a letter from Mr. Harlan today which shows him to be on the war path." He answered the importunate candidate by saying that he must remain silent as between the candidates; nevertheless, he was very grateful to Mr. Harlan for help rendered at Washington when he went there on behalf of the poor settlers in the Des Moines River Lands; at that time no other member of the Iowa delegation showed any interest, therefore his regard for him was what it had always been.²⁶

AL SWALM'S FRANK ANALYSIS

Real down-to-earth political appraisals now came from the pen of Al Swalm when writing to his fellow-townsmen and comrade-in-arms, Governor Carpenter:²⁷

You doubtless have seen ere this the demagogic article in the [Dubuque] *Times* on matters Senatorial. You have seen that we have made our choice from the real and pronounced candidates — and that we take Belknap in ours for a steady diet. [The *Messenger* held off from support for anyone until Carpenter made it clear he would not run.] Among the politicians and railway men you are not popular for reasons manifest to you. But among the masses, the farmers and the real workers of the land, you are strong, and to rouse and reach them one must commence early. The others are marshalled by a telegram — these must be slowly pounded into action . . .

I don't want any Kirkwood in mine. I remember his

²⁵ This is a view that causes one to examine carefully the customary assertion that Civil War veterans had a virtual monopoly on public office.

²⁶ Carpenter to Harlan, December 15, 1875. Carpenter Papers.

²⁷ Swalm to Carpenter, December 14, 1875. *Ibid.*

administration during the War, when some very scaly performances were carried on in the way and manner of army promotions; [he is] of a corrupt nature, all *hog* and supreme selfishness and adherence to his clique. As Governor he will do, but he will never be Senator by my vote. Harlan and Price are excused. McCrary is needed in the House, for the Iowa delegation has not got too big a load of brains as it stands. Beef and bowels seem to predominate. Belknap is a man of good ability, better than either of the others considered naturally, and has the bottom to do some hard and telling work. Then we have never had a soldier in Congress — Senate — and the four we had in the House were quickly kicked out. I take some stock yet in my discharge as a private soldier and would see some creditable comrade "go up higher." But enough. Write me when you can.

Kirkwood was aware of his difficulties, as explained above. On December 14, he wrote to Allison, reminding him of the part played by Rich and Woodruff "contrary to my wishes . . . After the election I found that a very serious obstacle to my success was my election as Gov." He said he did not expect Allison to take a partisan stand for him, but implied that he was under some obligation in view of the actions of Rich and Woodruff. The very next day, whether as an answer or not cannot be said, Rich wrote a letter of assurance to Kirkwood, telling him that H. L. Stout and all the other solid men of Dubuque were urging J. K. Graves, state senator from Dubuque county, to vote for him. "Stout told me tonight again that he would go at him again heavy. You know Stout is the richest man in the State, and a very fine one in every respect, and carries much weight. He is one of Allison's closest friends, also."²⁸

As the very end of the year approached many people were taking final stock of the situation and making their guesses as to the chances of victory of the respective candidates. General Dodge wrote to Allison that the Harlan men were making the most active

²⁸ Kirkwood to Allison, December 14, 1875, Allison Papers, Box 224; Rich to Kirkwood, December 15, 1875, Kirkwood Correspondence, Box IV.

fight, the Belknap forces were quite prominent, the Kirkwood contingent was not very much in evidence. Governor Carpenter noted the strong articles in the *Burlington Hawk-Eye* in favor of Harlan, articles which he called "special pleading," and also noted a call from Colonel Root of Fort Madison "who is out in the interests of Mr. Harlan. He talks confidently, but I doubt whether he feels so." Colonel D. B. Henderson of Dubuque showed a commendable independence of judgment when he wrote to his chieftain, Allison, that McCrary was his first choice — "That is my dead bottom feeling . . . He is my first choice and Belknap 2nd, K. [Kirkwood] 3rd. I doubt if Mc. can win in the quiet stay away policy. I have little faith in that."²⁹

Again General Dodge wrote, this time to report on a conversation with John Y. Stone, his favorite from Glenwood, Mills county. "I saw Stone here today. He thinks Kirkwood is in the lead. Still Harlan's organ is the best of any in the State . . . [Gear is for Harlan because the B. & M. R.R. is for Harlan *sure* and for Gear] [reports on others.] I tell you that if you want Harlan defeated it is necessary to get an anti-Harlan man for Speaker, for as is always the case with a Speaker, there is no end to the amount of influence he will wield . . ." On December 23, and again on the 30th, Al Swalm came out strongly for Belknap, running one whole page on the 23rd, proclaiming his merits and his deserts as a soldier.

Probably the most valuable letter in the vast series now available is one from Harlan to Carpenter, written from Mount Pleasant on December 25. He is still on Carpenter's trail, trying to secure permission to reprint his letter of the 15th, and he opens his letter by saying: "Soon after writing my note to you, of the 13th inst. I started on a journey to see my poor sick son at Cheyenne, Wyoming, which has caused delay in

²⁹ Henderson to Allison, December 23, 1875, Allison Papers, Box 224. Somewhat earlier, December 7, 1875. Henderson had written to Allison: "If McCrary writes to me what shall I say? He *must* find warmth in the region of your hearth." *Ibid.*

acknowledging the receipt of your kind and generous letter of the 15th, for which I tender you my heartfelt thanks . . ."⁸⁰ The story has been handed down through the sentimental history of Iowa politics ever since 1876 that Harlan was suddenly called away from the Des Moines fight in January, 1876, to go to the bedside of his desperately ill son and that this caused him to "surrender" to Kirkwood's forces. As this letter shows, there was nothing "sudden" about his son's illness. A better guess is that Harlan stayed with the fight as long as there seemed to be a chance of victory and then availed himself of an excuse for withdrawal. On one other occasion Harlan referred to his aspiration to office, but suggested to Allison that an appointment to a foreign post be kept in reserve for use in case of failure. It is quite understandable that Harlan should not want to appear as a "failure" — not after his distinguished career in the senate and cabinet.

1876 — KIRKWOOD WINS AGAIN

After the dawn of the new year there were only a few days to wait until the election for the senatorship. Inasmuch as many of the principals and all of their agents were now in Des Moines in person and a great many things would be handled by word of mouth rather than through written messages, it is impossible to be sure that any account of the pre-election maneuvers can be complete.

Harlan's manager at Des Moines was none other than General James B. Weaver, still among the faithful in spite of the trick played upon him at Des Moines the previous June. At a much later date Weaver wrote a very bitter account of the methods used in this election, likewise in the one of 1872, in which he charged that the idea was to defeat Harlan at any price.⁸¹ But Harlan was not the real threat to Kirkwood's candidacy. That threat came from Belknap and

⁸⁰ Harlan to Carpenter, December 25, 1875. Carpenter Papers.

⁸¹ See footnote 8. Weaver did not leave the party until 1877.

McCrary. It is interesting to speculate as to the strength that might have been commanded by either of these men if he had had the field completely to himself with support from the other. Certainly Keokuk was not large enough to afford two senatorial candidates at one time! General Dodge surveyed the scene on January 1 and concluded that McCrary was growing all the time. "Kirkwood is evidently a strong man, but how much work he is doing it is impossible for me to ascertain."

Captain John A. T. Hull of Bloomfield, a candidate for the post of secretary of the state senate, a keen and vitally interested observer, saw it this way:³²

Savery House, Des Moines
Jany. 6, 1876

My dear Wife,

Things are boiling. Harlan, Kirkwood and Belknap are sanguine with Price holding the bag. I have no opposition yet and all the Senators are very friendly. Am playing the devoted [*sic*] neutral on the Senatorial fight and think I will preserve my position of armed neutrality.

If Harlan or Kirkwood fail of the nomination on the first ballot, Belknap will be nominated. I wish I could see you all tonight and hope you are well.

Allison's fellow-townsmen, Julius K. Graves, sometimes friend, sometimes rival, now in the former position, a state senator well aware of his wealth and influence, wrote from Des Moines that he would support Kirkwood although his own strategy would call for Allison's help for either Belknap or McCrary now, since neither Kirkwood nor Harlan could be expected to be a candidate in 1878, when Allison would be up for his second term, whereas Belknap or McCrary might be. This well illustrates the lack of idealism in the politics of legislative election of the senators. No one seems to have thought of serving the State of

³² J. A. T. Hull to Mrs. Hull, January 6, 1876. Hull Papers, Iowa State Department of History and Archives (Des Moines).

Iowa; the only thing that mattered was keeping the office in the control of a certain group.

At long last, on the night of January 13, the fight came to an end. Its strenuousness is indicated by a message from J. W. Chapman, United States Marshal for Iowa, who reported to Allison: "Rich and Ballou told me they would write particulars. I am played out and must go to bed."

True enough, on the next day Rich sat down and in his best journalistic style wrote for Allison his report from the scene of battle. No faithful lieutenant ever wrote a more complete report. It would be worthy of full reproduction if space allowed. Most valuable of all is his closing observation. In his opinion, the situation for Allison is better now than Allison had had any right to expect. Kirkwood had been elected; Harlan, Belknap and Price have all been squelched. "There is no one to contest with you [in 1878] but George McCrary, and if you can't keep him out of the field, with the certainty of succession four years from the time of your reelection, you are not the man I take you for."³³

James F. Wilson was delighted with the results and asserted his lack of fear of Harlan two years hence. "We will take care of that pig when it gets fat" was his Lincolnnesque summary. J. Fred Meyers, the doughty editor of the *Denison Review*, sent Allison a full report in which he complimented Jacob Rich on his management and belabored Al Swalm for his actions. "If Kirkwood can be induced to change his shirt once a week and [learn] the use of pocket handkerchiefs, he will make a respectable Senator, and if he *will* spit upon everything round about him, he is no worse than some of his Senatorial colleagues." E. R. Kirk of Sioux City, a strong pro-Allison man, wrote and urged Allison to begin now to plan for 1878 and expressed

³³ Rich to Allison, January 14, 1876. Allison Papers, Box 226. The sequel is that McCrary went into the Hayes cabinet as Secretary of War, then into the Federal judiciary, and then into the employ of the Santa Fe Railway.

the hope that George D. Perkins, editor of the *Sioux City Journal*, had left the Harlan cause forever. He suggested that Allison ought to do something substantial for Northwest Iowa as a means of strengthening himself in that area.

A short time later Allison received a beautiful letter from his great rival thanking him for the sympathy expressed by Allison and his wife over the death of his son, Willie Harlan. Poor Mr. Harlan little knew of the scorn which was felt for him by the typical Allisonian at this time. How he would have grieved had he been able to see this letter:³⁴

... What do you think of the prospect of running two years hence against truthful James. I had hoped that he was packed away safely four years ago for the resurrection — but his indiscreet friends insisted on exhibiting the corpse this winter, and threaten us with an exhibition of the skeleton two years hence. I hope by that time it may cease to be odorous, as I know it will be otherwise harmless — scarcely a scarecrow.

Thus our long story comes to an end. The Allison-Wilson-Kirkwood faction had clinched the possession of both senatorial seats for itself for years to come. Allison succeeded himself term after term and became a national institution. Kirkwood's seat went to his crony, James F. Wilson, for two terms, then to the friendly John H. Gear, then to the man that Allison regarded as a son, Jonathan P. Dolliver. From 1876 to his death in 1908, Allison controlled not one seat but two in the house that many would consider the supreme policy-making body of the United States.

³⁴ R. S. Finkbine to Allison, February 25, 1876. Allison Papers, Box 25.

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